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Connected, alone. Is technology making you lonely?



Hello there! If you are new here, you might want to [subscribe to the RSS feed](#) for updates on this topic. 

As social media reshapes how we connect, it pays us to rethink what we need to feel fulfilled in our relationships, and realize that no amount of tweets, texts or Facebook status updates can provide it. Sure social networking is a great tool, but there's a profound difference between an online social network and a real one and when it comes to friends, quantity doesn't equal quality. "Like" if you agree.

Don't get me wrong, I love Facebook. But sometimes it doesn't surprise me that research has found that people are feeling lonelier and more disconnected than ever before as they crave friendship that goes deeper than the often-shallow exchanges and updates. Since moving back to Melbourne earlier this year after ten years in the U.S. I've used Facebook countless times to share my journey assimilating back into life Down Under. Fairdinkum. But despite

having more Facebook friends than my fourteen-year-old son (no small feat I might add), my online social network doesn't come remotely close to fulfilling my need for the real one I left behind in the U.S.



Of course I'm not sitting at home alone wallowing. I've been one busy beaver making new friends. I even remember some of their names. But making new friends takes time. Friendships are forged through shared history; through sharing what's really going on in our lives; our heartaches and hurdles, setbacks and sorrows alike. Not just through sharing craftily edited and extremely witty (even if I do say so myself) status updates. Like.

Not that I'm overly vain (well, maybe a little bit) but I reckon social media appeals to our vanity and vulnerability. We get to control what others see in ways we can't do in person. We can hide behind our monitor, and spare ourselves the discomfort of having to reveal what's really going on in our unedited, and often far from picture-perfect lives. Not that I have a problem sharing what's going on in my life. Most days. It's those "other" days that I struggle with. When I've been mean to my husband or acquired a whopping ugly cold sore that cannot be camouflaged with lipstick (believe me, I've tried), or just feel flat.

What's interesting about the research that has found more people feeling alone than ever, is that those who report feeling most alone, are those you'd expect it from least: young people (under 35) who are the most prolific social networkers of all. As we've built expansive social networks online, the depth of our networks offline has decreased. So it seems that because technology makes it easier to stay in touch while keeping distance, more and more people find themselves feeling distant and never touching. Or at least not enough to avoid loneliness.

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As I wrote in [Find Your Courage](#), human beings crave intimacy. Neurobiologists have proven that we are physiologically wired for it. Yet genuine intimacy demands vulnerability and vulnerability requires courage. It requires that we lay down the masks we can so easily hide behind online, and reveal all of who we are with others – the good, the bad and the sometimes not so (photo-shopped) pretty. As amazing a tool as digital communication is, it can never replace in person, face-to-face, contact in building relationships – in the office or outside it. Social networking provides a convenient and inexpensive means of avoiding aspects of our lives we wish were different. It allows us to play pretend – to others and even ourselves. Online websites promise avatars that will allow us to love our bodies, love our lives, and find the true romance we dream of. But at what cost to the real life (marriage, body, friendships) we have to face when we close our computer down? Even the most brilliant avatars can't compensate for what is missing in real life.

We've all witnessed it's power of social media in rallying people behind noble causes (think KONY 2012), overthrow governments (as we saw in the Arab Spring last year), enable people in isolated corners of the globe to plug into

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resources and information they could never otherwise access (think North Korea), and provide opportunity to conduct business more efficiently than ever before. But like all tools, we have to learn how to use it well, and not let it use us.

As we rely on technology to communicate more efficiently in an increasingly global world, we mustn't lose touch with the physical community around us or forget that human

element within any relationship can never be replaced by technology. The human element within any relationship can never be replaced by technology. The more we rely on technology to communicate, the more mindful we must be to turn it off and engage authentically with the people around us. No gadgets blinking and beeping and urging us to pick them up, return that text or update our status. It will likely feel awkward. Scary even. But real connection will always demand a degree of risk and **vulnerability**. Then again, what worthwhile endeavor doesn't?

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If this has resonated with you at all, please be sure to [LIKE my Facebook page](#) (I am in competition with my teenage son for the most friends!), and share with yours.

7 STRATEGIES TO BUILD YOURSELF A REAL & "MUCH MORE FUN THAN FACEBOOK" SOCIAL NETWORK:

1. **Unplug:** Turn off your computer, put down your iPhone, step away from your iPad, and take time to engage with people, in person, with face-to-face communication. A night at home with 500 of your FB friends can never compare with an evening out with five friends, or even one friend. If you can't connect face-to-face level, at least pick up the phone for a meaningful conversation, rather than a series of cryptic texts or Facebook comments. Fifty text messages over a day can never compare or compete with just five minutes of open, caring and honest conversation.
2. **Listen More:** Too often we talk too much and listen too little. Learn to listen well and be okay with yours and others' stumbles. We can't edit real conversation and we don't want to. It's when we hesitate, stumble on our words or simply find ourselves sitting in silence without any words that we reveal ourselves to others and connect most deeply. As I've said before we connect to others through our vulnerabilities, not through our brilliance.
3. **Act Local:** Get involved in your local community or neighbourhood. Join the local tennis club, or volunteer to help clean up the local park or spend some helping at a local service organization.
4. **Practice Conversation:** If you are out of practice at meeting people take small steps. Make the most of all chances for social contact, whether it's speaking to the local greengrocer or responding to a fellow bus passenger who strikes up a conversation. For some people, just making eye contact can be difficult. So it may be that you have to begin with just that.
5. **Find Like Minds:** Join a class or find an interest group. Getting to know new people can be part of the learning process in a new class. Whether you enjoy winetasting, water painting, bush walking or going to the movies, there's bound to be an interest group in your area where you can meet like-minded people.
6. **Reach out to old friends:** Pick up the phone and call an old friend who you have lost touch with. See if they'd like to catch up for coffee. It's very likely they will be delighted to hear from you, and will enjoy reconnecting every bit as much as you (assuming your

friendship didn't end badly)

7. Go right out on a limb... **invite people over!**: Many people are intimidated by the idea of inviting people over for dinner, or even a coffee. But some of the best conversations happen over a casual cuppa or BBQ. Yes it may be a bit scary, but real connection will always demand some level of vulnerability.