



In Real Life: Searching for Connection in High-Tech Times

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Technology helps us with our hardest work. It can also offer us endless distractions. Can technology enable us, as individuals and communities, to do our greatest possible work, the hard work of being a good person?

Jon Mitchell sets out to identify and explore the ways in which we can develop a more thoughtful relationship with technology. Rather than using technology as a medium for connecting with the world, he recommends we rethink our relationship with technology, using it as a resource that allows us to have a more intimate and personal relationship with the world around us, nature, and our loved ones. Mitchell offers concrete practices for the way we use technology in our daily lives.

With an accessible and conversational, easy-to-read style, Mitchell uses his years of experience as both a tech journalist and a mindfulness practitioner to propose a rethinking of both the design of technology and its use.

In Real Life: Searching for Connection in High-Tech Times Details

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Skylar says

I wasn't really sure what to expect from this book when I won a free copy from Goodreads. Turns out: it's a philosophy book. How do you think about technology, what IS technology anyway?, how does it affect your life, how SHOULD it affect your life? And let me spoil it for you: the answer to everything is meditation. I'm not bothered by that answer, but it was kind of annoying to come back over and over again that meditation is the cure for the problems the author has identified. Meditation and the philosophy of Burning Man. I didn't expect to learn a short history of Burning Man and its philosophy, and I didn't know much about it before, but it fit the book well. But if you hate "hippies" with a passion, this may not be a book for you.

This was a great thinking book, a way to change how we approach technology and how we interact with it. But whether you'll take the advice he prescribes depends on what you want after thinking about these issues.

Kirk says

Technology should work for us not control us. Be mindful. It's hard. The author suggests disconnecting, meditation, journal writing and Burning Man. There are rich techies at Burning Man whose real world jobs are to make technology more addicting and control us more. Is this a contradiction? Think about that while you meditate next.

Now you don't have to read this book.

It was just ok, at best. Too much musing and personal self discovery for the author. Not enough explication or evidence. Writing this may have been cathartic but it's not worth a read, unless you are drowning in social media FOMO and really need a guide. If you feel like you have good balance in your life, skip.

Eugene says

Promising premise, but discussion felt casual. Light and accessible read, but at the expense of depth. Could easily be summarized into an article, though its meandering ways might prove useful to the most technologically afflicted.

Bethany Jordan says

Very helpful. This was well written, and eye opening. It allowed for a great self analysis of what I already do for communication and how I can improve.

eigenvector says

I knew before reading this book that I had an unhealthy relationship with technology, but this book expanded my paradigm of how humans interact with technology. As a scientist I need technology to do my job (by definition), but too often I have found that certain technologies, namely social media, to be draining productivity in my personal life and my work life. Mr. Mitchell posits that mindful use of technology and meditation are the best course of remediation of the anxieties sown by an unhealthy use of technology-- and he does so convincingly. Peppered with brief accounts of the history of search engines, Burning Man, and start up culture, "In Real Life" makes for an absorbing read that prompts awareness and introspection.

Disclosure: my spouse is a friend of the author.

Susan Mumpower-spriggs says

Staying mindful in a wired world is a challenge. Jon Mitchell has been exploring how to do that for several years and shares what he has discovered. A journalist who reported on the tech industry and a practicing meditator, he comes at the question with experience in both disciplines. Very timely.

maddi1134 says

This book was meh. A lot of it felt like rambling about the challenges without actually addressing them. The last chapter was good. I would recommend reading only that part and reflecting on how to better manage technology as the tool we hire for a job while using other tools for unwinding and connecting with others.

The book ends by randomly talking about children and technology on the last page as if to give it some greater meaning without having talked about how to manage technology with kids throughout the rest of the book.

Randall says

"In Real Life" is written in the accessible, self-help style that makes for a leisurely read, with a few central points approached from many angles so that even the most distracted reader doesn't miss the message. This style serves the audience well for it is precisely this daydreaming reader who most wants these lessons. There's no preaching or mysticism here, though; this is pure workflow contemplation that makes as much sense next to a copy of "Getting Things Done" as any spiritual text, which is precisely the point. The problems discussed, connecting with others and finding meaning in a world of distraction, have never changed, but the vocabularies and the tools are in constant flux. Parts of the book would be gag-worthy if Mitchell didn't let his own cynicism come through. Whether you're more repulsed by religious language or Silicon Valley VC-speak, there's a mixture of sincerity and suspicion glossing each that demonstrates the earnestness with which Mitchell wants to cut through the vernaculars to examine our spiritual entrails.

More likely to save a few Luddites from technology-induced paranoia than to save us from the ad-pocalypse, "In Real Life" suffers a little from trying to address multiple audiences and from a pervasive positivity that

prohibits full-on criticism of an industry but it is nevertheless enjoyable.

Disclaimer: I am a friend of the author.
