
UCF Forum

2-12-2013

Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing

Eileen Smith
University of Central Florida

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/ucf-forum>

Information presented on this website is considered public information (unless otherwise noted) and may be distributed or copied. Use of appropriate byline/photo/image credit is requested. We recommend that UCF data be acquired directly from a UCF server and not through other sources that may change the data in some way. While UCF makes every effort to provide accurate and complete information, various data such as names, telephone numbers, etc. may change prior to updating. UCF welcomes suggestions on how to improve UCF Today and correct errors. UCF provides no warranty, expressed or implied, as to the accuracy, reliability or completeness of furnished data.

STARS Citation

Smith, Eileen, "Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing" (2013). *UCF Forum*. 165.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/ucf-forum/165>

This Opinion column is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in UCF Forum by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.





Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing

By Eileen Smith
UCF Forum columnist
Tuesday, February 12, 2013

As we all get pulled in so many directions in our daily lives, it's easy to think that technology is the holy grail, an organizing tool to give our lives direction, to help us multitask, and to connect us to everyone, near and far.

But is that really the case?

I've lately been pondering whether many of us are losing track of the need to "stop and smell the roses," as the cliché goes.

Technology is a wonderful connecting toy, and we have many of those toys to choose from — desktop and laptop computers, mobile devices, tablets, you name it. Most of us have several of them.

But what's happened to the idea of just turning away from all of that and just relishing the time we have with those around us? Or, heaven forbid, just being by ourselves for a while and thinking?

As part of an interactive-entertainment class that I teach in my digital media courses at UCF, there is a reality-to-virtuality continuum graph that we discuss. The graph demonstrates that our imagination can be stimulated along a range of physical to virtual experiences. Alongside physical things such as theme parks and magic shows, and virtual things such as films, and a mixture of both in "augmented reality," there is a spot called "lucid dreaming."

When students see that, there is invariably a laugh from most and we move on. But lucid dreaming may in fact be the most intriguing spot on that continuum. For it's the one spot where we as humans release ourselves from technology, conventions, and social norms — and just think. We allow our brains to disconnect with deadlines and responsibilities and just take us wherever our imagination leads us.

So what's the “main thing” I mention in my column headline? Well, in my mind, it's remembering that we only go through this life once. For every new technology that we get attached to, are we using it to make that one trip through life richer, more meaningful, more important to our journey? Not usually.

Many times, that technology is just used to fill time — as though we have time to spare, which we don't. We don't know how much time we have left in this life, and as the Tim McGraw song says, “Live like you were dying.”

This topic might read to some as slightly morbid; it's not meant to be. I'm an eternal optimist, but I'm increasingly struck by the disconnect I see in restaurants between folks sharing a meal while immersed in their phones rather than really sharing the time together.

A news program recently reported on a story about a group of young women who agreed to lock away their phones and iPads for two weeks, which nearly devastated them. They described going through withdrawal, feeling like they couldn't function for several days.

And then something happened. They started living in the moment, talking to the people they were around at any point in time, really experiencing what was going on in their environment. At the end of the two weeks, they described having made a breakthrough in feeling comfortable in their own skin, being aware of their surroundings in a whole new way, and relishing just talking to friends — and even strangers if they needed directions.

So then they were given their phones back, and in 10 seconds, each was busy in their own world with their phone, texting, tweeting, checking in online. Their favorite message: “I’m back!”

So, how will you change your life and live more in the moment, in the reality of where you are now, and celebrate each step in life’s journey?

Eileen Smith is director of the E2i Creative Studio at the University of Central Florida’s Institute for Simulation & Training. After more than two decades in industry, she joined IST to explore how the spectrum of technology can be used in understanding and assessing human performance - for military situational awareness, free-choice learning, classroom performance, and physical and cognitive rehabilitation. Her research initiatives include Learning in Informal Settings in museum and urban environments; and Healthy Living, which includes recovery from military-service complications of traumatic brain injuries and PTSD, obesity and diabetes prevention in young adults, and increasing quality of life and recognition of value for long-term brain-injury survivors.