



How
to be
Human
in a
Digital
World

INNER TECHNOLOGY

By Jenny Black

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This little handbook
is a work in progress.
It is a collaborative work.

None of us have all the answers
for what we need to thrive as humans.
But all of us have *some* answers.

We believe when we work together,
we might just get a little closer
to the answers that really matter.

If you want to share your perspective on media
trauma, we want to hear from you.

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THE BEST TWO DAYS OF MY LIFE

When I was 10 years old, my parents got rid of our television. It was devastating. My brother and I watched my dad bring it out to the trash and we sobbed. We wept as if our world was ending. We were not wrong. A world was ending, but it was Laverne & Shirley's world and it was Grape Ape's world. It wasn't my world. In reality, my world was being given back to me.

That day, after all of my tears dried up, I pulled my dusty bike out of the shed, found my roller skates in the dark corner of my closet and then baked up some mud pies in my own backyard. I said to my parents,

“This is the best day of my life!”

Thirty years later, I had a similar experience. My life had become gray. There was an undercurrent of depression and a buzz of constant anxiety flowing through my otherwise great life. Like for most people, my phone had become an extension of my body. One day, it wouldn't turn on. The screen was blank even after charging all night. It was like another world was ending. However, there were no tears this time. Instantly, it felt like the most freedom I had been

granted since that day without my television. The constant and invisible weight that had unknowingly become a part of me, magically disappeared. It made me start asking questions—How could this one “little device” be so powerful? Was my *real* life happening through that phone or was my *real* life how I lived when I was off of it? Was I in control of this device or was this device in control of me? My thoughts, my feelings, my dreams, my opinions — were they my own? Or was the phone dictating them?

I wondered if anyone else was being affected in the same way.

If so, why was no one talking about it?

Acknowledging the way our phones affect us is not just “the elephant in the room,” it is *that* the elephant has eaten us. The problem is, when we are inside the elephant, **we cannot see, we cannot hear and we cannot feel what is going on inside of us or outside.** Our personal technology becomes an individualized world that seems to meet our needs, until it does not—until our relationships suffer, our sense of self is lost and the real world seems gray in comparison.

Life inside of our device has become so important to us, to the way that we live, think, plan and produce, that our real life often depends on it. Sometimes, we probably want to throw the phone in the trash along side my giant television. Most of the time we don't know how we would live without it.

Since the day my phone died, every day has been an adventure. I did not know that my brain and heart could function without my phone in hand. I believed that it was my connection to everything and everyone who was important to me. But by living through my phone, I lost connection with myself, with nature, with my love of people and my appreciation for the gift of life itself.

The word “technology” comes from a Greek word that means to weave a system or method of making or doing. [1]

This handbook is titled Inner Technology because we have abilities inside of ourselves that help us know what we need. As our digital worlds advance, we must remember to pay attention to our inner system so that we can weave together a sustainable future for all of us.

We must “tune in” to our own inner technology in order to know how to tend to the things we need in order to grow and thrive as humans.

In order to function inside of our digital world, we often disconnect from our inner technology.

Our goal for this handbook is to help you learn how to focus your attention on caring for your inner needs. If you want to participate in your digital world in ways that are beneficial to you and your society, you must learn to listen “first” to your inner technology.

Our hope is that this handbook will help you see, hear and feel that your life, inside and outside of the elephant, has meaning.

**How many hours a week do you spend on each of
on each of these areas of your life?**

FreshAir/Nature _____ hours/week

Free Time/Screen-Free _____ hours/week

Rest _____ hours/week

Sleep _____ hours/week

Eating/Preparing Food _____ hours/week

Experience physical/emotional safety _____ hours/week

Experience relaxation and belonging _____ hours/week

Exercise/Being Active _____ hours/week

Personal Hygiene _____ hours/week

Work/School _____ hours/week

Chores _____ hours/week

Screen-free time with others _____ hours/week

Screen-free fun _____ hours/week

Screen-time for work/school _____ hours/week

Screen-time for entertainment _____ hours/week

Screen-time on social media _____ hours/week

Texting _____ hours/week

We have 168 hours a week to care for ourselves,
to grow, to contribute and to thrive.

Hopefully, this exercise will help you learn about
what you are doing with your time, how it is
helping or harming you and decide
what you want to change.

TOO MUCH TOO FAST

*Our humanity is our most precious and fragile asset.
We need to pay attention to how it is being impacted
by technological changes.*

*Mary Aiken
The Cyber Effect [2]*

The pace of our digital lifestyle has taken its toll on us. It is not easy to be pulled between two worlds at all times. As a result, we are overstimulated and exhausted. This stress shows up in our health, our work, our relationships and it affects our overall enjoyment of life.

Because this is “just how life is today,” we have a hard time seeing that something must be out of balance if we are all feeling so defeated by our days.

As a culture, we are suffering from unhappiness, loneliness, anxiety and depression that does not match our life circumstances.

As our personal technology is advancing, our human needs are being neglected.

Some of those needs are fresh air, free time, water, sleep, eye contact, and being attentive care givers.

If we do not get what we need and respect our natural limitations, we will break. That is what makes us human.

On the other hand, if we do get what we need, we can recover, heal and get back to our once in a lifetime opportunity—actually living the one and only life we have been uniquely given.

Reality is full of the nutrients we need in order to thrive.

FEELING ANXIOUS?

Try this...

Power off your phone.
Put it out of your sight.

Take a deep breath.
Look around.

Notice **5** things that you see.

Notice **4** things that you hear.

Notice **3** things that you smell.

Notice **2** things that you feel.

Notice **1** thing that you taste.

This is *your* personal world.

This is *your* personal life.

This moment has what *you* need right now.

And it is the only place *you* have to be.

YOU & YOUR PHONE

Did you know that you are a human?
Of course, you know you are a human.
But our technology has us confused.

We unrealistically expect the same things from ourselves that we expect from our devices. Keeping the outer world updated on our lives can sometimes seem more important than keeping our inner-selves healthy. We want to respond quickly and accurately to everyone who contacts us and sometimes we forget that is impossible.

Humans have limitations and basic needs. When we do not get those needs met, we glitch. We need to be recharged just like our phones do. But plugging in is not what recharges us.

We need fresh air, free time, rest, food, safety, shelter, good hygiene, supportive relationships and meaningful work.

{phones don't need those things}

FRESH AIR

Whenever, however—GET OUTSIDE! Open your windows, breathe in the gift of the trees, the sound of the birds.

Staying indoors where you are breathing stale or recirculated air makes our bodies have to work harder to get the oxygen they need and fresh air will help to rejuvenate our bodies and minds.

*Elizabeth Yuko
Heath Benefits of Fresh Air [3]*

Dig in the dirt.

Build a fire.

Plant a seed.

Wrap up in a blanket if it is cold.

Soak up the sun if it is warm out.

Take in the beauty of all of the colors, shades and contrasts in nature.

Watch the clouds float through the sky.

Climb a tree.

Smell a flower.

Visit with a backyard critter.

Take your dog for a walk.

Swing in a hammock.

Let the stars be the last thing you see before you tuck yourself into bed.

And, of course, leave your phone tucked away indoors. Reconnect with Mother Nature every chance you get.

She remembers that you are human.

FREE TIME

One of the most subtle and socially acceptable ways in which we harm ourselves today is through over-scheduling. We try to pack in too much and we are going in too many directions at once. We are often running late, always attempting to be in several places at the same time. This is one reason we do not have time to take care of ourselves. The advent of our personal technology has ham-strung our free time.

Unscheduled, unsupervised, playtime is one of the most valuable educational opportunities we give our children [and ourselves]. It is fertile ground; the place where children strengthen social bonds, build emotional maturity, develop cognitive skills, and shore up their physical health.

*Jessica Lahey
The Gift of Failure [4]*

The most urgent reason we need free time is because life is full of the unexpected. We are overwhelmed and stressed because we have no time for the unexpected. This makes everything an emergency. An emergency requires that we engage in our flight or fight responses, using up our adrenaline. Those resources are intended for

actual emergencies. Life and death situations. Lost keys, a stained shirt, a printer out of ink. These are not emergencies.

Save up your energy for the real emergencies in life and give yourself some free time so that you don't freak out the next time you miss an appointment or forget it was your day to provide snacks. Next time you find yourself getting stressed, ask yourself, does this situation deserve my precious (and limited) emergency energy?

The second reason is that most of what you need in life, you get during free time. This is when you clean the kitchen, this is when you pay a bill, this is when you can visit with a neighbor.

You might even discover you already have what you need. Only when paying attention can you notice how much other's are giving to you and appreciate what you already have. We spend most of our energy facing daily challenges that we have unrealistically set up for ourselves and very little time and attention investing in our own resources. There is no sustainable life without giving ourselves free time. We must begin to design it into our lifestyle and protect it vigilantly. It is free! Your time is your human right!

REST

As we begin to detox from the constant supply of dopamine that our phones supply to us, we will notice that we are mentally and physically exhausted. Our brains and bodies are going to need a lot of rest in order to regulate our systems again.

Sleep deprivation can cause accidents, difficulty concentrating, slower problem solving, serious health problems like heart disease and stroke, depression, weight gain and impaired judgment.

*Camille Peri
Ten Things to Hate About Sleep Loss [5]*

It usually takes about 3 weeks of extra sleep to recover from sleep deprivation. Rehab centers say it also takes about 3 weeks to regulate our dopamine levels. (We will talk more about dopamine later).

Our devices have overstimulated our brains and bodies depriving us of both physical and mental rest.

We are not as smart or productive when we do not get the rest we need. You want to make good decisions. You want to be productive. So take a nap.

You have got to sleep, my friend! If you can lay back, close your eyes and fall asleep right now, then do it.

If you can't, then go to bed an hour earlier tonight than you usually do. Keeping your phone out of your room will certainly help.

Rest will replenish your body and soul.

FOOD

One of the first skills we learn as babies is how to feed ourselves. As we have discussed, when we are consumed by our personal devices, we disconnect from our physical bodies. We do not notice that we are hungry. Once we disengage from our digital world, we realize we are starving! And we need something to eat right now! You need groceries, you need time to prepare, even if you are ordering food from somewhere, you need time for delivery.

Today, make sure you have some simple foods available for the many times you need to eat each day. There is nothing quite so nurturing to yourself as anticipating your need for food.

To reap the rewards of trustworthy, satisfying, internally regulated eating, you must provide yourself with regular, reliable, rewarding meals as well as sit-down snacks if you need them.

*Ellyn Satter
Eat and Feed with Joy [6]*

You don't have to get all Pinterest-y about this. Just some plain Jane food.

Here are some ideas:

crackers, almond butter and fruit
avocado toast
pasta with butter and cheese
pre-made salad with cut up deli meat
multi-grain cereal with milk

Make your list. Go to the store and buy it. Eat when you are hungry. Several times a day.

Congratulations! You are feeding yourself. What a very human thing to do.

WATER

Get a water bottle.
Love your water bottle.
Fill it up. Sip on it all day.
When it is gone, refill it.
Keep sipping on it.
Refill it again.
Repeat everyday.

Keep your water bottle by your bed, at your desk and in your car.

You know, how you used to be with your phone? Except you actually need water.

You would literally die without water.

We are mostly made up of water. So, drink it in. The world is mostly made up of water. Splash in a puddle, sing in the rain, tip your bare toes in a creek, river, swimming pool or the ocean.

Listen to running water whenever possible.

Water is a healing agent.

SAFETY

Safety is one of our most basic needs and when met, we don't think about it. Most of our attention to safety has been about physical safety, that makes sense when we used to live primarily in our personal world.

In a digital world, the idea of safety for our minds and our emotions must also be prioritized. We need to protect our inner selves with the same diligence we had when we first learned about "stranger danger."

Think about the last time you felt really safe. This is one of the most important "true north" things you can learn about your inner technology. What does safety feel like? When you know what safe feels like, you will also know when you are not safe.

Some signs that you are not in the safe zone are feeling isolated, confused, blamed, pressured, intimidated or manipulated. In these cases, reach out for help.

*Dan Neuharth, PhD
10 Toxic Forms of Control in a Relationship [7]*

The real world is full of so many wonderful things and even more than that, it is full of really good people. However, our digital worlds are littered with more danger zones than safe zones. Often you are the only one who will know if you are safe.

You have to learn to trust your gut, to always feel free to walk away, talk to one of your friends in person and get their opinion if you are feeling uncertain.

SHELTER

Shelter is defined as *a place giving refuge from danger or bad weather*. While we need safety in a general sense, we need an actual place (or hopefully places) that we are safe.

Where can you to be safe from danger?

Where can you go to be worry-free?

Think of a place where you are free to just be yourself. We suggest making your bedroom your refuge. Make it a screen-free zone (and that goes for other people's phones, too).

Create a screen-free space, where you'll build the habit of not using your phone in this room or area. You have a refuge when you're overwhelmed from notifications. You can read books again And, you'll have a place to go where you want to chat with your family and friends, uninterrupted.

Herbert Lui

Why Your Home Needs a Screen-Free Space [8]

Can you imagine one sacred place where you didn't have to worry about responding to a text, comparing yourself to that last post or worrying about what your friends were sharing while you were hanging out?

Create a place for yourself where you can be free of that demanding text thread, mindless scrolling, buying things you don't even want, or playing games you can never win. This could be your place to do all the things you've been wanting to do.

Most importantly, this is where you can rest. Not just sleep, but actually relax.

GOOD HYGIENE

This is another one of those basic-basics. It cannot be ignored. Personal hygiene is one of the most respectful things we can do for ourselves and no one else can do it for us.

Practicing good personal hygiene helps you feel good about yourself which is important for your mental health.

*Donald Novey
A Guide to Good Personal Hygiene [9]*

Take a shower or a bath

Shampoo and condition your hair

Shave

Clean and trim your fingernails (no manicure required)

Clean and trim your toenails (no pedicure required)

Brush and Floss your teeth

Take your medicine/supplements/vitamins

Care for any cuts or hurts on your skin

Schedule necessary appointments (eye doctor, yearly check-up, dermatologist, haircut)

Make a list of any items you need:

Shampoo

Conditioner

Razor

Nail Clippers

Body Wash

Tooth Brush

Tooth Paste

Dental Floss

Face Wash

Lotion

Medicines

Vitamins

Band-aids

SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

We are desperate for human-to-human connection. Simply being together is enough. We don't need a special meal or cute decorations. We certainly don't need to post about it. Think: having a bowl of cereal with friends on a Saturday morning.

The most important thing is that you regularly connect with other humans. Make a plan and then plan to put your phones away when you are together. Learn a new game. Watch a movie together and then discuss it over root beer floats.

To get to know someone, you must spend time with them and develop the relationship. You cannot depend on emails, texts, newsletters, blogs, etc., to build these relationships. Don't get me wrong: I'm not saying these aren't important tools that don't have a place. However, they cannot take the place of spending time with people.

*Michael Mirau
The Importance of Relationships in the Digital
Age [10]*

Find something that matches you, what you love, your pace of life. Would you prefer a book club, a game night, a fire pit night, trivia at the local pub?

Everyone is lonely. Everyone.

There is the potential for community all around you. When we look up and around (instead of down at our phones) we will find people waiting to connect. Because they are looking up, too.

We need each other to truly heal.

INSIDE TREATS

High fives, eye contact, smiles, comments, remembering someone's name, remembering someone's face, hugs, handshakes, pats on the back, holding a door open—these all give us inside treats. And it doesn't even matter if you are the one giving or receiving them, you get the treat.

Compliment people on anything you notice: great shoes, a bleach blond Mohawk, their smile, their beautiful name, their determination to be out running in this weather, absolutely anything!

You know that great feeling you get when someone leaves a funny or nice comment on your post, it is even better in real life. Comment, share, like, love... bring all those words back into your real world.

This is how we will weave together the fabric of our society and, in the process, we also fill up our insides with goodness. These kinds of treats do not go away. They do not disappear, they build up inside of us as well as build us up.

When we offer dignity to the humans around us, we also acknowledge our own dignity.

Today, fill your world (and yourself) with as many inside treats as you can.

What are some inside treats you have already given yourself?

What are some inside treats you have given to others?

What are some inside treats you want to give to the world?

THE FULFILLMENT OF PRODUCTIVITY

The more flow experiences that occur in a given week, the higher life satisfaction reported. Human beings, it seems, are at their best when immersed deeply in something challenging.

*Cal Newport
Deep Work [11]*

MEANINGFUL WORK

What is meaningful work? Ask yourself, do you love what you do or are you doing it for someone else's approval? Or in the case of social media, for the quick pleasure of someone else's feedback?

Meaningful work isn't just about changing the world or discovering your passion, it is about becoming more of the person you want to be. Even tedious, boring jobs—especially boring, tedious jobs—can help us develop patience, compassion, appreciation and help us find our own flow.

This is when our work actually works! It is also another way to invest in more inside treats. Meaningful work makes us want to wake up in the

morning because we are looking forward to what we will be doing that day. When we have worked hard, we sleep better as our tired body naturally recovers from a hard day's work.

Work can be doing some basic chores, it can be caring for a friend, it can be doing a project, discovering a hobby, making a meal, organizing or decorating a space.

Work is when you challenge yourself to accomplish something that makes you proud regardless of what anyone else thinks.

LIVING ROOM HOBBIES

When we stop “killing” time, all of the sudden life will begins to open up to us. At first, we will have nothing to do and not quite know what to do with our selves. One of the biggest challenges is transitioning from work to relaxation each day. We have become dependent on our phones do to this for us and thus, we never get to the relaxing part.

In preparation for childbirth, my cousin and her husband meditated together every evening. It was such a life-changing routine that after the baby was

born they decided to continue it with a little twist. Now instead of meditation, they each work on a hobby. The practice of a hobby calms our mind, relaxes our body and builds our self-esteem.

Personally, I love this idea. My kids are older and our life is louder so we do “living room hobbies” with background music and buzzing conversation. That way, in place of sitting down and checking in with our phones at the end of a workday, we pick up our hobbies.

Some hobbies we have discovered are knitting, calligraphy, coloring, mazes, cookbooks, sketching, playing a kazoo, playing a guitar, and reading out loud to each other.

Keep your supplies where they are always in sight. Go ahead, relax into your comfy spot and pick up your hobby instead of your phone.

You can also bring these hobbies to your car, to the airport, anywhere you might find yourself with some downtime to pick up something wonderful.

CHORES

When is the last time you did chores? Did you ever have to do chores growing up? Do you know what your chores are? Do you know how much time you need each day and each week to do them?

Chores are the tasks we need to do regularly to be prepared for life each day. Chores are the resources we need in order to be able to work, play and care for ourselves.

The ability to sustain your own daily routine is one of your essentials. And it is so important that you do so because this is where self-esteem is born!

This means: clean up your own dishes, take out the trash, wash, fold and put away your clothes, tidy your bedroom, keep your stuff picked up from any common living spaces, make your bed, wash your sheets, vacuum, and dust.

My three chores every day are: dishes, trash and laundry. When I miss a day, it's no big deal, but once I miss two days, there are no clean forks and I can't find my workout clothes. When I miss three days, we have no clean towels and the kitchen is no longer functional.

It doesn't take me much time each day to do my chores, but it does take time. All the important things in life take time.

You are a human and you have the ability to take care of your own habitat. This is the simplest way to increase your self-esteem.

Do a basic job for yourself. Another ripe opportunity for an inside treat! There is nothing quite like hearing a young child proudly announce, "I did it."

Self-esteem is built inside of ourselves a tiny step at a time.

PLAY

Do you remember how to play?

Were you one of those lucky ones who got to play outside everyday when you were growing up?

Play comes more naturally for some personalities than others. But we were all made to play. It is one of the very first things we do as humans.

Play is finding pleasure and joy in activities.

Play is engaging in some forgotten idea of fun like jumping on the trampoline or discovering something brand new like goat yoga.

Play is riding your bike, going roller skating, gardening, playing solitaire with an actual deck of cards, finding a local park and swinging on the swings, joining a dance class or a softball team.

Play helps us process all of the “too much” that is in our minds and bodies.

MONDAY:

I used to love to _____.

Fill in the blank and then go to it today.

TUESDAY:

I used to love to _____.

Fill in the blank and then go to it today.

WEDNESDAY:

I used to love to _____.

Fill in the blank and then go to it today.

THURSDAY:

I used to love to _____.

Fill in the blank and then go to it today.

FRIDAY:

I used to love to _____.

Fill in the blank and then go to it today.

SATURDAY:

I used to love to _____.

Fill in the blank and then go to it today.

SUNDAY:

I used to love to _____.

Fill in the blank and then go to it today.

MEDITATION

Real life used to be full of meditation. We just called it boredom. We sat in waiting rooms for hours with nothing to do but read outdated magazines. We drove forever with nothing to watch except the view outside the window.

We waited in line and just had to wait.

We had no idea how essential those boring moments were until we no longer had them.

These “boring” moments are when our brain is filtering through all of the information that it has taken in. This is when we process our feelings, think our thoughts, and organize our ideas.

These still moments are when our amazing mind sorts through the information it has seen and heard and decides what to throw away, what to file away and what to connect.

When we are hooked into the “dopamine hit” cycle created by digital devices, we become a lot less like toddlers discovering independence and a lot more like trained dogs.

We just react, with little to no gap between stimulus and response. We completely forget we have choices.

One of the effects of a sustained meditation practice is to help us hold the little space between stimulus and response. We can build up those emotional muscles that help us respond rather than react.

Be bored today as often as possible.

This is when your brain is healing.

EXERCISE

Get out of your head and into your body.

Exercise is one of the greatest life-enhancers you can find. Make it an adventure. Try walking, running, dancing, yoga, rock climbing, weight-lifting, roller-skating, swimming or any physical activity that gets you moving. You were made to move.

Humans are meant to move; the body is supposed to give the brain a great ride every day. When we don't move it throws a lot of things off. We've become so sedentary that kids have the same rate of back pain as adults.

Scott Bautch

Movement Throughout the Day [12]

Movement is so important. One friend said that her doctor told her if she wanted to still be walking when she was 80 years old, she needed to be walking three miles every day.

Do not worry about your skill level or how you look.

Just do it! This is for you.

Let yourself be a beginner. The most important thing is that you have fun because your brain and your body need you to exercise regularly.

“Exercise is important to me because unless I feel my heart racing, my skin sweating, my lungs pumping, I can forget that I’m a human and approach life as if I were a machine. I tend to feel a strong wave of resistance to feelings or “wasting time” when i go on a long hike, then when I move past that, I have all kinds of good ideas and problem solving and a wave of contentment and the feeling that all is well. I have not found a way to short-circuit that. It requires being outdoors, in nature, and time.”

40 year-old, PhD, mother of two

NEEDS AND FEELINGS

Feelings are your body's response to what is happening inside and out.

Feelings are not good or bad.

Ask yourself, what are you feeling?

Whatever it is, that is okay. You are okay!

Now that you know what you are feeling, what do you need?

What can you give to yourself that would be helpful?

Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone.

Mr. Rogers [13]

Real life is full of frustration, happiness, disappointment, anger, sadness, joy and fear.

If we listen, our feelings can tell us what we need. Humans are designed to feel needs, communicate needs and take action to meet those needs.

Our virtual worlds are also full of experiences that prompt feelings. However, these experiences and feelings are intensified because our behavior is intensified in the virtual world.

“The internet is like the red flag they wave in front of the bull to make him aggressive. When I feel myself getting angry, I just have to turn it off. I am not going to let something I am watching make me someone I don’t want to be.”

-19 year-old, male, philosopher

If you are having extreme feelings as a result of something online, that means you are human.

One of the best antidotes is giving yourself some breathing room from all those red flags.

THOUGHTS

Thoughts are the constant stream of conversation that happens inside of your head. Thoughts are the words our brain comes up with to try to understand our feelings and make sense of what is happening.

Our minds are amazing. We can think hundreds of thoughts in just a few seconds. We are full of ideas, opinions, dreams, problems and solutions.

Because of social media, we now have access to everyone else's thoughts. Which means we are also full of *other* people's ideas, opinions, and images.

This can be wonderful! We have the ability to work together, join each other, be and do more as a result of all of this communication. This is why we love and defend our virtual worlds. So much good can come from them.

However, when our thoughts become overwhelming or if we are not thinking for ourselves, we must remember that we are the only ones who get to decide what we want to think about.

One of your basic human rights is that no one else gets to tell you how to think or feel. That is *your* business. That is *your* inside self.

When your dopamine levels are reset, your thoughts will begin to slow down and your feelings will not be so overwhelming.

Soon you will notice that you are thinking thoughts you want to be thinking and your feelings will be based on your reality.

This is being human.

Our thoughts and feelings are resources for helping us learn how we want to live.

THE DESIGN OF THE PHONE

The ways we use and are used by our media affects individuals and social circles at different levels.

Before we dive into how we can design sustainable digital lives, it is important to note that we do not hate social media, believe it is the death of society or that it is to blame for everything that is going wrong in our world.

It is important to know how to use media to your benefit. It is also important to know when you are being used by it.

Our digital tools can allow any of us to grow, become, learn and do almost anything we want to. BUT, this can only happen if we learn to become architects of our own digital life instead of being consumed by it.

The more we understand our inner technology, the better we will know when something isn't right, or simply isn't right for us.

Let's start with the design of these life-changing devices.

Our phones are not neutral. That is how they keep our attention. Someone gets paid when we are scrolling through our screens. Your phone needs you to feel insecure so that you will stay hooked.

They are designed to psychologically manipulate us and give us dopamine hits to keep us hooked. These social media platforms were designed to be addictive and exploit users.

*Sean Parker
First President of Facebook [14]*

When we feel good, we put our phones down and no one gets paid for that.

Social media platforms hire attention engineers who try to make these products as addictive as possible. That maximizes the profit made from your data and attention. Social media brings with it multiple harms: permanently reducing your capacity to concentrate, more likely to feel lonely and isolated and increases feelings of inadequacy and depression.

*Cal Newport
Deep Work [15]*

Except for us! We get paid!

We get paid in sunshine, focus, quality of life and real relationships!

This is why your phone will never be your best friend even if it seems like everyone you love is in there.

Real friends make us feel safe, happy and accepted.

DOPAMINE

These designers know how to make something addictive. Many apps, most games, and even the simple design of our phones are created to give you hits of dopamine. Dopamine makes us feel good.

Dopamine is a brain chemical that literally makes us happy, and it is released every time we receive something on our phones. It could be a text from a loved one, a “like” on Facebook, or a bit of breaking news we find interesting. Dopamine feels good, so we keep checking our phones, hoping to get a little hit of it.

Jeff Stibel

Why You are Addicted to Your Phone [16]

That really good feeling starts to make the rest of our life feel really bad. One reason, of course, is because we have neglected the other aspects of our life. But, even more alarming is that too much dopamine can cause anxiety, hyperactivity, mania, learning problems, motivation problems, insomnia, aggression, depression and digestion issues [16].

Remember when we talked about real life becoming gray?

This is the reason addiction is, well, so addictive. Our life narrows down to only feeling “good” when we are living life enhanced by dings, buzzes and bright lights.

When our phones alert us, we receive a 400% spike in our dopamine levels. This is slightly less than a hit from cocaine.

*JustHealth.net
Too Much Dopamine [17]*

As you decide for yourself how you want to use your phone, start paying attention to which of your digital activities brings you that really good feeling, that not so good feeling, and to how you felt about your real life before you picked up your device and when you put it back down.

“I escape from my problems by going to my phone. It helps as long as I stay on. And then, when I get off it again, I feel worse than before about myself and about my life.”

-17 year-old, female, loves children and creating videos

“A few years ago I slipped into a deep depression. Not knowing how to turn to others in my time of need, I found myself retreating to remote areas and getting through the day on my phone. It was very easy to play games or scour social media in search of meaning and importance in life. My phone became a barrier to the healing I needed.”

-40 year old, financial advisor, father of two

DETOX

Our personal media has been created in such a way to send you messages that make you feel certain ways and think certain things.

When we live through our phones, we are actually being programmed to think and feel what those designers need us to think and feel. This means that many of our thoughts and feelings are not actually our original thoughts and feelings.

In order to heal we need to understand the difference between messages that we are processing and thoughts we are thinking. It will take some time.

The more hours we have away from the programming on our screens, the more time and space we will give our brains to filter all of this information.

At the beginning of this process you might be confused by what you notice.

When you see a disturbing image, your mind needs to process and it can often repeat the image or experience. This is called a flashback.

This is your brain processing what you have seen. Your mind is working to sense of those images and file them away.

For example, if I have seen a violent image and then I imagine something violent, this does not make me violent. It is my mind filtering information.

If you are having disturbing thoughts, you may want to seek out therapy. Talking it out with anyone will help. Especially other people who are also deprogramming.

We need support during this process.

AN ETHICAL PHONE

Currently, our phones have been designed with someone else's best interest in mind. However, one of the great things about this technology is that we can set up our phones and other devices so that they serve us instead of us serving them. Once you know what you need and you understand the ways this technology can harm and distract you, you can take some steps to create an ethical phone.

First of all, you must know that much of what we have come to depend on is actually addictive technology, programs that were designed so that you could not put them down. At the time of this writing, the big tech companies are beginning to acknowledge this.

The chances of most of us being addicted are very high.

Apple and Google are acknowledging the harms of addictive technology with their recent additions of tools to help with addictions caused by excessive phone use.

*Time Magazine
Why You are Addicted to Your Phone [18]*

The Center for Humane Technology offers some simple steps to help you design your phone in a way that is less stimulating and therefore, less addictive. Some suggestions are to go gray scale, monitor your screen time, turn off notifications, clear your home screen, and take social media off of your phone.

We have also interviewed some friends who have taken these steps and included their thoughts and experiences.

GO GRAY

This is the easiest step you can take today to help yourself put your digital life back under your control.

Go to Settings > General > Accessibility > Display Accommodations > Color Filters. Switch Color Filters on and select Grayscale.

Challenge yourself to go gray for one week or one month. Notice how it changes the way you engage with your phone.

"I've been gray for a couple months now. For me, it took the candy coating off my phone, so I could see it for what it was. I tuned the color on for 2 minutes yesterday to view a photo and it was astounding how bright and fluorescent it seemed- like totally over the top, like total visual overstimulation. I turned it back to grayscale as quick as I could!"

-40 year-old, rock star, mother of two

MONITOR YOUR TIME

People who use their phone less than two hours a day regularly enjoy and appreciate their phones as helpful tools.

Studies have shown that for every hour beyond two hours that we spend on our phones symptoms of depression, anxiety and attention issues increase

*Jean Twenge, PhD
iGen: [19]*

This means, that for many of us, the more time we spend on our phones, the more depressed, anxious and confused we are.

Use an app to track how you spend time on your phone or engage the settings on your phone. [20]

Monitor your phone use.

Take steps to insure you spend less than two hours on your phone each day.

"I use the app that tells me when I've spent an hour and 30 minutes on my phone and tells me to take a break every five minutes after. I also have it set up so it reminds me after I've spent 30 minutes in one app."

-18 year-old, female, social activist

NOTIFICATIONS

Turn off all notifications, banners and sounds. All those noises and lights are a significant cause of that incessant hum of anxiety. When we are reacting to the constant stimuli of our phone, we are not getting to make choices of what we want to do with our attention. Set up your Do Not Disturb so that you can turn off your alerts but you can also allow certain people to ring through.

"I have turned off all notifications on my phone and ipad including DND. That way I can work on those screens uninterrupted but I check them at breaks through the day. Like we used to do on lunch breaks. However, my phone is set up so when my wife and kids contact me, it always rings."

-44 year-old, producer and director, father of two

"I had to turn off all alerts on group messages. Those things can go on forever and sometimes have nothing to do with me. It was a constant interruption that was never worth it."

-19 year-old, male, debator and accounting major

YOUR HOME SCREEN

Clear your home screen so that you have a second to decide what you want to do on your phone before it starts bossing you around. We don't need a lot of room to breath. Just a little. Set up your home screen so it is like blank space for you to think.

“The only thing on my home screen is the search bar. When I power it on, I have to ask myself, what am I doing here? What did I want or need to do? It takes me awhile sometimes. Sometimes, I swipe just out of habit and then, it’s like, oh yeah, I needed to order that book. Before, I would power on my device and then check texts, check emails, look at social media and then turn it off and realize I never did what I meant to do there.”

-42 year-old, therapist, mother of two

For more ideas, step-by-step instructions and ethical apps, visit: humanetech.com/take-control [21]

SOCIAL MEDIA

There are entire books about the effects of social media on our culture.

This is not a book to discuss the pros and cons of our media. This is about how our media affects you. Regardless of if your experience of social media is mostly good or mostly bad, the most important thing is to stay in control of your use of it. Very few people have the discipline to not check constantly if it is constantly available.

There are many stories now of people quitting social media and at this time, most are reporting only benefits including a better quality of life in the real world.

Since leaving I feel like my own person. Before, Facebook and Twitter became almost like extra arms attached to me that I constantly had to be aware of. I used to check for updates countless times every day. Now, I don't have to be reliant and dependent on it any more – it's like a breath of fresh air.

*Sophia, 18 year-old
The Guardian [22]*

If you are not ready or able to quit social media or take a break from social media, consider taking the apps off of your phone. If you know you have a problem, find a support group or therapist that can help you.

"I took Twitter off of my phone because every time I got on my phone, I would check it and lose at least 30 minutes.

Since then I have noticed that I am less angry. It's not like I am angry person. It was more like, why are all these awful things happening in the world, why is no one doing anything about it? I still check Twitter on my phone, I have just added extra steps so that I do it less."

19 year-old, male, movie buff and journalism student

REAL CONNECTION

One of the greatest gifts our phones have given us is the ability to connect with and stay connected with the people we care about.

When we are feeling lonely, our knee-jerk reaction is to scroll through someone else's life and to find out what is going on with them.

We may be more informed about them, we may have even disconnected from our loneliness for a moment, however, the true antidote to loneliness is real connection.

While seeing each other in person is preferred, our phones can give us the second best thing... seeing their face or hearing their voice.

Yes, it is harder and more vulnerable than scrolling but it works. Commit to using the phone or FaceTiming the next time you are feeling lonely. Or send out a text to schedule a date to meet up.

Even the act of reaching out for connection is healing. Try to remember if there is anyone who has tried to reach out to you lately. Go ahead and reach back.

SUPPORT

While there has been a lot of attention put to the perfection that is consistently being portrayed over social media, it is also true that we can always find people out there who also share our struggles. It can be a lifesaver to read someone else's story of dealing with the same thing that you are.

Everyone struggles with something and now is possible to connect with others who struggle with the same things.

It could be the same illness, the same loss, or recovery from the same addiction. As you find support out there in your digital world, pay attention to what information is helping you. What is actually helping?

The endpoint of "recovery" from addiction, if there is an endpoint, is to change one's life for the better, to gain stability in one's life, and to become more functional in one's family and in one's community. Being responsible, being reliable, being interested in others and not just in oneself, and being a loving being who cares about and is helpful to others, are all part of recovery.

American Society of Addiction Medicine [23]

Learn to trust your own inner technology as it informs you of what is good for you and what is not.

Let this build your confidence to seek out a support group in your community where you can build relationships and receive all of the benefits of human connection.

YOUR POWER SOURCE

Many moons ago, there was an ad campaign for phones, the kinds that came with cords and attached to walls, that said, “Reach out and touch someone” [24].

Yes, once upon a time these extraordinary devices were used to reach out, to touch, to connect. If you look up and around today, you will see that these devices are now being used to create little tiny walls.

Most of us want to use these devices to connect, but is so easy to use these devices to avoid, to hide, to distract, or escape.

You are the one who gets to decide. You can use your phone to build a wall or a bridge.

You have the power right in the palm of your hand. You hold the power for good or for evil. For connecting or for disconnecting. For peace or for violence.

You don't have to wait for laws to pass or for your voice to be heard. You don't even need permission to turn it off. It's all up to you. Start a revolution by starting a conversation with anyone anywhere.

How do you want to use your power?

YOUR BEST DAY

Can you imagine your best day? Have you glimpsed it yet? Turn off your phone and you will see it really is possible.

You can get caught up on your rest. You can have personal space in your home and free time in your week. You can eat good food, spend time outside, and focus on the work you have to do today (no more and no less). You can look forward to regular play times and hangout times with other humans just being humans together. You can sit in your living room and enjoy a hobby every night if you want to.

You have 24 hours a day and they all belong to you.

With our personal technology, we have the greatest tools known to humankind at our fingertips. Once you are reconnected to yourself, you will be able to use these tools to create, research, invent something new or reinvent your self.

While it is only possible to share an edited version of your life on social media, the most important thing to be conscious of is not living an edited life.

Life is hell but also paradise. Be writers and not editors of [your] life. Write [your] life story and don't look to make it a best seller. Pay attention. Most of all don't to wait.

*Paul Pearsall, PhD
Toxic Success [25]*

You were made for fresh air and free time. And they were made for you. Don't let anything or anyone take from you the very best things about being a human.

Our life, our breath, our attention, our time, our energy, our thoughts, our feelings...they belong to us. And it is time for us to enjoy being human again.

Finally Felt What I Feel

i got in bed
and slept for a bit,
woke up, thought “naps are legit.”

i reached for my phone
cause i was alone
my brain told me, “stop just sit.”

i turned off my screen
and laid in my sheets
looking at ceiling and walls

i scrolled through my mind
instead of my feed
missing the memes and the “LOL’s”

but then i began
to see what i saw
and finally felt what i feel

i think maybe i’ll swap
busy for bored
and let some things in me heal.

-Christian Yoder

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