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Connecting By Disconnecting

I despise my iPhone. The one item that travels with me everywhere has become such a source of stress that all I want to do is throw it in the garbage. Acknowledging this truth is strange because I can recall the days when I was obsessed with the idea of getting my own cell phone. When I finally turned thirteen, I received my first iPhone as a birthday present. As I reflect back upon that moment I remember how thrilled I was to be able to make calls, text, SnapChat, search the web, send email, etc., all from my handy device. How is it then that now only three years later, my cell phone has become a burden? Why is it that a device that makes it so simple to connect with others has in actuality, resulted in us becoming more disconnected from one another? My belief is that the cell phone has enabled people to communicate without thinking, and has created a distracted society that has forgotten the value of human connection.

Do you recall the last time you had a conversation without your cell phone in hand? If you are like me you have to think long and hard because the cell phone is our constant companion. We bring it on outings with friends, we take it to dinner with our families, we even bring it to the movies with us! Before I had a cell phone things were less complicated. I remember hanging with my girlfriends being goofy and laughing, and not being distracted by incoming text messages. I remember family dinners where we actually engaged with one another and shared the day's events rather than eating silently with our eyes glued to our glowing screens. I remember special moments being with my brother just talking and listening to one another without either of us having to check our cell phones to see if we were missing out on the latest gossip in some group chat. I remember a time when we were not so distracted, where we were content with the here and now, and when the person we were speaking to was all that mattered in that moment. I remember a time when I felt more genuinely connected to my friends and family.

It seems that as cell phones got smarter, we humans got dumber. For starters, the ease in which we can communicate with one another has made us less aware of the impact of our words. Perhaps because the cell phone allows us to communicate remotely and impersonally it has made us less thoughtful. I think we can all relate to being on the receiving end of a text message that has made us feel badly, created anxiety, and has led us to question our relationships, and even our own self-worth. Certainly, misunderstandings occurred before smart phones, but I don't recall those misunderstandings being so cold, mean, and lacking any form of empathy. A second consequence of the smart phone epidemic is our inability to focus. Today when in-

person conversations occur, more likely than not at least one person is also looking at their cell phone screen. The unfortunate reality is that smart phones provide us all with a constant flow of information which is very hard to ignore. If one does not constantly monitor their news feed, text messages, SnapChat, Instagram, etc., they feel as though they are out of the loop. The consequences of impersonal communication, coupled with the constant feed of distractions the smart phone provides, may not seem all that serious, but they are! As a society, we are slowly losing our connection with one another as human beings. We are beginning to see and treat one another as objects, and if this continues we will experience serious consequences. For example, depression is already at an all-time high and that will continue to rise as people feel more and more isolated from one another. Additionally, our ability to solve the many problems facing the world will become more difficult as we will lose our capacity to relate to one another as human beings with common values and morals. Make no mistake; we need to change the course we are on.

Admittedly, despite the crisis we are facing, I am not going to throw my cell phone in the garbage, and I don't expect you will either. The fact is that the smart phone is here to stay.

Technology will continue to advance, making communication easier, while at the same time

increasing the risk that authentic connections between humans will decline. However, the

situation is not hopeless. Being aware of what is at stake is a critical step in ensuring that as

technology improves that we do not lose our ability to truly connect with one another.

The fact of the matter is that within us lies the problem, and also the solution. If we want to address this crisis, all we need to do is manage our technology better. Choosing to prioritize personal connections and relationships over the ease of smart phone communication and distraction is all that is required. It is a choice that if made by enough of us can have a big impact. So in an effort to lead by example, please do not try to reach me between 6-7 pm tonight as I will be having dinner with my family and I look forward to sharing my day with them!