

Being Electronically Liked Is No Substitute For Soul Connection

BY JANET REICHART

I have been thinking lately about empathy, active compassion, social isolation, and social media – text messaging included. Specifically, I have been wondering if there is a correlation between the absence of a human voice, face, touch in communication, and a strange loneliness that is the result of the loss of soul connection, something that feels absent when I hide behind my keyboard.

Sure, I can say I have 753 “friends” (not even close!), but the more I use social media, the less connected I feel. I notice the less connected I feel, the less I am able to feel genuine empathy for others. I don’t like to admit this. I strive to live a life of active compassion. It is easier to utter the words, “I love you,” than it is to show “I care about you.”

I wonder if, connecting through our keyboards, we have forgotten how to care. Do we associate people more with tweets, posts, and memes, and less with souls? Full disclosure; no research has been undertaken in the writing of this, and the opinions here are my own.

I am of an age that allows me the privilege to observe how we have changed as a society. I remember when the most exciting thing to happen in the neighborhood was the arrival of a new appliance. Almost immediately the box was commandeered and made into a fort, a spaceship, a castle complete with a moat and princess, a race car. Metal trash cans were rocket ships, suits of armor with trash can lid shields. Wrapping paper tubes were swords, telephones, tunnels for toy cars. Sworn

enemies became friends, drawn together by imagination and excitement.

I remember summer evenings, when the parents of the appliance-box kids would gather along fences, on the street corners, on front stoops, simply appreciating the gentle air, and the sound of each other's voices. I remember how comforting it was to hear those voices and the sounds of kids playing together.

I learned to show I care about people, not because my parents told me to as they emailed and texted their friends. I learned by example. I learned how it feels to have my heart and soul touched, and how it feels to reach out, person to person, moment to moment, to rejoice in the simple sound of my sister's voice.

Have we lost something crucial, not only for the fulfillment of our own souls, but for the survival of humanity? In sharing our words instead of our hearts, have we forgotten how to really care? In forgetting how to care, have we suffocated our souls, creating a kind of isolation that strips us of connection?

Yes, it feels good to be electronically "liked", but that is no substitute for soul connection and the cultivation of care about community.

The technological gains of the past few decades have certainly eased some aspects of day-to-day life. The speed at which business gets done is efficient, addictive even. Communication with distant family, sharing good news and bad, is nearly immediate for most of us.

The ability to instantaneously learn of events around the world has driven a global awareness and economy that is not

possible without the varied forms of telecommunications we rely on today. Expanded global awareness informs choices, and often within minutes the ability to experience the consequences of choices. If there is doubt about this, consider the impact of a single tweet.

I believe that somehow, somewhere, tossed in the waves created by storms of information, our souls have been cut adrift, isolated, disconnected. Through this disconnection, we have forgotten how to touch and be touched. When we forget how to touch and be touched, we substitute a text message for a phone call, an email for a hand-written letter, an "LOL" for an embrace.

If we live in this sort of busy isolation for too long, we forget how to be actively compassionate. We believe that if a news story, or a meme, or a Facebook post brings us to tears, we must care. I'm not saying we don't. But we quickly scroll on – out of sight, out of mind – to the next distraction. Humanity becomes less real, less about "me", and more about "them". Have we lost "us"?

When we lose the concept of "us", it becomes easier to cause harm, to ignore regard and respect for others. We consider less the far-reaching consequences of our actions than we consider our need for instant gratification. We begin to view others as disposable, unworthy of our regard and consideration. Perhaps this is because we have learned to view ourselves as disposable, unworthy of our own regard.

I believe that when a Facebook "like" is our primary source of self-worth and self-satisfaction, we have lost our ability to really connect. To connect at a soul level. We crave that, but we no longer know how to find it.

Instead, we fill the disconnected hole in our heart and soul with addiction, with intolerance, with hate, with black and white, isolationist thinking. We disconnect even further, spinning down a rabbit hole of loneliness, no longer knowing what we are missing.

So...go out and play. Find a box. Pretend your car is a box. Use your imagination. Your destination is precariously perched on one of Saturn's rings. Write a letter. With a pen, on a piece of paper. Buy a stamp and mail it. Call someone whose voice you miss. Begin to reconnect.

When we remember to connect at a soul level with the people we hold in our hearts, we will find ourselves connected to humanity. When we connect to humanity, we feel empathy. When we feel empathy, we can become actively compassionate. When we are actively compassionate, we feel our souls expand. When our souls expand, we become caregivers for our communities. Actively caring communities defend human dignity and self-worth. When we actively defend human dignity and self-worth, humanity thrives.

Then, if you want to, feel free to update your status.

For more self-study, [The Urban Howl](#) recommends [Courage: The Joy of Living Dangerously](#) .

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more important
than now to drop
in and listen. To
each other, to the
land, to the rhythms
of our hearts."

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