



TECHNOLOGY: Pulling The Plug

Technology may have made our lives easier, but it certainly hasn't made them simpler. Smartphones, tablets, and the like have made us reachable at all times, yet have also presented new challenges to communication. **Mira Khreino** lists the top 10 reasons to power off and step into the real world.



Despite the fact that they have only been in our lives for a decade, our smartphones and tablets are now so central to the way we function that it is difficult to imagine having ever lived without them.

Whether it is text messages, emails, WhatsApp, BBM, Viber, FaceTime, Twitter, Skype, Facebook, Instagram, or plain old telephone calls, we are always busy either being bombarded or bombarding others, constantly responding to others or awaiting others' responses. We hardly know how to be without our devices, on our own, with ourselves, anymore. If we do find ourselves in silence without this constant

stimulation, we feel bizarre, awkward, and uncomfortable — so much so that we usually reach for the remote control, the phone, or the tablet touchscreen. Sitting down uninterrupted with ourselves in this day and age has become a foreign concept and the overstimulation of our senses is the new status quo.

Much of the time, we do not consciously acknowledge the detriment of this overuse to our lives and to the lives of those around us. Shorter attention spans, a lack of face-to-face communication, and the rise of procrastination are but a few of those cons. Here are the top 10 reasons we should spend less time staring at our myriad of screens.

“We hardly know how to be without our devices, on our own, with ourselves, anymore”

1) False Sense Of Urgency

We often forget that when we receive a call, email, or text, we have the choice to answer immediately, postpone answering, or never answer at all. Instead, we find ourselves, as if obliged by a sense of duty, reacting to our smartphones instantaneously. We reach for them with every little ping, answer every message on the spot, and revisit an unfinished game as soon as we have a spare moment. We have become so habituated to this behavior that we feel it is “normal” to have our phones on and handy all the time. Many of us have allowed ourselves to become slaves to technology; instead of technology serving us, we serve it! Not only do we have the option of putting a phone on silent, we also have the option of turning it off altogether, eliminating any temptation to check it. The choices we make are just that: conscious choices.





2) *The Trouble With Multi-Tasking*

When accessing or responding to information on our personal pieces of technology, we are often multi-tasking. This means that we are not dedicating or applying ourselves wholly to one activity, but distributing our attention to more than one task. We usually prize ourselves on our multi-tasking, but, even though we might not like to admit it, each action distracts from the other. This often leads to multiple tasks being done at a mediocre level in the same time it would have taken for them to be done well separately. Furthermore, on the occasions when we do try to focus our energies solely on one task, we allow our phones to interrupt our work and distract us from the job at hand. Our work then takes longer to complete, our “flow” is disturbed, and we sometimes give up what we were doing all together.

3) *Missing In Action*

With all the distractions these technologically-advanced gadgets provide, it is difficult to maintain presence and experience the present moment. Instead of being in one place, body and mind, we find the body in one place and the mind wandering elsewhere. This takes away from the enjoyment of life, the pleasure of connecting to your current experience. Studies show that people who lack presence in their lives have lower levels of personal satisfaction and rank lower on happiness measures. Even when on vacation, we find ourselves attached to our phones, preoccupied with past discussions or future plans instead of the here and now. Our bodies are physically on vacation, our minds are not — realistically, neither body nor mind will benefit fully from this arrangement. Give your full attention to your chosen task or activity and experience it fully, without distraction or interruption.

4) *The Impact On Our Loved Ones*

When we’re plugged in to whatever gadget is closest, we become inaccessible to our partners, loved ones, and children. Partners often complain that they feel neglected and de-prioritized, mentioning technology as a major interfering factor to spending quality time with their other half. For children, the distant parent is always around in body, but never around in mind; they become emotionally hungry, always struggling for the undivided attention of their preoccupied parent. Sadly, we are also seeing this phenomenon happening in reverse, with parents battling iPods and iPads for their children’s attention. When connecting with our smartphones, we disconnect from our loved ones and cheat our nearest and dearest out of our full attention.

5) *No More Human Interaction*

Constantly hiding behind a screen is a means of avoidance. We used to mainly interact face to face, but, with the advent of mobile phones, we moved to talking to each other on the phone instead. Now, many of us prefer instant messaging or social media to phone calls, both even more distancing options. What is even more anti-social — and increasingly visible — is spending time occupied with our phones in the presence of others. Even when we do manage to see each other, we opt to disconnect from our environment and our friends to connect with our devices instead. This may be interpreted as disrespectful and inconsiderate in more than one way. To an extent, this new attachment to personal devices has resulted in the loss of a few of our essential social skills, manners, and graces.



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6) *Replacing The Personal*

Emails have replaced letters, cards, and mail packages; phone calls have replaced face-to-face interaction; video calls (on Skype, FaceTime, etc.) have replaced putting an effort into travelling to see each other; and online gaming has replaced group sports and activities. More and more, we are seeing a detached and isolated generation whose optional social interaction (as opposed to obliged, such as in school) is through a laptop, desktop, smartphone, or tablet. Young people, however, do not have a monopoly on technology addictions — people of all ages are disappearing behind their screens, making for a lonely human existence.

7) *Procrastination Nation*

Procrastination is another big, unwanted byproduct of our reliance on electronic devices. We can now occupy ourselves, wherever we are, with anything and everything except the task we should be performing. Playing games, surfing the net, messaging friends, checking emails, and posting on social media can take up the whole day if we let it, distracting us from channeling our energies into more enriching and fulfilling activities. In the end, we are racked with guilt, our productivity suffers, and we find ourselves unable to explain where the day went.

8) The End Of Free Time

The overuse of smartphones and computers robs individuals of the creative process of discovering their interests, as well as coming up with imaginative ways to spend their time. A free moment now is met with an undeniable impulse to pick up our phones. Once upon a time, leisure time was spent reading a book, writing a letter, drawing, meeting up with a friend, taking a walk, playing an instrument, or kicking a ball around. But if there are only so many hours in the day — and a large chunk is spent in the company of the phone, tablet, or computer — then how much time is left for the rest?

9) Gaming And Social Media

With online gaming and social media rising in popularity, we can expect further teenage social withdrawal and isolation, among other negative effects. Online group and individual games have become staples in homes, the content of which is often age inappropriate, explicit, and violent. Characters can subconsciously become role models for younger game players, leading to “modeling” behavior and a distorted way of social interaction. Furthermore, violent games increase adrenaline and cortisol levels; biologically, these hormones allow us to mobilize, to fight or flee an imminent threat. When playing a game, these hormone levels rise but are not expended, meaning they stay in the body, building up and creating a pressure-cooker effect. Partaking in violent acts in the virtual world compounded with unexpended adrenaline in the body is a recipe for pent-up aggression. Social media addictions are not much better. Not only are people incessantly checking their accounts and those of others, but online public bullying and peer pressure have impacted many young peoples’ lives. Some people and age groups are more impressionable, vulnerable, and sensitive to this material than others, but, in essence, everyone is affected in some way by what they see online. Being selective about what is read and how it is interpreted is essential.

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10) Forgetting How To Live Offline

We live in an age of overreliance. Though technology may seem to offer us a measure of freedom (and it does), it also takes away some of our fundamental skills such as spelling, grammar, and mathematics. Integral to every device is a spell-check, thesaurus and calculator. We needn't have a wide vocabulary, good spelling or grammar, or basic arithmetic skills anymore due to the inbuilt systems on our computers and phones. The result is a limited, sluggish and lazy brain. We unfortunately opt for the easy way out, even when it means sacrificing the training of our brains. Gone are days of going to the library, sifting through academic journals, reading studies first hand, doing cross-comparisons and drawing up our own conclusions. Students nowadays research using search engines, where these comparisons are already done and readily available. We are cheating ourselves out of skills such as hand-eye coordination, special

accuracy, mental calculations, speed, and sharpness in thinking, as well as overall improved connections in the brain.

Even though technology has, in many ways, improved our quality of living, one must pick and choose how, where, and when to use it. We are already moving so fast in our daily lives and technology — with its speedy communication and easy access of information — is just adding fuel to the fire, making us move so quickly that a sense of rushing dominates our existence. Racing through life often results in regret. At the end of our lives, we aren't likely to say, “I wish I had responded to my emails faster or answered every phone call on the first ring.” More often, we hear people saying, “I wish I had spent more time with my loved ones, taken time out to really watch my children grow, and appreciated life a little more while I was still fit and healthy to do so.” So unplug your computer and plug into life. Disconnect from your phone and reconnect to your loved ones. ■

