Smartphone Tips & Tricks

Artwork: Bryan Smith

Tech Coach Corner – Smartphone Tips (that you wish someone would have taught you years ago)

by LTCL Coach Bryan Smith

I confess that I use, and really rely, on my smartphone a lot. A LOT! And over many years, I've picked up things that I routinely use, but forgot how powerful they are. I've been wanting to write this column for quite a while now, but each time I started, I couldn't think of anything earth-shattering. Well…with a little help from my friends, I came up with three tips that if they weren't available, I would be MUCH less effective/productive on this powerful tool that I carry with me every day. If you have tips that you'd like to share, please click the link at the bottom of this column – we may publish them in a future column. Here are three powerful tools that I think EVERYONE can benefit from.

Keyboard Text Shortcuts

This is my favorite tip today. Our phones don't have nice large keyboards, yet we are expected to type letters, numbers, and symbols accurately. Well, I can't make the keyboard on your screen larger, but keyboard text shortcuts, aka dictionary shortcuts, can absolutely help you with commonly typed responses and even phrases with accuracy. Here's how I use this tool:

I often type in my email address, my phone number, my home address, my work address, and phrases like: "On my way!" or "On my way home." But these are tedious and more than I care to type each time. So, with keyboard text shortcuts, I type in the following characters "Text Shortcut", and just like text autocomplete, once I type in the shortcut, my phone replaces the shortcut with the desired full text. This works in email, texting, websites, notes, ... nearly in any app where you type text.

Text Shortcut	Full Text Replacement
@@	bfsmith@gmail.com
##	512.555.1212
1938	1938 Lohmans Crossing Austin, TX 78734
OMW	On my way!
OWH	On my way home. See you soon!

It's important to pick text shortcuts that don't occur in natural language, e.g., if you choose "email" as a text shortcut for your email address, then each time you type "email", it will be replaced with your email address when maybe you wanted to use the word "email". "@@" and "##" aren't what I ever intend to type on my phone, so they work really well. Click on the link below to follow steps to use this powerful tool:

Apple iOS -> Step-by-step instructions

Google Android -> Step-by-step instructions

Document Scanning

I used to have to use my multi-purpose printer to make high-quality scans of documents – single or multi-page. Not anymore. I now use my smartphone's camera to scan documents to save or to send to others. You might think that I'm saying to just take a picture of a document, and you can do that using the camera app, but I'm referring to something much more powerful. Your smartphone can take a photo, detect the edges and automatically crop, and get rid of some shadows and crisp up the picture such that it looks like a high-quality scan. It can also create a PDF file of your single or multi-page scan to save or send. You can even sign such documents all from your phone.

Apple iOS -> Step-by-step instructions

Google Android -> Step-by-step instructions

Capturing a Picture of Your Screen

Have you ever had something pop up on your smartphone's screen that you didn't understand, but you were not in a position to immediately understand it or show it to someone else to get assistance? Well, you're in luck because your smartphone has the ability to easily take a "screenshot" of your screen and save it as a picture. This tip has worked well for several of my family members who questioned what they saw, took a screenshot, and then sent it to me so we could figure out what it was.

Apple iOS -> Step-by-step instructions

Google Android -> Step-by-step instructions

Tech Coach Assistance

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techcoach@laketravislibrary.org and one of our coaches will respond to assist you with any questions or challenges you have with this or any other technology.