

Humanity on Speed

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For the next eight minutes I have your undivided attention. It's just us, just you and me. No texts, no Facebook and no emails. In our world, this is a rare privilege. We don't even give our friends or families that kind of attention. I realized this a couple weeks ago when I walked into my dad's office while he was answering emails. I kissed him and put some food on his desk. I reentered his office a few minutes later, and he was ecstatic to see me- "Oh hey, honey! How are you?" He had not even seen me the first time, had not felt my kiss, had not heard my voice or even noticed I was there. I'm sure you've all had similar experiences: a friend who's texting instead of listening to you, knowing someone who spends hours on Facebook but has no time to get lunch.

In 1966 Robert F. Kennedy said, "Like it or not, we live in interesting times." Which is true, but in our history what makes our times any more interesting or important than the past or the future? Every generation experiences its own successes, failures, and evolutions that seem more significant and catastrophic than past generations or generations to come. But our time is different. The interesting times we live in can be defined by the compromised nature of our relationships due to our society's obsession with speed. In the daily dash against time, we have failed to see the toll that our fast-paced culture takes on the quality of our lives and our relationships. Our time demands the youthful quality of a strong will to overcome our need for speed and improve the relationships that have deteriorated so drastically.

Today, our relationships can be characterized by poor prioritization and unrealistic expectations. Somehow, we always find time to check Facebook, email, Twitter. Days slip by me all the time. I think, "I just don't have the time to call my grandma back, I'll call her tomorrow..." But I don't. Where does all the time go? William Penn said, "time is what we want the most, but what we use the worst." Our priorities are all out of whack; you see, we prioritize, but not for the betterment of our relationships.

When was the last time you had a deep meaningful conversation with someone? According to a study by Digital Buzz, 57% of people talk more online than they do in real life. That means that in all likelihood, half of the people in this room spent more time interacting through a screen today than actually talking to someone. When logging onto Facebook, users see the message: "Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life." But is this the truth? Are we really connecting and sharing? Or are we compromising the quality of our relationships because face-to-face interactions have become optional? A recent study published in *The Global Media Journal* found that, not only is there a

direct correlation between increased internet use and a decrease in face-to-face communication, but also a decrease in desire to communicate face-to-face.

Yet in today's world, we expect to connect with more friends than ever before. When I log on to Facebook my newsfeed has countless pieces of information about my friends: relationships, birthdays, weekend plans. But even with all this overwhelming information, I don't know any of these people better. So think about it... how many Facebook friends do you have? Do you know? After checking, I'm embarrassed to admit that I have 1,578 Facebook friends. But what do I and what do you really know about these people? Even more importantly, what do all of our Facebook friends really know about us?

We may realize that meaningful relationships are being sacrificed but we can't seem to control ourselves. We as a nation have developed an addiction to speed. The interesting times we live in are due to a world that is stuck in fast-forward. We value our time so greatly that we continue finding ways to do things faster and faster; we cram more and more into less time. It's a numbing obsession. If we take a moment to think about how we make things better—we make them faster. We used to dial, now we speed-dial; we used to read, now we speed-read; we used to date, now we speed-date. But behind all of this there is a serious issue.

We have let our relationships with people and the world around us become shallow and superficial. We know but we don't understand. The instantaneous nature of our communication technologies enables connection but lacks deep human interaction. A recent study done by The Brain and Creativity Institute at USC found that rapid fire media confuse our moral compass, raising questions about the emotional cost of a fast-paced world. One researcher stated that “[i]f things are happening too fast, you may [never] fully experience emotions about other people's psychological states,” thus potentially impacting our morality and relationships.

You know, my dad and I talked about what happened that day. He apologized of course and felt so guilty he hadn't seen me. Neither of us will ever forget that day, and in hindsight I realized something.

The fast-paced nature of our lives isn't going away. The pace of change, the speed, the tempo of our society, is not going to slow down, but only continue to accelerate. Our interesting times don't call on us to revolutionize technology. No, we need to revolutionize ourselves. The youthful quality of willpower can help us respond to and conquer the harsh reality of more friends and fewer friendships.

In the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, “willpower is regarded as the supreme quality of the superman.” Willpower can overcome our addiction to speed and will enable us to fight for more fulfilling and meaningful relationships. Steve Jobs, world-renowned innovator said, “It's really clear that the most precious resource we all have is time.” And Jobs was right, but more importantly we must use our time in a meaningful way instead of always the most efficient one. Facebook, Twitter, these things are not connecting us. What really connects us all is compassion, kindness, and love. So use your willpower. Call

someone you love, and take the time to connect. Together, we'll close our Facebook accounts, and stop letting our passions end with dot-com.

The youthful quality of willpower makes it possible for us to fight back against the dogma of speed. Because of our interesting times, a time defined by speed, we've all been stuck in fast-forward so long we have lost sight of what makes us all human. What we all need is to be encouraged, and listened to, and loved. As Charlie Chaplin said, "We think too much, and feel too little, more than machinery we need humanity."