

Reflections from
Habits of the High-Tech Heart

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The book Habits of the High-Tech Heart by Quentin J. Schultze sits on a special shelf in my personal library along with other books that have greatly inspired me. In this work the writer takes the reader in many directions as he examines the instances where the human heart meets the harsh surface of technology. For me one of the most introspective areas of this book was found in Chapter five where Schultze examined "Being Authentic in Webs of Spin."

The author begins this chapter by providing two examples of people who misrepresent themselves online. When I read quotes such as "He discovers online the kind of social support he finds more difficult to receive from the offline world" (Schultze, 118) and "Some people journey into cyberspace, therefore, not just for information but to be acknowledged as living persons and thereby to gain a personal identity" (Schultze, 118). I found myself deeply contemplating the negative examples this author had provided and wondering if he would provide any positive examples of personal growth through the remaining pages of this chapter.

As a Pastor to singles the issues of providing social support and recognizing the personal identity of those that many in our society overlook are key themes for ministry life that I reflect on each day. Schultze's examination of these issues as they relate to technology provoked much interest and encouraged much reflection on this topic.

Schultze examined six differing ways that the internet can be utilized as a 'web of spin.' First he discussed how the artistic mind takes liberties in his/her use of the internet (120), then he examined how individuals in what I would call their search for significance seek to utilize the web as a tool for personal enhancement (120). The next area this author recognized was how technology in and of itself can be lifted up at times and touted as a cultural enhancement in and of itself (126). Examples of how technology can be used to enhance the image of a public figure (127), and also how technology can be utilized to enhance the persona of an organization to the

public (128) were then added to this discussion. Finally examples of how technology can be used to improve a company's image were provided (129).

For this reader it was an intriguing examination of the lengths people will go to 'cover their sin,' much like Adam and Eve hid in the garden after eating the forbidden fruit; it seems it is still a human characteristic to hide ourselves so that our shortcomings cannot be seen. To this end I believe that Schultze is right to observe that we often "make [the] sale first and worry about product later" (130). Not only in the terms of business, but also in online dating, chatting with friends and even church shopping.

As I read the many examples of artistic hype I considered our church and our church website. There are questions that must be asked regarding our web presence that lay beyond the technical merits of the website's production. Questions such as, Does this website really portray us as we are? Does the visitor to our website really see what is important to us? Or has our web presence become co-opted by what appears as the "Soul of the New Economy [which] is hip hype (130).

Schultze points out three ways we can become more authentic in our web endeavors. As I reflected on these seemingly simple guidelines it became apparent the level of impact they have on the work that is done and how it is done would be enormous. First he points out we must "Be truthful" (131). The ramifications here would be to watch for any of the six types of spin that he examined earlier and to also be focused on portraying people, the organization and the business all 'as they really are' on the web.

As a former college webmaster I reflected here on the pressure I felt even at a Christian college to create a web presence that placed only the finest examples of people online followed by the most well kempt policy guidelines and promotional materials for the world to see. Any

organizational policies that were in question were kept offline as well as photos that might display construction on campus or a building in disrepair. I remember when our campus public safety department was mandated by law to have our campus crime statistics placed online; our college president pulled me aside and asked me in non-technical terms to ‘bury this link.’ As I considered the impact that ‘being truthful’ would have on the construction of all websites, it would be startling how advertising would change in our world if the pursuit of truth invaded the hearts of people.

The next way this author encourages authenticity is through having empathy (133). This term for me seems to balance what could be the unfeeling use of truth. As some may say “the truth hurts,” but when seasoned with empathy truth is not used for the purpose to correct, but rather to care for. An example of this would be as a college webmaster if I had used a photo of a building on campus that needed to be painted specifically to force someone to paint that building. Rather empathy adds to the element of truth the desire to care for the needs of both those using the web and those visiting the website. When an artist both thinks and feels he/she only then can create something that is honest and true.

Integrity is truthfulness plus empathy for this writer and I fully agree with his assessment. Psalms 78:72 says, “David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.” That small phrase ‘integrity of heart’ means for me that David understood both truth and empathy as a leader. When David cried out to God and mourned his own shortcomings, he asked God for forgiveness and then was still able to lead despite the truth of his faults because of his heart for God and God’s people.

Schultze encourages us as he says “Don't be blinded by technology to our own in-authenticity” (136) and “Don't replace virtuous living with technological savvy” (137) which I

believe we can easily do as we rush to hide our faults from one another and attempt to only show the picture of us as we desire to be and not who we truly are. To this end this writer offers three practical examples of ways we can ‘stop the spin’ (134).

First we should sequester any email that needs time and prayer. I would expand this thought for webmasters to reflecting on web requests as well. Next consider the impact of taking the time to consider just a few news stories each week. This thought could be expanded to encourage the webmaster that he/she is a part of a larger world and that to be clear in our thinking and feeling we need to take the time to consider the world around us. Finally, we need to listen to the whispers of pain, doubt and fear in the email messages of those around us. For myself personally I reflected on how each of these was present as I worked as a webmaster for several years. At the time I did not notice them as I do today. When it comes to the display of an organization and its people on the web, everyone has their idea of how and what should be shown and many are afraid of being seen in the wrong light.

I agree with this author, but would very much like to have read of some positive examples of how the internet has been utilized in ‘good’ ways. Perhaps he intends for the reader to find his/her own ways to utilize the tools that he is providing. Perhaps it is enough for this author to encourage us to consider that "It is absolutely unethical when one is so busy communicating that he forgets to be what he teaches" (135) and that integrity is not old fashioned, it is not constrictive, but rather freeing for the pastor and real truth seeker who must take time to process information (135). Dr. Larry Crabb in his book The Safest Place on Earth discusses the difference between managers and mystics (Crabb, 145) and as I read this chapter of Schultze I found myself desiring again to seek the life of the ‘mystic.’