

**Dr. Michael N Compton**

**Fall 2019 Public Affairs Essay Contest**

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**Biography:** I am a junior pursuing a degree in Hospitality Leadership with a minor in Entrepreneurial Studies. I am from Washington, Illinois.

**Essay Theme:** This essay will address how technology has affected individuals' personal well-being due to the lack of rest and fulfillment it cultivates.

**Non-profit Organization:** Pregnancy Care Center

**Word Count:** 862 words

Learning how to steward digital technology is one of society's greatest battles today. There are many studies and self-help guides that discuss the practicalities of that — how to limit screen time, etc. — but the first step is awareness. It is not that technology is an evil, greedy force ready to pounce on any vulnerable subject. It was created for the people, by the people. Rather, digital technology is a prescription, a prescription that has solved our problems of inefficiency, lack of safety, lack of productivity. But just as with any other medication, the “Warnings” label must be given adequate attention. When it is not, people suffer on a level deeper than what this medication is supposed to cure. If not taken in proper doses with the correct methods, technology can create unnecessary suffering for the uneducated user, and can actually become an epidemic to society.

According to the Chicago Tribune, a study performed by psychologist Larry Rosen tracked the time college students spent on their phones per day. In the third year of this study, students' average screen time was 277 minutes, or nearly five hours, with approximately 77 check-ins, or rather the number of times they picked up their phones. We could approach this strictly from an efficiency standpoint and analyze how these in essence “77 interruptions” affect the ability of individuals to work efficiently and effectively. However, the ways in which technology assists people, practically speaking, at the individual and corporate level seem to surpass the ways in which it hinders our productivity. The genuine concern that digital technology presents is not how it affects society's efficiency, but rather the well-being of the individuals it is comprised of. While our productivity and innovation may be thriving, people's personal fulfillment is lacking due to the absence of genuine rest.

With the constant stimulation of a phone vibrating and the fast-paced life technology has allowed, anxiety is a very prevalent concern. In fact, the ‘77 interruptions’ discussed earlier were

directly related to anxiety. Students consistently checked their phones due to a concept called nomophobia, or the fear of missing out, according to the Chicago Tribune. With a wide network to keep up with, events to check out, news to follow, products to buy, etc, our minds are constantly being stimulated. Yet oftentimes we are oblivious to it. Having the freedom digital technology gives is an incredible opportunity, but when we do not know how to correctly steward it, it can have a significant hold on our minds, hindering our ability to rest. Rest in its purest definition is “to cease work or movement in order to relax, refresh, or recover strength”. Yet, with the constant stimulation of a screen, or rather the information behind that screen, how is a true state of rest attainable? My mother was a devout believer in the saying “less is more”. The reversed phrasing of that statement is true to technology: more is less. The more digital technology available, the more stimulation, the more opportunity. And with that, the less personal fulfillment, the less experienced peace, the less ability to rest.

This concept is in reality derived from our increasing hunger for immediate gratification. Because everything is available at the end of our fingertips, we are used to having what we want when we want it. While this is not inherently bad, it has created a spirit of impatience and frustration. Waiting in line for food that has already been purchased, prepared and cooked takes too much time for many, as seen by the use of apps such as Grub Hub on the college campus. We look for any possible way to shave off time from one task to complete another. Yet oftentimes we feel dissatisfied due to our scattered days that seem less productive than hoped for. We deprive ourselves of deep focus and fulfillment from solely devoting ourselves to one or a few tasks. In an attempt to simplify our lives, we are in fact complicating them more. When one task is cut short, we fill that time with other, sometimes important and sometimes arbitrary tasks that give us the feeling of “accomplishment”. But by dividing our focus and energy between so many

engagements, we are accomplishing more less well. We cut corners and make sacrifices in order to feed our desire to stay busy and check a never-ending list of boxes on our to-do lists. Yet, we fail to enjoy the genuine sense of accomplishment and to truly rest due to our never-ending, self-imposed responsibilities.

With great freedom comes great responsibility. Digital technology provides freedom to a higher degree than ever before: freedom to learn, to experience, to plan, to organize, to communicate, etc. It expands our reach tremendously. However, it is imperative that we do not let digital technology have more control of our lives than it should. When we do not consider the warnings that come with the benefits of technology, it can easily become a detriment to the personal wellbeing of its consumers, creating a frustrated, impatient, and less fulfilled society. Let us steward this technology diligently so it does not hurt the people it was created to help.