

# From the Sidelines



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## Communication technology overload

**N**EARLY 15 YEARS AGO I wrote a column for another publication under the headline “I Hate Cell Phones.” It decried the intrusion into our daily lives of communication technology—how it was impossible to claim you were “unavailable,” how rude it was for people to be loudly carrying on private conversations in public places, etc. Of course within months of that being published I had my own cell phone, foisted upon me by my insistent and, more importantly, pregnant wife.

Fast forward to today where if you don’t have a cell it means you must either live off the grid or maybe cannot afford the bill. And even then you can buy disposable phones so you’re never “out of touch.”

Add in the smart phone option and you have scenes like the one I experienced recently; at a boys-only dinner there was a moment where the other five guys all had their devices in hand, checking email, looking up baseball stats, texting wives, and so on. I looked around the table and asked if any of them would be willing to shut off the device just long enough to eat and have some adult conversation and everyone said, “Sure”—but no one actually turned off their phones and two guys were back on within 10 minutes.

Another friend sent me an email a few days before a party he was throwing for his wife’s 50th birthday, wondering why I hadn’t responded yea or nay earlier; after all, he’d posted the invite on his and her Facebook pages. He couldn’t believe I wasn’t on Facebook. “Everyone is on Facebook, get with it!” he emailed. “Don’t you want to connect with long-lost friends and know what everyone’s doing?”

Uh, well, hmm, actually no, I don’t. Going to the party, sharing some laughs and seeing friends sounds good. Being informed of those same friends’ every move sounds boring as hell. Likewise, I’d question the judgment of any of my friends or relatives who would be interested in what I was doing all the time. That would be time for the old “get a life” refrain.

LinkedIn, a site that is “Facebook for People with Jobs,” I’ve got an identity there and it has worked in connecting me with some folks I’d otherwise not know; it’s been helpful in my work. But I’m not tied to it like a crackhead is to his pipe the way too many people seem to be beholden to their phones and the oft-times useless information they offer.

I first heard of Twitter 4 years ago at a conference for communications professionals; it seemed unnecessary then and it has proven to be just that. Unless you count reading about the incredibly stupid things famous people have to say, which can be hilarious. Only a matter of time and it’s probably happening already, Twitter will be sending you advertising messages about your favorite ice cream, which Big Marketing Brother knows about from your grocery’s “rewards” program card buying record. And while you are reading the message you’ll be missing a chance to do something real, something better—like a conversation with another flesh-and-blood human being.

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