



## *Reasonable Voice*

### **Turn Off the #\$\$%^ Phone**

In the February 25, 2016 issue of The New York Review of Books (“We are hopelessly hooked”), Jacob Weisberg noted that Americans spend an average of five and a half hours a day with digital media, more than half of that time on mobile devices, according to the research firm eMarketer.

Wow. Seriously?

Maybe so.

One evening recently I headed out to dinner after a full day of meetings, conference calls and writing. It had been a fast-paced day, and I was just looking forward to a nice break with family and friends.

About 20 minutes after we sat down, I suddenly realized I had forgotten my iPhone, which meant no ability to receive calls or digital information for at least the next 2-3 hours.

I panicked.

What if one of my kids called, or a client had an emergency? How could I check the weather for tomorrow’s planned flight, or read the news alerts that stream to me every hour or so throughout the day with the latest election coverage? What about any email that might come in with important documents attached for review, or the fun fact I wanted to look up that related to the conversation we would have during dinner?

Finally, I disclosed to my group my personal crisis. They offered up a half-hearted, nervous laugh – trying to minimize its importance while subtly signaling their hidden relief that it hadn’t happened to them.

This is crazy.

How many times have I lamented that I was too busy, too in demand, too hurried to get from one priority to another? How often have I complained about the constant interruptions, spam email and telemarketer calls? This was a chance to unplug, if even for just a little while. And I couldn’t breathe.

Once I finally settled down and accepted that there was nothing I could do about my situation, the whole evening changed. I paid more attention to others. I listened better. The food tasted better. I felt refreshed.

We have all become so wired now that it’s hard to imagine anything else. The ding, the buzz, the ring... we live for dopamine that somehow affirms and feeds our existence. I’m in an airport terminal as I write this, and just counted 46 out of 50 people around me on electronic devices.

Wow.

And while I know that I feel just as strongly as others that *my* need to be connected is really important, we all have to be reminded on occasion that we communicate best when we get some distance from the electronics and focus on what's right in front of us at the moment. It might be the only way we really become intimate, as noted by David Brooks in the New York Times ("Intimacy for the avoidant").

So turn off the #\$\$%^ phone.

You might be surprised how good it sounds.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Meath', with a large, sweeping initial 'M' and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Michael Meath  
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