

Turning 50, reflecting on life in a technological world

A principal reflects on how technology is eating away at the limited family time available and offers some tips to correct the imbalance.

By Chuck Bloch

I am a school principal, and I turned 50 recently. I know, it's just a number, but on watershed moments like these I find myself a bit more reflective than normal. Among many things, I have been thinking about how things have changed in my working life. I taught in the classroom for 11 years and have been in administration for 15 years now. I can honestly say that it has been a great career so far.

There have been so many great people to work with and for, so many great kids and families, so many successes ... and an ever-increasing supply of technology to help me do my job. Technology has allowed me to enjoy instant access to support, instant and improved communication systems, increased access to information and professional development, motivating teaching strategies, etc, etc.

However, as I have paused to reflect, I am becoming aware of the way technology has allowed my job to encroach on every moment of my life. Think about it. You're just like me; you work a full, long day. You do not take a regular coffee break, and you spend your lunch time on the move interacting with kids, parents, volunteers and staff members. You work hard to make your school the best, warmest, highest-achieving school in the district. You coach, lead a club, have district responsibilities, etc. You go home in the evening feeling a little guilty because you are conscious of the

many things you could still be doing at school. And so you catch yourself sending a quick email at the dinner table, making one more call in the middle of your son's hockey game, updating your web page at all hours, Tweeting as you walk to your car, or catching up on Facebook during the church service!

There was a time not terribly long ago when technology was a telephone and a hand-cranked copier (raise your hand if you remember the blue ink of the Gestetner). Principals worked hard all week, and when they went home in the evening or on the weekend, they were away from work. They were able to relax, or pursue family activities and hobbies. Today, this no longer seems to be the case. In this culture of connectivity, you may leave your office, but you are never away from work. I am guessing that, as you read this, you have a smartphone in your pocket, a tablet at your side, and a laptop or desktop computer at the ready. You are always tempted

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to check your email, do a little more research, contact one more person. That work ethic is admirable, to be sure. And yet, I wonder: Is it healthy? If I never disconnect from the heavy responsibilities of my job, I will never recharge my batteries, and I will soon become less reliable.

Having recognized that technology threatens to control my life, and that this has the potential to negatively impact my life and my effectiveness as a Principal, I have instituted some self-regulating limitations. I suggest them here to colleagues who may be interested:


1. Family first. My family needs to know that I will be there for them when they need me. Yes, I will be gone for most of the day every day, and some evenings and the odd Saturday may be spent at school, but my family knows that they can call on me at any time if they need me (I have left this as a standing request with my secretary). They also know that I have set aside priority time for them throughout the week. This includes being at every game or performance, and home for dinner. I figure that when I retire, not too many people will remember that extra hour at the office, but my family will remember the time I chose to spend with them.

2. Turn it off! I realize that my mind never stops being at work. Have you ever woken up at 3 am because you were planning a meeting or reviewing an issue in your head? But I can reduce that load a bit by turning off my devices at a prescribed time. For me, I choose to stop checking emails at 8 pm. If

someone needs me that badly in the evening, they know my phone number and can reach me. Otherwise, it can wait until morning. And I can sleep. I also choose not to check my emails on Sundays. I still believe in having a “day of rest.”

3. Enjoy your vacation. We get holidays for a reason. I need to rest, relax, recharge, and catch-up on my hobbies and responsibilities. My family needs to know that our home life matters. And I try leaving my devices turned off for at least a while during the holidays. It is liberating!

4. A reflective moment. I don't know what your personal beliefs are, but for me it is essential to keep some quiet time set apart each day. This includes reflection, contemplation, prayer ... and it may be the only time in my day that is actually peaceful. It takes a conscious effort to take this quiet time, and the temptation to check my messages is constant. But the renewal I get from it is irreplaceable.

This is not an exhaustive list, nor is it a prescription for you. It's just a list of a few things I am doing most days to keep my life in balance. You may want to try at least one of these ideas and see if it makes any difference in your life. I am willing to bet that it will actually make you better at your job, as you make sure to keep your batteries well-charged. 


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Green, continues from page 2

are being met. You are able to be an intricate part of Friday Forum, the President's meeting and the professional development sessions.

What you realize from this experience is that the BCPVPA is an amazing organization and there are more things happening than you ever realized. It is a fantastic opportunity to become provincially involved with both the Association and the members. I am sure that if you asked any Board member they would tell you that it has been one of the most rewarding experiences they have ever had.

So the next time someone asks I hope you will think ... yes it is definitely on my “bucket list!”

And remember, this year BCPVPA members will elect a President-elect and four members to the Board. A special issue of *eNews* will be published on May 17 and voting for President-elect takes place May 28 to 30 and voting for Directors takes place June 4 to 6. 

BCPVPA election dates

A link to a secure, individual ballot will be emailed on the day prior to the first day of voting.

**President-elect
Vote May 28 to 30**

**Directors
Vote June 4 to 6**