



There is no denying social media has become an integral part of our lives. It has shaped the way we communicate and interact with the world around us. It's used for everything from marketing to dating, and has even spawned its own career field. We have the power of instantaneous interaction with family and friends and our lives are lived in an endless cycle of status updates. The promise of social media is connection. So, why do I feel we are more disconnected than ever?



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It starts with the type of “connecting” social media produces. For the most part, our interactions in the digital world are built on a superficial foundation. True, meaningful relationships are cultivated around vulnerability. The kind that allows us to be real with each other without the fear of judgement or disapproval. Where our value is derived from *who* we are and not *what* we are. Yet, this is nearly the opposite of online friendships.

More often than not the relationships we maintain online, through social media, demand that we manage our image and put our best foot forward. We gravitate toward those who think like us, believe like us and act like us. It generates a culture of exclusion that isn't necessarily

reflective of our real lives. People feel safe in their digital groups and often find themselves rallying around shared causes. They become armchair activists where allegiance to the cause is always more important than people.



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Over the last several months I have really noticed the negative effect social media plays in my daily life. I felt saturated in negativity. We seem to swim in a perpetual state of antagonism and dogmatism. When has a meme, Facebook post or comment ever changed a mind or won an argument? Answer: never. My real-life encounters with people, even with ones I disagree with, are not as hostile as social media portrays the world to be. Yet, so much time is spent online investing energy into defending a cause, arguing a point of view or, lamenting our current woes. So, I've taken a step back, reassessed and made some changes.

All of us have a limited supply of time and emotional energy. Like any natural resource, it can be squandered or, it can be harnessed. I want my time and energy to produce positive, tangible results in the lives of those I care about. I want to shed the negativity that was permeating my daily life because it's a destructive force that impacts everyone around me. As a husband, father, friend or Director, learning to manage where and how I invest my time and energy is crucial to being successful in each of those roles.

I hope each of you takes the time to assess whether your energy is being used in a positive and productive way or, in a way that leaves you agitated and frustrated. Focus on the relationships around you that really matter. Fixate on what you can actually control and engage in ways that are effective. We have an immense responsibility to our family, friends and, even our co-workers, to be present in the moment with them. To forge genuine relationships built on a

trust that allows for differences of opinion without condemnation. A trust that gives birth to loyalty and says no matter what, "I'll be here." This is a genuine connection. This is what I'm striving for.



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Be smart. Be safe.

If you have questions, feel free to email me at [RobertHarris@lappl.org](mailto:RobertHarris@lappl.org) or contact me at (951) 415-5943.