

13 Tips for Putting Technology in Its Place and Regaining Control of Your Life

The human race is inundated with technology—especially computer technology.

It's a huge part of our lives. Today, almost everything depends on it. But too often, we become the servant, and technology the master.

However, to wholly condemn technology is an overreaction. Technology is here to serve us, and it can serve us well as long as we are careful. What we must do is learn to temper our use of technology so we can regain control of our lives.

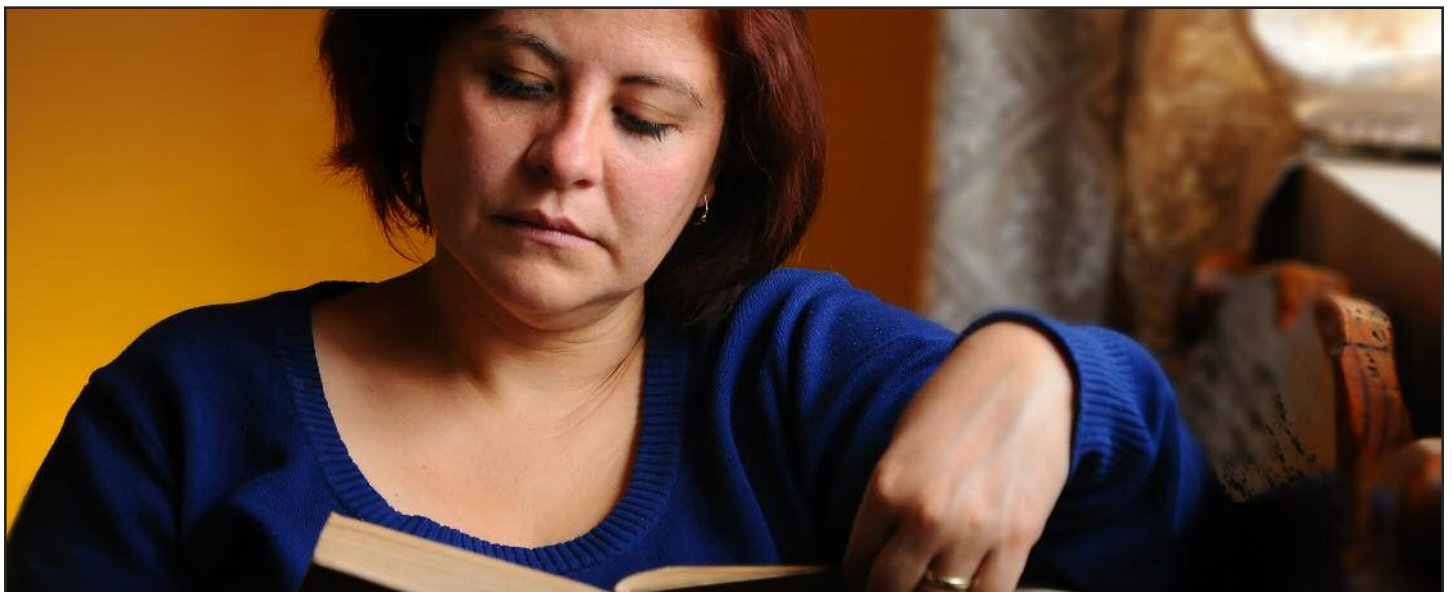
Three vital things to keep in mind:

- 1. You must regain control over the technology in your life. You should be in charge of technology, not the other way around.**
- 2. Be realistic about what technology can really do to improve your life. Remember: technology should be a means to an end—not an end in itself.**
- 3. You must protect yourself from the brutal pace of life brought on by modern technology. Don't let technology and speed rob you of your humanity.**

1 The right way to start the day: After waking, read or reflect on something that lifts your mind to the higher aspects and realities of life. It should be something that captivates your unique personal aspirations—something that gives you food for lively and refreshing thoughts throughout the day.

You can begin with a short reading or meditation. This contemplative activity must capture and engage your imagination in a manner that fosters calm pondering and is pleasurable, enduring and rewarding. Choose something you will enjoy reading or meditating on, something that fits your personality and way of being, so that you can do this day after day, week after week and month after month.

Once this thoughtful reading or meditation becomes a habit, you'll have a true “forest” of wisdom to pull from whenever you hit a rough spot. If you find this too difficult, it is a telltale sign that technology is precariously leading you, as if you are a rider who has fallen from the saddle and is being dragged from the stirrup by the horse.





2 The shoe box solution: Share old items and keepsakes with family members, especially with your children. These are things handed down from your ancestors, clippings from historic events that shaped their lives or even such things as a baptismal certificate or your parent’s wedding photos.

Scrap booking is very popular because it offers meaningful time with family and friends looking at old photos together. Even if the pictures are in an old shoe box it’s still fun to go through them with others.

The shoe box solution is much more “human” than Facebook because the sharing of memories happens in the same room and involves things Facebook cannot communicate—body language, a smile, an infectious laugh, a hug. Looking at these family relics restores to your soul an idea of connectedness and a reminder of where you came from, who your ancestors were, their traits and achievements, their lifestyles and traditions, etc.



3 Quality time offline: Carve out quality time in your day when you are completely unplugged from radio, television, Internet, MP3 player, smart phone, etc. Try doing this for at least one hour in the morning and three hours before you go to sleep. If you are unable to stay away from technology for this length of time, start weaning yourself off it in smaller increments of 15 or 30 minutes at a time. If even this is not possible, you may consider going on a weekend fast from all technology so you can regain control over your technology use.



4 Reading aloud: Spend 10 to 15 minutes reading aloud. Let the concepts from each sentence sink into your mind in an ordered and cadenced manner. Don't feel bad if you need to reread the paragraph for the concept to become part of you. Remember: if you cannot explain it, you really don't know it. This practice not only helps you retain what you read, but it increases your attention span, which may have been damaged by multitasking.



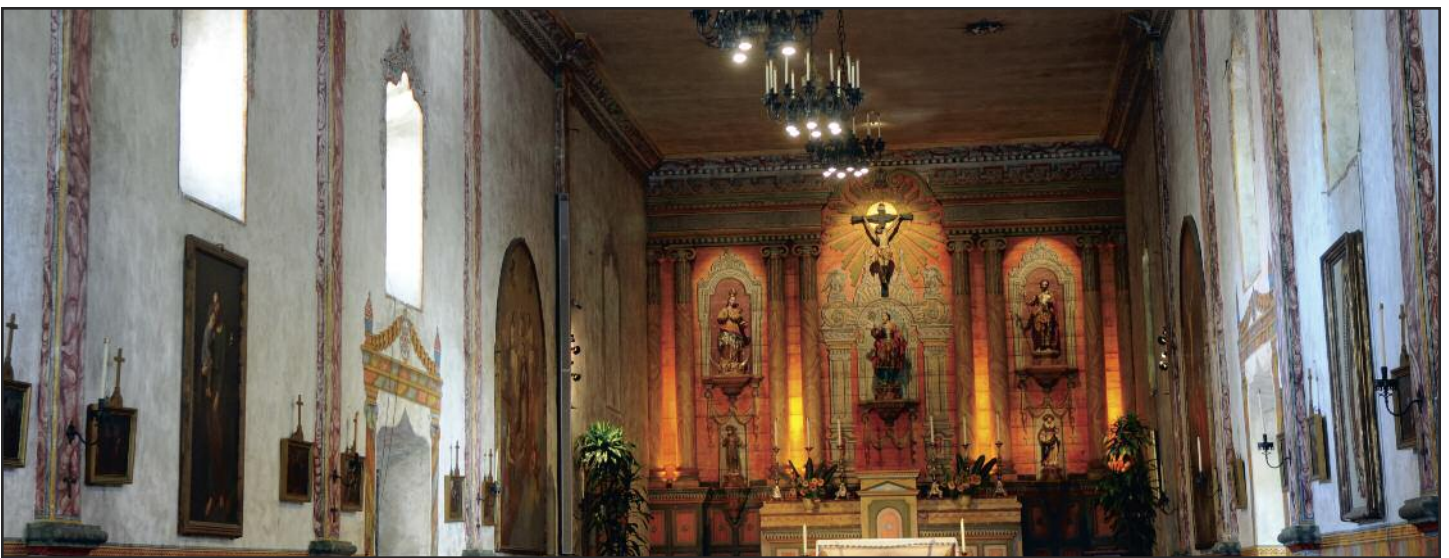
5 A calm evening practice: In the evening, do something that engages the mind, calms the emotions and focuses the attention on one single thing for a period of 30 minutes to an hour. Try not to let your attention wander and flit from one thing to the next. For example, handwrite a letter to a friend or family member you have not heard from in a while. Use a fountain pen. Write on quality paper. Use a crisp, clean envelope.

Or, try writing a journal entry or spending time doing a hobby that involves the act of creation, imitation and the striving for perfection. Another idea is to listen to a piece of classical music—preferably Mozart, Hayden or Bach. Close your eyes and think about what you are hearing and how it touches your soul.

6 Notice and appreciate surroundings: Go for a walk in a park or wooded area without your smart phone. Even better, walk along the seashore if you live near the ocean. Pay attention to the things around you: the smells of the salty breeze, the seagulls flying about, the ebbs and flows of the waves—but all without overworking your mind. Do it calmly and for a moderate amount of time. If you feel inspired, write down some of your reflections after you walk.



7 Silence is golden: Once a week, go to church and pray in silence for 10 to 15 minutes. If nothing comes to mind to pray for, spend time in silence. You don't absolutely need to pray, but you can gain from simply opening your soul and listening to God, who silently speaks to your interior. Write your impressions down, but only if you feel so inclined. Don't prolong the experience beyond that certain point of balance and normal endurance. If you do, this marvelous experience could turn into something boring or forced.



8 Reflection is refreshing: Don't be afraid to think about the big questions of life that all human beings ask. Are there things you wonder about for which you have no answers? For example, why did God create ugly creatures? To heighten the contrast with beautiful ones? Or, why do some notorious and public bad fellows



seem to have an easy and carefree life, while other evidently honest folks experience tremendous hardships? Not all such issues need to be strictly spiritual. Natural and metaphysical ponderings can also be very helpful and lead to the understanding of higher, supernatural realities.

For example, do you enjoy looking at the ocean? What does its beauty symbolize? What metaphysical qualities does it have? In what way can these qualities remind us of God?

9 “Dr. Google” can wait: When you are in a conversation with friends and information is missing on the topic under discussion, don’t immediately reach for your smart phone and do a Google search for the piece of information at question. Rather, try to first search your memory to see if you can solve the problem through deduction, an effort of memory or by looking at the problem from a completely different perspective. Or, look at the premise of the discussion. Perhaps the very premise of the conversation is badly laid out and is the obstacle to reaching a satisfactory answer. If, after this, an answer is not immediately forthcoming, let the issue brew in your mind for a while. Ask older, wiser people if they know of a solution. Finally, if all else fails, look at a qualified book or encyclopedia on the issue. Avoid consulting “Dr. Google” immediately for a quick-fix solution, which often is just as immediately forgotten.



10 Control smart phone usage: Leave your smart phone in the car while having a meal at a restaurant with family or friends and ask others at the meal to do the same. Don't answer your phone in the midst of a conversation with friends, at a business meeting or conference, and especially not in church! If you can, turn off the ringer so you won't be tempted to answer your phone—unless, of course, there is an emergency. By answering your phone, tweet or email at these times, you send a powerful, very real, nonverbal message to those around you that they are of little worth. Moreover, you break the unity of thought, focus and purpose of your group. Once broken, this unity is difficult, if not impossible, to reestablish in the short period that follows the interruption.



11 Enjoy the higher pleasures: Don't be fooled into thinking pleasure is always directly related to physical sensation. Life's greatest pleasures by far come from the higher things of the soul, the cultural and spiritual experiences that lift the spirit to a higher realm of reality, such as a good conversation with friends, a refined piece of music, a pious moment of prayer, the enjoyment that comes with sacrificing to help a neighbor in time of need. Once a week, go to a concert of classical music, listen to Gregorian Chant, look at a fish tank, join a discussion club, engage in a fireside gathering with family where you pray, read or simply enjoy one another's informal company.





12 A tech-free Sunday: Plan your Sunday with meaningful activity. Go to Mass. Unplug your computer at home for a period of time, especially from 8 a.m. until after dinner. Meet with family. Cook up a nice brunch. Invite friends over for dinner. Savor a wine or beverage you like. Take a hike. Learn an instrument. Call an old friend. Do a disinterested act of charity out of pure love of God for someone who is ill, or for someone who doesn't have the means or the position to repay or reward you. All these things will help fill your day, keep you busy and help you resist the temptation to go online.



13 Slow down: As a matter of course, calmly, seriously and deliberately ponder your thoughts, motivations and options before you act. An ounce of sweat in careful planning is worth a pint of blood in poor execution. Experience shows the slow approach to your daily life decisions will actually save you a great deal of time and headache, which comes from poorly made choices that are influenced by haste, passion or the lack of mature reflection. Haste is waste. So, please slow down.

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