

The Travesty of Technology: Because texting is so much easier than talking

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September 25, 2007

No matter where you go or what you do in public these days, you cannot avoid the sight of people listening to music on their iPods, talking on their cell phones, text-messaging their friends, or even using their phones to surf the web. While the technological advances of the past decade have brought a renaissance of communication breakthroughs, they have also damaged the very essence of human interaction: verbal conversation.

As a college student in 2007, I find myself in the heart of this revolution. While growing up, I have experienced each of these advances one after another, and by the time high school arrived, the internet had become the key social outlet for students my age. By my Junior year of high school, I no longer received phone calls about parties or events. Instead, an "e-vite" would be sent over a social networking site, such as Myspace or Facebook. I watched the people around me get sucked into this revolution, and I saw them spiral into depression as a result of their technologically-induced isolation. After going to college, I learned from students who had come from all over the United States that this did not apply only to my community, and that this lifestyle encompasses all of America's teen culture.

Rather than sitting down and talking with their friends about a problem, teenagers will write a blog about it instead. Instant messaging has become a critical communication tool among youth, where adolescents will spend hours online and instant messaging ("IMing" for short), instead of actually visiting with their friends in person. Such a lifestyle leads to feelings of isolation and emotional starvation, because body language and the warmth of a friend's smile or touch are lost in a ":-)" text or an instant message.

The true nail in the coffin for human interaction, though, is public solitude. Portable electronics have brought about an escape from daily life, and the headphones of an MP3 player that serve as noise-cancelling earmuffs also tune out everyone else in the world. Rarely do people strike up conversations with others on a bus, in a waiting room, or while in line at the store anymore. Instead, they insert their earbuds, check their email, and tune everything else out. This can make life easier in the short-term, and even seem like emotional management, but in the end, it has the tendency to make people feel isolated

and socially inept, as it becomes impossible to meet others without actually communicating with them.

Simple interaction with others is the key. A college student in line at a grocery store would benefit greatly from removing his headphones and taking in his surroundings. At that point, he would notice the woman in front of him loudly complaining about the prices, the man behind him sighing loudly, and the checkers complaining to each other about their long shifts. Getting used to these irritants serves as preparation for the potential problems in the work world to come in the future. How will this student react when he gets his first job, and finds that he has to work with people just like this? The iPod headphones won't be available, and he may find himself in a world that is unknown to him.

Life is not conducted through the earbuds of an iPod. A CEO of a company does not rise through the ranks by text-messaging the board members. True leadership skills come from everyday life; development of these skills at a young age is critical for success in the real world. It is not to be doubted that these inventions have improved the quality of life, and that it has never been easier to keep in touch with friends. The key is to use such technology selectively and resist letting them dominate everything you do. It is to be remembered that a little conversation goes a long way.