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Boundaries for the Internet of Things: How to Control Our Connectedness?

Daphne Stanford · Wednesday, January 3rd, 2018

The great thing about the internet is that it's always there when we need it. However, what if mobile technology's greatest feature is also its biggest caveat? Can we train our minds and habits to be less dependent upon technology, or have our devices trained us to be dependent upon them for everything?

Let's examine a few ways to set firmer boundaries around how, when, and where we allow connected devices to play a role in our lives — with a few ideas on how we can manage them without allowing them to manage us.

Sleep VS Waking Life

Do you keep your phone next to you at all times? The predilection toward always keeping some sort of mobile, connected device near our bodies may not be good for us — especially when we're trying to wind down in preparation for sleep.

Our collective addiction to social media, streaming video, and television is not likely to help our national sleep problem: [according to the Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), insufficient sleep is tied to unhealthy behaviors such as snoring (a sign of sleep apnea), unintentionally falling asleep, and nodding off while driving. Just think about the number of times you may have fallen asleep during a movie: a sign of lack of boundaries between sleep time and waking life.

If you'd like to [make your bedroom into an ideal place to sleep](#), try thinking of your sleep space as an area completely separate from your waking life. In your sleeping space, aim for the goal of eliminating anything that distracts you from slumber and peacefulness, including busy decorations and clutter. Try selecting calming colors for your walls and eliminating excess light. Get rid of distractions like TVs and cell phones — which should remain in the next room. The goal is to set up an association between your bedroom and sleep so that your body knows that when you enter the room, you'll soon be asleep — rather than engaging in more waking activities.

Prioritizing Our Time

Some schools and restaurants mandate phone-free zones because of the difficulty many people have in consciously directing their attention. Although you may find the idea of [cell phone lockers](#) a bit too extreme for your home, you might try a designated basket or desk drawer where you can stash your phone while working on other tasks.

For example, try putting your phone away — “Out of sight, out of mind,” goes the old expression — while you work on other priorities like reading, writing, making art, cooking, playing music, or eating dinner. Try creating designated areas for these activities: whether it be an art corner, a writing desk, or a meditation zone.

If we physically reserve places in our dwellings as well as time on a calendar for the things we love, we’re more likely to make those hobbies priorities and less likely to allow ourselves to mindlessly browse Facebook or Netflix during periods of down time.

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Radiation & Technology

In case you hadn’t heard, cell phones [have now officially been deemed risky](#) if kept close to your body at all times. A UC Berkeley professor Joel Moskowitz initiated a lawsuit against the state of California to release [their findings of these studies](#), which suggest that radio frequency (RF) energy may affect human health. I don’t know about you, but the possibility of my phone being linked to possible cancers is enough for me to want to limit my exposure to it.

While keeping my phone in the next room while sleeping and avoiding long phone conversations is enough for me to feel better, for now, the studies also got me thinking about other forms of [radiation technologies](#) that are used for scientific and medical purposes. For example, ultrasound imaging is used not only for the well-known fetal ultrasound images that abound on Facebook, but also for breast cancer detection and bone strength monitoring. Unless you have metal plates in your body, you should remain relatively in the clear for medical risks as a result of medical imaging.

For the time being, then, perhaps we should keep any medical appointments involving X-rays and simply avoid having three-hour conversations on our smartphones or keeping them next to our heads at night.

The Internet of Things & Privacy

Speaking of healthcare-related breakthroughs, a lot has been made of what medical professionals are calling [the technology of nursing’s future](#). From genetic-based treatment and medical robots to locator systems and simulation technology (not to mention the ubiquitous smartphone), the healthcare professionals of tomorrow will likely be able to track patients’ vitals, symptoms, and location at the touch of a button. However, what are the risks to our privacy?

Can we ensure, for example, that we will be able to control what information we sign over to doctors and nurses and which pieces of information we keep to ourselves? How can we ensure that our location — tracked via GPS on most smart devices unless we consciously disable the location function — is only disclosed when necessary?

How can we know that robots won’t usurp the intentions of their owners — and how do we control who can access this information and who cannot? It’s been said that this issue, in particular — that of user privacy — is the main reason why the smart home, age-in-place, and IoT markets haven’t taken off as predicted: because of the potential loss of privacy.

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Maybe the future will bring us smart home assistants who can turn off our connection to the internet at the push of a button. But maybe it all comes down to different tiny decisions we can make throughout the day.

Sometimes this simple realization can be enough motivation to disconnect and unplug from external noise, news, and social media. Perhaps we will feel motivated to choose our physical or internal worlds more often, if only to remind us that we're still alive in our bodies — regardless of whether there are little red notification buttons popping up on our screens or not.

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