



This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears next to any article. Visit www.nytreprints.com for samples and additional information. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

July 16, 2010

Tweet Less, Kiss More

By BOB HERBERT

I was driving from Washington to New York one afternoon on Interstate 95 when a car came zooming up behind me, really flying. I could see in the rearview mirror that the driver was talking on her cellphone.

I was about to move to the center lane to get out of her way when she suddenly swerved into that lane herself to pass me on the right — still chatting away. She continued moving dangerously from one lane to another as she sped up the highway.

A few days later, I was talking to a guy who commutes every day between New York and New Jersey. He props up his laptop on the front seat so he can watch DVDs while he's driving.

"I only do it in traffic," he said. "It's no big deal."

Beyond the obvious safety issues, why does anyone want, or need, to be talking constantly on the phone or watching movies (or texting) while driving? I hate to sound so 20th century, but what's wrong with just listening to the radio? The blessed wonders of technology are overwhelming us. We don't control them; they control us.

We've got cellphones and BlackBerrys and Kindles and iPads, and we're e-mailing and text-messaging

and chatting and tweeting — I used to call it Twittering until I was corrected by high school kids who patiently explained to me, as if I were the village idiot, that the correct term is tweeting. Twittering, tweeting — whatever it is, it sounds like a nervous disorder.

This is all part of what I think is one of the weirder aspects of our culture: a heightened freneticism that seems to demand that we be doing, at a minimum, two or three things every single moment of every hour that we're awake. Why is multitasking considered an admirable talent? We could just as easily think of it as a neurotic inability to concentrate for more than three seconds.

Why do we have to check our e-mail so many times a day, or keep our ears constantly attached, as if with Krazy Glue, to our cellphones? When you watch the news on cable television, there are often additional stories being scrolled across the bottom of the screen, stock market results blinking on the right of the screen, and promos for upcoming features on the left. These extras often block significant parts of the main item we're supposed to be watching.

A friend of mine told me about an engagement party that she had attended. She said it was lovely: a delicious lunch and plenty of Champagne toasts. But all the guests had their cellphones on the luncheon tables and had text-messaged their way through the entire event.

Enough already with this hyperactive behavior, this techno-tyranny and nonstop freneticism. We need to slow down and take a deep breath.

I'm not opposed to the remarkable technological advances of the past several years. I don't want to go back to typewriters and carbon paper and yellowing clips from the newspaper morgue. I just think that we should treat technology like any other tool. We should control it, bending it to our human purposes.

Let's put down at least some of these gadgets and spend a little time just being ourselves. One of the essential problems of our society is that we have a tendency, amid all the craziness that surrounds us, to lose sight of what is truly human in ourselves, and that includes our own individual needs — those very special, mostly nonmaterial things that would fulfill us, give meaning to our lives, enlarge us, and

enable us to more easily embrace those around us.

There's a character in the August Wilson play "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" who says everyone has a song inside of him or her, and that you lose sight of that song at your peril. If you get out of touch with your song, forget how to sing it, you're bound to end up frustrated and dissatisfied.

As this character says, recalling a time when he was out of touch with his own song, "Something wasn't making my heart smooth and easy."

I don't think we can stay in touch with our song by constantly Twittering or tweeting, or thumbing out messages on our BlackBerrys, or piling up virtual friends on Facebook.

We need to reduce the speed limits of our lives. We need to savor the trip. Leave the cellphone at home every once in awhile. Try kissing more and tweeting less. And stop talking so much.

Listen.

Other people have something to say, too. And when they don't, that glorious silence that you hear will have more to say to you than you ever imagined. That is when you will begin to hear your song. That's when your best thoughts take hold, and you become really you.



More in Opinion (1 of 24 articles)

Editorial: Reform Moves Ahead

[Read More »](#)