

Have a cup with your cellphone and ignore the do-gooders

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- **By Kathy Hedberg of the Tribune**



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UP FRONT/COMMENTARY

Let this be a lesson to you: Once you ruin your good reputation, it's darn near impossible to turn the tide of public opinion and salvage it.

Take the case of coffee. Once upon a time a group of farmers in Central America roasted some coffee beans, ground them up, poured hot water through them and discovered it made a pretty tasty brew, especially paired with doughnuts.

Coffee caught on, and for awhile all was well. People all over the world started to enjoy a hot cup of coffee with their morning paper and noticed that the potion gave them an energizing little pick-me-up to start the day.

Then one day some do-gooder got suspicious about that little pick-me-up and found out it was actually a highly addictive drug that makes people do strange things, such as going on power shopping sprees and making snap judgments.

Coffee's reputation plummeted, although people continued to drink it because, of course, they were addicted. But scientists (this was in the era when they were discovering how bad cigarettes and illegal drugs were for you, also) tried to discourage people from drinking coffee by comparing it to all kinds of terrible things.

Coffee - the heroin of beverages, the naysayers said. Coffee rots your gallbladder (like you really need it), makes you forget the names of your own children and (this one really hurt) deflates your sex life like a spider on a hot stove.

This was all poppycock, of course, and more credible scientists (the ones who did a lot of their research sitting around tables with their laptops at Starbucks) finally proved that coffee is good for you. Caffeine gets your heart pumping, stimulates your brain, which can make things like psychotherapy a lot more effective, and, hey, what else are churches going to serve after Sunday services? Beer gardens just don't make sense.

Yet still, some people just can't resist making coffee out to be the bad guy.

"Cellphones a possible carcinogen, like coffee," the headline in the newspaper read last week.

This is ridiculous. First of all, how could cellphones be like coffee? People don't drink cellphones. They don't even taste good. And second of all, coffee is not a carcinogen, or maybe it is, but so what?

"Anything is a possible carcinogen," said Donald Berry, a professor of biostatistics at the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center at the University of Texas. "This is not something I worry about and it will not in any way change how I use my cellphone or drink my coffee," he said - speaking from his cellphone and sipping a latte.

I'm with you, guy.

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