

Peopletech

Grounding Technology's In The Wisdom of Grandparents

By Garry Priam

There seems to be no end of innovation in the technologies at our disposal. Troublingly, a great many of these technologies are either designed with disposal in mind or simply add to the growing distraction which plagues our attempts to find a few truly useful tools.



Without doubt, the business world has some powerful technologies that can and do improve the workplace on multiple levels. From process to production, these technologies have terraformed the global workplace, introducing new efficiencies and opportunities for potential. They have also provided us with tools that have changed the way we communicate and interact in both our personal and business lives.

There seems to be a never ending amount of new devices, gadgets and computer programs designed to help make our lives easier and more fulfilling. Granted, a lot of these do add value to our lives. However, it's always valuable to look back at how people like our grandparents survived without many of these modern day marvels.

Back in our grandparent's time when they began working, there was no Internet, Laptop Computers, iPhones, Blackberries or Electronic Social Networking. Strangely, they managed just fine.

By no means does the generation gap neatly delineate the usage of technologies in the workplace and in our lives. There are techno-whizzes amongst the boomers, return-to-basic troops amongst Generation Y and a great many of us still trying to figure out how to program the timer on the coffee machine.

To be clear, I am not a technophobe, far from it. However, as HR is firmly grounded in the human equation, it serves us well to consider technology from a "best-suits" perspective, one that keeps our focus on the flesh and blood, while remaining open to those tools which bring fresh energy to the people paradigm.

However, it is interesting to note what our grandparents did not have and what they relied upon instead. So, with tongue-in-cheek and technophobia in check, let's take note of how our grandparents managed without any of the following:

Cell Phones, Blackberries, G3s et al. – What we carry in our hands, our grandparents carried in their heads. As the quantity of information/communication at our disposal increases, the quality of the same runs the risk of being diminished. Much as calculators, invaluable as they are, have been accused of leading to a marked decline in mathematical ability, so to does the omnipresence of data devices run the risk of devaluing the currency of our communications. As hard as it is to believe we can live without a cell phone, many do.

Social Networking – How did our grandparents every manage without Twitter? While there is no denying the benefits of being able to communicate with people all over the world and share information of every form imaginable with the click of a button, have we lost something in translation? What of the content and context? Our grandparents had phones and used them, but key communications took place either face to face or by employing pen to paper with purpose. The impact of the written letter and personal connectivity remains and is regaining consideration in the sea of social media.

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GPS (Global Positioning Systems) – Wherever they were or needed to be, our grandparents knew their place in the world. They held the lay of the lands around them to heart. Travel involved maps, requests for direction and gathering needed info via the art of communication. Now, we have GPS devices that we can hold in our hand – and still manage to arrive late for meetings after relying on inadequate online direction.

Debit Cards – These did not exist in our grandparents time. However, my father is in his 70's and has never stepped up to an ATM. He always chooses to enter the bank, walk up to the teller and do "business face to face." The facelessness of the ATM simply devalues his relationship with the people portion of each transaction. This service-centric perspective is by no means anachronistic and has ironically resurfaced under the heading of innovation.

Digital Cable – Whether or not video killed the radio star, television culture did not hold sway in our grandparents times. Try to imagine getting all of your news and entertainment from a radio, instead of from TSN CNN, Fox News and MTV. It is only recently that the number of channels has exploded. Again though, the quality vs. quantity ratio has spawned little more imaginative than an unending spate of 'reality' programs. The conundrum at the heart of so much of our communications is a lack of connective clarity that anchors and inspires us on a daily basis.

There is a tendency to look back at the 'simpler times' of our grandparents and romanticize what we essentially view as a technologically impoverished period. Nothing could be further from the truth. Like us, our grandparents lived during times where a lot of really beneficial tools were created to make their lives easier.

They realized it then as we need to also realize it now...tools have a purpose to serve us and to enrich our lives, but not to take over our lives. Many people sometimes get so caught up in their everyday lives and don't stop to think about what is important and how doing simple things could actually make them happier – like going and having a coffee with a friend who lives a few blocks from you instead of chatting with them online or texting them. Or actually getting up from your chair in your office to ask your colleague a question would be a novel idea.

When we lose face to face communication we begin to lose part of us that makes us human. When we have the good fortune to live where we do, how is it we often forget that simply unplugging and 'taking a meeting' by the water or in the forest or even walking downtown can be so rewarding? I think it is because we are trying to keep pace with technologies that by their very nature never rest. We, on the other hand, benefit immensely from such little things.

Our grandparents can learn a lot from us in how we now communicate and live life just as we can learn a lot about how they lived. There is always room for the new ways from our generation and the old ways from our grandparent's time. We just have to remember that we can certainly embrace both sets of tools and not forget about where we came from...

By Garry Priam, Owner Mossa International