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Tapping Into the Issue of Phone Privacy

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By Elizabeth Santiago
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Technology has brought us so much innovation the past few years. We now have the ability to stream movies from our cell phones and contact people across the globe. We can send important messages in a matter of seconds and essentially pack our entire lives into one small device.

Our laptops and cell phones have a large influence over our lives, but like Spiderman's Uncle Ben said, "With great power comes great responsibility." With every phone call made and text message sent, we trust that our correspondence and anything else on our devices stays private.

Up to this point there has been a solid wall between the user and the manufacturer. For instance, once the cell phone is handed from producer to consumer, the producer no longer has access to the device. But it has been seen recently that the once sturdy wall is in danger of being cracked.

This is the issue that Apple faced when the Federal Bureau of Investigation asked the company to unlock the phone of two terrorists who were responsible for the massacre of 14 people last year in San Bernardino, Calif. The FBI argued that unlocking this phone was necessary to get a glimpse into the series of events prior to the attack. They said that knowing who the terrorists corresponded with and what websites they visited, federal agents would gain knowledge that could help them learn more about the background of the two.

Apple argues that it isn't as simple as unlocking an iPhone to help the good guys win. For them, it goes deeper than that. They believe that in the grand scheme, this will have a long-lasting effect after this case is settled. If they develop software for this particular instance, who is to say that it won't happen again or that the new breaching software wouldn't fall in the wrong hands?

They say this "master key" would give access for anyone to open any cell phone, including yours.

When I first heard this news, I was conflicted because I understood both sides to the story. Trying to formulate an opinion was like trying to choose between my heart and my head. While my heart was leaning towards doing whatever it took to put this case to rest, my head was weary of the damage this case could do toward our privacy for tomorrow.

I eventually found myself siding with Apple. My heart ached for the families lost and the unanswered questions, however I couldn't help but think of all the lives that are guarded by our privacy. Through encryption, our most private thoughts and conversations are protected. If exposed and exploited, there can be consequences that take us to a different playing field where there isn't a defense. We would run the risk of being left vulnerable to cybercriminals and to those whose goal is to destroy anyone with opposing beliefs.

In this day and age we have become so reliant on technology that it holds our business plans, schedules, contact information, emails, and memories through photographs, and is key to accessing the internet.

Just think about it this way: While at work, what if the computers and cell phones just power off? What work could get done? I am sure there would be housekeeping work to be done, but there are very few businesses that could operate on a normal standard without the technology.

Now, picture a different scenario: What if the reason they powered down was because of a mass hacking? Every document read, transaction known, and plans for action foreseen?

For some businesses this might be the equivalent of a benign tumor — inconvenient but not too harmful. But for institutions such as the U.S. Government, it could mean something catastrophic.

Though the breaking in of one phone isn't going to instantly send us in to a national crisis, who is to say that it won't open the door, even just a little, and set precedence to other instances that continue to pry that door open?

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