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Social Media

I'm soooooo bored. And worried, too.

Yes, yes, I know. The world has changed. Nothing will ever be the same. Because now, we have social media. There's Facebook and LinkedIn. Pinterest and Twitter. You can text and not even bother to talk with anyone. You can even stay in touch with everyone else while you're sitting with friends in the park. Or you can do your email while attending a board meeting. Or...

This is actually not good. This is, actually, pretty bad.

You aren't paying attention to the friends you're with when you're texting others. You aren't making good decisions at the board meeting when you're checking your email. And really, you think all those people on Facebook are your friends?

Social media has a role in relationship building. But not everyone wants to link through social media.

Social media can help you bring people together sometimes. But, as Malcolm Gladwell wrote, "the revolution won't be tweeted."¹ We still have to gather together physically and demonstrate and march.

Communicating is different than true connection. "We live in a technological universe in which we are always communicating. And yet we have sacrificed conversation for mere connection."

Yes, technology (and social media) is making people lonelier

Read the cover article of the May 2012 *Atlantic*? "Is Facebook Making Us Lonely?" The subhead says: "Social media - from Facebook to Twitter - have made us more densely networked than ever. Yet for all this connectivity, new research suggests that we have never been lonelier (or more narcissistic) - and that this loneliness is making us mentally and physically ill."

Do you have kids or grandkids, nieces or nephews? Read Lee Siegel's article "The Kids Aren't Alright: The Perils of Parenting in the Digital Age," *Newsweek*, October 15, 2012. Consider these two comments – and there are so many more: "Kids are losing jobs because of things they've posted." "For the most hurt, withdrawn children, the Internet is like 'Columbine on Crack.'" You remember Columbine, don't you?

¹ "Small Change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted," Malcolm Gladwell, *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2010.

Read Sherry Turkle's² *New York Times* opinion piece, "The Flight From Conversation."³ Texting and tweeting and Facebooking... These aren't true conversations. These aren't true relationships.

Turkle notes: "Texting and e-mail and posting let us present the self we want to be. This means we can edit.... and delete..." But true human relationships are rich, messy and demanding. And true conversation is rich, messy and demanding, too.

Turkle's article ends by noting that all this social media stuff has a place in our lives - in our work and politics and friendships and romance. But social media does not "substitute for conversation."

For even more analysis about technology – and insights about how technology is likely making us lonelier – read Turkle's marvelous book *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. I found this book to be intriguing and engaging, worrisome and just plain scary. The book is a must-read for people designing and managing businesses, for-profit or nonprofit. A must-read for those highly engaged in technology and social media.

Just consider this research – yes, research! – about how technology and the digital world affects us: Technology as the “architect of our intimacies.” Risk-free affairs on Second Life. Facebook postings as “authentic communication.” Sociable robots “marry companionship with convenience.” “Relentless connection” making people lonelier.

Getting people to take action

Consumers buying stuff. Donors giving gifts. And the hype tells us that this all works faster, easier, and better through social media.

But not so fast! Ed Keller and Brad Fay have tons of research that deny this assumption. In *The Face-to-Face Book: Why Real Relationships Rule in a Digital Marketplace*, Keller and Fay talk about the "social media gold rush." You know, all the hype and frenzy.

Instead, the authors remind us that we're missing a "far bigger opportunity with much greater impact to connect with people....the word-of-mouth conversations that happen in our kitchens and living rooms, in our churches and synagogues, next to the office water cooler, on the sidelines of youth soccer and baseball games, powered by the intimacy of face-to-face communications.

The Face-to-Face Book focuses on consumers and sales. But smart fundraisers can apply this to fund development and relationship-building with donors.

Human conversation

Face-to-face conversations. Just imagine that. Face-to-face conversations with customers and clients, volunteers and donors. Honest, genuine conversation.

Read the lovely, lovely book *Conversation: How Talk Can Change Our Lives* by Theodore Zeldin. Inspiring and motivating. (And really short, too.)

Get scared by Maggie Jackson's *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age*. No, we mostly cannot multi-task. Instead, we have to pay attention... "For nothing is more central to creating a flourishing society built upon learning, contentment, caring, morality,

² Turkle is a social scientist at MIT, and a psychoanalytical psychologist. As a specialist in technology and society, Turkle has been exploring our lives in the digital world for almost 15 years.

³ "The Flight from Conversation," Sherry Turkle, *New York Times*, Sunday Review: The Opinion Pages, April 21, 2012.

reflection, and spirit than attention." Then check out "Growing Up Digital, Wired for Distraction," *New York Times*, 11-21-10, by Matt Richtel.

Think about humanity and being human. Read "Who's the Boss, You or Your Gadget?" *New York Times*, 02-01-11 by Mickey Meece. Then read Jaron Lanier's book *You Are Not A Gadget: A Manifesto*. Lanier is the father of virtual reality and has been engaged in the Internet since the beginning. And he's worried that all our gadgets are compromising our humanity.

If you're really motivated, read about conversation as a core business practice. And then apply it to all kinds of relationship building. Check out Peter Senge's learning organization theory and the concepts of dialogue and conversation and asking questions. Read *The Fifth Discipline* and *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* if you haven't already. Read *Dialogue: Rediscover the Transforming Power of Conversation* by Ellinor and Gerard.

So. There you have it. I'm sooooo bored with social media. And I'm worried, too. I'm worried for our society and our ability to nurture community. I'm worried for our nonprofits and our donors.

Stop the hype. Pay attention to the broader context. Read these books and articles. Don't get distracted.



People describe me as "one of the most thoughtful, inspirational, and provocative leaders in the philanthropic sector." In January 2013, I begin my 26th year as a consultant, specializing in fund development, strategic planning, and board development. I work with all types and sizes of nonprofits. I'm also a teacher, speaking at conferences worldwide, and serving as faculty in the graduate program for philanthropy at Saint Mary's University, MN.

My books *Keep Your Donors* and *Strategic Fund Development* (released in its 3rd edition in 2011) are standards in the field. I am a web columnist for the *Nonprofit Quarterly*, write feature articles, publish a free e-news, and blog. As a volunteer, I founded the Women's Fund of RI, chaired CFRE International, and regularly serve on boards. Visit me at www.simonejoyaux.com. Check out blogs, which give you lots of tips. And visit my Free Download Library for materials to use in your organization.