

## The Luddite Librarian

*"I fear the day technology will surpass our human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots."* Albert Einstein

Dear Reader, the esteemed editors of this periodical were pleased with my first contribution, and have asked me to continue my tirade and lambast against the insidious toys of cyber communication, those which eat our brains and civility.

Allow me to elucidate the ills that are leading our frail society on a downward spiral toward collapse. Civility is not something kept in cold storage, like a Virginia ham, and trundled out for Aunt Trudy and Uncle Hiram. It is really the exercising of the Golden Rule on a daily basis.

Imagine: You are explaining the subtle yet excruciating details of the hemorrhoidal pain you suffer to a coworker who blatantly pulls his phone from his cardigan to check NHL scores. Of course you would be slighted, and it's bigger than medicine trumping hockey. Imagine you are waxing piously to some colleague the many accomplishments of your precocious child, and he pulls a comrade over for a selfie, complete with that new scepter of egoism, the selfie stick! Consider: you and the man who is courting your skillset are dining in a booth at KFC and the party next to you are cavorting and carping over a Jim Carrey movie that they watch as they munch on the skins of extra crispy chicken. You are offended! Of course, you are, because the Golden Rule has ceased to have validity for so many. The Visigoths and Vandals have crossed the frontier and soon will be dining on your children.

If you think this is somehow farce or parody, think again. The key to one to one personal communication is the premise that both of you are in the room. How can you really be in the room if you are inspecting the newest outfit of Kim Kardashian? I have colleagues who attempt to fool themselves, that multitasking means all tasks are performed equally with adeptness and finesse. This perhaps is true with checkers and beer drinking, but it is not true with human discussion, and I am sorry, but you fool yourselves.

## The Technophile

Imagine, dear reader, that your loved one is sick and you must continue to work-- you cannot be there at every moment to help make the quotidian choices that modern medicine enables. Imagine, now, that there is a device that allows you to both gather around the water cooler and hear about the drama of a recent sporting match or celebrity selfie, and simultaneously remain updated on your loved one's medical condition. This is the reality of digital mobile technology.

And, while these digital technologies are not the barbarians of yesteryear politely requesting your attention from a newsstand, but a new crop of invaders, vying for your undivided and continuous attention, we still have the ability to both benefit from advancement and remain politely engaged in society.

If we consider the golden rule: *do unto others as you would have them do unto you*, we can see that it is about goodness but also understanding. Contained in this brief statement is the idea that each person has a personal truth and a lens to see the actions of others. The golden rule asks believers to remember that there are many personal truths when you interact with others. It is about modeling good behavior not only for the sake of kindness, but so that we ourselves might be shown respect and attention. It hitches selflessness to the wagon of selfishness to achieve a more pleasant society. The thoughtful user of any technology would consider how their activity affects others each time they use it. For example, you might ask, Does my print newspaper take up too much room on this crowded train, and even though I am busy reading page six, should I fold it a little? or, Will my friends understand if I check my phone to see this text message from my mother? or, Should I watch this short video of the weather report on my phone in this crowded movie theater? (yes, yes, no).

Technology has the ability to draw our attention away from the immediate concerns of daily life or social interaction. It can limit

As an educator I am gifted with more meetings that I would wish. It is galling to be spending my precious time listening to warm air rising when the Under-Superintendent of Cognitive Duress and the Director of Digestive Assessment whip out their devices because they are soooo important that they can't be incommunicado for an hour-long meeting! Really? Does your puppy have a hangnail? Or do you have another funny home video of your neighbor swatting yellow jackets with a tennis racket?

The device makes the world spin exponentially faster. To walk in the woods, to smell the roses puts the universe into perspective. The device is perverse; it brings one a cosmic myopia. The physicist-theologian may ask for the correlation between the omnipresence of technology and the decreasing of spirituality in our everyday lives. Ulcers prevail and tranquility ceases to nudge you. Daniel Post Senning, author of Emily Post's *Manners in a Digital World: Living Well Online*, writes, "Our working definition of etiquette happens any time two people are relating. It's all about the expectations we have for each other, and the ways that we take each other into consideration when we think about what we do and how we behave. New communication is inherently fraught territory."

Live in the present, reader. Smell the roses all around you, not those you find on Facebook. Fight the fraughtness!

James B. Tindall  
tindallj@nwasco.k12.or.us

the quality of interpersonal interactions by drawing our attention away, if we let it. But current technologies can also provide solutions for interactions that cannot be face to face. Not all digital communication is cats riding on Roombas. If we are able to respect all communication, both in person and digital, we gain perspective without losing civility. Online classes allow global student populations to learn skills and interact with experts that they might not have otherwise had access to. People miles and miles away from each other can share the one-on-one conversations that are so vital to connect human to each other. Consider the parent away on business, the sibling deployed in a foreign country, the aid worker who needs the help of a remote translator, or innumerable other situations where geography is an impediment that we can overcome. Here, digital linked mobile technology is not a disturbance or a frivolity, but a key tool to living a meaningful life in good company.

Reader, if you can't be with the one you love, love the technology that allows you to have a close meaningful relationship anyway. And remember that it's possible to be a boor with or without technology. Before the advent of distractive personal technology did you really think that your child's precocity was that interesting? The appearance of that annoying smartphone during your monologue may simply be confirming what was true all along.

Leila Belle Sterman  
leila.sterman@montana.edu