

# Please, Let's Talk

We are spending too much time on our smart phones and tablets texting to one another instead of talking face to face. While the smart phone and texting can be a positive tool for quick and convenient communication, too much texting is not healthy for building long-lasting healthy relationships and it is not good for the brain.

I have literally seen people going for walks, sitting by the beach, and waiting at the bus stop, and all they are doing is looking at their smart phones texting or surfing the Internet. Some are even texting while they are stepping on the bus. While we feel good receiving instant messages, there are times we must look up. You need to look at people around you. Take in the moments. Look at nature. What's most embarrassing and perhaps insulting is when there is family or community social gathering and the majority of people are looking at their tablets or smartphones instead of interacting with one another. Perhaps it is wise that when there is a family dinner or group gathering designed for social interaction, the organizers have a receptacle at the entrance in which everyone leaves his or her smartphone until the event is over.

My wife and I were at a neighborhood eatery where there is a place for people to relax and socialized. Right away we observed that we were the only ones talking with each other and looking at each other. Every table had either a family, teens, or single adults who were all looking at their smartphones. They were not even talking to each other. It was a deafening silence and a pitiful sight to behold. "Is this socialization?" I said to myself. The other morning, I saw a man whose dog was walking him. Yes, that is true. He was not walking his dog. The dog was on the leash pulling him along as his head was turned downward with his eyes fixed on his smart phone and his fingers were continuously clicking away. It was a good thing there was no traffic on the street at that time.

I wonder if we are losing the art of talking with each other. It concerns me that if we continue down this pathway, relationships and communications in relationships, as we once knew it, face to face, will be something of the past and it will really be detrimental to our very existence. We will no longer know how to interpret body language, tone of voice or inflections.

Let me once again hasten to say that I am not against using a smartphone, iPad, or another modern device to help us be more efficient and to keep in contact with each other. During the past four years, Annick and I have actually watched our four grandchildren literally grow simply by the weekly free video communication via Messenger, WhatsApp, Hangouts, Snapchats, Google, etc. When we finally met them face to face they responded as though they have always been in our presence. Despite this positive experience, we have learned that nothing can replace the human touch and face to face sharing. Nothing.

## ANOTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Interestingly, there is even a global trend towards less and less use of voice mail (leaving a message on the phone) even as a part of professional services. Neil Howe, in his July 2015 article, "Why Millennials Are Texting More And Talking Less" states: "As part of a firm-wide campaign to cut costs, JPMorgan Chase offered to eliminate voicemail for thousands of employees who don't interact directly with clients. About 65% took the offer, resulting in over \$3 million in annual savings. Executives say that the decision is overdue, pointing out that most workers—particularly those under 40—have long relied on e-mail, text messaging, instant messaging, or social media to reach others on the job and in their daily lives." Neil continues to explain that several huge companies decided to follow suit. Coca-Cola KO made a similar move, only 6% of employees decided to keep it. Bank of America BAC and Citigroup are considering following suit. In 2012, Vonage reported that the number of voicemail messages left on user accounts dropped 8% from the year before, while the number of people who retrieved their messages fell 14%. In a Harvard Business Review essay urging companies to dump voicemail, author Michael Schlage doesn't mince words: "A communications medium that was once essential has become as clunky and irrelevant as Microsoft MSFT -DOS and carbon paper."

While this might not be that negative and it is saving millions of dollars, it might be feeding into a trend that in the long run might be more non-productive because the human touch would have been lost.

I do admit that Millennials think differently than Baby Boomers and the rest of us. Neil states: Millennials are shying away from calls and moving toward texting because many of them see the phone as “overly intrusive, even presumptuous.” Thus, a less intrusive force of sharing—texting. How cold are we going to get!

### THE WEAKNESS

There are some concerns about the long term use of smartphone texting. In the article “5 Worrying Ways Texting Affects Your Health, Your Relationships, and Your Brain” by Gabrielle Moss, he shares this painful finding: “You've probably heard the bad news about "text neck," a medical condition caused by the downward angle we hold our heads at while texting, emailing, and otherwise using our smartphones. The pressure that bending our head down puts on our necks creates text neck's side effects, which can include strained muscles, pinched nerves, and herniated discs (yup, the same kind of herniated discs that often require surgery). Doctors even worry that, if nothing is done to correct it, text neck could eventually even lead to the neck's natural curve being distorted.”

What about relationships. There is no evidence that texting itself can damage relationships. Sometime texting helps because it is quick and easy way to tell your partner that you will get home later than planned. Research indicates: “While texting affectionate thoughts was viewed as improving the relationship's overall quality, relationships that prominently involved texting to apologize or make decisions were ranked as lower quality by women, while relationships that involved very frequent texting were ranked as lower quality by men. . . Study researcher Jonathan Sandberg noted that using text messages to hash out important relationship issues can strain a relationship's emotional development and the bonding of the pair in it, because when you limit most of your conversations to texting you miss out on the natural cues—body language, tone of voice, intonation, inflections, that really impact our views and interpretation. I have come to realize that there are lots of arguments because the one who sent the text forgets that the receiver did not see the body language or hear the voice intonations.

### THE BRAINS OF TEENAGER

Space would not allow me to share all I can on this topic. But I must share this serious findings about texting and brain development in teenagers. “A 2010 Canadian study on the link between texting and adolescent brain development found that teens who used smartphones frequently performed worse on tests measuring memory and attention span than teens who used their phones less often. Epidemiologist Dr. Michael Abramson, a professor at Monash University and the lead researcher on the study, postulated that this might be because smartphone technology like predictive text trains teens to work too quickly and make frequent mistakes.” Dear reader, let’s spend more time talking face to face and less time texting. Let us be respectful while in the presence of friends, in relationships or in meetings by putting away the smartphones or tablets. Let’s talk, please.

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