

Technology and Your Relationship

Those of you who have followed this column for a while may remember that I moved to California for a girl I met online (back when my online experience consisted of AOL, email, and chat rooms). That turned out to be a disaster. A year after that relationship ended, I turned to the internet again, but this time I placed an ad on Yahoo! Personals. Thankfully that experience ended much better. After a few tries, including a short-termed dating relationship with a younger woman (I wasn't old enough to be a cougar at that point), I finally met Julie.

That was over eight and a half years ago. Back then, I had an old PC and had just gotten a hand-me-down cell phone just in case I broke down on my 45-minute commute in my old car. I can't remember if Julie had a cell phone, but I do know she still had her work pager. We tended to use our landlines to talk on the phone.

Since then, our technology use has grown substantially. We each have a BlackBerry (mine seems to very rarely leave my side). Our landline phone is mostly used for telemarketers and a fax machine. We each have laptops and share the PC in the house, which also doubles as our network hub. (There have been times when we were using all three computers at once.) We have digital cable, which we watch on our HD television with surround sound. We both access Facebook on our laptops and our cell phones. I have also added the element of Twitter to my phone and computing experience.

One day I noticed, not for the first time, that Julie and I were sitting at a restaurant and we were both staring at our phones. I think one of us was on Facebook and the other was answering a work email. Thankfully, we only did that for a few minutes and then we turned our attention back to each other, but it got me thinking. Has the incorporation of technology into our lives made things better or worse for couples? I have my own thoughts on this, but I wanted to see if there were any common themes, so,

of course, I asked my Facebook friends if technology affected their relationships with their partners, girlfriends, wives, husbands (yes, I have straight friends), or other significant other.

There were many variations of how people felt technology affected their relationships. There were minor changes like, "I no longer leave those notes 'went to store' etc. on kitchen table - I just text." There were also a lot of couples who had a similar experience to me, knowing there were some times that technology got in the way, but overall it helped enhance their relationships.

Several of my Facebook friends loved that they could stay connected to their honey throughout the day. Statements like, "Now it gives us the opportunity during the day to send a quick hug, hello, or kiss," and "We also have busy work lives, so a simple "I love you" text during the day goes a long way" were common.

Spouses also used technology to keep in touch for the smaller things like using their "BlackBerries to coordinate family calendar" and bigger things like, "I'm due with our first 'any day,' so now hubby brings his phone into all appointments and leaves it on." After one friend drops her daughter off at school, she calls her husband "to let him know how our morning routine and drop off went. He has learned to rely on that call and misses it if for some reason I don't call."

I was happy to learn that, like Julie and I, a few friends could thank technology for their relationships. One couple chatted on TangoWire with no intention of pursuing anything more than friendship because of the few hour distance that separated them. However, once they met, they hit it off. It seems to have gone well based on this quote, "Now we are truly in love and if it wasn't for the technology of the computer, I never would have met my soul mate!" Another couple was friends who moved their relationship to the next level with the help of a few text messages.

Technology was not always a great thing. Jealousy or just plain annoyance at time spent on Facebook or staring at the HD TV were common trends. It was also pointed out that sometimes a message can be misunderstood because things like tone and body language were missing from texting and online messages. There were also negative changes to the relationships that included lack of freedom issues like, "I felt like I was on a leash [with constant checking in via text messages]. It definitely did not help the relationship." On the other side of the issue were problems with individuals in couples having too much freedom, including "Reconnecting with old flings, intimate discussions that should be with your partner are now with others because you may feel more comfortable behind the computer rather than face to face." Unfortunately, I saw a lot of issues about cheating through technology, so much so, that I will further expand on this topic next month.

Thankfully, Julie and I have started to make a conscious effort to pay more attention to each other rather than to our technology. For example, when we go into a restaurant, I no longer set my phone to vibrate, I turn off all alerts. However, we continue to use it to our advantage. When Julie is out of town, we send each other love notes via text, share our day through Facebook posts and pictures, and, with the beauty of free mobile-to-mobile plans, talk to each other often. Nothing can replace our face-to-face conversations and being able to hold each other, but at least we are able to supplement those precious moments with virtual contacts. Hopefully you have found ways to use technology to assist, not hinder, your relationship. Until next month.

Blog: nested.wordpress.com.

Email: nested_lez@earthlink.net

Twitter: ACTeeple

by A.C. Teeple