

CHRIS'LL DEAL WITH IT

episode notes



EP 29 - Balancing The Benefits Of Our Tech

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I'm struggling to find a balance between the benefits of all our technology with the downsides of their effects on me individually and on our society as a whole. Any advice?

Since we're talking about balance, let's start with two stories about boats.

Two centuries ago, an 87 foot whaling ship left New England. It sailed down the Atlantic, around the tip of South America, and then up to the Galápagos islands. From there they sailed west, cruising on the Pacific Ocean for whales.

But one got its revenge. Rammed by a large whale, the boat was destroyed. The 20 man crew survived thanks to their rescue boats. Only problem was that they were over

a thousand miles from land. For 3 months they drifted. They resorted to eating their dead to survive. In the end, 8 of the 20 made it home alive. Their tale would go on to inspire Herman Melville's epic novel Moby Dick.

Our second story is more recent. In March of 2023, a group of 4 sailed from those same Galapagos Islands. Their destination: French Polynesia in the South Pacific. Enjoying lunch on the deck of their 44 foot sailboat, a sailor spotted a whale. Soon after, alarms started going off. Water was filling their boat.

Another sailor sent out mayday signals, while two others prepared their lifeboats and packed emergency provisions. The fourth jumped in the water in snorkeling gear in an attempt to save the boat.

Determining the boat was lost, the four sailors evacuated into their lifeboat. They carried everything they could take: Food, emergency supplies, bottled water, kettles, and more water in pots. As the sailboat sank into the briny depths over the next few minutes, the sailors rationed their provisions: A weeks' worth of water and 3 weeks worth of food.

The group was stranded, but well prepared. Most in the group had extensive survival and maritime training. But more importantly, they had a satellite phone, satellite-enabled wi-fi hotspot, power bank, and emergency tracking beacons to regularly broadcast their location.

Wi-Fi made it handy for them to send a message to a friend they knew sailing 180 miles behind them along the same route:

“*This is no joke, we hit a whale and the ship went down.*”

The reply came quickly:

“*We have a bunch of boats coming. We got you brother.*”

The mayday signal at the start had already alerted the Peruvian and U.S. Coast Guards, as well as several nearby boats. A catamaran was closest, and within 10 hours of the whale's impact, all four sailors were rescued.

I start with these stories since the comparison helps highlight the scope of our technological evolution in just two centuries. There is no denying that we live in an era of unheard of capability, relative wealth, and human longevity.

With development seemingly proceeding at an exponential pace, what will the next two centuries bring?

Like our asker, I have a hard time balancing the scales between the benefits vs. detriments of all our technology.

What technologies that seem so ubiquitous and necessary today will end up as obsolete as that whaling vessel? Which technologies are just a stepping stone for something greater & more meaningful to humanity? Could it be something we hold so high today such as e-mail or electric cars?

These are unpredictable questions for unpredictable times - And I'm avoiding the rabbit hole of a tech pro/con list here - since it's not the point of this episode. This is about strategies to find some balance in the here and now.

So, here are 4 strategies that have proven helpful for me:

1. [Unplug](#)
2. [Establish better filters to find the signals within the noise](#)
3. [Work on challenging, long term projects in a consistent manner](#)
4. [Continue to learn about technology](#)

1. Unplug

- There's no denying that we live at an unnatural pace.
- With that comes the fear that the world will pass us by, triggering our natural fears of being left out, or worse left behind.
- In a world of constant distraction & cheap dopamine hits, is it any wonder many of us feel this strange mixture of stagnation and overwhelming opportunity?

- It's a tricky thing to unplug from stuff. To unsubscribe from certain things that no longer provide value. Skip an episode of your favorite podcast or magazine because there's too many piling up. Close your inbox for a few hours to do some deep work, even knowing e-mail is piling up for your return.
- You'll never suffer from a lack of input. Something/someone begging for your attention. And there are times & places where it's worth being receptive to that. But we all need moments of quiet. For doing work that matters, for reflection, and to enjoy with those we love.
- By unplugging we allow ourselves the room to be more. To rise above the noise long enough to both decipher and send out clearer signals of what really matters. Which brings me to my next strategy...

2. Establish better filters to find the signals within the noise

- There's no shortage of amazing things to learn and do out there in the world: Thrilling and informative books; Inspiring live performances; Cheering on your favorite team; Near-infinite types of jobs & hobbies; or sitting in a quiet place of contemplation.
- In both the broad world of options, and within any narrow field of activity/study/work, there's going to be a lot of noise. Hundreds of thousands (millions?) of writers, legal experts, and there could even be noise amongst the historians of Slovakian interpretive dance.
- It's vital to develop filters that help you hone in on the valuable signals within all that noise.
- Your filters help you:
 - Discern who is credible
 - Understand what qualifies them as credible
 - Allow material through that helps you improve, clarify, and/or challenge you
 - Block out negative or detrimental information or feedback

- And most importantly: Good filters help you maintain a balance on the quantity of information you digest. This has a direct impact on your mental & physical capacity to do work.

You can't create when you're consuming

- It's worth cautioning against confirmation bias. To be careful about what you define as noise.
 - If you're simply tuning out important signals just because they don't align with your ideal view of the world.
 - There's value in attempting to understand opposing viewpoints, and form a more complete picture of how things really are. Rather than holding firm to an incomplete view.
- There's been a few places where filters have helped me find better signals:
 - Subscribing to lower-bias newsletters with more succinct content rather than tune into the rhetoric of 24/7 news media. There's a few of these out there, personally I recommend [RocaNews](#) and [Morning Brew](#).
 - Podcasts & Spotify versus Radio: Tuning into content providers that have earned my trust, rather than passively letting whatever content radio personalities or DJs want to play. These apps also have great discovery tools to find new voices on topics I care about
 - Reading Books: Reading is a slower, intentional process. They both allow me to unplug from screens and relax the pace of information to one that's easy & enjoyable. I'll include listening to audiobooks while I do chores, but for me the preference is sitting down with a physical book.
 - Unsubscribe Buttons: It takes a lot of earn my permission, and even more to keep it. Start flooding me with e-mails and I'll likely unsubscribe. Waste my attention with poorly prepared or repeated pleas to get me to buy something or take action: I'll definitely unsubscribe, no matter how much I liked your product or service in the first place. Not only does this streamline my e-mail somewhat, it also ensures that what does end up in there has a higher hit rate in terms of value.

3. Work on challenging, long term projects in a consistent manner

- Aside from family responsibilities, writing books is the best thing that I do. It's not my day job, it's not what puts food on my table, but it's the single greatest product I produce.
- My words certainly won't last forever, but they'll last a lot longer than my greatest e-mail, budget report, or employee review.
- Here's the thing: Writing books is HARD. There are points in the process, with every book, that absolutely suck. But I know that the end result is something I'm incredibly proud of. I'm confident that I've put my best possible thoughts, refined & edited, out there in the world as clearly as I can.
- The other benefit to writing is that it's mine. I set aside time for myself, as free from distraction as possible, to write. There are times of quiet reflection while I ponder characters, plot decisions, action beats, etc... These projects are a great counterpoint to all the e-mails, conference calls, and daily efforts of my day job.
- It's worth noting that these projects can provide you skills that benefit other areas of your life. There's a mindset that develops from:
 - consistently working on hard things
 - repeatedly solving difficult problems
 - developing mastery in specific skills
 - publishing & shipping work with your name on it
 - learning the techniques & mental models from other disciplines*we'll touch on this more in the fourth strategy*
- It doesn't matter if you're writing the next Rainy River Bees book, turning wood blocks into gothic candlesticks on a vintage lathe, or maintaining a peaceful garden, whatever you're into it's best to have work that challenges you. Work that you can do consistently, and most importantly: Work that stirs your soul.
- It's also totally okay (perhaps preferable) if these projects are different than what pays the bills. That you're not relying on them to eat. That brings pressure and business requirements that risk breaking the balancing nature of these projects.

- Not to say that I would mind if a movie studio came for the rights to my intellectual property. I wrote them to tell stories to the world. I'd be thrilled for them to reach a wider audience. Not to mention the auxiliary income. But I didn't write books for the money.
 - What I'm trying to say is that the context and purpose with which you create is vitally important. Don't lose sight of that, or the benefits the projects have on helping you live a balanced life.

4. Continue to learn about technology

- When I listed these out earlier, this one probably stood out as counter-intuitive. But it's just as important as the other three.
- The more you understand about the technology around us, the better able you'll be to manage it.
- Be more efficient at utilizing programs
 - examples: e-mail rules, creating automation scripts, reducing execution time on work tasks
- Develop an intuition on how programs and systems work, speeding up adoption time
- Become a linchpin within your organization, potentially opening up opportunities for career advancement that can provide better pay, create more balance for your preferred lifestyle, and increase connections with your co-workers, just to name a few.
- Properly contextualize the benefits, detriments, and impacts of new technologies - avoiding fear mongering, misinformation, and misinformed opinions.
 - Or put another way: Be able to establish the better filters I mentioned in the second strategy.
- Face the reality that learning doesn't stop with a diploma or a degree. It should be a lifelong process. You don't need to know every nuance of every technology. Besides being impossible, it's impractical. But there's no shortage of fantastic content out there that can give you benefits such as:

- A working knowledge of how a technology works
- Summary-level analysis or contextualization of what a tech means to a specific industry
- Learn tips & tricks on how to use advanced features of hardware and/or software you use on a regular basis
- Get you up to proficiency with core functions of a new tool faster than your peers
- Assess developments from other industries so you better grasp the methods by which they could impact your own

 **Episode 29 Quote:**

“It’s not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters.”

Epictetus