

Is Your Partner Married to Their Blackberry?

You've got to love them or hate them. Our tech gadgets: the Blackberry, iPhone, Palm, whichever P.D.A. (Personal Digital Assistant) you have. They are here to stay and growing in popularity. They keep us connected to work, friends and family. They also interfere with our in-person relationships. They are intruding on marriages. A recent survey found that over a third of tech gadget users would pick their PDA over their partner if they were forced to choose. Eighty seven percent say they bring their device into their bedroom and almost all of them check their PDA just before going to bed and as soon as they wake up. Eighty-five percent say they sneak a peak at their PDA in the middle of the night. (Gulliver, 2008)

Do you worry that your partner is in that one third who is more married to their Blackberry than you? Is your partner's PDA interrupting you in the middle of your conversation with each other? Is someone you love more attentive to the next phone call, email or text message than they are to what you have to say? Are you worried that this compulsion to talk, text or email is distracting you from a deeper personal emotional connection? Have tech devices become a distraction from underlying troubles in your relationship? Does your partner prefer to be more connected to work and others than you?

Maintaining a strong relationship is difficult for all couples these days. There are so many forces pulling at us. The promise that technology would help us to work more effectively so there would be more time for relaxation with loved ones has not been realized. It has led to worse work life balance for many. With most couples having two busy careers, work expectations of instant response, and some with business travel, balance is very difficult. On the home front, care for our children often pushes attention to our marriage to the back burner. What we really need is more focus on fortifying relationship connections, not more distractions.

Multi-tasking or Continuous Partial Attention?

Many people pride themselves on their ability at multi-tasking. However they may really be in a state of continuous partial attention. These are two different activities. When we multi-task, we are motivated by a desire to be more productive and more efficient. When we pay continuous partial attention we also want to connect and be connected. We want to scan for opportunities and optimize for the best opportunities, activities, and contacts, in any given moment. To be busy, is to be connected, is to be alive, is to be recognized, and is to matter. Rather than multi-tasking to be more productive we pay continuous partial attention in an effort to not miss anything. An artificial sense of constant crisis is more typical of continuous partial attention than it is of multi-tasking. Like so many things, in small doses, continuous partial attention can be a very functional behavior. However, in large doses, it contributes to a stressful lifestyle, to operating in crisis management mode, and to a compromised ability to reflect, to make decisions, and to think creatively.

Strong, secure, long lasting love relationships possess three key aspects: Accessibility (Can I reach you?) Responsiveness (Can I rely on you to respond to me emotionally?) and Engagement (Do I know you will value me and stay close?). (Johnson, 2008). Many stressed out couples do not stay accessible, responsive or engaged to each other and pay little attention to their relationship. They fail to reflect and instead are reactive or indifferent. They tend to put out fires rather than make thoughtful decisions and problem solve well. They tend to struggle to keep their heads above water, which means that creativity, if there is any, is reserved for the children.

The symptoms of tech gadget overload include confusion, frustration, burn out, and feelings of emptiness. Constant demands on our attention can happen to anyone before we realize it. Here are some signs that you or your partner needs to take control of your life/relationship and limit use of put your Blackberry or PDA

- suffering from feelings of withdrawal when a PDA cannot be accessed;
- an increased need for the most up to date and better equipment;
- the need for more time to use the tech gadget;
- after you have been working full out and then when you are relaxing with your partner you feel guilty that you should doing something else rather than enjoying each other's company
- fatigue, resentment, increased conflict,
- being bored when you have down time and rather than relaxing by reading, an activity or conversations you need much more stimulation

How to Create a Better Balance

- 1. Cut back on the amount of time you spend on all types of technology.** First keep track of how much time you spend answering email, talking on your cell phone, text messaging, watching television, on your iPod or anything else that takes you away from face to face interactive contact with your loved ones. Add up the total time. Decrease it by 10 to 20 percent at intervals that feel comfortable to you. Establish times of the day when you will not check your text messages or email.
- 2. As you are reducing your time on one tech device, be careful not to substitute it with another.** Instead of going from your Blackberry to internet video games, spend time in person with others.
- 3. Make a conscious effort to spend time with your spouse, children and friends relaxing.** Have fun doing activities you enjoy and create a more fulfilling social life.
- 4. Make sure you have regular family dinners at the table talking with each other.** Establish a rule of no interruptions from phones, TV or any devices. Facilitate conversation from everyone, especially your teenagers, and talk about and reflect on how your day was spent and other topics of interest.
- 5. On your regular 'date night' with your spouse, turn your device off** altogether or at least on to silence. If you want to deeper your relationship and create a romantic mood, taking a call rather maintaining eye contact will kill it.
- 6. When on a vacation with your spouse or family set strict limits on cell phone and Blackberry use –** perhaps for 15 minutes at the beginning and end of day or agree, if you can, to leave the devices off or at home.
- 7. As well as putting more effort into strengthening your relationship with your spouse and children, be sure to look after yourself.** Eat a healthy diet, get regular cardiovascular exercise, and practice stress reducing techniques. Mindful Meditation is extremely helpful for those who suffer from tech gadget overload.
- 8. If the reduction of your time on your Blackberry reveals underlying serious problems,** like an unhappy marriage or unfulfilling personal life, do something to improve them or seek professional help.