

We The People
Program 62
Real Communication



Around 10 years ago I heard we were entering the information age. I thought that sounded like just another catchy phrase but its true and the speed with which we communicate now was unimaginable just 10 years ago. Gone is the felt topped card table, gone is the washing up conversation, gone is the idle chatter over morning tea. The electronic super highway of the internet has provided us with instant communication at very low cost anywhere, anytime. It's now a borderless world where communication drives buying and selling, politics, power, religion and social interaction. It's a time for miraculous inventions and yet it's a lonely world as we lose the ability and the will to communicate directly and personally with others.

I shop at Woolworths at Robina once a week and I seldom notice any conversation between people. However what I do see is women of all ages using their mobile phones to either call a friend or text someone about a tube of toothpaste on special and whether they should buy it as it has the added benefit of sorbitol or zinc citrate. I wonder if we actually know what all this means or whether the apparent savings are absorbed by the cost of the call anyway. I see young people crossing the road, head down rapidly thumbing buttons on their mobile phone to text a friend about the fact they're on their way to the phone shop to get the latest Nokia. Maybe it has sorbitol in it as well. They text at the movies, they text at night, they surprise themselves with a text of delight. They text in the summer, they text in the Spring, they text and they call about any old thing.

Now I must admit to being a techno junkie myself and I love the way the internet instantly opens up a world of information. I have a mobile phone for convenience and overall this is the age of electronic communication but not personal communication. For all this the rise in loneliness in society is astonishing as we forget ever having sent a hand written letter or joined with friends for a game of canasta or 500. Even the ubiquitous slide nights using a sheet as a screen were an excuse to get together and reminisce about the past or recent holidays, a new baby or a family wedding. So how with all this technology can society possibly be in a general state of social isolation. I guess the equivalent today would be that the good Samaritan would see the sick man on the side of the road on Skype call triple O for help and text the poor sole that help was on the way. It just doesn't fit the picture does it and what is lost is real human communication with additives like kindness and understanding which require the face to face presence of a real live person. We have lost the ability to really appreciate the plight or joy of another and devoid of that 'compassion' may well be going the same way as a Devonshire tea.

In the end its how we use contemporary communication rather than the devices themselves and there is much good to be gained from the light speed interaction we can have. Nonetheless I am disappointed that the simple art of speaking to another face to face seems lost. As a society if we raise a whole generation to believe texting and emailing or telling friends on Twitter or Facebook you have just bought a tube of toothpaste with sorbitol then that represents a great loss for humanity. You can't wind the clock back but it's important we don't lose the ability to speak directly and sincerely to others and to laugh out loud spontaneously and not reduce that to LOL in an email. In an uncaring isolated world full of communication mediums many good folk are alone and wish for the simple touch of another's hand. Now that can't be emailed and communication must make us rich and not poor. In the words of Mother Tereser, "Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty". Make today a rich day and speak to a child, a friend or a neighbour and share the touch of humanity.

Until next time this is Kent Bayley