

## Talk More, Tech Less

<https://mindmatters.ai/podcast/ep234>

Robert J. Marks:

Greetings. Welcome to Mind Matters News. I'm your digitally recovering host, Robert J. Marks. You know, digital media surrounds us. Communication theorist, Marshall McLuhan famously said, "The medium is the message." It means that media embeds itself in the message creating a symbiotic relationship with us. And McLuhan wrote this in 1964 when the only media was billboards, television, radio, magazines and newspapers. We didn't have digital media per se back then. Escaping commercial media was no problem then. Just turn off your TV, spend some time with your family. Go outside or read a good book. It's a lot worse today.

Heck, when filling up my car at my local gas station, I am subjected to stupid ads on a screen embedded in the gas pump of all places. It used to be that I could hit a button on the gas pump, turn off the audio, and pump my gas in peace. No more. That feature of stopping the audio has been removed, at least at the gas station I go to. So I have now switched gas stations where the gas pumps are not trying to sell me a bag of Fritos or some sort of cold, refreshing beverage as they call it.

McLuhan said we become symbiotic with the media. I think this is a really interesting word, symbiotic. Famously, remora fish attached themselves to sharks, eating parasites on the shark's skin and mouth. If imagine you or the shark, digital media is the remora fish attached to your spirit. For those addicted, the media distracts us from what eats at our spirit. Now, ironically, what eats at our spirit has also been caused by digital media. So the relationship is developed into something which is addictive. We become addicted to digital media, and not in a healthy way. Not like I'm addicted to coffee. I always say that my addiction to coffee is healthy. That's okay.

There are other addictions, serious addictions. There are severe alcoholics for example. There are also functioning alcoholics. I would sadly confess myself as being a functioning digital media addict. And I tell you, I'd like to recover. So that's what we're going to talk today about. There is good news. Today we get an exciting perspective on digital wellness from Dawn Wible, who is the founder of Talk More Tech Less. The website for our organization is [talkmoretechless.com](http://talkmoretechless.com). Politicians say you should repeat a website three times. So let me do it again. [talkmoretechless.com](http://talkmoretechless.com). Dawn is a certified digital wellness educator and is an alumna of the Digital Wellness Institute. She works with the Screen Time Action Network to combat online harm to children. Dawn trained school districts and communities in healthy and safe screen use. And if you contacted Dawn, I bet you she could help you out. Welcome, Dawn.

Dawn Wible:

Well, thank you so much for having me. I'm glad to be here.

Robert J. Marks:

Oh yeah, it's a delight to have you. We've talked a little bit before the podcast and kind of have gotten to know each other. But nevertheless, I don't think the listeners have know very much about what's happening. So tell me more about, Talk More Tech Less, what you do. And maybe just start with the backstory. What's the backstory of Talk More Tech Less?

Dawn Wible:

Yeah. So this really organically started out of hanging out with teenagers. My husband and I have worked with youth age teenagers for 20 plus years. I'm a former educator as well. We really saw about 15 years ago the shift from when our handheld devices became such a part of our lives and really when handheld started. So when kids started getting smartphones, my husband runs an outdoor mentorship group for junior high and high school boys getting them outdoors, hunting, fishing, hiking, taking them to Colorado, and they hike up in the mountains and fly fish up in the lakes there. It's just a really great avenue for connection with young men and mentoring them.

Robert J. Marks:

And I bet you, Dawn, that up in the lakes and in the rivers, there's probably no cell phone service.

Dawn Wible:

No cell phone.

Robert J. Marks:

So it's a great place to go away and get away from the media, right?

Dawn Wible:

That's exactly right. We have a T-shirt now that says No Signal Needed. We've got a couple of those guys taking pictures up there in the mountains because they don't have a signal up there. So yeah, that's really where it got started. He runs a summer camp in the summers. Years ago it was really easy for the guys to turn in their... At the beginning of the camp, we asked them, "Turn in your pocket knives, your medication, your cell phones, and put them in a baggie for the week. And when you needed something, you could go get it." But it got harder and harder for them to turn over those cell phones as the years went on and we started to realize they were giving friends their Snapchat passwords so that they could keep up their streaks while they were at camp. And just all of the things that we realized, "Oh, we're getting more dependent on these devices and so are the kids."

Robert J. Marks:

Boy, you talk about addiction I mean, these kids were... It was like it was a job and they were going away from their job and they had to have somebody cover for their work.

Dawn Wible:

Exactly right.

Robert J. Marks:

Wow.

Dawn Wible:

It's very meaningful for them to stay connected that way. And so taking a week off to unplug, which is a term we use to get away from all of that is very healthy for us, but it got very hard. And now it's hard to imagine being away from our phone for one full week. I mean, that would be quite the sacrifice. So back then it wasn't as much. But now it really is. I mean, we like to say Talk More Tech Less started with kids, but the reality is we weren't seeing this shift just happen with the teenage boys. We were seeing it happen in our own marriage, with parenting our own kids. It wasn't just happening in our community, it

was happening globally. Our work, our school, everything became a part of our lives as this all turned into our computers became our smartphones.

Robert J. Marks:

Wow. So tell me a little bit about Talk More Tech Lesson and what you currently do. When you go out and you talk to organizations, what sort of thing do you tell them? Are you primarily aiming at teenage, the teenage audience and their parents?

Dawn Wible:

That's actually where it got started, but no. It's been really pretty expansive since we started. So after we realized that was happening at the camp, like I said at the camp when the guys handed over their phones, we started to notice real clear signs of withdrawal, which were the early signs of looking at this addiction like we talk about. At first we said dependency, but now we're really adamantly saying this is an addiction.

Robert J. Marks:

So if I can make a parallel, that's kind of like going to a detox center, isn't it?

Dawn Wible:

Exactly.

Robert J. Marks:

And getting dried out. If you're an alcoholic, you have to get dried out mentally from your cell phones.

Dawn Wible:

So exactly,

Robert J. Marks:

Those retreats are detox.

Dawn Wible:

Exactly. Day one or day two they would be reaching for their phones when their phones weren't there. We started to see a decrease in eye contact, conversation skills. Conversations were really easy back 10 years ago and they started to get harder and harder. The guys would come into the kitchen and cook with us and we'd have easy conversations with them, but that was just getting more distant. And so we started to really look and see that this was way before the current research that is out, which is wonderful research that's coming out about this.

But back in 2011, 2012, there wasn't as much research on this. But what there was, we did start to latch onto and say, "Okay, there's something we can do here." So I formed Talk More Tech Less. Because I was an educator, that's really where I got started, was going into schools, talking to students about this, universities, talking to college students about it. And now I'm down to pre-K age because three and four year olds actually have access to technology and use it. We can even teach them how to be safe and healthy when they're engaging with their technology. But I also do retreats, digital wellness retreats for adults and training in companies and organizations as well because it really affects our productivity at work as well.

Robert J. Marks:

When you said that you were actually talking about three and four year olds having availability to technology, I got a little chill and then I realized probably in most cases, these are not three and four year olds that are given cell phones, but it might be something like putting them before the TV and let them watch Netflix, cartoons for children or something like that.

Dawn Wible:

Well, you may be surprised some of the younger kids even do have cell phones because games are-

Robert J. Marks:

Oh my gosh.

Dawn Wible:

... so easily accessible on phones. When parents are out with strollers, they're babies, our babies can actually swipe. Young toddlers know how to swipe on phones and play early games. They create games for that age. So yes, American Academy of Pediatrics suggest to wait at least 24 months, two years before you give any kid a screen. But you'd be surprised to that, is it's really almost accepted that younger and younger have access to it, which you're right, is a little bit chilling.

Robert J. Marks:

Wow. So they're treating digital media almost like a pacifier or a binky I think is what some parents call them.

Dawn Wible:

Exactly right.

Robert J. Marks:

You put it in there and it distracts them. I'm wondering on these phones, are they safe in the sense that if they swipe something, they could come up with something inappropriate?

Dawn Wible:

They're not safe. Now, I mean there are ways to make our phones safer, but as of right now, they're not safe. We actually are working on legislation right now to help have better safeguards for phones not just for kids, but for toddlers and very young age to be able to have some kind of something set up so that it is by default a safer device than what it is right now.

Robert J. Marks:

Well, one of the things that I think is that parents can go overboard and banning their kids from use of cell phones for example. Because if you ban a cell phone, for example, and all your friends have it, you're going to want that so bad. When you turn 18 and the parents are no longer in control, you're going to jump there. I tell people about when I was a little kid my mom wouldn't let me watch the television program The Untouchables. She said, "Bob, it's just too violent." But even to this day, I see The Untouchables and I want to watch it because mom banned me from it. So what's the solution to that?

Dawn Wible:

That's exactly right. I have families that say, "My kid will never get a cell phone in my home." And I always say that that's a missed opportunity to be able to walk with them through these issues while they're in your home. But I do encourage delaying, especially social media, but even cell phones for the earlier ages, delaying that. Probably the biggest question that I get from adults is, "How old should my kid be when they get a cell phone?" Every family is different. I have a friend who just walked through a recent divorce and her ex-husband and her have different ideas about the phones, but she needs to be able to get ahold of her kids. And so we talk about ways to still delay the phone for later, but ways to set it up to where you make your smartphone a dumb phone. You're blocking lots of things like access to the internet and other things like that to dumb down your smartphone so that it's a lot safer, but you can still have access and get in touch with your kid.

But really it depends on the family when you do get a phone, but I do encourage slow introduction and a lot of being involved in what your kids are involved with online. Especially social media, I would delay that till high school if possible.

Robert J. Marks:

One of the things I think that is important, I'll see if you agree, is the parents talk to their kids and limit the apps and the things that their children have access over the phone. I have a son who's great at doing this. He talks with his two boys and says, "Look, I'm doing this because of this reason and this reason and this reason." They sit down and they talk it out. So his kids really understand the limitations and why dad has their best interest at heart. It's that sort of thing that you can take into your 18th birthday and not run out and get a cell phone and just have a big dump of everything.

Dawn Wible:

Exactly right. I mean, the name of our organization is Talk More for a reason, Talk More Tech Less, because we really do encourage talking about all of these issues with your kids. An organization that I love and promote and follow and have for a long time is Protect Young Eyes. One of the things that they say is to have 10 talks about porn before the age of 10 with your kids. Because the early average exposure right now is 11 years old, and some studies are saying eight years old.

And so by the time your kid is 10, you can have had all of these talks. And you don't have to use the term pornography. You can say if you have a five-year-old for example, "If you see anything on anyone's phone..." Because it's not always your own kids' phone. They may not even have a phone, but their friends may or their classmates may. "But if you see a picture or an image of somebody that isn't wearing any clothes, you can tell Mommy. You won't be in trouble for that. You can come tell mom or dad and we want to help keep you safe."

That way you're taking the shame aspect away, but you're opening the door and you're opening the conversation for them to feel like they can come to you, like you are a safe place. Otherwise, if it's shut down, if it's blocked, if it's this fear-based mentality, it's going to be really hard for you to be a safe and open, secure place for your family, for your kids to come to when they are encountering this kind of stuff.

Robert J. Marks:

I talked to Jay Richards at the Heritage Foundation who has done research in this. He says one of the reasons for the increase of dysphoria is the availability of pornography to young people. That a young girl who's going through adolescence might view pornography and go, "Man, that's what a woman is supposed to do. I don't feel like I should do that. I must not be a woman." And so it gives her pause in

her identity, especially going through the transition to adolescence. So anyway, he blames a lot of the dysphoria on pornography.

Dawn Wible:

Yeah, that's interesting.

Robert J. Marks:

11 years old. I mean, that's chilling. That's terrible. Yeah, there is such thing as a free speech, but I don't know, where do you draw the line? I'm kind of a libertarian, but I would like to see some of that stuff outlawed or limited or something.

Dawn Wible:

Yeah, similar. I mean that is part of the work that I've been doing with... You mentioned that I was a part of the volunteer with the Screen Time Action Network.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah, what is that?

Dawn Wible:

So it's a group of parents and advocates and organizations that are working towards safer screens for kids and just awareness around the issue of screen addiction, online harms. My specific work is online harms prevention work group. There are parent survivors in that group who have lost their kids to cyber bullying or online challenges, some dangerous online challenges, different things like that have impacted kids and they are working on legislation to do something about it. Because like we said, regulating the internet is a really hard issue to get into when you're talking about freedom of speech and politics. But there are definitely some safeguards that we can and should be responsible to put on these devices because they are so accessible to young children and to our youth and it's negatively impacting them.

Robert J. Marks:

The Copyright Acts and the Free Speech Acts are really what allows this stuff to propagate. You're probably familiar, maybe not, with Angel Studios. They're the ones that present the work The Chosen which is a popular dramatization of the life of Christ. Really well acted. My opinion is that most biblical sort of films are kind of cheesy. They're poorly written, they preach at you, they have poor acting, they have poor writing, they have poor cinematography. That's not the case with Chosen. It's class from A to Z, or Alpha to Omega I probably should say. It's really cool.

Well, one of the things that Angel Studios did before the chosen is that they made software to remove bad parts of movies. You could go in and you could apply their software to remove bad parts of movies so that your kids could watch them. Well, the people that were making the movies didn't like that, including Disney. Disney sued Angel Studios for violation of copyright that were missing with their intellectual property. Disney and some of these other companies, they won the suit and it just about bankrupted Angel Studios. So there is this powerful presence of, let me just say filth if you will, filth and inappropriate content that you can't edit, so you really have to censor it and explain to your kids why the heck you're doing it. When I found that out, that was really chilling, that Angel Studios was sued by Disney. Wow.

Dawn Wible:

Yeah, that's really interesting. When you're talking about legislation, backing with the research has been so helpful because that really shows how this is impacting our youth and the law is there to protect society. And so we are able to use that in some of this legislation. You mentioned libertarian. A lot of this stuff is bipartisan. I mean, it's parents, grandparents wanting to say, "Hey, big tech, you have a lot of power here, but in this specific area, we need some help in protecting our kids." And so it's been very bipartisan, left, right, religious, non-religious groups backing some of this.

Robert J. Marks:

Wow. Cell phones are ubiquitous. Even in Haiti. I have a friend, a colleague here at Baylor University that spends time in Haiti every year. Most of the Haitians, even though they only make on the average of a dollar a day, have cell phones. It's hard to believe. One of the statistics from your website is that 96% of Americans own a cell phone and most users check their phones 63 times a day. I'm going to have to put a little clicker on my cell phone. I don't know how many times I click it, but I don't know if it's up to 63. I hope not.

Dawn Wible:

Well, you may be able to check that in your screen time settings.

Robert J. Marks:

Oh, is that right?

Dawn Wible:

Sometimes it shows how many times. Yes, how many times. Depending on your software, depending on if you have an iPhone or what. But it will show how many times you've picked up your phone that day.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah. Another statistic is 60% of the global population uses social media. 60% of the global population uses social media. And social media, here's my synopsis of it. It makes you feel like the whole world is having a good time except for you because you know specifically what you're going through. But everybody presents themselves in the most positive light. So the presentation is that everybody in the world is having a good time except for you, and therefore you must be a loser. This is a reason for some of these terrible statistics that come out about people that are exposed to social media a lot.

Dawn Wible:

Yes, that's very true. There's a lot of FOMO, fear of missing out when you get involved in social media. And it's been interesting, the relationship research that comes out from being online and connecting online and what connections are actually increasing our wellbeing and what connections are lowering our wellbeing. Some of that really looks at who you're following, what accounts you're following.

So we talked to not just students, but even for myself, it took me a while to get my social media to a place where I actually feel better when I'm coming out of it. I go into it feeling good and I come out of it feeling good, and that's a hard thing to do, but it really has to do with what accounts I'm following. Am I following accounts that are uplifting, that are inspiring me? If students set up their first social media account and they start following a bunch of people that have a lot of subscribers or influencers or celebrities, it shows that their wellbeing is lower because they see these people with perfect bodies that

actually aren't even realistic with all of these filters. And they see these people with seven Lamborghinis and two mansions, and they feel like their life is terrible. And so their wellbeing is lower. Really, it's really interesting what comparison is doing to us.

Robert J. Marks:

It is. It's chilling. Here's one I identify with. Again, I'm going to do a confession here. 90% of 18 to 29 year olds sleep with their smartphones close by. I do, but I have a reason. I have a reason, Dawn. And that sometimes when I go to bed I can't sleep and I can't sleep because my mind is racing. It's going around and thinking of this and thinking of that. I think a lot of people get their mind racing so I put on a boring podcast and I use earbuds and I turn the volume way down low so that I have to think to listen to it. And I began to listen to it, and man, I began to fall asleep.

And you know my secret podcast? I almost don't want to confess it, but the one that puts me to sleep the quickest is Thru the Bible by J. Vernon McGee. I don't know if you've ever listened to J. Vernon McGee. He has a wonderful, wonderful series of sermons. But if you turn it down really, really quiet, man, he's good for your sleep. So I'm one of these. But 90% of 18 to 29 year olds sleep with their smartphones close by. This is a statistic from your website. This is chilling.

Dawn Wible:

Yeah, well it's kind of like you were getting some bedtime stories read to you to help you fall asleep. That's nice.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah, I guess so. Okay.

Dawn Wible:

I understand. Well we-

Robert J. Marks:

That's a nice way to put it. Thank you.

Dawn Wible:

Making you feel better. Yes, this is definitely what we're seeing, especially when we talk to teachers and seeing students falling asleep in class. Phones are keeping students up, keeping adults up. Melatonin sales have gone up 500% since smartphones came on the scene. So that just tells you-

Robert J. Marks:

Wow.

Dawn Wible:

That just tells you how much the blue light emission impacts our natural melatonin levels. And so really having that phone set aside, at least where you're not on the screen, not staring at the screen, 30 minutes to an hour before bed helps your natural melatonin levels rise and it helps you fall asleep and stay asleep longer. So that's one of the techniques that we give. As I'm doing our trainings to the students, usually when I present a problem, I like to present just a small step, a small solution to help.



And that's one of them. If you can't have the cell phone out of the room, the next best option is to have it at least put away 30 minutes before you're trying to fall asleep.

Robert J. Marks:

I think this is part of your rehab effort. Now, I think you mentioned this with your husband's thing where they put all their cell phones and stuff in a bag and it's called a detox box. What's a detox box?

Dawn Wible:

Yes, we created a detox box. That's right. That's what we have on our website. We created a detox box at the very beginning because this was one of the issues that the boys were dealing with. They were saying... Back then it was Twitter. Now it's Snapchat that they're on. But the teenagers were on social media in the middle of the night. They were getting into websites they wish they weren't on in the middle of the night and they were just not getting good sleep. We had this extra wood leftover from one of the work projects we were doing at camp and we said, "You know what? Let's build these boxes and let's just put our phones in them for bedtime. You plug your phone in, put it in the box and you recharge your phone and you recharge your body while your phone's recharging and you get some good sleep."

And then we also talked about mealtimes, having that box for mealtimes because a lot of them were saying, "We're sitting around the table with our family and we're not really talking and connecting over meals anymore." So we say, "We'll use the detox box for that. Stick your phones in the box and go to a restaurant. Or stick your phones in the box and sit around your dinner table or breakfast table and have those conversations."

So that's really where the box came into effect. We definitely use it in our home. I love it. This was way before we knew the science of having a home for your phone. That's what I call it. Because when our phones are on us, our minds are attached to whatever is on the other end of that. So some of the newest statistics coming out are saying 22 hours a day is how often our phones are with us. I mean, they're pretty much an extension of our body. So if we can set them aside and walk away from them, we're actually freeing our mind and giving our mind space to do what it needs to do, whether that's connecting with someone or it's getting good sleep.

Robert J. Marks:

Dawn, my family owns a little cabin in West Virginia. It used to be that there was no internet there, no cell phone service. We went there. And because of the lack of all of this, it totally forced us to interact and it was great. You got to know your family and be able to talk to them. But thanks to Elon Musk and his satellites, we now have internet there and we have phones there back in this backwoods cabin way back in the hills in West Virginia down a long holler. They call them hollers in West Virginia. So we've decided, like you said, to have a little box that when we go in there, we put all of our cell phones in the box. That forces us to interact. We're not allowed to go get it.

The funny thing is this anxiety that you talk about being separated from your cell phones... You got a good name for it by the way, NOMOPHOBIA, no mobile phone phobia. That's called NOMOPHOBIA, N-O-M-O phobia. It says that 66% of the world's population shows signs of NOMOPHOBIA. Seven out of 10 people report some level of anxiety when disconnected from their phone. In my work, I have to have my phone with me during work time because, well, not only calls, but the idea that a lot of the websites that I check on double check with me over my cell phone to see whether the connection is safe. And I must admit that I suffer from NOMOPHOBIA. You also say it's called PSA, phone separation anxiety?

Dawn Wible:

Mm-hmm.

Robert J. Marks:

And so this is a very interesting malady that we have.

Dawn Wible:

It's so true. We have a couple locations that we used to go to that had no cell service, and now they do. I think about that old Verizon commercial. "Can you hear me now? Can you hear me now?" And the guy is up in the mountains and they're trying to get cell service everywhere. But it's so true. So it's just such a part of our lives. It's integrated into our lives. One of the phrases I actually start out with our training, Gretchen Rubin coined this phrase, she runs The Happiness campaign and does a lot of research on loneliness and happiness, and she said, "Technology is a great servant, but a bad master."

Robert J. Marks:

Wow.

Dawn Wible:

That is really so true. If we can keep our phones where they are serving us, then it's in the proper place. We need it for work. We need it during COVID. My goodness. We needed it to keep our companies open, to keep our kids educated, to keep us connected. We had Thanksgiving dinners over phones. And so Talk More Tech Less is not an anti-technology at in any way. We definitely use our technology, but we put it in its proper place. We make sure that it's serving us and not mastering us.

When I'm scrolling on social media and I haven't done any laundry and my kids don't have pants for the next day of school, then I realize most my technology's mastering me. So if I can put it in its proper place and use it as a tool, use it in a way that it's supposed to be making me more productive, making me more connected, that's the purpose of technology. But what we're seeing is that it's becoming this piece of entertainment versus productivity and connection. It's really entertaining us and distracting us a lot of times.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah, it seems that social media in general, it's hard to say general things about social media, but in general, I think social media is bad. I don't see positive things about it. It allows you at Facebook initially to keep up with some people that you haven't seen for a long time. That's kind of helpful. But eventually it comes back and bites you.

One of the other statistics that you have on your web is teens who spend five or more hours a day on electronic devices are 71% more likely to exhibit suicide risk factors compared to teens who only spend an hour on electronic devices daily. The number of teen suicides has skyrocketed in the last decade, which is just incredibly-

Dawn Wible:

It really has.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah. Apparently, this is social media. I guess we get back to the idea that it makes you think the whole world is having a good time except for you.

Dawn Wible:

We talk about keeping social media social. I think the danger comes in when we isolate with our social media, when we're by ourselves, when we're spending all of our time on it. We are deceived into thinking we're connecting, but we're really not. We're actually voyeuristically watching other people's lives. And we may be commenting or trying to really be connected on there, but if we are having the balance of that in our lives and we're keeping social media social. So I say, the way to do that in your home is you're on the same platforms as your kids are. When they set up a social media, you set it up. You're posting pictures of their games. Grandparents are getting to see that they have a game this night and their team won.

Different things like that is a positive way to keep social media connected. But if we are spending a ton of time and we're isolating on it, then not only is our wellbeing going down, which can lead to these loneliness, anxiety, depression, even to the point of suicide, all of that is impacting us as we're separating out from real life, from the real world that we're trying to stay connected to and just connecting completely on a screen.

Robert J. Marks:

Dawn, good final words. Thank you. We've been talking to Dawn Wible, who is the founder of Talk More Tech Less, and the website for organization is [talkmoretechless.com](http://talkmoretechless.com). We're going to have Dawn back to talk about other aspects of digital wellness. Thanks for listening. So until next time, be of good cheer.

Announcer:

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