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EAD 860  
Unit 8

“Digital devices can and do make things happen. We use them to nurture relationships, to feed our emotional, social, and spiritual hungers, to think creatively and express ourselves” (Powers, p. 27). The developments in globalization and technology have shown that we are now living in a learning society that is a “runaway world” (8.12). The book Hamlet’s Blackberry by William Powers has shed some light on this topic, recognizes that there are common problems now associated with “digital maximalism,” relates to us today and suggests ways to improve upon it. Powers has suggested multiple strategies in order to help fit technology into our lives and to create a balance with it. From his suggestions and my own personal and professional experience, I have distinguished ones that seem the most and least desirable and the most and least feasible as resources for the learning society.

In order to distinguish what would be best and worst for the learning society, it is important to understand what I mean by the learning society. The learning society is referred to as what must be done, by individuals, organizations, and institutions to keep up with the pace of life as it changes. As we learned in this unit, the learning society is made up of four essential criteria. First, everyone has the opportunity for learning, at different ages, times and ways. Secondly, learning can happen in a formal or “highly structured” education. Thirdly, there is nonformal or “moderately structured” and “unstructured” learning, which includes a lot of self-study. Finally there is learning that can occur from other than institutions and organizations across the lifespan (8.2). Now that we know what the learning society is and the components of it, we can better apply these strategies to it.

What we are able to take away from the book and how technology is affecting our lives on a daily basis is that, “The pursuit of excellence requires the pursuit of connectedness” (p. 58). I think Powers has got it right in that technology really does help us in our everyday lives, sometimes simplifying things, but it also has added complications (p.39). Powers has done a great job seeing both sides of technology and coming up with strategies to help us all in working with technology instead of against it. In fact, he has suggested seven strategies for us to use to balance technology with our every day lives.

Of these seven suggestions, I find that Principle #5: Positive Rituals is the most desirable. This strategy based off of Ben Franklin, focuses on setting positive goals for ourselves and even rewarding ourselves when we complete the task or do well with it. In addition, it also suggests setting times of when to be with technology and even keeping certain times of the day screen free. By limiting the time spent with technology, it enables us to have more time to do other things like spending time with our families or with hobbies. Sometimes we need to maximize just one thing and minimize the rest (p. 117) in order to get things accomplished efficiently. This to me is the most desirable because I think that most people always wish that they had more time to spend doing the other things in their lives away from technology. By enforcing this strategy into our daily lives it forces us to be able to make time to do the other things that we really want or desire to do. Personally, I do so much better when I set times to get things done. I often will

acknowledge what I need to get done and say in 2 hours from now I need to have this completed. I make these time constraints on myself at work and with school. If I get my work done in the allotted time I will reward myself with small things like watching the show I taped before I go to bed. Often when we have time constraints, we are able to get much more accomplished. "Somehow when the battery is running down on a laptop, its much easier not to be distracted from the task at hand" (p. 217). I think that this principle is very desirable because all of us have heard everyone say "There's not enough time in the day to do..." We all want to make time for other things, and I think by following this strategy it would allow us to do just that.

On the flip side, I think that Powers has suggested a strategy that would appear as the least desirable to the learning society. This strategy, Principle #6 Walden Zones, is based off of Thoreau's past creation of a zone of simplicity and peace. This principle basically suggests creating a zoning area for each type of experience. More simply stated use certain locations for specific tasks. This could mean using the family room for only watching the television and using the office only for work on the computer. Although this principle has good intentions, I do not think that the learning society will desire to follow this suggestion. I think that this will not be desirable because zoning creates constraints. For instance, personally while at home the only computer I have is a laptop. By creating a zone to use a laptop only in a certain room or area will not always make me happy. Sometimes I like to change up my surrounding environment and work in different locations. By having to follow this strategy, I would not be able to make this happen. Even though the zones are created by each of us, it seems that it still constrains us to what we can do and where. Just think how we would use the Walden Zones in the work place. It seems to me that this would upset more people by making rules basically be set for what they are allowed to do. Because of this, I think that this suggestion, although sounds great, would be the least desirable.

The strategy suggested by Powers that I think is the most feasible would be Principle #2: Inner Space. This strategy limits screen activity, promotes conversing with people and suggests narrowing and refining the crowd. An example of this would be no email Fridays. Even though Powers even says that this is a love hate relationship (p. 169) I think this is something that would be good for us and is totally feasible. My friend just started a new job at USF in their athletic department and they do this. Theirs is set up that they are not allowed to email anyone within their building on Fridays. This promotes co-worker interaction, getting to know the people you work with, putting a name with a face, potentially increasing productivity, increasing relationships, increasing physical activity among others. Although we know that often email is the best way to get things done these days, there is much to say about face-to-face interaction. This would also provide an opportunity to step away from the screens and other technologies. I also see this strategy and think of things like Facebook. This social network is a great tool for keeping in touch, but it is also a big distraction. This could be a way I could limit and refine my crowd. It would be very easy for me to weed out some friends I have on there because their information I do not really care about and it just provides distractions and takes up space and time. I think this strategy is something that we all could feasibly do and that we could all really benefit by incorporating it into our every day lives.

Lastly, the strategy of Powers that I find to be the least feasible would be the last one, Principle #7: Lower the Inner Thermostat. This strategy enables us to create our own

ways of escape from technology. This is something that Powers did incorporate into his life and certainly struggled at first. He was able to disconnect himself from the outside world via his phone and computer devices for the weekends. I think this is a great idea, but with so many different jobs and education requiring us to keep up, this strategy does not seem feasible to me. For example, I was an athlete in college. Our lives as student-athletes revolved around class and practice/games. We traveled a lot for our games and as a result, missed a lot of class. Because of this, we had to keep up with our schoolwork and drag our laptops with us everywhere we went. Now, I am completing my Master's Degree online. Although it could be feasible, a lot of the reasoning for taking classes online is because of the flexibility. It allows us to be able to manage our time differently based off of what we have going on each day/week. It would be next to impossible for me to complete my schoolwork if I did what Powers did and shut myself down for the weekend. I also know that a lot of people are in constant communication for work at all hours. Some jobs, this really just isn't feasible. I think if it is possible on an individual basis, than it should be something people should try to incorporate into their lives. But, as a whole, I do not see this suggestion as feasible at all.

Powers has done a wonderful job providing us with examples and strategies of how to be able to balance our lives with technology. Although some may be more desirable and more feasible than others, I think it is a great start. For the most part, these are suggestions that people could incorporate into their lives best off of which fits their lives best. As Powers says, "Any effort counts as progress" (p. 211). I am able to walk away from reading this book having been reinforced that our own lives can teach us things that no data set ever can (p. 19), that the brain is the most amazing associative device ever created (p. 60), and that the learning society must include how community - works and doesn't work - online (8.4). Ultimately I think this sums it up best, "No matter what kind of work one does, it's essential to step away on a regular basis, to recharge and gain perspective. In an always connected world, the need for these gaps is more urgent than ever, yet harder to find" (p. 102). We need to be able to adapt with technology and learn with it and from it since globalization is both an opportunity and a challenge (8.2). Yet we also need to be able to balance our lives and not let it run us. Powers believes that we can change things -and ourselves, a bit at a time, small and incremental (8.7). Now after reading this book, I too feel it is feasible and that I even desire to make some changes too.