



Why Social Media Doesn't Create Social Intelligence

Jeremie Kubicek

They say that if we have more followers in our online, social media world, then we will be deemed more important.

They say that the more people you know via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and the others, then the more influence you and I will have. They say that if we would connect more then we will be more connected.

I say they are wrong.

Who “they” are is one issue. What “they” say is another.

Here is the most important fact: **Social media doesn't create social intelligence.**

In fact, the more socially connected we are virtually online, the greater the risk of creating social dysfunction in our actual lives.

Let me prove this with these scenarios:

- How many of you awake each morning and check in on Facebook or your preferred social media platform instead of doing something that inspires you or motivates you for the day?
- How often do you find yourself walking the streets with your head down, reading on your smartphone, perhaps about the new restaurant a high school acquaintance you haven't seen in 20 years just visited?
- Who here spends most of their evenings watching TV with your families looking down at another screen without any conversation between you?

Social media keeps us engaged in a global preview with people who, for the most part, we don't particularly care as much about as the ones sitting around us in our own homes. This global connection detracts from our local connections, and thus trades present relationships for the whimsy of distant relationships.

Think of the ramifications of generations who have traded real relationships for virtual ones on a screen. On one level, there are associated physical issues, like eye strain or carpal tunnel syndrome, that go hand in hand with overuse of social media. And yet, these are mild compared to the pain of social disengagement that occurs when people trade the real for the perceived. Friendships, dating relationships, marriage, kids, family—all of these become less real when we do not invest in the flesh-and-blood people right in front of us.

All of this, this perpetual quasi-connected state of disconnection, is an issue for me. I am not anti-Facebook or social media; I actually spend my fair share of time in those virtual places. I am simply asking you to do a reality check, and snap out of the buzzy haze you're in, if you've become addicted to social media.

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Shift Your Mind

There is a time and place for everything. The most socially adept people in the world know this and understand these key things:

1. They know what gear they should be in at any point in time.
2. They have gotten very good at shifting gears by shifting their minds.
3. They are focused on being interested before interesting.
4. They understand what mode others are in and try to meet them there.

There is focus mode that we all need in order to do our work. There is a task mode that we need to be able to handle multiple areas in our lives. Each of us needs a time for social mode, and we all need to be able to connect to each other in a deeper way. And, finally, we need to be able to recharge and rest.

We need every one of these modes, or gears, as I call them in my book, *5 Gears: How to be Present and Productive When There's Never Enough Time*. The secret to being socially adept is learning how to be in the right mode, or gear, at the right time.

For years I was stuck in task and focus mode, giving little attention to social, connect, or recharge modes. Because of this fixation on the work modes, my social world became unbalanced.

What I am seeing among the thousands of people I speak to each year is that most of us are either consumed by task or focus mode, or we are escaping to the online social world, which doesn't require a lot of effort, but makes us feel that we are either connected, or eventually sends into a social depression of sort because we are not keeping up with the Joneses.

The most emotionally intelligent people understand how to shift gears by shifting their minds. To counter my work addiction, for instance, I have chosen a bridge two miles from my home as a trigger to get off my phone and shift into connect mode so that I can be ready for my family at night. This is intentional living.

When meeting others, emotionally intelligent people are fascinated by others' lives and work to get to know them without worrying about what they are going to say or wondering why others are not asking about them. They are secure, confident and humble. These socially adept people become skilled in recognizing what mode others are in and work hard to connect to them by shifting their own gears to be in the right mode at the right time. Does this sound like you? Or, are you suffering from the unintended consequence of being socially addicted to social media?

Follow this flow to see if this is what is happening with you and a loved one:

1. When our heads are down looking at screens, you can't focus upwards on the eyes of the person sitting with you.
2. When you don't see the other person's eyes, you miss what the windows of their souls have to share with you and you miss their reality.
3. When you miss their reality, you lose influence with that person.
4. When you lose influence, the other person will eventually begin to distance himself or herself from you.
5. When they distance themselves, they begin to look for someone who will look them in the eyes and provide attention.
6. Most of the time, those people are not the ones that you would want them to surround themselves with.
7. All of this, because of your desire to connect with someone else in another place.

Our undermined influence has a direct correlation to our social media addiction.

Without realizing it, we are sabotaging the relationships of those we are closest to.

How to Be Present and Productive

My rant is not directed at the social media talking heads, as if the executives at Facebook or Snapchat were reading this anyway, but actually targeted to adults who have become lazy and who are leading, parenting, or living accidental lives.

Accidental is the opposite of intentional, and I know firsthand that intentional living is much more fun than accidental living. Primarily because when you know that you are adding value to a spouse or child or friend or colleague, there is a feeling of satisfaction that takes place in our hearts and minds.

This can only occur when we are willing to learn how to be engaged in the right mode at the right time. We can absolutely be present and productive in a given day, if we choose to be. To do so, however, takes a commitment to manage our time much more intentionally than most people, accidentally, do. Here is what I mean:

All of us wake up, eat, shower or get dressed for the day, drive or prepare for work, work, then take breaks or lunches, drive home, eat in or out, connect or not then go to sleep to prepare for the next day. We all have these in common.

Your opportunity is simply to master your settings of your day, to intentionally plan to manage certain portions of your day differently than you have been. Moreover, deciding to live intentionally opens the door for change, to stop doing things that cause you to disconnect from others and trading up to better things. For me, for instance:

- I usually wake up by 6:30 AM and have traded up my mornings by reading some things that inspire me and get me ready for the day instead of perusing social media or emails. I have even incorporated music at times to get me fired up for the day ahead.
- Most weeks I have added weight training into my world because I like the way it makes me feel compared to the past, inconsistent workout routine I was doing.
- As a family, we have added in 2nd Gear/social connection times during the day to make sure that we are connecting while our high school-aged kids are still at home.
- At night, I have worked to trade up to reading something interesting before bed rather than skimming Instagram or Twitter.

Trading up from something mediocre to something life-giving is called being wise.

Gaining a Competitive Advantage

Do you get the feeling that most people won't attempt the things that I am suggesting here? They are comfortable riding along with the herd, with people who are glazed over, who are neither inspiring or inspired, who have given in to the social malaise that comes from becoming obsessed voyeurs who look through windows—screens—and not at the real person with a pulse sitting right next to you on the sofa. Missed opportunities for connection and influence for the quick fix online connection is the modern Achille's heel for most people.

For those who would attempt to trade up, master their settings and shift their mindset to be in the right gear at the right time, they are doing something that the masses are not doing—creating a competitive advantage.

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In the new world, those who are socially adept, emotionally intelligent and trained in intentional, relational dynamics will be the ones who have the competitive advantage over others. Don't we grow weary of people who are fixated on themselves? Don't we tend to distance ourselves from those consumed with their own social media world. Don't we also, by extension, also tend to lean in to those who are paying attention, and listen to those who are interesting, and promote those who display social intelligence.

People like people who are good at relationships. We tend to make fun of those who aren't, oftentimes without that person even knowing that we are doing so. Which one do you want to be?

This is your opportunity. Understand the gears and know when to shift. Take the time to learn where you are best and where you struggle. Create your competitive advantage by becoming intentional in other people's lives. You will easily stand out, as the majority of people are so distracted by their devices to make any impact that you could possibly make.

Put some boundaries around your social media. Set aside a time and place where you are engaged in it, but let others know that you are going to do that for a period of time, not all the time. Or else... you will create a social media world that will take over the rest of your life.

When we lived in the South we observed the power of an indigenous plant called kudzu. This vine would grow dramatically in a day, week, month and year. Eventually, wherever kudzu is planted, it will take over the entire forest, taking the much-needed water from the trees and killing any other plant in the vicinity simply because of its voracious growth pattern.

Social media will do the same thing if you let it. If you don't put boundaries around the way you use it, it can creep in and take over your free time and diminish your ability to influence to those you really care about. That is the reality of our modern world.

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Being skilled at social media doesn't make you socially adept. In fact, I say the opposite. It is much easier to do relationships through a phone, but much more difficult to be present with others in your life and committed to their highest possible good.

If you want to experience the dynamics of being socially intelligent, you will have to be disciplined in learning how to shift to be in the right gear at the right time. **When you master the ability to do this, you will notice your real influence spike in the lives of those around you. That is serious clout.** 📱

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Jeremie Kubicek is a founding partner of the GiANT companies and is co-author of the *5 Gears: How to be Present and Productive When There is Never Enough Time*, as well as *Making Your Leadership Come Alive*, a *Wall Street Journal* best-seller. Jeremie is passionate about helping liberate leaders and train them on how to fight for the highest possible good in the lives of those they lead. His business, [GiANT Worldwide](#), is focused on helping organizations multiply healthy culture through an apprenticeship process. More information about his book can be found at www.5Gears.com and his blog can be found at www.jeremiekubicek.com.

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