

A Nation of Mute Zombies



You may think this sounds like the beginning of a Tommy Cooper joke but I went to the doctor the other day and....nah, there's no punchline. The end of the sentence should read 'forgot to take my mobile phone with me.'

Shock and horror of horrors. It's the way of the world these days that mobile phones have been almost forced upon us and we all must have one. I discovered I had left mine at home whilst I was sitting in the doctor's surgery. An immediate feeling of discomfort enveloped me, almost as strong as the discomfort which instigated the appointment with the doc in the first place.

What if someone was trying to contact me? What if I need to call someone? What if I get in an accident? What if Rod Petrie wants to offer me the Hibs job? (Mike you support Hearts....how ill are you? Ed.)

What if...well, just what if?

Before we had email, texting, Twitter, Facebook, or any other social/communication network on phones we could fit in our pocket and use anywhere we wanted, people either a) made contact if we had answered the phone at home or b) left a message on an answerphone (if there was one) Hell, they even did that almost unheard of action these days – call back. They didn't try every number, email address, or online account they had for us just to reach us for whatever reason – we simply weren't available. We either missed their call at home, arrived to find a voicemail waiting for us or answered their call when they tried again.

Now in this super-advanced, high-speed technical age, we are supposed to be contactable 24 hours per day, 7 days per week,

whenever someone feels the need to be in touch.

It doesn't matter if you are at the supermarket, grabbing a bite to eat during your all too short lunch break at work or playing with your children or, in my case, grandchildren at the park – everyone knows you have a mobile phone and thinks you should be available to answer it. But what if you didn't?

With the mass production of mobile devices, it's a sad sign of the times that even eating out at a restaurant can see people sitting at a table together quietly, staring at their phones. Have you ever sat with someone while they texted, emailed, or talked on the phone with someone else for just a tad too long? Perhaps it's my age but this really irritates the hell out of me and makes me feel even less important than I normally feel.

The constant need for constant updates about everything under the sun (and it's usually of no importance at all) has created a nation of mute zombies, blindly walking with their head down engrossed in the latest update about...whatever. We used to be able to deal with not seeing the latest news until we got around to it; why the need now?

Don't get me wrong, I am not a tech-luddite. I have a Blackberry, laptop and tablet. And I do browse on the internet on my mobile while the bus driver has to negotiate his way through selfish and occasionally stupid motorists on Edinburgh's streets as well as dealing with the ned culture that seems an ever-increasing presence on our public transport (but that's for another rant).

I understand it's now become difficult to leave the house without the modern-day adult version of a security blanket. As the aforementioned trip to the doctor proved, I found it difficult too. However, this experience made me think about getting some 'me' time back – and going out more often without the demanding little piece of instant technology that common consensus says you can't do without. When I do go 'mobile

free' I have been rather startled at just how often I reach for my phone in my pocket only to find it's not there – and I am forced to do something else. You may feel the same. What to do?

Try looking around. Try talking to a human being. Try paying attention. When you don't feel chased down by someone or aren't busy staring at that little 4.5 inch screen full of Facebook and Twitter updates, it's amazing what you can experience.

Try it out a few days a week or a few times a month. Leave your phone at home once in a while. It could change your life.

Got to go now. My phone has just beeped to indicate there's a text message for me. And I simply *must* read it immediately...