



LET'S TALK ABOUT

PURPOSE

"I wake up in cold sweats every so often thinking, what did we bring to the world?"

-Tony Fadell, creator of the iPhone

THERE IS NO DOUBT ABOUT IT: THE SMARTPHONE IS INCREDIBLY POWERFUL

In the palm of your hand, an almost-infinite supply of knowledge is just a quick scroll away, thanks to the powerful minicomputer known as the smartphone. With the smartphone, we can call, text, surf the internet, play games, read the news, broadcast our lives via social media, take photos, and share those photos with thousands, sometimes millions, of people. That tiny, shiny rectangle holds a flashlight, calculator, news, calendar, and apps for just about everything.

It's important to understand that the smartphone and its apps were developed by some of the world's brightest minds to capture our time and attention. They've intentionally engineered platforms and apps to be highly addictive through what's called persuasive design.

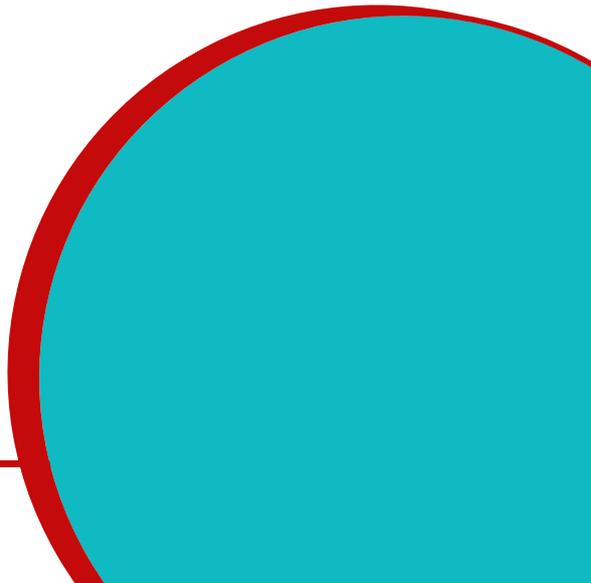
To keep us hooked, technologists have taken some major plays from the gaming industry. A former Google manager even compared smartphones to slot machines in our pockets. There's a reason that casinos have no clocks, serve drinks, pump in oxygen, and make it hard to find an exit. It keeps gamblers there. Similarly, there is a reason for the smartphone's endless social media notifications, pings, alerts, streaks, likes, and Netflix next episodes starting in 3...2...1. It keeps us there. It returns us there. It creates the urge to reach into our pockets right now!

IN THE BATTLE FOR OUR ATTENTION, WE ARE LOSING.

- Humans now have a shorter attention span than a goldfish. Humans have an 8 second attention span compared to a goldfish's span of 9 seconds.
- The typical phone user touches his or her phone 2,617 times every day[1].
- Common Sense Media recently reported teens between the ages of 13 and 18 are spending on average 7 hours and 22 minutes a day on screens. This number does not even take into account schoolwork. This means that some kids spend more time on screens than sleeping!
- Plus, some people can't even sleep without checking their phones! A recent study says one-third of teens check their phones in the middle of the night, as do one-quarter of their parents.[2]

[1][Business Insider](#)

[2][Wall Street Journal](#)



WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

If we're not mindful and intentional with how we use technology, then technology will quickly use us. Our lives will not be well spent. Instead of our days being filled with laughter, adventure, rich friendships, and precious family moments, it will be a blur of endless scrolls, auto plays, notifications, and likes. This will not fill us.

In fact, research shows overuse of screens and social media depletes us. It wears on us physically with eye strain, chronic neck and back strain, sleep deprivation and even reduces hand strength and dexterity. One surgery professor shared in a news article that students are arriving at medical school without the hand strength and skill to perform basic medical tasks. For mental health for children, the explosion of smartphone and social media use has come with an avalanche of anxiety, depression, self-harm, and even suicide. The overuse of screens is even altering our brains! The early results of a landmark study on brain development by the National Institute of Health show children who spent more than two hours a day looking at a screen got lower scores on thinking and language tests. Additionally, the study showed with more screen time, the brain looked physically different on MRIs.[3] What we know from all of the research is that overuse of technology impacts us physically, emotionally and cognitively.

[3][CBS News](#)

ALWAYS REMEMBER WHAT THE PURPOSE OF YOUR PHONE IS

Phones can be useful, and they certainly have their place. Unfortunately, we can quickly develop a bad habit of turning to our phones when we are bored, mad, sad or uncomfortable. To guard against this, let's zero in on what we want our phone not to be.

The phone is not...

- a boredom eliminator
- a crutch
- a pain killer or a procrastination machine.

The phone is a tool to be used for deliberate reasons such as communicating with family and friends, managing our calendar, taking a picture, researching a quick question, or mapping our way to unknown location.

People should always trump screens.

Have you ever tried to talk to someone when they are distracted by their phone? How does that make you feel? When screens take our attention away from real people in real life, screens are not in their proper place. People are more important than screens. In any fight for our attention, people should always win.

HOW DO WE SHOW PEOPLE THEY MEAN MORE TO US THAN OUR PHONES?

Look people in the eyes.

The eyes have been called the windows to the soul. Too often, however, these windows are essentially shut because they are staring down at a phone. When you are not engaging in eye contact, you are likely to miss some important social cues from others. Your friend could be struggling with a hard issue, but you miss it because you're glued to your phone. Your brother could have had a rotten day but you're oblivious because you're zeroed into a funny group text. Do you want to show your friends and family you care about them? Look up and make eye contact.

Show you care with your body language.

Picture this: You enter your friend's house. You're excited about the basketball game you all are going to together. Your friend is hunched over his phone on the couch fully engaged in a group text. He mumbles "hey". Do you feel welcomed? Does it seem like he is happy you are there? What if instead he put his phone down, stood up, high-fived you, and chatted with you for a few minutes? What difference would that make?

Explain what you're doing on the phone.

Don't get me wrong. There are times when you are going to need to pick up your phone when you are with your crew. You may need to see when your ride is picking you up or you need to let someone know where you are. In these situations, try to make it a habit to tell the people you are with why you are using your phone. For example, say "Let me wrap up this text so I can tell the guys we are meeting at Shake Shack before the game" or, "I'm going to look up how far this party is from the house."

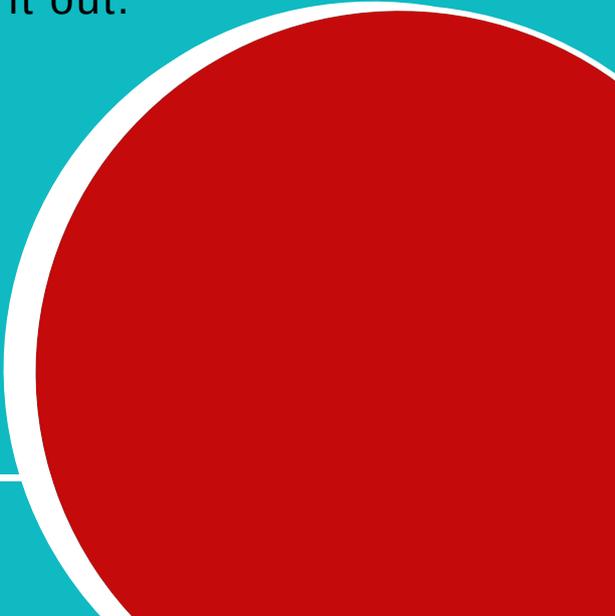
Narrating what you're doing on your phone goes a long way not only with your friends but with your parents too. You may be checking a grade from your science test on your phone and your dad assumes you're scrolling social media instead of catching up with him.

PIVOT

You can bring all of these tips together with the “pivot.” If you are on your phone and someone enters the room or asks a question, take these steps to pivot.

1. Put your phone down.
2. Turn your body towards the person.
3. Look them in the eye.
4. Ask what’s up.
5. If you need to get back to a time-pressing task on your phone, narrate to your friend or family member what you are doing and how much time it should take.

Here is an example of the pivot in action: You are texting with your social studies group about a project due on Friday. Your mom comes home from work with several bags of groceries. She enters the kitchen. You put your phone down and look up. Your mom looks like she has had a hard day. You say, “Hey, Mom. Can I help you with those bags?” After unloading the groceries, you tell your mom you are texting with your social studies group about a tough project and it should probably take 15 to 20 minutes to sort it out.



GUARD AGAINST THE HOOK

In addition to valuing people over screens, we need to be on guard against the phone zapping our time. As we know, tech developers are intentionally working to keep us on their apps or platforms, making it hard to resist constantly checking for updates or endless scrolling on our phones. Check out these pro tips to help keep phone use in check:

- **Switch to gray:** Experts say when your smartphone is in black and white versus color, you are less drawn to it. We tested this setting and found that it reduced interest in the phone and its applications across the board. Try grayscale for a week to see how it changes your phone habits. Go to Settings > Accessibility > Display & Text Size > Color Filters > Select > Grayscale.
 - **Nix notifications:** Your phone wants your attention! Every day, we are bombarded by a constant stream of dings, flashes, and red badges screaming for our attention and pulling us away from our family and friends. Turn down the digital noise by going to Settings on your phone. Then click “notifications” and turn off the badges, banners, and notifications for everything except for calls and texts.
 - **Go bare bones:** The fewer bells and whistles we have on our phone, the easier it is to resist. Keep your apps to the bare minimum—it will help you learn to use your phone moderately.
 - **Out of sight, out of mind:** It is much easier to keep tech in check when we are not seeing it or feeling it constantly. When you are at home, try limiting phones to the kitchen and the living room, keeping bedrooms and bathrooms as phone-free zones. When you’re tackling homework, it is best to keep the phone out of sight. Research shows that even the mere presence of the phone can detract from learning.
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- ***Never leave home without a book.*** With a book by your side, you will be less likely to reach for your phone if you have a few minutes waiting at the orthodontist or for your ride to arrive. All of these moments add up and help us not to use tech as a crutch or a boredom eliminator.
 - ***Put your phone last.*** Make a practice of not using your phone when something else will do. If you want to know what time it is, wear a watch. If you need to get up early tomorrow, use a real alarm clock. Choose to read a paper book or use a Kindle instead of reading on your phone. If there are newspapers you are interested in, invest in print instead of checking the phone for news.



KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Our phones are a tool to be used for deliberate reasons.
 - Our phones are not a boredom eliminator, a crutch, a pain killer or a procrastination machine.
 - People are more important than screens, and we show this to them with the “pivot.”
 - Since the apps on our phones were designed to hook us, we have to put boundaries in place to guard against the hook.
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FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

KIDS TO ASK PARENTS:

- What are your favorite parts about having a phone?
- How do you keep your phone use in check?
- Are there certain apps on your phone you struggle being on too much?
- How do you feel when you know you're using your phone too much?

PARENTS TO ASK KIDS:

- In what ways do you see kids using phones for good?
- What are some examples of your friends overusing their phones?
- In what ways do you think you will be challenged with using your phone moderately?

FAMILY CHALLENGES

CHALLENGE 1:

Go grayscale and turn off non-human notifications on all of your family's phones for one week. Did the change make any difference in how much your family used their phones?

CHALLENGE 2:

Shoot for no devices at mealtimes or car rides for one week. Did the quality of your conversations change at all?

CHALLENGE 3:

Unplug from all devices for 24 hours as a family. Pick a weekend day so Mom and Dad can participate too without pressures from work. Fill the extra time not captured by a screen with a family hike, bike ride, or board game night.

EXTRA CREDIT FOR FURTHER TRAINING:

- Watch ["We've Been Sneaking Into Your Brains"](#) Video for Students by the Center for Humane Technology