



Deep Work, Smartphones, and Changing Times

*How to Take Back the Control We
Have Almost Lost*

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The Rise of the Technological Age and How Deep Work Will Keep Us Balanced

Deep work is the practice of limiting distractions and diving into a project or work-related activity with all efforts pointed towards that certain project (Newport, 2016). In society today, people are having difficulty concentrating on anything for longer than a few minutes due to our smartphone usage. The Technological Age has drastically changed our working models, and in turn, people are accomplishing less in the normal workday.

Cal Newport dives into the practice of deep work and how the attention resistance could be the best step forward for people who are tired of being distracted all the time. The time has come for people to try to keep up with machines. “As intelligent machines improve, and the gap between machine and human abilities shrinks, employers are becoming increasingly likely to hire “new machines” instead of “new people,” (Newport, 23). Due to an unprecedented growth in the economy and technological world, restructuring is occurring. With this restructuring comes a divide among people in the “Intelligent Machine Age” – the high-skilled workers, the superstars and the owners (Newport, 2016).

In a very short amount of time, the way humans find, process, decode and analyze information has changed. We no longer need dictionaries or newspapers to discover a new word or learn about world news. We don’t send letters to learn about our relatives’ or friends’ lives. We carry the world in our pockets, which has benefitted humans and the rise of the Technological Age in many ways. But, many of the negatives that have been ignited through the Technological Age seem to be outweighing the positives.

Reading has become one of the skills that humans seem to leave behind as the Technological Age advances. We do not read actual books anymore. Why is that?

Smartphone screens are replacing the books of the New York Times best-sellers list. We live in a world now where we digest information by infinitely scrolling through small blocks of 240 characters or less. We read opinions from thousands of people every day, some, who we have never met. In turn, the ability to successfully conduct our work has become difficult.

Taking Back Our Control...

Before it's too late

“...Book-oriented styles of reading opened the world to me – by closing it. And new, screen-oriented styles of reading seem to have the opposite effect: They close the world to me, by opening it. ”

(Harris, 2)

Smart phones have truly changed the world in a short amount of time. These little devices in our pockets show us where we are in the world, help us navigate, connect us with others and shrink the size of the world immensely. Because of these features, we have become addicted to them. We can't focus on a project or read something without picking up our phones to check and see what we have missed.

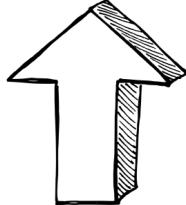
Cal Newport's, *Deep Work*, explains step-by-step process in how to overcome the smartphone dystopia and how to take back the control in your life. We are not necessarily reading less, it is more so that we are reading worse, due to our lack of motivation and diminishing reading comprehension skills (Newport, 2016). We have been sucked into the tech giants' black hole of constant information and alerts, which is right where they want us to be. Sitting at the top of a throne in Silicon Valley, the tech giants like Google and Facebook are bringing in maximum revenue because users cannot stay away (Lewis, 2017).

Roger McNamee, a capitalist and investor of Facebook and Google, claims the early goals of the companies have been altered and overtaken by the advertising revenue each has benefitted immensely from. He explains that the people who created these tech giants are good people, whose products and features have led to detrimental consequences, similarly to that of tobacco companies (Lewis, 2017).

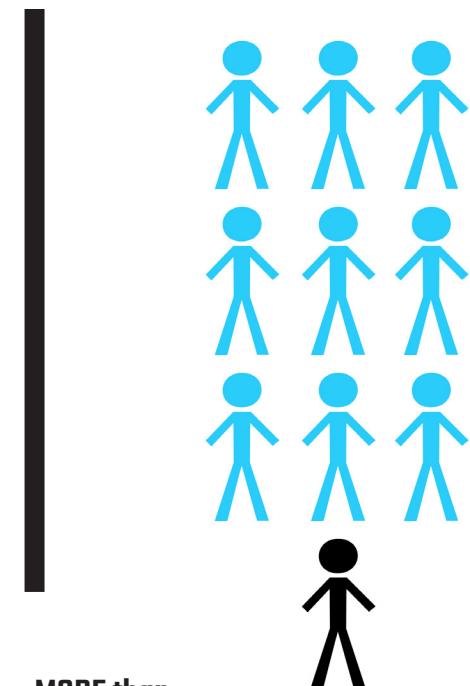
In addition, this issue does not affect a certain group of people; it is affecting everyone. From the children who were born right into the hustle of the Technological Age to the group of people over the age of 65 who are reconnecting with their classmates on a Facebook, everyone is affected by smartphone usage and a diminishing work ethic. More than nine in ten Millennials own smartphones as compared with 90% of Gen Xers (those ages 39 to 54 this year) and 68% of Baby Boomers (ages 55 to 73), according to a Pew Research Center survey from 2019.

Our reliance on smartphones begs the question, what will happen over the next few years? Will people realize the nation-wide addiction is real and begin to learn about the Attention Resistance and deep work? We will never have a clear answer, but we can learn how to take back the control we have almost lost and learn how to manage balance our smartphone time with our **real life** time.

81%
of Americans own a smartphone

 **46%**
increase since 2011

(Pew Research Center, 2019)



MORE than

9/10

Millennials have a smartphone

(Pew Research Center, 2019)

How We Got Here

A History of the Smartphone

When Ray Kroc and the McDonald Brothers created the McDonald's Corporation in 1955, they realized what the impacts that "fast food" would have on our society.

The McDonald's pioneers didn't create the Big Mac in 1968 to block arteries or increase obesity on purpose. At the time of the first Big Mac in 1968, people did not realize the harmful effects a diet filled with salty French fries and super-sized sodas could have on our health (McDonald's Corporate website).

The same ideology can relate to the creators of the iPhone, social media, and even Facebook's LIKE button. The history of the iPhone dates back to 2007, when the product was first introduced, and interestingly, so was Facebook's LIKE button (Twenge, 2017). Back then, did Steve Jobs and Apple predict the impact that the iPhone and the apps that came along with it would have on society? Facebook, Instagram and Twitter created their platforms for users to share and connect with each other, but they could have not seen the transformation of their apps over the last decade.

“It is very common for humans to develop things with the best of intentions and for them to have unintended, negative consequences,” Rosenstein said.

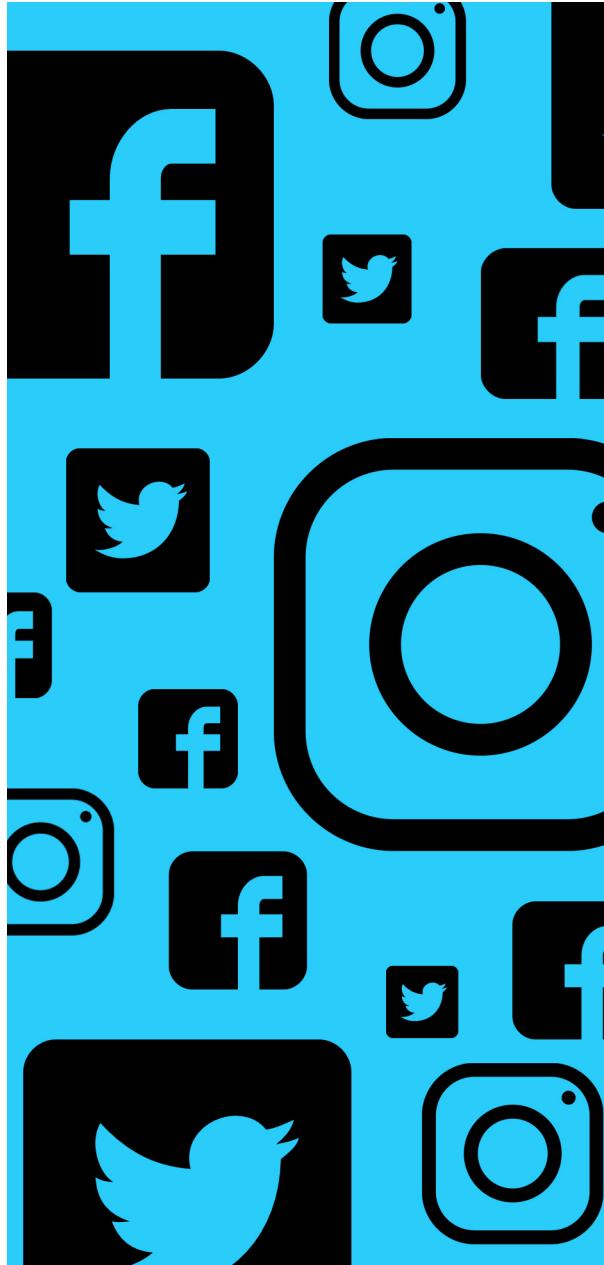
(Lewis, 2)

Justin Rosenstein created the LIKE button for Facebook back in 2007 (Twenge, 2017). The red heart double-tap motion quickly became one of the most sought-after actions of young people. Beginning on Facebook, Instagram later implemented the LIKE button with a heart, and people would later work endlessly to get as many hearts on their photos as possible.

History of the iPhone

June 29, 2007	First iPhone released
July 11, 2008	iPhone 3G released
June 7, 2010	iPhone 4 launched with FaceTime
October 14, 2011	Siri and iCloud introduced
September 20, 2013	iPhone 5S and 5C launched with new colors, touch ID, and slow-mo camera
September 19, 2014	iPhone 6 and 6 Plus launched with Apple Pay
September 16, 2016	iPhone 7 and 7 Plus introduced without headphone jack
September 22, 2017	iPhone 8 and 8 Plus launched with wireless charging
November 3, 2017	iPhone X introduced with out home button, OLED display and Face ID
September 10, 2019	iPhone 11, 11 Pro and 11 Pro Max launched

(Jones, 2014)



Inventors like Rosenstein had no idea the impact a single touch on a thumbs up button would have on society – they were just doing their jobs. Loren Brichter, the designer of the “pull-to-refresh” feature you see on almost every app with the spinning circle to indicate loading information, never wanted the mechanism to be addictive (Lewis, 8). But soon after its inception, the pull-to-refresh feature was seen on almost every app.

Tristan Harris, a former Google employee, compared the “pull-to-refresh” design to an addictive slot machine (Lewis, 7); users will pull the page down, not sure of what they will receive in an updated page, and either become satisfied, excited or disappointed.

In turn, after these seemingly minuscule features were created, the addictive nature of smartphones was born. And today, we can't figure out if we are still the ones in control.

The Technological Age emerged in the political world during the 2016 Election, and we saw for the first time how powerful social media can be. The rise of the Technological Age brings up the issue of whether or not democracy can survive. We got a glimpse of this issue in the 2016 election, specifically on Facebook.

“Drawing a straight line between addiction to social media and political earthquakes like Brexit and the rise of Donald Trump, they contend that digital forces have completely upended the political system and, left unchecked, could even render democracy as we know it obsolete,” (Twenge, 2016). Twenge explains that the impact that social media has had on politics is unmatched, and soon, democracy could be gone as we know it.

However, we have the ability to take back the control. We can reclaim all of the power that we are currently losing to Google, Facebook, and other tech companies, but it will take deep work to do it.

DEEP WORK

How We Fix It

Let's Take Back the Control

In *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World*, Cal Newport introduces the practice of deep work to readers. Newport explains that with the changing time of the Technological Age, machines have begun to take over job opportunities due to efficiency and cost.

Due to the growth in the economy and technological world, a restructure in the economy is occurring. With this restructuring comes a divide among people in the work force - **the high-skilled workers, the superstars and the owners**. The high-skilled workers work well with machines, the superstars are the top-notch group people that excel at what they do and the owners have the direct access to capital (Newport, 2016).

Newport gives us a few tips to help us survive in the ever-changing technological environment that we find ourselves in every day. We must quickly master hard things while producing on an elite level with quality and speed (Newport, 2016). As the technological environment changes around us everyday, we are also affected in the work force with numerous distractions. Many new implementations of businesses like instant messengers and smartphones have actually made work harder and has caused employees to decrease efficiency. This is the paradox that Cal Newport, the author of Deep Work, explains about businesses' promises to help improve work flow and efficiency. In actuality, many of these products or ideas make work harder and more distracting. Emails, texts and office space have impacted the ways in which people work during a normal nine-to-five job. Due to the **lack of deep work**, employees bring their work home and work into late hours. The "Metric Black Hole" is a topic that Newport explains to happen when companies think their new technological ideals make things easier when actually, they create difficult environments to work in (Newport, 2016).

Deep Work *is meaningful*

1. Neurological

In order to maintain a deep, positive attitude, you must focus and clear distractions.

2. Psychological

Deep work requires you to lose yourself or flow in an activity, which creates happiness.

3. Philosophical

People will work hard on things that deeply matter to them and have a purpose.

ATTENTION RESISTANCE

1. Delete Social Media from Phone

This doesn't mean to delete your accounts, just take them off of your phone.

2. Use Device as a Single-Purpose Computer

Think of your device as a tool that already has a default blocking system for certain sites and apps that you should only use occasionally.

3. Use Social Media like a Professional

Only use social media and the content on it, if it benefits you. Weed out the unuseful information.

4. Embracing Slow Media

Slow media manifesto urges users to measure themselves in production, appearance and content

5. Dumb Down Your Smartphone

It is ok to have a flip phone for certain situations and smartphone for other situations.

(Newport, 2019)

Cal Newport also explains in *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World* that the **Attention Resistance** is the key to taking the control back that we as consumers are losing. Of the many things we could not live without nowadays, the iPhone comes to mind and has become one of the most powerful gadgets ever invented. We stare at its screen all day, and it stares right back at us, watching our likes, views and searches. It is almost as if it knows what we are thinking. This is why the Attention Resistance is so important.

“Extracting eyeball minutes, the key resource for companies like Google and Facebook, has become significantly more lucrative than extracting oil.”

(Newport, 2019)

We are glued to our phones. We buy things off of our phones. In turn, the advertisement business of social media has exploded. Google and Facebook are throwing their money into ads everywhere because that is where all of the eyes are. In addition, algorithms and location services track what users look at and buy online and then have similar ads pop up on Instagram and Facebook, enticing viewers to continue shopping.

According to Reuters, Apple is the most valuable company in the country right now with Microsoft and Amazon following closely behind (Randewich, 1). With the power that comes with these companies, do we have any sort of control as consumers? Newport believes we do. The five steps to implement in your life to become successfully a part of the attention resistance are located to the left and above.

Positives to Putting Down the Phone

Accomplish More

After taking Newport's thoughts and call-to-actions into consideration, it may seem like a daunting task. Many studies have found that people who let go of social media are generally happier. According to an experiment conducted by Taylor Hatmaker, over 2,000 people did not log into Facebook for a month and found that they were consuming less news in general. When consuming less news and recording less screen time, people have been found to have a clearer mind and more time to focus on real life situations.

One important reason to join the attention resistance, focus on deep work and put down the phone is better sleep. According to the National Sleep Foundation, blue light devices like our smartphones affect the levels of melatonin due to the shorter wavelength the device emits. Reading on blue light-emitting devices in the evening will keep us up and in turn, make it harder to fall asleep. We also wake up feeling sleepier even if we got a normal amount of sleep time.

In addition, putting down the phone will help us to reconnect with the world around us. Things are passing us by because we are too busy looking down or trying to capture the moment for our camera roll. Using deep work and the thoughts of the Attention Resistance will push in the right direction. We will accomplish not only more work, but also *better* work (Harris, 2018).

In Harris' opinion article for The Globe and Mail, he states, "Author Nicholas Carr writes that, 'digital technologies are training us to be more conscious of and more antagonistic toward delays of all sorts.' We become, 'more intolerant of moments of time that pass without the arrival of new stimuli,'" (Harris, 2). Time passes us by and the world turns, but we are not taking advantage of the world around us and the wealth of information it has. We are stuck looking down. We must look up every now and then.

In Conclusion

A Call to Action

As members of society, we transform and adapt with the changing world around us. But, do we ever get to a point where the environments around us are influencing our lives too much? Smartphones and the advancing technologies that come with them have changed everything we know about education, social interactions, adolescents, adults, work and life in general. Twenge even asks if smartphones have destroyed a generation. Julian Vigo states the Generation Zer's explain that technology is just "an extension of themselves," (Vigo, 3). Have we already lost a generation due to the fact that they were born in the technological age?

But Newport's extensive explanation of deep work shows that there is a way to take back the control. By joining the Attention Resistance force, we have the ability to control how much smartphones control us. From five steps of changing the setup of your smartphone and carrying an older phone to using apps that help limit screen time, there are many things we can do to limit smartphone usage. Deep work is important across many facets of life - work, home, social and physical. We can use deep work to do better at our jobs and at our home life. Interestingly, deep work requires us to step back and examine our usage habits. The hardest step? Putting the phone to the side. The only choice we have is to stand by and let a small device control and monitor our every move, or put the phone down.

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