

## Disconnect to Reconnect

The smartphone is by far the most important consumer invention of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

When I was in elementary school, I really wanted to have one. I would ask my parents to get me one every chance I got even though I knew that they would say “No!”. After several unsuccessful attempts, my parents eventually gave in. I was able to convince them by telling them that I really deserved one for doing very well at school and for having an irresistible baby face.

I remember it like it was yesterday. I felt like the luckiest boy in the world. My smartphone immediately became my most precious possession, my source of joy, and my non-human best friend.

Thanks to the smartphone, it's very peaceful and quiet in our home! We don't speak much. On average, we speak to each other for a total of merely 5 hours a week. No, that isn't much but we are not alone. In fact, according to a study, 60% of Japanese elementary and junior high school students said their family members use their phones even when they are spending time together.

Truth be told, those statistics didn't make me feel worried at all. On the contrary, I thought it was expected because young people like me want their space. Yes, we hardly ever talked but at least we stayed out of each other's way. We seemed to be okay being alone together.

However, one thing happened that changed my way of thinking about this issue. My mother told me some bad news that shook my world. Her friend suddenly died and left her husband and a very young child. I know that it's normal for people to die, but it must be painful for the poor family and loved ones. The thought of losing my mother or any member of my family flashed forward to me. I realized that if one of them died, I would no longer be able to see them or talk to them like we used to before I got my smartphone. I felt sad and scared. Life is too short to waste. It occurred to me that if nothing were done, human relationships would keep deteriorating while technologies would keep improving.

In this speech, I'm not trying to malign the smartphone or campaign against it. No! There's nothing wrong with using the technology available to us. But when our smartphone usage interferes with our relationships with others, that's when it becomes a problem.

What does Japan have to do now? Does a new law need to be passed? What is our role individually?

Here are my thoughts:

1. Children should disconnect from their smartphones when their family and friends are around and allow themselves to reconnect with them.
2. Local governments should at least remind their citizens of the importance of having quality offline moments with their families.
3. Companies should not require their employees' 24/7 online availability.
4. Parents should assess how much or how little they communicate with their children and create and implement a plan that will increase both the quantity and quality of family talk time.

Ladies and gentlemen, and my fellow youth, please hear me out, there's a time and place to use devices and, more importantly, times to put them away. Let's not forget that technologies like smartphones are supposed to bring people closer together and not to break us apart. Let's communicate with our family “raw”, face-to-face and heart-to-heart. Let's disconnect to reconnect.

I appreciate your time and attention.