

# Wendy Riemann: Make time, concentrated effort to personally unplug

Posted on Thursday, Nov 2, 2017

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Two years ago, today, I officially launched my business, 1492 Communications. My WisPolitics columns started shortly after that, and last month's column, on putting our phones away to better engage with the people around us, inspired more feedback, follow-up, and conversation than almost any other column I have written (thanks!).

Unplugging – whether literally, figuratively, or both – is one way to demonstrate to others that we care about them and that we are listening.

Building on that, if our family, friends, and colleagues benefit from uninterrupted time, does our inner self not deserve a little uninterrupted time as well?

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Routine unplugging is good self-care and an opportunity to hear ourselves think. Acknowledging and admitting to our own inner thoughts can sometimes be more difficult than being without our phone for an entire day. As a result, we sometimes put the earbuds in, turn the radio on, or keep the television on in the background for the distraction.

However, taking the time to appreciate the silence is healthy.

This often requires not only MAKING the time, but also making a concentrated effort. A Microsoft study found the average human attention span is now eight seconds (that is shorter than a goldfish). A different 2014 study found that people in

the U.S. spend an average of 444 minutes every day looking at a screen – with more time spent watching television or looking at a smartphone, than a computer.

It can be hard to focus when apart from the phone buzzing in our pocket, blasting screens are everywhere from a doctor's exam room, to the grocery store, to restaurants. Not to mention, we like being connected.

Yet, the benefits of unplugging are worth it. When my computer (or most of my gadgets) stops working, I unplug it, count to ten, and plug it back in. My computer almost always starts working again. Humans are the same way. Taking time to unplug brings us back fully recharged and restored.

But I'm so busy... Leave the phone at home while walking the dog. Let a child play 15 minutes of a soccer game unwatched to take a little "me" time. Take the family out somewhere so a spouse can have an hour of quiet time and then swap the following week. Use a lunchbreak to eat alone in a park. Stop using the phone 30 minutes before bed. Prioritize these times to unplug.

Whether it is the voice in your head, the voice of God, or something else, over time, silence helps us to truly reflect, listen, and start to process. It allows us to think about whether we are where we want to be. Are we where we need to be? Or, are we just masquerading lots of daily motion for actual forward movement?

Unplugging is not just for those monumental decisions – it can help us recognize our own frustrations, joys, or voids, and then start to process reasonable solutions – such as regularly volunteering to feel more personal satisfaction, joining a club to meet people, or learning something new to spice up a monotonous day. Small changes can make a large impact in our quality of life.

For me, sitting outside on a trip, completely unplugged, was the catalyst for 1492 Communications. If the idea kept turning in the back of my mind, what was the worst that could happen by taking a leap of faith? What were my specific fears and did they have rational solutions? Why would I let anyone but me define what success or failure would look like for my own life and business?

Fully acknowledging the questions and answers helped lead me to one of the best decisions I have ever made. The last two years have been full of ups, downs, and all-around growth, and I would not change it. And, it would not have happened without first making time to unplug.

So, what might my loyal readers discover in their own unplugged moments this weekend?

— *Riemann is president of 1492 Communications, a consulting firm. Like 1492 Communications on Facebook to learn more.*