

Another Perspective

Written by Lori Pankonin, The Imperial Republican

Modern modes of communication create positive and negative . . .

Communication means continue to change dramatically as the years go by. I recall when one of my best friends went to Brazil as a Rotary exchange student our senior year in high school. It took eight days for a letter to go one way. So even if we responded immediately, there was a very minimum of 16 days between when you sent a letter and when you received feedback.

Nowadays exchange students can get instant response from family and friends through e-mail. The same holds true for the military folks and their loved ones and anyone traveling abroad.

The cost of phone calls also makes it more feasible to call long distances or overseas. And options such as Skype provide opportunities to speak as you see each other on the screen live.

Texting has its place for quick communication. I do think it gets waaaayyyy out of hand with teens as they send multi-thousands of texts in a month. What is it doing to personal direct communication, like talking to someone as you look at them? But there are many times when I appreciate it.

I've heard statistics where texting while driving can be just as bad or even worse than driving drunk. And I have no doubt that is true. Getting drivers to admit that is indeed a challenge and accidents resulting in death happen because of it.

Numerous folks in my generation agree they refuse to use Facebook. It can be damaging, divulge personal information to search companies and there are too many other things that take priority with their time.

I'll have to say that I first went on Facebook at the recommendation of a friend who was able to see pictures and communicate with a mutual friend overseas. I've since been happy to reconnect with college friends as well as elementary and high school buds who I very well might have never heard from again.

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And I see pictures and keep up with nieces and other relatives and friends as they have their own children and grandchildren.

Yes, it can be damaging. Sometimes pictures are posted which the subject really doesn't intend to have publicized. Or false information can spread.

I definitely don't visit Facebook every day but there are those times when I sit down to catch up a bit and get totally mesmerized. A moment can indeed turn into an hour, which can lead to half a morning on a weekend. I end up seeing experiences of friends of friends and get totally sidetracked, sometimes learning more than I really care to know. But I also appreciate the communication.

Personally, I feel it's no more wasting time than watching TV, and I cherish the conversations.

Frankly, we attended a Facebook for Business class recently. In putting the newspaper on Facebook, we got some great feedback in the first week.

I get tired of walking through airports and shopping malls when you constantly meet people whose faces are buried in their phones. I think it's offensive when store clerks wait on you while talking on the phone. It's disturbing to see couples out to eat when one of them is on the phone most of the time. We don't get away from constantly taking care of business, even when on the road. That's a personal choice, however.

Children are taught not to talk to strangers. Yet we post pictures of them and tell what they do and where they are. Supposedly only "friends" have access but "friends of friends" can be pretty far-reaching and there are kooks out there who attempt to finagle the system.

On the other hand, positive communication can result as well. A young friend who moved from out of state got word a college friend had died. He was pleasantly surprised to see so many other friends from several states when he went to the funeral in Kansas. Had it not been for

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today's social networking, there's no way they all would have heard about the death and had time to get there.

Announcements of new arrivals are instant any more. Rather than spending hours calling people to share the good news, word can spread to many, many contacts instantly, even showing a picture of the brand spankin' new baby.

I've found e-mail to be very beneficial for communication in several organizations I'm in. A word can go out to an entire committee for feedback with a decision being taken care of without having to try to fit a meeting into everyone's busy schedules.

However, I can see how e-mails can interfere with the workflow and wonder just how many hours workers are being paid across the country for taking care of personal matters by e-mails and texts. That can be very significant money for a company.

I realize how much my day is interrupted by much more than phone calls. When signing on to send business correspondence, I might see an e-mailed invoice that needs printed out and tended to, a message concerning one of four organizations I'm in and I look something up and respond, or information about an ill relative or just something from my siblings, my mom, my friends or my kids.

The communication is great and each item might not take really long, but it sidetracks me from accomplishing my tasks for the day over and over again. At the end of the day, I generally work late or take work home.

One can use discipline to prioritize and tend to personal matters later but you have to work hard at it.

My mother is very busy in her retirement years. Occasionally one of my siblings would call with concern that they couldn't reach Mom. I asked her to e-mail me her plans for the day even though she's just a block away from the office. It allows some relief for her and me that if something should happen, I'd know to check on her if I don't hear from her.

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I also have an idea where she is without her having to call me numerous times a day (that is unless it's a day e-mail isn't going through). For the most part, it works well for both of us to leave messages that can be retrieved when convenient for the other one. No, we haven't stopped our face-to-face communication.

Like anything else which provides positive progress, modern communication can be severely abused.

It takes good decision-making. I do have some concerns of where social media is leading the next generation when good decisions go by the wayside. An effort toward positive habits and even occasionally sending a personal note in the mail is key!