

Working Towards Digital Flourishing

<https://mindmatters.ai/podcast/ep235>

Robert J Marks:

Greetings. Welcome to Mind Matters News. I'm your non-digital host, Robert J. Marks. We're talking to Dawn Wible, who is the founder of Talk More. Tech Less. The website for her organization is talkmoretechless.com. Dawn, welcome back.

Dawn Wible:

Well, thanks. Thanks for having me. Glad to be here again.

Robert J Marks:

As you mentioned, not all digital media is bad. Some is pretty wonderful. But we want to move forwards to digital flourishing, and away from digital addiction. Those are words that you use on your website. I like this. Digital flourishing is what we want to achieve and we want to go away from digital addiction. Doing that will make us digitally well, so we talk about the idea of digital wellness. What is digital wellness? You outline five areas in our lives that are deeply affected by our screens. And what we can do to move towards healthy habits.

Dawn Wible:

Yeah, the simple definition of digital wellness is, it's learning to be healthy with our technology use. In the last episode, I talked about how we have our phones with us 22 hours a day. So that's essentially pretty much all day. I mean, besides those two hours, I don't know where it is the other two hours. But it's near us 22 hours a day. So don't you think that we should look at being healthy and the issue of health around that number?

Robert J Marks:

Oh, I know where your phone is the other two hours a day.

Dawn Wible:

Oh, where?

Robert J Marks:

It's recharging.

Dawn Wible:

Right.

Robert J Marks:

It's recharging.

Dawn Wible:

That's right.

Robert J Marks:

Okay.

Dawn Wible:

Even when it's recharging, sometimes we have our chargers right by our bed or right by... No, that's right. I said maybe in the bathroom. But then there's just a lot of statistics about phones in the bathroom, so I don't think that's the other two hours.

Robert J Marks:

Oh, I tell you something, Dawn. I used to have these books called Uncle John's Bathroom Readers. I don't know if you're familiar with them. They are great books that have a thousand articles about just trivia. They're great to do in the bathroom. And you don't need those anymore. You just...

Dawn Wible:

That's exactly right.

Robert J Marks:

Take your cell phone and you could check on Wikipedia. So you can use your cell phones there.

Dawn Wible:

That's right. Yeah. So maybe that's not the two hours. I don't know. We'll figure it out where that two hours falls. But yeah, so we really look at the five areas of our lives that are deeply affected by our screens in our training on digital wellness. And the idea of digital flourishing is going into your phone feeling good and coming out of your phone feeling good. Because a lot of times that's not happening. We're going into our phone because we want to numb out or because we're bored. Or because our brain is just telling us, "Hey, grab that." Because we are very dependent on it. And then we're coming out of it not feeling as good. Maybe it's because we're following accounts that make us feel lower. Maybe it's because we're comparing ourselves to others. Or maybe it's because we're opening a bunch of emails that are overwhelming us. But studies are showing we are negatively affected a lot of times when we're coming out of our phones.

Robert J Marks:

Oh, I got to tell you, every time I go to my Bank of America account, I come out feeling worse. So, there's some that are unavoidable, I suppose.

Dawn Wible:

Yeah, I think we all can pick the app that would make us feel bad once we come out of it. So really, when you're looking at these five areas, you're saying, "These five areas have been the most affected in our lives from our phones." The first one is our physical health, and that's our bodies. The second area is our mental health, and that's our minds. And really those two areas overlap a lot. Because when we start to look at those, what is impacting our bodies? What is impacting our minds? They're very closely related because we are humans. And our minds and bodies are connected. And then the third area is our time. Before cell phones, and we know this as we're considered digital immigrants. Because we knew the

world before the internet. But our kids are digital natives, so they didn't know the world before the internet.

Robert J Marks:

I like that. Digital natives. They don't know a world without digital media. And we are old enough to remember a world that it wasn't here.

Dawn Wible:

That's right.

Robert J Marks:

What a great concept. Immigrants and natives.

Dawn Wible:

Immigrants and natives. And before smartphones, before we call them handhelds. Our computer, our work, our school, everything was in our hand. Our communication. We had to go to the phone when it rang. We had to go to the computer to check our email. And now it's on us. It's on our body. And so our time is not our own anymore. And a lot of our time is impacted by our distractions or notifications. And so we really dive into what it looks like to get your time back and to outline your life. And be intentional. Take intentional steps to get your life back and your time back. And that's the third area. And then the fourth area is...

Robert J Marks:

Okay, let's review them again. Bullet number one is what?

Dawn Wible:

Number one is your body. So that's our physical health.

Robert J Marks:

Okay. Number two is?

Dawn Wible:

Number two is our mind, our mental health.

Robert J Marks:

Mental. Okay, number three that you just went over was?

Dawn Wible:

Time, our time.

Robert J Marks:

Time. Okay. Okay, great. Okay. Continue with four and five.

Dawn Wible:

Yeah. And four is really where we got started. Talk more. Tech less. Four is about relationships. So it's our connections, whether that's in real life connections, IRL. Or if it's our on our screen connections. Because we do have a lot of online connections. And that's an important thing to look at. How to have healthier online connections and safer ones for kids specifically. And then how to have offline connections and connect with the people in our lives. So that's the fourth area. And we really dive into what helps us to feel healthier and be healthier in our relationships. And then the last area, and this is where I spend a lot of time on the school trainings. The last area is ethics. It's our values. And we talk about two areas of ethics. How our phones are either ethically or unethically designed for us. And how we use our phones ethically or unethically.

Robert J Marks:

Now this is interesting, you meant how our phones are designed unethically. Do you believe that there's people that design phones, or maybe apps for example, unethically?

Dawn Wible:

Absolutely, I do. I definitely do.

Robert J Marks:

Okay. Elaborate on that. Who, for example... I know that, for example, Facebook wants to sell you stuff.

Dawn Wible:

Exactly right.

Robert J Marks:

Because there's so many ads on Facebook now. And that really isn't an app that has your wellbeing in mind. Is that the sort of thing you're talking about?

Dawn Wible:

That's right. That's what I'm talking about. Really, the study of human behavior and human design. Our biology, sociology, how we connect with each other. All of that's studied and set up to monetize off of us. And keep us on their apps and on their platforms as long as possible, because they will make a lot of money off of us being on there a long time. And so it really is what and how our society has changed, and how it's been impacted. Used to be the information age where we could go Google something and find out whatever we wanted. Ask Siri, ask Alexa. It's the information age. We can find everything. And it shifted to the attention economy, and they are monetizing off of our attention.

And so if we can recognize that and be aware of that. That really can help us to say, "Okay, what are our values? Because I know that these companies are not really putting our values first. So what are my human values?" My human values are connection. I want to be productive with my technology, like we talked about. Setting it up as a tool. Serving us, not mastering us. I want to be productive with mine. So what can I do? Having my values aligned with my technology use, with my phone use. So that I'm not being mastered all the time. So that I'm not being pulled in all the time. Because it really is designed well. We desire connection deeply as human beings, and that is being offered to us. But when it's not connecting anymore and we're scrolling and scrolling and scrolling. And all the algorithms are pushing all the things that we like and are into toward our phone. It's just keeping us on there as long as possible.

Robert J Marks:

I very rarely visit Facebook. Last time, I think was about a month ago. And the reason I don't is because they know me well.

Dawn Wible:

They do.

Robert J Marks:

I begin to scroll down, Dawn and I get all sorts of ads that they know I like. I'm old enough to have been to two Rolling Stones concerts when I was younger. I don't know how they know this, but I'll scroll down and they say "From 1968, the Rolling Stones such and such." And there's a video there of them. And, "Oh my gosh, I want to watch that." And then the next one is something else. A classic song or something like that.

Dawn Wible:

Oh, exactly.

Robert J Marks:

They know me so well. They know me better than my wife, I think. In terms of what I like and what I don't like. It's really chilling. And also Google has this new thing on my cell phone. Where I open up the Google and it gives me a lot of news articles. And those news articles are chosen exactly for me. And I tell you, a lot of them I'm interested in. A lot of them, I must admit, that I find useful. But Google knows me too. Google Chrome. And they're pitching stuff all the time, trying to get me to click on this or click on that.

Dawn Wible:

Oh, exactly.

Robert J Marks:

It's actually kind of scary. And they use algorithms and data mining, and that's how Google makes its big bucks, is selling your privacy information and your browsing history to different people. And of course it knows it. So yeah, you're exactly right. That's very interesting.

Dawn Wible:

Yes, exactly. And really, yeah, you named it. I mean, the algorithms are a big part of that. Some say they know us better than we know ourselves. Because one of the areas we really hone in on in the mental health is the importance of silence. And how our mind craves silence. But our world is very loud. I mean, it's hard for me to go pick up my kids from school without turning on a podcast. I want to fill all of my time and silence with the noise that's available to me. And some of it is great because I'm learning a ton. Or I'm hearing a ton of connecting with a ton. But I'm not really being with myself. And that is what our minds need. That is what our hearts need, our souls need. And we're filling it with a lot of noise.

And so they truly say that sometimes the algorithms know us better than ourselves, because they are studying every little thing that we may just pass by and not pay attention to. Like where my thumb slows down on my feed on my social media account. That's even being studied. What ads I'm slowing down on, what accounts I'm slowing down on. And then the algorithm will push more of those ads toward my

feed. And so my feed is designed exactly for me, exactly for what I desire or think about. I had someone say the other day, "I didn't even say it out loud and I got an ad for it. It's like it's reading my mind."

Robert J Marks:

That is a little bit spooky. Yeah.

Dawn Wible:

It is a little bit spooky. So I think just, you can go down a deep rabbit hole with that whole thing. But being aware, at least paying attention and being aware and saying, "Okay, this is what I value in my life. This is what I want to set up my technology to look like during the day. I want to take these notifications off my phone so that I'm not super distracted with that." And just making these intentional steps to help us align our use with our values. So that's what we spend a lot of the time on in that last section.

Robert J Marks:

That's a great observation. I think that one of the effects on me of social media and just digital media in general, is the shortening of my attention span. My son the other day showed me TikTok. I've never watched TikTok before. But I watched it and he showed me one incredible video after another incredible video. And a lot of people don't like TikTok because they say that China is spying on us. But that others say, and this was a congressman, I forget his name, that says that, "TikTok is fentanyl for the mind." That you just want more and more and more and more. And I have noticed that it has shortened my attention span. And when I try to spend time in quietness, I'm a Christian. So quietness, reflection, prayer, meditation... Medication. Meditation and those sort of things, I'll be into it. And then my mind will flip. "Oh, you should be doing something else." It's that short attention span. So gaining back that ability to be quiet for long periods of time, at least in my experience, is something which is very important. But not always easy to achieve.

Dawn Wible:

Exactly right. And you're speaking for your age and my age, but you think about how little kids' minds are being wired. When we take healthier steps to rewire our minds... So if some of the most recent research is saying, if you watch a lot of TikTok or you watch fast videos, short clips, lots of videos to make sure you read something for 20 minutes a day in a book. Like a real book. Get out a book and read for 20 minutes left to right, you've got a storyline going. It's very slow and boring to your mind, but it will reset it and rewire it. But for little kids who are having that initial wiring, it's going to be so interesting to see what studies are going to come out about how they can rewire their minds. Because you're right, it does. It shortens our attention span.

We're not able to focus as long. And same thing with my... I have a centering prayer mindfulness app, and the first 10 minutes when the bell goes off, I'm like, "Oh, I need to start over." Because that first 10 minutes, my mind was offloading all kinds of information. And then I reset it and do the second 10 minutes, and my mind is quieter after that. So, you're right, it is a short attention span.

Robert J Marks:

So what other things do we see in culture regarding the overuse of our screens? Have we kind of touched all the big points here? Or are there other things?

Dawn Wible:

One of the things that I like to go into on that last section on values with students specifically. And if you have any parent listeners, this is good for them to hear for their kids as well. Is really having them understand what a digital footprint is. Because...

Robert J Marks:

Really? What is a digital footprint?

Dawn Wible:

Yes. So...

Robert J Marks:

I'm not even sure I know what a digital footprint is.

Dawn Wible:

So digital footprint is your online presence. And, it's everything that you do online. I'll use an example, some people think a footprint like walking in the sand on the beach and the water washes it away. But your digital footprint is like stepping into concrete. And you lift your foot up and that concrete dries. And water can hit it and it's not going anywhere. So even deleted photos, the snaps that are sent, that kids think are disappearing snaps and they're gone on Snapchat are actually there forever. Software designers own that content. A lot of times during legal investigations law enforcement can get into those apps. Can get into some of that stuff that you think is so private. And so really helping kids understand that that privacy is essentially a myth. That what they think is between them and that screen, or them and the other person on that screen is not between just them.

Once you send that picture, it's out of your hands and you have no control over where that picture's going to get sent, who's going to see it. And so that's a big thing when we're talking about our values and what we're using our phones for. And if we're using our phones according to our values. But it's also a really hard thing for kids, to think about the fact that they live in this almost surveillanced world with cameras everywhere. Or I think about the slumber parties that I went to with my girlfriends when I was 13. No, we didn't care what we looked like. We could stay in our PJs and eat junk food and no one knew. But slumber parties now are very different. And kids are always on, essentially. Because they're being filmed on social media, they're texting constantly. They're in constant contact with people in the outside world.

And so that really helps. It helps empower them to know that. So that they can have language for saying no to inappropriate requests for pictures or for content from them. It's an easy way for them to have an out and say, "You know what? I don't know where this picture's going. I'm not going to send it." So I like to frame that for kids to really understand the importance of their digital footprint, that it's there forever. And employers are going to Google your name and look at your social media. And be able to see even back to the pictures you posted in seventh grade. Or whatever you were doing. So it is there forever. And that's impacting kids' lives.

Robert J Marks:

The internet is forever. Yeah. In fact, I have a close friend that's going through a divorce right now. And he emailed me some stuff and I said, "Man, don't do this. Everything that you email me, imagine it being presented in a court of law during your divorce. You just have to be careful." I mean that's an example of being just very careful with what you do. Anything on the internet is possibly there forever.

Dawn Wible:

Yeah. That's so true.

Robert J Marks:

Yeah. Let me ask you a question, Dawn. There's some of us who have to use a computer and a phone all day. How does digital wellness work for us? What do we do?

Dawn Wible:

That's a great question because you're right. I mean, it is really incorporated into so many of our lives. And the biggest thing that you can do is to be intentional with, when you have hours in front of your screen, you're having to write something, you're having to be on your screen. I like to recommend some form of a blue light filtered glass... Your glasses. So if you can put on glasses...

Robert J Marks:

Tell me about that. Yeah, what's the deal with the blue light? You mentioned that before. Does the blue light... Is that supposed to affect you some way?

Dawn Wible:

So it does the blue light filter glasses actually filter out that light. Our eyes are just not meant to be in front of that. The amount of time that we're in front of screens. So we think about the outdoors, we mention the outdoors in the body section, the physical health section, and in the mental health section of our training. Because we truly are meant to be outdoors and we're surrounded by concrete walls and we have these blue lights in our eyes and fluorescent lights above us. I'm reminded of that scene in Joe versus the Volcano. Do you remember that movie with Tom Hanks?

Robert J Marks:

I've never had the pleasure of seeing Joe in the Volcano.

Dawn Wible:

It is something you should watch. It's a wonderful movie. But that opening scene is just him in this office. And it's a perfect picture of that. His eyes kind of twitching and he just needs to get out to the ocean. And it's a wonderful movie. But it is true. When we have blue light glasses, it helps our eye strain and our eye fatigue. They're starting to notice with kids who have computer tablets and iPads in front of their face for a long period of time. They're eyes, they're having to get glasses younger and younger because of the eye strain. And because their eyes are shifting from their iPad up to the whiteboard. Or if they're watching a TV show and having phones in their lap on the couch. Which that's very common. You could see that strain that your eye is shifting from that nearsighted to farsighted back and forth, back and forth.

And it is causing eye strain. So blue light filters just help relieve your eyes a little bit from that, when you're having to be in front of your screen a lot. So that's a great healthy choice to make. And then just taking breaks. Taking breaks, getting up, moving your body, not having such a sedentary life. I mean, that's what a lot of us have. And so incorporating creative ways of being outdoors and moving our body. I have a friend that spends a lot of time... Graphic designer, so a lot of time in front of the screen. And he tries to go for walks during his lunch, and he'll bring a smoothie and go outside and walk. And sometimes he'll even do some of his phone calls on a walk. And he just is trying to incorporate that

outdoor time. Getting away from the computer screen, getting away from the light and getting some natural light. And that actually boosts your wellbeing physiologically and mentally as well.

Robert J Marks:

Is this backed by scientific research? Excuse me for being skeptical, but...

Dawn Wible:

Yes.

Robert J Marks:

Do you know if there's any science research into this blue light thing?

Dawn Wible:

Yes. So that's a great question. There's a website called childrenandscreens.org.

Robert J Marks:

Okay.

Dawn Wible:

And it has a lot of the research that we find, yes, there's just a lot of research on the eye strain and on myopia. The nearsightedness for young kids specifically, who are having a lot of time on their screen. The digital wellness concept is pretty new. But a lot of computer scientists, people that spend a lot of time in front of screens have known about some of these healthy decisions and choices for a long time and have tried to implement them. And then the other thing I'd say along that, is a lot of times we say that our technology is really distracting. But if we can categorize in what is essential, what's a part of our work, and it's just shifted to digital media from decades ago. Now it's on our computer screens, it is incorporated into our life, then I think it helps us to make better decisions with our time. Because everything's not a distraction. This is actually a really important part of our life. But there are some things that are distractions. So really being intentional with our time and with our technology use.

Robert J Marks:

Yeah. I just wish that Facebook and Netflix weren't on the same computer that I work on. Because they are distracting. They're just a click away, Dawn. It's just a click away. So it's frustrating.

Dawn Wible:

I'm going to do a little advertisement here for you. There's a great app called Freedom. Freedom app, and it's exactly for that.

Robert J Marks:

Freedom app.

Dawn Wible:

It's called Freedom App. And they block websites. So it helps you to really do... Because we get to a place where our work is becoming too shallow. We're not getting to that flow state of work where we're

doing our deeper work. So a lot of writers will use this app, Freedom app, and it blocks the specific websites that you need blocked. So if you need Netflix and Facebook blocked, I may not need those. I may need Instagram and whatever else. And Freedom allows you to go in and tailor which websites you need blocked. And you can do the different times of day that you need them blocked. And you go to do that one click away and it won't open. And it helps hold you more accountable, and you're not using all of your energy trying to stay away from it, it's taking that off your plate. So it's very helpful.

Robert J Marks:

Okay. Freedom app for people like me that don't have a strong free will.

Dawn Wible:

Well, it's not just you.

Robert J Marks:

Yeah, I know. Yeah. It's a lot of us that are addicted. When you quit smoking and you quit alcohol, there's obvious health benefits. You're a better person because you quit smoking. You're a better person because you quit alcohol. What real life benefits would somebody get, if you will, from making healthier choices on their use of screens?

Dawn Wible:

Well, your wellbeing will increase. And so I think that that overflows into every area of your life. That's going to overflow into your physical health, into your mental health, into your relationships. When you feel better, when you're happier, more content and not chained to this device, then you're going to have that freedom. You're going to have a healthier life. And so it really overflows. And those are the benefits. I mean, it overflows into every area. The harder and trickier thing about technology is that you're not just quitting buying packs of cigarettes. It's there. It's a big part of our life and it's right in front of you. You don't have a pack of cigarettes sitting in front of you when you're quitting... Usually when you're quitting smoking. So that's what's trickier. And so using a lot of these tools, backing off on notifications, putting on apps like Freedom or other apps that help you. Having your centering prayer, your mindfulness apps. Having those downloaded, those are going to really help you make those better choices.

Robert J Marks:

That is a great answer. I think that typically when we surrender to our whims, we're doing what our whims say. And we're thinking about our impulses. When maybe it's better to think how we're feeling. Are we feeling good? Are we feeling productive and worthy? And things of that sort. And thinking about how you are and what you do, and how what you do is going to affect how you feel is sometimes a difficult thing to do. But I think it's a better metric of what you should do.

Dawn Wible:

Yes, I agree. And I think it just really takes, start small. I mean, the smallest changes, the smallest choices make huge impacts in our life. And so some people will hear our training and think, "Oh, I'm going to do this and this and this and this." And I'll say, "Nope, just put your phone in a box at mealtimes. Start there, and see what impacts and what benefits you notice." And so I would say, yeah, just make those small choices and start there.

Robert J Marks:

Exactly. Dawn, thank you. This has been a great conversation. We have been talking to Dawn Wible, who is the founder of Talk More. Tech Less. The website for her organization is talkmoretechless.com. That's talkmoretechless.com. Thanks for listening to Mind Matters News. Until next time, be of good cheer.

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