

## TED talk on social media listening transcript

Over the past 15 years, I've studied technologies of mobile communication and I've interviewed hundreds and hundreds of people, young and old, about their plugged in lives. And what I've found is that our little devices, **those little devices in our pockets, are so psychologically powerful that they don't only change what we do, they change who we are.** Some of the things we do now with our devices are things that, only a few years ago, we would have found odd or disturbing, but they've quickly come to seem familiar, just how we do things. So just to take some quick examples: People text or do email during corporate board meetings. They text and shop and go on Facebook during classes, during presentations, actually during all meetings. People talk to me about the important new skill of making eye contact while you're texting. People explain to me that it's hard, but that it can be done. Parents text and do email at breakfast and at dinner while their children complain about not having their parents' full attention. But then these same children deny each other their full attention. This is a recent shot of my daughter and her friends being together while not being together. And we even text at funerals. I study this. We remove ourselves from our grief or from our reverie and we go into our phones.

Why does this matter? It matters to me because I think we're setting ourselves up for trouble -- trouble certainly in how we relate to each other, but also trouble in how we relate to ourselves and our capacity for self-reflection. **We're getting used to a new way of being alone together.** People want to be with each other, but also elsewhere -- connected to all the different places they want to be. People want to customize their lives. They want to go in and out of all the places they are because the thing that matters most to them is control over where they put their attention. So you want to go to that board meeting, but you only want to pay attention to the bits that interest you. And some people think that's a good thing. But you can end up hiding from each other, even as we're all constantly connected to each other.

A 50-year-old business man lamented to me that he feels he doesn't have colleagues anymore at work. When he goes to work, he doesn't stop by to talk to anybody, he doesn't call. And he says he doesn't want to interrupt his colleagues because, he says, "They're too busy on their email." But then he stops himself and he says, "You know, I'm not telling you the truth. I'm the one who doesn't want to be interrupted. I think I should want to, but actually I'd rather just do things on my Blackberry."

Across the generations, I see that **people can't get enough of each other, if and only if they can have each other at a distance, in amounts they can control.** I call it the Goldilocks 35 effect: not too close, not too far, just right. But what might feel just right for that middle-aged executive can be a problem for an adolescent who needs to develop face-to-face relationships. An 18-year-old boy who uses texting for almost everything says to me wistfully, "Someday, someday, but certainly not now, I'd like to learn how to have a conversation."

When I ask people "What's wrong with having a conversation?" People say, "I'll tell you what's wrong with having a conversation. **It takes place in real time and you can't control what you're going to say.**" So that's the bottom line. Texting, email, posting, all of these things let us present

the self as we want to be. We get to edit, and that means we get to delete, and that means we get to retouch, the face, the voice, the flesh, the body -- not too little, not too much, just right.

Human relationships are rich and they're messy and they're demanding. And we clean them up with technology. And when we do, one of the things that can happen is that **we sacrifice conversation for mere connection**. We short-change ourselves. And over time, we seem to forget this, or we seem to stop caring.