



# Whimsy

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**L**ike many of you, I sometimes feel that I'm caught up in a whirlwind of change... upon reflection - some of it good, some of it bad, some of it "really strange". The change is not localized but rather pervades the complete continuum of work and family. We have become conditioned to simply accept things as a matter of natural evolution - a power so pervasive that we're willingly swept along with it. If I were a cynic, I reckon that I'd say that we are the victims of a curious mix of very good marketing and (plainly speaking) propaganda.

I'm a great fan of Starbucks Coffee and when I feel I've earned it, I get my Mocha Grande for the princely sum of \$4.65 (give or take). When you think about it, it's pretty pricey (but great) coffee. What you don't think about is that in contrast to other establishments, you stand in line for service, there's usually no place to sit, if there is, you have to clean the table, and you get your coffee in a paper cup! Premium pricing and minimalist service ...and we actually love it.

While on the subject, my teenagers will happily spend \$200.00 on a pair of \$40.00 jeans for the privilege of being a walking advertisement for Diesel jeans,

It has virtually become a matter of fact that every child over the age of 6 is absolutely entitled to a cell phone, a digital camera, an iPod, an xBox and a prepaid Blockbuster account to complement the 149 channels on the 50" plasma flatscreen TV - to withhold those necessities of life would be tantamount to child abuse. When you think about it, the entertainment/communications costs per child, per month, today likely exceeds our parents' monthly mortgage payment - and then some.

Ironically, to compensate for the lack of their physical activity compounded with the daily visits to Wendy's, MacDonald's, Kentucky Fried, Taco Bell or Pizza Hut, we then enroll our kids in one of the local fitness palaces at another \$50 per month, and, of course, drive them there.

People of my vintage were happy to get out of the house and play after supper to avoid any possible chores that we knew our parents could contrive if we hung out within hollering distance. We were very low maintenance and thin, read books and comics, and were elated to watch Walt Disney and Ed Sullivan once a week; a coke and a candy bar or a package of chips were real treats.

It's inescapable to avoid making a comment about our addiction to communication - in touch, real time, all the time - 24/7. When I was a CIO we used to take pride if our computers (machines, mind you) had those attributes - now we feel guilty if we don't.

I ponder this love/hate relationship with our communication tools/toys - I have to admit that it's great to get the answer to a question from someone several thousands of miles away in a matter of seconds; it's not so great that someone expects a response from me in the same time frame!

What's worse is that e-mail seems to be becoming THE form of communication - with due respect to our writing skills and those of our offspring - where it gets difficult or a bit complicated, let's pick up the phone instead (or even better, Skype or its equivalent) - voice communication is much faster and inflection more effective in achieving results.

My real concern is that there's an expectation that we be electronically available all the time. Yes, there are those people who choose to make their careers their full-time focus, and then there are others who feel pressured to be 'available 24/7' for fear of not considered to be a team player. The latter is of most concern to me - I wonder if there is a relationship between succumbing to the connectivity/accessibility pressure and the reality of our children's worlds, as mentioned above?

I'm tempted to call "foul" on behalf of those of us who are living under the illusion that we have a life.

I don't have the answer - this is a real, societal problem. I do know that our productivity increases when we've had a complete break from our work, and our personal relationships strengthen when we're able to focus quality time on them.

I wonder what life would be like if we disconnected from our technology tools and connected with our 'other life' when we went on vacation, weekends, or even just at the dinner table.....

Perhaps an answer would be to send a message to my contact list a week before I left saying "I will be away next Friday for the next three weeks, please do not send me messages during that time".

Perhaps I should.

... No doubt there's a Blackberry in my future, I'm told that it's the right thing to do. ●