

Texts for Connection -

Text #1 – The Flight from Conversation

(Excerpts from NYT, April 21, 2012, by Sherry Turkle)

WE live in a technological universe in which we are always communicating. And yet we have sacrificed conversation for mere connection. At home, families sit together, texting and reading e-mail. At work executives text during board meetings. We text (and shop and go on Facebook) during classes and when we're on dates. My students tell me about an important new skill: it involves maintaining eye contact with someone while you text someone else; it's hard, but it can be done.

Over the past 15 years, I've studied technologies of mobile connection and talked to hundreds of people of all ages and circumstances about their plugged-in lives. I've learned that the little devices most of us carry around are so powerful that they change not only what we do, but also who we are. We can't get enough of one another if we can use technology to keep one another at distances we can control: not too close, not too far, just right. I think of it as a Goldilocks effect.

Human relationships are rich; they're messy and demanding. We have learned the habit of cleaning them up with technology. E-mail, Twitter, Facebook, all of these have their places — in politics, commerce, romance and friendship. But no matter how valuable, they do not substitute for conversation.

WE expect more from technology and less from one another and seem increasingly drawn to technologies that provide the illusion of companionship without the demands of relationship. Always-on/always-on-you devices provide three powerful fantasies: that we will always be heard; that we can put our attention wherever we want it to be; and that we never have to be alone. Indeed our new devices have turned being alone into a problem that can be solved.

I am a partisan for conversation. To make room for it, I see some first, deliberate steps. At home, we can create sacred spaces: the kitchen, the dining room. We can make our cars "device-free zones." We can demonstrate the value of conversation to our children. And we can do the same thing at work. There we are so busy communicating that we often don't have time to talk to one another about what really matters. Most of all, we need to remember — in between texts and e-mails and Facebook posts — to listen to one another, even to the boring bits, because it is often in unedited moments, moments in which we hesitate and stutter and go silent, that we reveal ourselves to one another.

What is something from this piece that particularly resonates with you?

What is a piece of advice you can share about connections and conversation?

Text #2 – A Pastor’s Efforts to Improve his Community

From Chicago Tribune News, April 22, 2012

The Rev. Corey Brooks spent three months living on top of an abandoned West Woodlawn motel to call attention to the violence plaguing the community and to raise money for the cause. Now he’s taking his mission on the road.

Brooks announced Sunday at his packed South Side church that he will walk across America — from New York City to Los Angeles— this summer with the same goals.

“I believe God put me on Earth to bring attention to violence in inner cities,” he told hundreds of parishioners at New Beginnings Church, 6620 S. King Dr.

Brooks said he will begin walking in Times Square on June 5. Organizers don’t yet know how long it will take to complete the nearly 3,000 mile walk.

“I’ll be back,” he told worshipers who clapped and murmured with excitement.

Brooks' rooftop stand drew national attention, and visits from politicians as well as dozens of Occupy Chicago protesters to show support. In the end, a pledge of \$100,000 from movie mogul Tyler Perry provided the final push for reaching the pastor's goal of raising \$450,000 to buy and demolish the decrepit motel, a haven for drugs and prostitution.

On Sunday, Rabbi Michael Siegel spoke to Brooks’ congregation. The rabbi likened the pastor’s mission to the civil rights marches in Selma, Ala.

“When we pray with our feet, we change the world,” he said drawing inspiration from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel who marched with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr, in Selma.

Worshiper Pamela Allen said Brooks’ mission is “amazing.”

“It’s not about notoriety,” said Allen, 56. “It’s about stopping the shooting.”

What inspires you about Reverend Brooks’ story?

Is there something in your community that you’d like to direct your energy towards?

Text #3 – The Story behind “Take them a Meal”

In December of 2007, a close friend of ours collapsed from the sudden onset of a heart condition. The phone rang day and night because family, friends and neighbors wanted to help by bringing meals to her husband and four young children. We felt overwhelmed by the task of coordinating meals, but we wanted to help and knew the meals were needed. As a result, we designed a site that eliminated the need for making and receiving time-consuming phone calls.

Once the site was finished, we realized that meal scheduling is done not just when tragedy strikes, but when babies are born, when friends are receiving medical treatments, and in so many other situations. Before we knew it, many of our friends were making use of TakeThemAMeal.com and word was spreading. Just recently, a child in our community was severely injured. The family posted a link to their TakeThemAMeal.com account on their blog, and a meal schedule for several months was filled overnight.

We made TakeThemAMeal.com to help one family we care about deeply and that in itself made the site worthwhile. Now we'd like to share this tool, so others may be helped as well.

*What is the main message you take from this story?
How do friendships influence you?*

Text #4 – One Man’s Steady Struggle

From Harvard Health Blog P.J. Skerrett senior editor Harvard Health

It isn’t easy to get rid of a harmful habit like drinking too much, or to make healthy changes like losing weight and exercising more. Media stories about people who run marathons a year after surgery to bypass cholesterol-clogged arteries or who climb Mt. McKinley after being diagnosed with diabetes are interesting, but they don’t resonate with me. Mostly it’s because they often leave out the hard work needed to change and the backtracking that invariably accompanies it.

I ran across a truly inspiring story the other day in the *American Journal of Health Promotion*—one that shows how most of us ultimately manage to make changes that improves our lives. The journal’s founder and editor, Michael P. O’Donnell, wrote a moving essay about his father, Kevin O’Donnell. Once an overweight workaholic who smoked and drank heavily, ate mostly meat and potatoes, and didn’t exercise—and who eventually needed a double bypass—Kevin O’Donnell gradually made changes to improve his health. Now, at age 85, he has the cardiovascular system of a 65 year old and is working on a house-building project in North Korea.

How did Kevin O’Donnell engineer such a remarkable transformation? By being aware of his habits and lifestyle and how they were affecting his health and relationships. From that starting point, he took advice from others and asked for help. And he kept at it.

O’Donnell quit smoking, though it took five tries over 16 years. He stopped drinking when he realized that alcohol was becoming a problem. He began changing his diet and started exercising at age 49 after a doctor told him he would begin facing serious health problems if he didn’t get in shape and lose some weight.

There was no monumental struggle, no epiphany—just a regular guy doing his best each day to become healthier for his sake and for his family. The changes Kevin O’Donnell made might not seem like dramatic accomplishments. But they have given him the time and health to do the things he wants to do and be with the people he cares about.

To me, *that’s* an inspirational story.

What do you find most inspiring about this story?

How does your connection to family influence you?

Text #5 – Exodus 18:1 – 7: Moshe – Leader and Family Man

א וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ כֹּהֵן מִדְיָן, חֵתָן מֹשֶׁה, אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים
לְמֹשֶׁה, וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ: כִּי-הוֹצִיא יְהוָה אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל, מִמִּצְרָיִם.
ב וַיִּקַּח, יִתְרוֹ חֵתָן מֹשֶׁה, אֶת-צִפּוֹרָה, אִשְׁתּוֹ מֹשֶׁה--אֲחֵר, שְׁלוּחִיהָ.
ג וְאֵת, שְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ: אֲשֶׁר שֵׁם הָאֶחָד, גֶּרְשֹׁם--כִּי אָמַר, גֵּר הָיִיתִי
בְּאֶרֶץ נֹכְרִיהָ. ד וְשֵׁם הָאֶחָד, אֱלִיעֶזֶר--כִּי-אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי בְּעֶזְרִי, וַיִּצְלַנִּי
מִחַרְבַּ פְּרַעֲהָ. ה וַיָּבֵא יִתְרוֹ חֵתָן מֹשֶׁה, וּבָנָיו וְאִשְׁתּוֹ--אֶל-מֹשֶׁה:
אֶל-הַמִּדְבָּר, אֲשֶׁר-הוּא חֹנֶה שָׁם--הַר אֱלֹהִים. ו וַיֹּאמֶר, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה,
אֲנִי חֹתְנְךָ יִתְרוֹ, בָּא אֵלַיךְ; וְאִשְׁתְּךָ--וּשְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ, עִמָּהּ. ז וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה
לְקִרְאת חֵתְנוֹ, וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ וַיִּשְׁק-לוֹ, וַיִּשְׂאֲלוּ אִישׁ-לְרַעְהוּ, לְשָׁלוֹם;
וַיָּבֹאוּ, הָאֱהָלָה.

1. Now Moses' father in law, Yitro, the priest of Midian, heard all that God had done for Moses and for Israel, His people that the Lord had taken Israel out of Egypt. 2. So Moses' father in law, Yitro, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after she had been sent away, 3. and her two sons, one of whom was named Gershom, because he [Moses] said, "I was a stranger in a foreign land," 4. and one who was named Eliezer, because [Moses said,] "The God of my father came to my aid and rescued me from Pharaoh's sword." 5. Now Moses' father in law, Yitro, and his [Moses'] sons and his wife came to Moses, to the desert where he was encamped, to the mountain of God. 6 And he said to Moses, "I, Yitro, your father in law, am coming to you, and [so is] your wife and her two sons with her." 7. So Moses went out toward Yitro, prostrated himself and kissed him, and they greeted one another, and they entered the tent.

According to the Mechilta, a halakhic midrash on the book of Exodus, Yitro calls to Moshe to come down from the mountain intentionally using all the names of his family members (verse 6); "I, Yitro, your father in law, am coming to you, and so is your wife and her two sons with her", meaning, if you will not come out for my sake, come out for your wife's sake, and if you will not come out for your wife's sake, come out for the sake of her two sons." Yitro helps Moshe understand that even a leader like himself who is in the midst of crucial and holy work needs to take some time to connect with his family. Not only is Moshe a dedicated professional

he is also a husband, a father, and a son-in-law. Consider the messages in this short text in our own challenges to attain a healthy work-life balance.

Think of an example when family time and professional time conflicted. What was the situation?

Of course, it is not always possible to achieve that balance, so what is one step you can make towards a more balanced professional and family life?