

# The Daily Transcript

TUESDAY, JULY 11, 2006 • Business & Technology • THE DAILY TRANSCRIPT

## On Technology

# Are we prisoners of technology?

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While there are thousands of self-help books covering all sorts of addictions, Lisa Whaley's "Prisoners of Technology" (\$20 from Amazon) is one of the first that addresses the addiction of high technology.

This addiction is best characterized as being tied to your technology devices day and night, to the extent of curtailing other relationships and activities.

While perhaps not in the same league as alcohol or drug addictions, an obsession with technology is a real problem for some, and there's been little written about it, making the book very timely.

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Photo: David Karp/Bloomberg News

Technology has transformed the business world, but are you sacrificing too much to stay in touch?

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Whaley covers the symptoms and behaviors, her own experiences and those of others, and makes suggestions on how best to recover. Whaley knows what she writes about. As a former vice president of IBM, she experienced many of the problems she discusses, some of which affected her own family life.

She observes that the proliferation of devices such as BlackBerrys, cellular phones, notebooks, and wireless make it all the more difficult to escape from work. While Whaley treats this as a serious problem, she uses humor to effectively make her points.

### Are you addicted?

The first step to solving the addiction is acknowledging that there's a problem. So how do you know if you're addicted? Some examples she provides:

"If the last time you took a trip you needed an extra piece of luggage just to hold your electronic devices."

"If the only thing keeping you warm at night is the heat from your laptop....."

"If you respond to your emails via your BlackBerry while sitting in

church or synagogue."

"If your cell phone has fallen in the toilet and you've reached for it without hesitation."

"If you're driving to Miami but end up in Chicago because you're following the directions from MapQuest and can't possible fathom that they may be wrong."

Do some of these hit home to you as they do to me?

One of the more serious impacts of technology addiction is how it blurs the lines between work and life. The irony is that these same devices and technologies promised to give us more free time by increasing our productivity and letting us work from home. In fact they've done just the opposite; they've eliminated many of the boundaries between work and home and have intruded into our personal lives.

Part of the problem, Whaley explains, is the difference between theory and reality. While we're able to create a division between work and home if we want to, too many of us are fearful of retribution from our bosses and worried about keeping up with our co-workers by not being on-line and accessing email well beyond normal work hours. And being out of the office more often makes some want to stay connected even more.

What's the solution? Whaley recommends that we set expectations and establish ground rules with our managers and co-workers. While that's not easy to do, it's our responsibility to set our own boundaries, to turn off our devices and just unplug.

Besides encroaching on our private time, our technology obsession also impacts our privacy. Whaley discusses how our on-line activities are monitored and how much personal information we surrender as a result of being plugged in.

In one chapter Whaley described

an experiment she conducted in which she sees how much she can learn about others by just listening to those around her in restaurants, airports, and stores, as they shout into their cell phones. She learned about an adoption that didn't go through, the name of a person about to be fired, and heard a huge amount of profanity from those thinking their conversations were private.

In her conclusion, Whaley offers eight common-sense recommendations. They include setting boundaries, eliminating multitasking, making time for yourself, how to really be on vacation, practicing technology abstinence, and more, all with specific details.

I found the 130-page paperback easy read and full of good, practical advice. Most importantly it opened my eyes to my seemingly routine activities that could border on obsessions to others. Such as checking email many times a day, and (rudely) sending messages from my BlackBerry while in meetings with others or at dinner with my wife.

So the next time you're about to curl up in bed with your laptop, you might be better off curling up with this book and following its advice! Or better yet, curl up with your spouse!

(Disclosure: I made a small voluntary contribution to the book on the subject of personal privacy).

Baker has developed and marketed consumer and computer products for Polaroid, Apple, Seiko and others. He is the holder of 30 patents and was named San Diego's Ernst & Young Consumer Products Entrepreneur of the

Year in 2000. Send comments to phil.baker@sddt.com. Comments may be published as Letters to the Editor.

