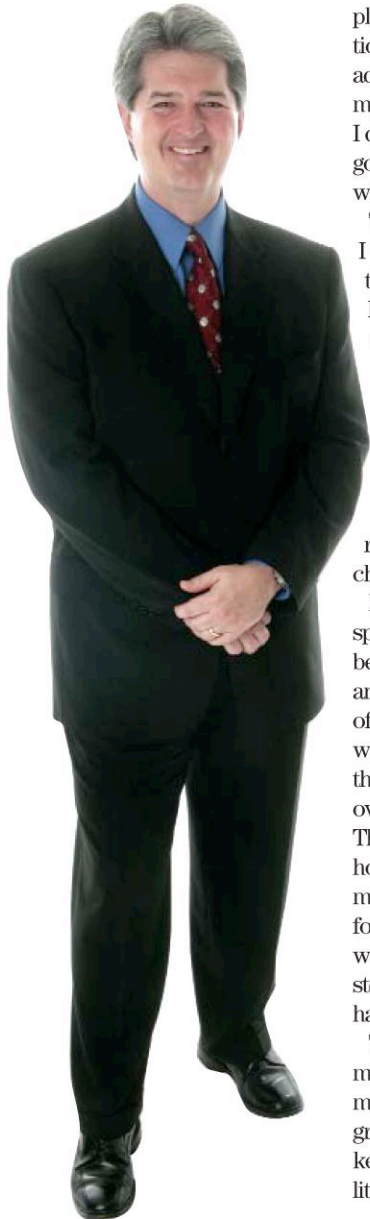


Be truly connected

TURN OFF THE BLACKBERRY; TURN ON YOUR LIFE.



“You’ll never make it,” my friend Steve said to me one day over lunch. “You’ll give up before the weekend is over.”

He smiled in smug satisfaction, having issued a challenge that he was confident I couldn’t meet.

Throughout our lunch, I had been routinely checking my BlackBerry for new messages and had even interrupted our conversation to type a quick reply. Frustrated by my distraction, Steve accused me of being addicted to the device and its demand for responsiveness. When I disagreed, he challenged me to go through an entire weekend without using it.

The terms were simple, and I was confident I could meet them. From Friday night until Monday morning, I would not use the BlackBerry, either for e-mail or as a cell phone, except in an extreme emergency. If I succeeded, I would win lunch at our favorite restaurant as well as the satisfaction of being right. Both rewards made the challenge worth pursuing.

It began simply enough. I responded to a final set of e-mails before going to bed Friday night and then turned the BlackBerry off for the weekend. When I woke the next morning, I fought the impulse to check my e-mails over my first cup of coffee.

Throughout the day of household activities and errands with my family, I constantly reached for my hip where the BlackBerry would normally have been holstered and was surprised that I had created such a strong habit.

The pressure to know what messages had arrived began to mount, and, ultimately, it was so great that I really had to fight to keep my commitment. Twice, I literally felt the BlackBerry

vibrate on my belt, even though it wasn’t there. More important, I began to have very real anxiety that somehow I was missing things and falling behind. It was a palpable fear that I wasn’t *connected*.

And then it hit me. Maybe Steve was right.

If the BlackBerry had become this dominant in my life, what was I really missing? What moments with my wife were ruined by glancing at my e-mails while she tried to tell me about her day? What risk was I taking by reading an incoming message while driving in traffic? And what opportunities to think, to pray or to dream were being lost as I filled every spare moment with my thumbs flying across this little keyboard?

The fear of losing my connection that weekend was real. But instead of my e-mail, I should have feared losing my connection to my life and to the people who matter most.

In the months that have followed, I’ve learned that my BlackBerry, or any other device, can be either a powerful servant or a terrible master. The choice is up to me — and to you.

Here are three disciplines that enable me to make the right choice.

Focus on people first.

Whether at work or at home, make connecting with the people in your life the first priority.

When you’re talking with someone, really listen and refuse to even look at your device until the conversation is finished.

You’ll have ample opportunity for messages later, but you can’t afford to miss these moments of real connection.

Intentionally disconnect.

There is an ancient archery teaching that says, “You will break the bow if it is always bent.” This applies to life, as well.

While you may feel productive by being on call at every moment, you really aren’t. Eventually, your energy and capacity diminish and an unconscious resentment of all you have to do begins to undermine your best efforts.

Turn the device off, and take time to recharge and reflect. When you return to your work, you’ll feel the difference.

Be effective, not simply responsive.

I recently heard another executive cite the BlackBerry as one of the greatest leadership challenges that he faces. After my own experience, I believe he was right.

If you are not careful, you will become obsessively responsive, spending your day reading and replying to every incoming message, regardless of its importance. Use the device to help you respond to important messages but have the discipline to focus on the most effective use of your time and energy.

I won the challenge with Steve that weekend, but, through his challenge, I also learned to focus on the true connections to my work — and to my life — that make all the difference. <<

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