

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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“Smartphones Addiction Can Be A Problem”

It has been said of the Smartphone that it is something that you don't need but you can't live without it once you have used it. The vision for the original iPhone wasn't intended to be our constant companion commanding our attention, from the time we wake up to the time we lay our heads to sleep. When Apple co-founder, Steve Jobs, introduced the iPhone in 2007, he meant for the device to be used as a revolutionary tool, i.e., an iPod that made phone calls. Jobs didn't make a mention of the phone's internet connectivity features until more than 30 minutes into his famous presentation. Jobs was convinced that the phones carefully designed native features were enough and that apps were not needed. Boy, he was wrong on that one. As of the first quarter of 2019, Android users were able to choose between 2.1 million apps. Apple's App Store had almost 1.8 million available apps. The average smartphone user has more than 80 apps on their phone and uses close to 40 of them each month. According to Georgetown professor Cal Newport, author of the new book "*Digital Minimalism*," Mr. Jobs didn't seek to radically change the rhythm of users' daily lives. He simply wanted to take experiences we already found important and make them better." So, what are these devices doing to us? In Dan Schawbel's bestseller, *Back to Human: How Great Leaders Create Connection in the Age of Isolation*, he argues that contrary to the illusion that today's workers are "highly connected" to one another, most people actually feel isolated from their colleagues, and the main cause of social isolation is technology itself. Schawbel interviewed 100 top young leaders and most agreed that their devices are a "double-edged sword," in that it helps their teams become super-connected, but at the cost of the human touch. Smartphone addiction technology can actually make the workplace more dysfunctional. It keeps employees constantly working, even after they leave the office, leading to burnout and health problems. Yet, most of us can't live without our smartphones. The use of social media apps has caused so many psychological disorders, including addiction? As one commenter in Newport's Times piece articulated, "I use my Android phone to read the New York Times, to take photos, to look up information that I need or want, to get GPS directions, and to communicate with others via phone or email. It's no threat at all. It's just a tool."

In the America that I love, all addictions seem potentially harmful. Try to verbally communicate with your friends and family in the old-fashioned way, i.e., talk to one another. It's fun. There really is life beyond your Smartphone.

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