

MILLENNIALS AND PLANNING

Young adults today, are not advocates of planning. I am a victim of this scenario, being a member of the preceding generation.

Speaking for Gen X, a good part of our life existed in the pre mobile phone era. Consequently, when one left the workplace/ house to meet up with others, there had to be an impeccable plan in place, down to the last detail. That little exercise was really good for our cognitive abilities. The sequencing, planning and organizing that went into planning a meeting, were all frontal lobe activities. The efficient frontal lobe in the brain, crisp, alert and sound, helped us lead our lives in as stress free a manner as possible.

Meeting up with a friend for a cup of coffee involved fixing the time and place, well before one was out of communication range. Going for a movie together was slightly more complex. The person who would reach first had to buy the tickets and then wait on the corner. There had to be a 15 minute buffer between arrival and show time as contingency for unforeseen happenings. One did not want to miss the beginning of a movie!

Going with a colleague from another branch for a meeting to a third place was even more complex. There were discussions of who would carry what material, strategizing on how the meeting was going to be addressed, who would say what...along with co ordination on time and whether to meet around the corner or below the building or in the client's office.

The most complex task belonged to the housewife (or 'homemaker' if you will)! She had to get up early enough to get breakfast ready, pack lunch boxes for everyone, get children ready for school, get ready herself, attend to the washing and cleaning, by the time all that was done, grocery shopping loomed large, then there was the preparation of dinner, getting ready to receive the children and then helping them with their homework...whew!

That was like a fascinating workout for our frontal lobes and it

contributed to our mental acuity. We did it so frequently and efficiently that we were unaware of this important skill that we had. It made living our lives so much easier. It freed up Thinking Time for other creative endeavours.

Lets take a look at the same situations today.

Meeting up for a cup of coffee would go something like this:

(On Whats App)

How bout cuppa coffee?

Wer?

Coffee Hse, down d street.

Wil kum

Wen?

Will msg wen I lv

K

Some time later...

We go to Chai Parlour instd?

Y?

M Hppning. Hv lft

K

Yet some time later..

Rchd. Wer u?

Shoe sale. Coming

K. M next door. Cards

I do not even dare to get into the possible conversations in the other scenarios.

Youngsters today do not need to plan. They are in constant communication with their friends, workmates and families. They take everything, a step at a time. The trouble is, without exercising the ability to plan, they have begun to lose the skill of pursuing something in its depth. Partly responsible for this, is the ubiquitous smart phone.

In the early 1980s, schools were very enthusiastic about using

computers over paper. They felt that there were many advantages of digital documents as compared to paper ones. That is quite true but as in all things new, there are advantages and disadvantages. The presence of hyperlinks on digital text, while freeing the student from the linearity of thought presented in a printed text, was quite a distraction for many students and led them down a path of enquiry which ended up quite different from what they started out with. With the advent of the smartphone, the computer screen just got smaller. One turned on the screen to get directions, saw a message, planned to answer it, saw another message that offered a 40% discount on a music app and in the end, the original task was forgotten.

Trying to evaluate links and navigate a path through all the information involves a mentally demanding exercise in problem solving. Also, responding to every ping on the smart phone has the same effect. Each time one breaks away from the task at hand to read a message and respond then and there, the frontal lobe gets involved and eventually the brain gets tired. When it then came to important decisions and planning, the individual would just be too tired to give it his/her best.

Today, one sees several children with Executive Function Disorder. I say this because in a career of over 25 years, one is able to compare then and now. I believe one of the reasons is the addiction and reliance on smart phones to do all the planning. What presents as EFD may not actually be EFD but a reluctance to get involved that then turns into a habit. It is somewhat similar to children exhibiting 'dyspraxia like' symptoms due to the fact that they don't go down to play anymore.

It is a concern that we, as educators, need to address.

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