

If only advice was good enough

It is always eureka time somewhere.

In the late 1980's Joseph Campbell said something that stuck with me. In an interview, he was explaining to Bill Moyers why Star Wars had a valid mythological perspective, then he asked:

"Is the machine going to crush humanity or serve humanity?"

Although that was a conversation to illustrate his point about a particular subject, as a millennial who watched so many technologies coming and going, it always sounds like a pertinent question.

I used to say I was born in the wrong generation because I guess it would be fun to attend Woodstock and see many of my favorite artists. I thought I was an old soul. As time went by, I realized I was lucky enough to be part of a generation that I believe got the best of both worlds. I got to know it was like having no internet at all, and watched the whole world go digital right in front of my eyes. Many millennials were able to enjoy the first years of childhood without the internet and only had access in teen years, such as myself. My family could not afford a computer until I was fifteen years old, I was way behind my friends computerwise. And when we finally bought our first computer, it took us another year to get internet access in our home. Until then, we used the computer to make small school projects or play an old card game that did not require connection.

I remember, now with a lot of nostalgia, that we were able to "leave" the internet. We could be offline. We had a schedule, since it was one computer for four siblings, so there would be no fight and everyone would get some time online and then, well, we were offline and went on living our real lives, riding our bikes on the street with our friends, hanging out with our family or playing sports in the school's court.

Fast forward to five billion floppy disks later, now we each carry a small computer in our pockets with full access to the internet. We are always online, we can never leave the internet because if we dare to go offline, automatically people assume something is wrong. We have access to all kinds of news from all around the globe and apps that constantly make us feel too ugly or too poor, and sometimes both.

Jonathan Haidt, is a social psychologist who recently wrote an article proposing the end of the phone-based childhood. In this paper, very well grounded on research, he discusses how unlimited access to phones and the internet helped to increase depression, anxiety and other mental disorders rates. He also states that members

Peter Drucker Challenge 2024

of Gen Z are doing poorly on academic achievements, in comparison with other generations. This problem is not limited to one specific country. Research shows that this pattern emerged in the US, Canada, U.K, Australia, and beyond. Like it was not enough, now humans have developed technology that can write poems, scripts, edit movies, or illustrate any image that the human mind is capable of imagining. And this is only the part that is free for everyone's use, I can only imagine what those technologies can really do and is just not open to the general public yet.

Everyday there is something new, and probably as I write this essay, some discovery was made on how to make something faster, smaller, or with greater potential to kill. It is always eureka time somewhere, right?

Artificial intelligence is undeniable the next big thing. It is something that I am still trying to digest. I honestly can't tell if it is just that I am getting old, or if it is a bit scary to anyone who puts some thought into it. I guess I should be used to new technologies by now, but the truth is I feel overwhelmed by all of it, and sometimes I almost tend to believe that it might be the end of humankind. And I would succumb to this feeling if it weren't for something that happened to me on December 25th of 2022 that lit a flame of hope within me. I became a mother.

Ben arrived on christmas morning and he changed my whole perspective on life. It is amazing what a chubby smiley baby can do to our brains. When I graduated from college I thought I could change the world, after some very short time I realized I wouldn't, and now I feel like I have to.

Many theories and possible outcomes

What do mommies do? They worry about the future and their kid's education. So I went on a personal quest to understand, or at least try, what education will be like when baby Ben goes to school or finally has access to the digital world.

According to research made by Imperva, a cyber security firm, 47.4% of all internet traffic in 2022 was from automated bots. Based on these numbers, it is not wrong to assume that in a short period of time, almost all the content we consume on the internet is going to be created by a bot. On the other side, there are some worshipers of conspiracy theories that believe that the internet is dying. How is that even possible in the AI rise? Well, some people believe that since a great amount of data on the internet is made by bots and also consumed by bots, overtime that interaction will put humans on the sidelines, and soon enough the content on the internet won't be as attractive to humans as it is now.

To me the very idea of a chatbot will inevitably fall into a lost loop. If the content offered by an AI source, like ChatGPT, is based on whatever it can find online and people are using it to "create" data they are putting on the internet now, soon enough

Peter Drucker Challenge 2024

all the content on the internet will be created by a bot. In this case, intermediated by a human, but still created by a bot.

For example, chatbots web scrape all data that we humans supplied the internet in the last thirty years. And a content producer, or a social media influencer, needs to meet the demands of a platform algorithm to keep relevant. To meet the high demand imposed by the algorithm, this online content producer chooses to use ChatGPT, to create the content of his social networks, then he uploads this content to the internet and later the chatbot will be using information from this very same post on its web scraping to make another delivery. Won't we fall into a loop of data? I believe so, and it is as confusing as it sounds. I tried to rewrite this sentence many times and it still tangles my mind. It feels like watching the movie Matrix for the first time.

There are so many theories and facts about the future of the internet and AI that it is hard not to get sucked into a swirling mix of feelings and thoughts and end up not being able to determine how good or bad this all is to our future. I guess I might have visited some questionable forums with too many cyber theories, and I have to tell, that got me feeling like changing my smart phone for a good dumb one.

So for me to be able to get somewhere here, I will stick to only one question that now lights up the bigger red light in my head: Will the new generation only use AI to do all their work? Maybe I sound a little alarmist, but while I am writing this, a major news platform just announced that the governor of the State I live in, intends to use AI to teach kids in public schools. I don't want to get into details about this information but I have a kid, and though he is just a baby now, I fear the kind of school he will attend in the future.

Will he learn how to do math without the help of any device or AI? Will he read the books (hopefully written by another human being) Will he learn science with real experiments? Will he have the chance to experience a school that will help his developing brain to achieve the most of it? Will he use his hands to create an image he has in his mind or only describe to a computer to receive all done? Or write a paper, knowing grammar, coherence and vocabulary without using AI to do it for him?

Our brain is amazing, but it needs to be stimulated. Brain researchers say that the synapses that are used frequently are retained while those not used disappear. We already face many problems, because our phone based life interferes with a great number of development processes, specially in early childhood, and on top of that, now we won't even exercise our creativity? And what would happen if you accustomed an entire generation to depending on a digital tool, and then simply ended up with that same tool? Do people think about this or am I worrying too much?

Is there a silver lining?

With some effort, I can see the good part of having machines doing things for us. But for me, machines are supposed to be doing tasks such as, laundry, doing the dishes, mopping the floor, so we can have time to write, read, study, create, enjoy leisure, play instruments. Not the other way around.

I do not think the solution is to deny technology and all sorts of AI, but for sure we need to learn to make good use of it. Unfortunately we can not lean on corporations, and hope that they will teach how to use AI with any ethical sense. A few lines of use policy with a checkbox in the end is not enough. So, I think that one possible path to go down is to teach people how to learn and how to use those tools with a huge sense of responsibility and ethics.

Peter Drucker once said:

"We now accept the fact that learning is a lifelong process of keeping abreast of change. In addition, the most pressing task is to teach people how to learn."

This sentence is timeless and so accurate for this moment.

I will not make a social cut as not to dwell on these lines, but considering that kids that have the minimum to grow up healthy, one way to roll with this and try to control possible future threats, is to be as close as we can to the next generation, on their learning processes in order to make sure they know good from bad, and learn how to use this new tools to serve humanity not to end with it.

The next generation will need to be very resilient. Not only to deal with this chaotic world, but also to manage their feelings and anxiety, in order not to get lost. Because things are going to change, change faster and eventually things that sound very good at first might sound very threatening later.

When I think if there is anything I can do to help the next generation thrive, the only thing that comes to mind is advice and presence. There is an old saying in Brazil that goes: "If advice was good, it wouldn't be given, it would be sold". It is easy to tell them how they should do while we haven't figured it out ourselves. But the advice worked well for me. As tough life was for me, especially in my teenage years, I had received great advice from older family members and mentors. They guided my life with purpose and a good moral compass. Not too high for me to believe that there is only one way to live life, and not too low to hurt anyone or put profit over any sort of life.

Not a long time ago I felt that tips and letters to the future were addressed to me. I am not old but here I am seeing a generation ahead and if I could tell anything to help their path to the future I guess we would be pretty cheesy but filled with love. It sounds somehow bittersweet, because advice to the next generation is advice to my

Peter Drucker Challenge 2024

son. I wish so many good things for him and I want to make sure he is well guided to pave his own way.

A tip for the future

As I learned with the ghost of a mentor, here is my tip for the future: follow your bliss, find what makes you happy and do not let anything distract you. Happy, fulfilled people don't start wars. When you wake up everyday, try no to be sucked into a world of bad news presented by cheap sensationalism dressed as morning news. Being realistic is important, being pessimistic can stop you from doing what you are supposed to do and freeze you in fear. Find the right dose of optimism. Sometimes it helps to look at the micro instead of the macro. There are unimportant people doing incredible things. We can't change the entire world but we can change the environment around us. For bad or good.

Do not let social media hold you to an idea of life that does not exist. Acknowledge your flaws but do not allow them to stop you from becoming a better person. If you have nothing nice to say, then do not say anything.

The world can be scary and sometimes very sad, but it is an amazing place, filled with many good people, willing to give their own lives to help others around them. Be light, but know that it is okay to feel afraid. If you ever get sad and the world begins to look like an inhospitable place to be, try to remember the big picture: we are floating in a rock, in space, and we are made of the same elements that stars in far away galaxies are made of. Stargaze every now and then. Everything is possible.

If you feel like you are missing out on stuff, or can't buy all the things you believe you need, remember that Earth gives us everything we need, if it does not come naturally from the planet, you don't need it. You might want it, but you don't need it. Love nature. Be a great guest for the planet.

Technologies will come and go. The planet is staying put and taking good care of it has to be a priority. Create things on your own. Use tools, but make sure things come from your mind, not from your digital devices. Use digital devices to get closer to people that are away from you, don't let them steal your presence from people who are next to you.

If you ever create something big enough to change the world, make sure it will change for the good. Create things to serve humanity. The right things are right even if nobody is doing it. Have a rebel heart and a peaceful mind.

Be adventurous. The world has places that can take your breath away. Travel for real. By bike, bus, plane, boat. Do not spend much of your precious time in a chair in front of a screen. Make real connections. Meeting people tuned in with the same energy as you is a much better feeling than any digital interaction.

Peter Drucker Challenge 2024

If you got hired to do a job, and got tasks that you do not quite know how to do, it is okay to use the internet to learn how to do it. But please learn and do it by yourself. Do not lean on any source of AI. What is in your computer can be taken away, what is in your mind is yours. Don't let your brain shrink, use the full potential of it.

You are divine. And so are the children of other mothers. Do not harm them. Do not let anyone harm you. When in doubt, let your moral compass guide you. If your heart tells you it is wrong, it probably is. People will always matter more than money or profit. Always.

Ben, on your way, be strong, be kind and be brave. I've been telling you this since the day I found out you were a tiny little person inside my belly. Love is the ultimate thing that makes us human. It is pretty obvious but I only really learned that when I first saw you. No device or program in this world can replace or describe a real love connection. Thank you for giving meaning to my life and for giving me the strength to keep on fighting for a better world. You deserve it. Lastly, enjoy technology but do not forget that love is a real world kind of thing.

References:

1. [Gestão Tarcísio coloca inteligência artificial nas escolas, mas diz que professores não serão substituídos | Blogs CNN](#)
2. [The Terrible Costs of a Phone-Based Childhood - The Atlantic](#)
3. [The Developing Brain - From Neurons to Neighborhoods - NCBI Bookshelf](#)
4. [2023 Imperva Bad Bot Report | Resource Library](#)