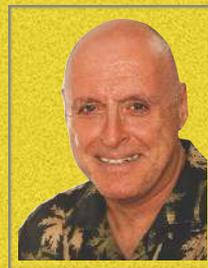


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



626 The Social Media Habit We Don't Want

In a desperate search for clarity and meaning in this increasingly bizarre and news-infused world of ours, we have turned to an activity that sets us on a potentially bad course. A course you may be on. I'm Jerry Roberts and it shall be revealed, today, on The Extra Point.

It may start our day, fill our breaks at work, grab our attention between courses in a restaurant, or in line at a store, after dinner, and then pushes us past the time when we should sleep. It is unrelenting. What could it be?

If you guessed social media you'd be right, but it's a specific aspect of using it, one that psychologists have picked up on as unhealthy. They've given it a name: doom-scrolling. Each night ends the way the day began, with an endless trek through social media in a desperate search for that clarity I referred to.

Since March we've had a steady stream of COVID-19 and dozens if not hundreds of stories and sub-trails to skip down, murder hornets, George Floyd, police brutality, systemic racism, protests, riots, cancel culture trying to take down anything and anyone who has an opinion different from theirs, economic insecurities, virtually everything politicized, threats of civil war in America, and anger everywhere you look.

And yet, we continue to scroll, somehow thinking that a measure of relief will come from the very platforms that bring us such distress. Why do we think that the promise of some answer, or perhaps even some good news, is only the next click away?

Mental health professionals question the benefits of social media, particularly the highly politicized channels such as Facebook and Twitter. Most people there feel they receive what the professionals term "net benefits," when it's used responsibly.

That means when you subtract all the anxiety, depression, anger, frustration, and downright fear created by those social platforms, the fact that we can connect with others — far flung family members and old friends, plus the social media friends we have developed relationships with — it yields a positive result that overrides the negative.

However, for many people, that net benefit isn't there. The positives that others gain aren't as prominent and they end up with a net negative. Over time, this can cause personality and behavioral changes, which can impact workplace performance, job satisfaction, generate increased conflict, and determine how well one worker gets along with another.

Is it fair that I hammer social media and lay this responsibility on them? Well, let's look. Just as you can't sell many newspapers by printing that everything is peaches and cream, people won't spend as much time posting to their timeline if they're happy and satisfied with the way things are going.

Mesfin Bekalu, a research scientist at Harvard's T. H. Chan School of Public Health, said: "As humans we have a natural tendency to pay more attention to negative news."

Social platforms monitor every click we make, how long we spend on certain pages and posts, the videos we watch, the people we follow and how we engage with others — then they crunch all that data to develop a profile of who we are what we want, then feed more of that to us.

If we bathe in negativity and fear, they'll make sure to refresh the supply so we never have to climb out of the tub.

(Con't.)

There's also another side to this. Some people live on social platforms, love the arguing and are, in fact, energized by it. They lie in wait for us to come by and would like nothing better than to get involved in a never-ending and juicy back-and-forth with us, which ends like most of them do — accomplishing nothing.

Are there positives? Allissa Richardson, a professor at USC's Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism, said for many non-Black Americans, the coverage of protests has brought them news about the contributions of Blacks throughout the country's history.

Sure, people not too tightly tuned into the news aspects of social media see things quite a bit differently. To them, it's more fun, more entertaining, and they use the platforms for connecting.

So what does the employer do? I recommend sitting down with workers who are physically in the building and others virtually, and talk about it.

If a worker is losing sleep and sacrificing productivity, and they're being adversely affected by the continual doom and gloom, encourage them to give it a break and stay off social media for a day, two days the next time, and increase from there.

There are people who have left for a month, felt great, then returned to find the arguments were the same and they hadn't really missed much. Some have disengaged entirely and don't miss it.

For your own mental health, for your organization's general well being, talk about social media and how to control it, not have it control you and grind away at your emotions and happiness. This is a conversation that affects every organization in Guam, yours included.

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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