



## **Are you more intimate with your mobile devices than the people in your life?**

When you are in a line at the grocery store, or sitting in a coffee shop, or restaurant - what do you notice? Are people looking up or down? At a red light, do drivers notice when it turns green, or does it take a honk to redirect their attention?

Electronic devices are everywhere, and rarely out of reach. Have you ever left your phone behind somewhere, and felt the panic of being disconnected? Cell phones, tablets, or laptops accompany us everywhere, and are often bedtime companions. Many people have difficulty putting these down, and powering them off.

Many conflicts happen when you and a contact have different expectations about responding to texts, emails, or posts on social media. For some people, an incoming message is a stimulus demanding an immediate response, while others are occupied and prefer to wait until they have down time. In the time gap, assumptions are often made that may have no basis; and only reflect differences in management of communications.

For business purposes, there may be expectations that you are always on or

open. Do you buy in to customers' expectations, or do you have business hours and set limits on your availability? Can you power down, or does fear of a missed opportunity keep you always "on?"

The constant stream of incoming messages or mail can be overwhelming. Trying to keep up is potentially anxiety provoking when you have a need to be continuously clearing your mailbox. Learning to prioritize, and unsubscribe are keys to staying focused on what is truly important.

Have you had the experience of sitting face-to-face, not on face time; and your conversation is repeatedly interrupted with beeps? Your companion was looking at you, and then looking down before coming back up. Can you tell that this person lost track of what it was you were talking about?

Disrupted conversations are also interrupted trains of thought, and conversations go off line -the subject matter is lost. Do you hear "huh," or an acknowledgment of "where were we" before I took this call/ Apologetic or not, frustrations are likely to set in, and one or both may give up on the conversation. Or, the person waiting may embark on their online surfing expedition instead of waiting around feeling like a low priority.

There are many benefits we enjoy from technology that makes instantaneous communication possible. Urgent messages can be delivered, and information is readily available for making timely decisions. Although "out of office" messages are possible, does anyone really expect you to be unavailable?

We have become more intimate with our devices than the people in our lives - posting on social media rather than sharing our experiences in another person's presence, taking in the warmth of looking and being looked at, affirming your connection.

I believe we are becoming a culture of emotionally disconnected people. Increasingly, we are having more difficulty engaging in verbal conversations, discussing our differences, and problem-solving. The skill of inquiry has become a lost art in an age of self-absorption, commonly - "I don't want to miss the next beep."

Self-esteem is now measured by "likes" or the number of "followers" or "friends." Keeping up with postings and commenting are the language of today. In the past, reading a book while you were visiting with someone may have been considered rude. Today, the screen in front of your face is more the norm than the exception, and the concept of respect in another person's presence seems to have disappeared.

In my practice I help clients reconnect with their inner self, and the innermost parts of significant people in their lives. You can learn or perhaps relearn ways to relax the hold technology has on you, and be in charge of taking breaks. I believe you can choose to put the word "significant" back in relationships between human beings, knowing we really matter.

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