

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The “Devolution” of Social Etiquette

Since the beginning of the current Millennium there has been a significant shift in the manner in which we humans communicate with one another, which has been brought on by a technological tidal wave of unparalleled proportions. This dramatic change has many sociological and psychological ramifications and its presence will become more pervasive in the future and deeply entrenched in our society.

Fasten your seatbelts!

Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone which, in turn, revolutionized interpersonal and global communication, making the world a smaller and more accessible space. The initial social etiquette created around the telephone was clear; one did not speak on the phone in the presence of others unless the call was of an important and/or urgent matter. It was clearly tasteless, if not rude, to entertain company and speak on the phone simultaneously.



Many cellphone users appear to have lost this sense of etiquette, and their mobile phone has become their cherished and preferred partner. When these folks do interact, others often assume a secondary or subservient role. What is even more remarkable and disturbing is that the first ever Apple iPhone advertisement appeared as recently as 2007. Effectively, within one decade, the social etiquette of interpersonal communications has suffered a significant blow due to the pervasiveness of new and improved mobile devices.

Technological dependence is but one element that triggers alarm bells. Far more serious is the impact that technology is having on interpersonal interactions and communication. For an increasing number of souls, eye contact has moved downward to the hands (and more specifically, the cellphone) rather than regularly looking in front of oneself, observing and acknowledging others and assessing one's larger immediate environment. One speculates further that for many of these individuals, the device frequently, if not routinely, accompanies them to bed. In fact, in a 2015 study by Trends in Consumer Mobility of 1,000 people, 71% reported that they sleep with or next to their phone – 3% slept with it in hand, 55% on nightstand, and 13% in bed. 35% of people also reported that their smartphone is the first thing they reach for when they wake up.

Cellphone addiction is now so prevalent that one regularly hears the admonition: “Please turn off all cellphones and other electronic devices.” Furthermore this warning is not restricted only to concert halls and theatres. This relentless assault of such devices on the social etiquette of interpersonal communications, particularly the ability to converse with each other as a couple or in a group, is sad.

Most individuals, especially those younger than 30, appear to be amenable to “cohabitation” with this reality. They have embraced or alternately have become resigned to some alternate interpersonal communications etiquette. One has to travel no further than the local Mall, the local park, take public transit, or walk through any group gathering at random to observe the foregoing.

Cellphones and Kids

One of the more alarming aspects of this technological wave is its ability to attract and snare younger and younger participants.

Across Europe, 46% of kids aged 9-16 owned a smartphone, according to a study published in the journal, *New Media & Society*, in 2015. In February 2017, a Nielsen report revealed that 45% of US kids aged 10-12 owned a smartphone with a service plan.



How we can avoid becoming too dependent on our cell phones:

1. Turn off notifications.
2. Turn on grey scale to make your screen look less attractive.
3. Keep your phone out of your bedroom! Alternatively, turn the phone off or put it on silent before going to sleep.
4. Set a timer to reduce checking in on your phone. Start with 15 minutes, increase to 30 minutes, 45 minutes, and so on...have someone hold you accountable.
5. Try using a regular alarm clock instead of your phone.
6. Get rid of addictive apps such as Facebook or twitter entirely.
7. Turn off your cellphone when in the presence of company, or put it on “Do Not Disturb” mode.

YOUR LOGO

For confidential assistance
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