

Hi, this is Wayne Rivers at FBI, and *We Build Better Contractors*.

This week, I want to ask the question, has technology harmed our abilities to communicate? This comes from a conversation that Dennis was having with my wife, Lisa at the 2020 AGC convention a couple years ago, Dennis made a comment over dinner that IT, it's kind of a big, broad discussion. IT is the way of the future. And Lisa challenged him on that. And she said, "IT is the way of the present. The future is, how are we going to integrate the interpersonal in the digital age?" How are we going to make IT more personal basically? And man, I wrote a note down. I sent an email to myself. This is good stuff. It's taken me several years to figure out how to make a blog out of it. But here we are.

All right. So, what about this is important to you? Well, people my age, if you're in your 60s or older like me, technology's cool and it's definitely changed the way we've done things, but the people you're hiring now grew up with technologies. It was a part of their lives from their infancy. For us, we've learned a little bit anyway and we've adapted, but for these folks, it's almost part of what's in their bloodstream. So, as leaders, we've got to learn how to integrate these people and their obsession with technology into what's going on in the workplace.

So just online research, a few things that are pros about technology. And these are kind of obvious technology has eliminated the need to be geographically in one place in so many occasions. The constraints about being present are less than they once were. Technology has allowed for a much, much greater degree of immediacy, right? You're available with your cell phone basically 24/7 these days. Mobility is greater than it was. You can be on the job site sitting in your pickup truck and have just as much computing and communicating power at your fingertips as what you have in your office.

And it's easy. Technology is so easy now. They've removed all the friction from technological communication. You can text, you can use all these apps, WhatsApp and all that stuff. Golly, it's just so easy. And it's also easy to get ... This is the concept. It's easy to get pulled into that rabbit hole because suddenly you've got a text, you're doing task A or B, and now you've got a text trying to get you on task Z, or maybe it's somebody from home or whatever. It's just, it's so easy as to be distracting, literally distracting.

Okay. The con side of it. Researchers conclude that young people today have poor nonverbal reception. They don't respond to nonverbal cues the way other generations have. There's certainly less intimacy in technological communication versus person-to-person communication. There's the lack of the physical. So, the nuances of gaze, of physical posture, of eye movement, all those things are much less apparent in digital communications versus personal communications. Therefore, it's easier to misinterpret things that you think you see or hear digitally versus in person.

Digital eliminates the opportunity for touch. Now, I know, I know. This sounds all weird and touchy-feely, especially when I'm talking to a group of contractors. But shaking hands, for example. Shaking hands improves trust. You've heard Dennis talk about this in his blogs. That is a basic piece of business etiquette that establishes trust, contact. And then, just to be able to put your hand on somebody's shoulder, if they're angry or upset or whatever, just to be present physically through touch, you can't have that digitally. It's just absolutely eliminated. So that leads to less richness of interaction between people.

And digital allows us to hide our feelings much better, because you can put on a happy face for a 10-minute Zoom call or something like that. But if you're in the office all day or you're working on a job site with people for extended periods, they're going to be able to tell that maybe your shoulders are rounded and you're kind of slumping around. Maybe things aren't right at home. Maybe you had an accident on the way. Maybe the kids got bad grades on their report card. People can pick up those visual, physical cues much better in person than they can digitally. And that allows them to interact and help and offer whatever assistance they can offer.

In some of my research, I read about a high school teacher that talked about the difference today from even 10 years ago. 10 years ago, everybody was chatting in the hall before class or when she came into the classroom, the students would

be interacting and talking and joking around with each other. Now, when she walks into the classroom, everybody's quiet, heads down, tapping on an iPad or a phone. And dramatically different. And the conclusion that she came to was, these people are drawing in on themselves. They're focusing on themselves instead of on other people. And you can see sort of reflexively that's not necessarily good for our interpersonal communication going forward. These young people are choosing, it is a choice. They're choosing to tune out other human beings who are immediately present with them. Kind of shocking, but it's a fact in today's world.

A Harvard study that I found said that face to face requests generated 34 times more positive responses than electronic requests. Can you imagine that? 34 X. If you could get 34 X of anything in your business, you'd be begging for it. 67% of managers said that their organizations would be happier and more productive if senior leaders interacted face to face more often. We are who we are. We have evolved to be who we are. Our brains need and expect these nonverbal cues in order to communicate with other people. And you think about today, the rates of depression and even suicide are much higher than they were in previous generations. Some of that could be laid at the feet of our reliance on digital communications.

What do you think? I'd like to hear what you have to say about this. Is IT, digital, is it a net plus or minus for you and your organization? We'd like to hear from you in the comments. This is Wayne Rivers at FBI, and *We Build Better Contractors*.