



Disconnect to Reconnect

Finding balance in a tech-centric society

Remember when leaving work meant jumping into the car and turning on the radio to decompress before getting home to enjoy an evening with the family?

Today, we are often on our mobile phones talking (or working) until we arrive home. Sometimes we continue the conversation when we walk through the door and fail to greet loved ones.

It wasn't that long ago when most households had a landline and kids needed to ask permission to call friends—they would never think of calling during family time. There were well-established boundaries regarding dinnertime and after hours. Now, thanks to the advent of mobile devices, text messaging and emails, boundaries have nearly disappeared. We have lost the ability to disconnect.

Who is having difficulties disconnecting?

We can't just blame the millennials who were born in this technological age. A recent report from Pew Research found that more than 90% of individuals between the ages of 16 and 64 visited YouTube, Facebook, Twitter or Google+ in the past month, and of those, nearly 20% visited all platforms.

The fastest-growing group spending time almost constantly connected are men and women in their 40s. The top reasons noted—necessity or demands from work to remain competitive in the marketplace.

There are now more than three billion people in the world online, accounting for 40% of the world's population. A majority of online users are also becoming more dependent on mobile technologies, which helps keep them connected. As a result, we are becoming a society that cannot disconnect.

Connection: What it should be versus the reality

To better understand what we are missing, we need to examine the definition of connection. Connection at the core is an emotional closeness to another person, allowing

us to share personal feelings, display compassion, patience and understanding. It involves accepting someone for who they are, without judgment or ulterior motives. While communicating or connecting online can fill a void, or mask what we are missing, real emotional connections are becoming a rarity in a world in which we are digitally dialed in.

How can we truly reconnect?

Make actual face time a priority. Start by committing to having time without technology, and make spending time with those you love a priority.

Create a schedule. Balance the need to connect online with wanting to connect. Then, limit the time.

Practice mindfulness. Pay attention to the task at hand, function with purpose, and stay in the present moment without judging others.

Practice restraint. Try non-digital activities as an alternative. Treat technology like the piece of candy or cake you shouldn't have too much of.

Choose tech-free days. Try tech-free Tuesdays or select one day each week when you will not be disturbed by technology.

Technology trade-off. Rid yourself of some of your devices, and the distraction they cause, by giving them to charity.

Plan breaks. Make it a habit to schedule breaks from being connected, and make the effort to talk to family, friends and coworkers eye-to-eye.

Enjoy the moments

Living most of the time attached to a device, we are often left in a technological haze, unaware of how run down we are or how we've lost sight of our priorities. When we commit to reconnecting with the people in our lives, our reward is renewed emotional energy.

Take time to observe others with their heads down, eyes glued to their mobile devices and disconnected from life around them. Try to catch their attention, say hello, offer a smile, and engage them back into the real world. When you make reconnecting from the digital world a priority, people around you will notice and begin to connect more face-to-face.

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