

Creativity, Community, and Respect: Three Human Experiences A.I. Will Never Understand - and Shouldn't

INTRODUCTION

I was having a glass of red wine the other day with a friend who owns a popular, local brewery.

We were talking about Instagram and how - as business owners and entrepreneurs - we choose to use social media for our respective businesses. He brought up the idea of automating the process of following and unfollowing; engaging followers; liking pictures; then unfollowing once they've followed you. As easy and cool as it *sounded* - it actually *felt* complicated and disconnected. There's a 20-something girl just around the corner who's trying to build her following for whatever reason, and she just got excited to see this popular, local brewery follow her; only then, to discover just a couple days later that this popular, growing brewery has unfollowed.

Automating - or managing social media channels with a robot - isn't something I do. I manage it - or a human on my team manages it. Yes, it takes a lot more time, energy, effort, money to do that; but there's always a human behind my accounts or my client accounts.

When I mentioned that to him, he gawked, almost snuffing Pinot Noir out of his tiny nose.

"Well, I don't understand why you wouldn't use robots," he said. "I mean, they're *there* - why the *hell* not."

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In this respective case, the robots who are 'employed' to engage people on social media, are artificial intelligence. There are a million and one complicated ways to define artificial intelligence, but it comes down to this: artificial intelligence - or A.I. - is the smart machine charged with the responsibility of doing human-like behaviors - planning, thinking, understanding, listening, learning, processing.

Yes, there are times in life that artificial intelligence is a game-changer. I love having my airline ticket automated, updated, and ready to go; I love Alexa and Google Home and anything that can answer a logistical - or trivia - question quickly; I love how certain brands feed me reminder emails when I have an item or two sitting in my virtual shopping cart; I love that the car knows who I am when I start the ignition.

And that's what I think artificial intelligence comes down to - making our lives and the experience of being human easier, more efficient, and more productive.

I think Peter Drucker would have been *absolutely fine* with that because, in an odd way, it eliminates middle management, and puts me - the user - in direct contact with the information and the system by which to manage my experience.

It's a non-traditional approach that's making it happen and getting processes done.

We can and *should* rely on machines to manage today's information – the processes, operations, and logistics. I'm talking anything from iPhone calendars to large-scale manufacturing and production. That is information - or knowledge – perfect for artificial intelligence. In that case, A.I. can and should be the next generation's 'knowledgeable specialists' as Drucker would say - a nod to his *The Coming of the New Organization* in HBR's 1988 edition.

Where A.I. goes sideways though – *or really, how we humans are using it* - is the fact we're using it - *and perhaps over-using it* - in and for experiences that are distinctly human.

Case in point - you can't automate *creativity*; you can't automate *community*; you can't automate *respect*.

CREATIVITY

Part of my everyday work as an entrepreneur is walking into a classroom - and that classroom can be an *actual* classroom, a boardroom, or a truth-telling, one-one conversation - and talking brand and content strategy with a manager, founder, or CEO.

Quite obviously, no, I can't automate any of that; or source any of that intimate process to artificial intelligence. There are some people who want to - and those people are in the wrong business. You can do more business if you can automate those conversations with tools, right? Get people into a sales funnel, so when they finally reach you they've completed enough information that you know exactly what their problem or opportunity is, right? Wrong. There's nothing more human than sitting down with a company's founder and hearing how they bootstrapped their business for good years and bad years to create this *thing* that is now their entire life. Period.

I call those creative conversations. They're real, open, and unfiltered; without a path, without an agenda.

Because – ironically – these conversations harken back to our earliest classrooms - with papers, pencils; crayons, paint. It's a distinctly and intimately human experience of **discovery** that no smart machine will ever know.

At that point in time when we were children, information technology was crayon to a blank, sheet of manila construction paper. You cannot intimate that. More importantly though, there's no algorithm that'll imitate human creativity that came out of it.

Drucker understood the power of creativity, and not just run of the mill “creativity” - full-blooded creativity that packs a punch and makes a sustainable difference. It makes a difference because it is, in fact, different – from the very beginning of the process.

“We will have to realize that innovative work is not capable of being organized and done within managerial components,” he noted in [Toward the Next Economics](#). “It needs to be organized separately, with different structural principles and in different structural components.”

That needs to be that part of the human brain that we ignite every time we pick up a pencil, a crayon, a paint. A smart machine will never know that joy.

COMMUNITY

In this context, there are two respective definitions of community - there’s the community driving the organization, and the community that “receives” the business or brand - the ‘community’ or audience of clients or customers whether local or virtual.

As in the example I cited at the beginning of the essay, community can, in fact, be automated and managed via a smart machine. You can follow, unfollow, engage, like, or comment as a way of fostering and building community. However, this approach makes community transactional; it defines community in numbers.

Community becomes a game.

Truth: That’s not community.

From mankind’s earliest days, community has been relational. Even if it was a transaction for food, land, or power, it had to be relational first whether that was good or bad.

Artificial intelligence cannot establish, build, or sustain life-long relationships in the way we’ve come to respect them in the human experience - real, raw, authentic, transparent, honest.

When someone posts on social media that they just celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary at your restaurant, and the smart machine just ‘likes’ it – is that enough? No. Does the smart machine know how special that is? No. Will it form a life-long relationship with the community of that family – this generation or next? No.

There’s something lost in translation.

It’s not too far off from Drucker’s definition of management and the manager - that management is a distinct and unique function and being a manager is a distinct responsibility.

Organizing and growing a community is a responsibility. It's about finding the right personalities; it's about finding people who are working towards goals that are similar to yours as a business; it's about growing connections between people so that everyone wins. And that sense of community should be present among the people who are driving the business as well as the customers, followers, advocates.

In this age of smart technology, automation, artificial intelligence we've forgotten that building community is a responsibility of the human experience.

It cannot be automated - it must be curated.

RESPECT

Drucker said it well when he said this: "Every single social and global issue of our day is a business opportunity in disguise."

It's not only a business opportunity - but also an opportunity to do business differently.

There's no other way to say it - respect cannot be artificially conceived.

We don't talk enough about respect in business. And, consequently, there's not enough respect in business. It's one of this world's number one social and global issues.

Respect isn't a number, a like, a follow; it can't be automated.

Respect is answering the phone for a lost and confused employee struggling with depression at midnight; respect is showing up to the store ten minutes early because you know a customer needs that color tie before a business-changing presentation; respect is acknowledging every religious holiday your respective customer base adheres to; respect is sending an email message to your customers on Mother's Day - some of whom are mothers and some of whom have probably desperately and painstakingly been trying to be a mother for years - and so Mother's Day is a really hard day.

You can see respect; but, more so, you can feel respect - whether you're the giver or the receiver.

We are so challenged by this - by respect - because it's information that's hard to measure intelligently. Ironically, it can only be measured in feelings - and followings. It can also be measured by the good created. If you have the right community, they'll understand and respect that.

In that case, yet again, it's an act of responsibility.

“It is management’s . . . responsibility,” Drucker noted in *The Practice of Management* (1954), “that to make whatever is genuinely in the public good become the enterprise’s own self-interest.”

Respect is anything but artificial.

CONCLUSION

This isn’t a conversation about why artificial intelligence is insufficient. It’s not. It’s a powerful tool and resources that has changed the course of the human experience.

Where we get it wrong though is thinking that it’s an answer to everything. It’s not.

Yes, it’s an answer to operational efficiency, productivity; perhaps making lean even *leaner*, getting the right and resources tools in the right people’s hands; producing more widgets.

No, it’s not a replacement for the human experiences of creativity, community, or respecting each other. Artificial intelligence should never replace the responsibility of being human.

My call-to-action is this – a clear-cut, gut check for business owners, managers, CEOs:

If a task is something that - when whittled down relies on a distinctly human process - should you really, truly rely on artificial intelligence for it?

Or – even better – this question: In lieu of artificial intelligence, can there be a human-centered partnership or collaboration that can help to manage it first?

When we rely too heavily on artificial intelligence or smart machines to manage distinctly human experiences, we disconnect from each other and our respective original intents, missions, and philosophies in an odd, ironically artificial way.

Drinking *wine* with a guy who owns a *brewery* is a perfect example.

Stay human. It’s both a privilege - and a responsibility.