

Stepping Away

By Miffy Farquarhson



In [my last column](#) I wrote about creating work/life balance by compartmentalising aspects of your online life. But there are times in your life when you just have to step away to keep your sanity.

I've been doing some 'stepping away' over the non-teaching period. I've stepped away from my personal Facebook account, and have just been keeping tabs on my other social networking accounts – Tumblr, Instagram and Twitter.

As Term One drew to a close I realised that I was using it as an escape, as a way to avoid doing work that I didn't want to do, and as a result I was actually missing out on 'doing' life. There are piles of mending (which I love doing – it's very soothing), I'm in the middle of two knitting projects, the garden was terribly overgrown, my tomato plants were not producing because of neglect, and the pumpkins almost died from thirst.

My health suffers, too, when I'm glued to the screen. I slump. I can sit for a whole hour in the one position, and then feel terrible when I finally move my aging body. I get much more tired, probably from the slumping, which means I'm not breathing properly.

But it's my personal relationships that really suffer when I spend too much time looking at the screen. Conversations are half-heard, or forgotten the instant they finish. I don't look people in the eye while I'm talking to them because I've got one eye and half my brain locked into looking, not listening. And opportunities and responsibilities fall by the wayside while I'm immersed in the virtual world.

It's been difficult. I love hearing what people in the library world are doing, what creators are creating and thinking, what gob-smackingly outrageous rubbish our politicians are spouting today. But . . . it takes me hours to scroll through all the posts, rants, videos, jokes, photos and links on my feed. So I had a couple of choices.

Go cold turkey.

This option crossed my mind for maybe a nanosecond. Not possible. There's too much good stuff to just throw it all away.

Cull my 'friends' list.

Also not a realistic goal. My 700 plus Facebook friends are a diverse bunch – authors, illustrators, librarians, teachers, old school mates, old uni mates, random famous people, etc. Where would I start? By what criteria would I keep or cull? Too hard.

Step away.

This option I like. But it relies on one crucial action from me – exercising my willpower. For someone who can eat a whole Lindt bunny in one sitting despite agreeing with myself that I should make it last longer, this is not as easy to do as to think about.

And yet, I seem to have managed reasonably well. What I have noticed is that real people generate very few of my notifications. The notifications are mostly Facebook telling me about birthdays, events, 'likes' on posts in groups, etc. And I've also noticed that I've stopped ranting quite so much. There's nothing quite like a crazy government policy to get your blood boiling, and sometimes it's very hard to resist reacting in written form for the whole world to see.

It is a constant struggle not to get sucked in, but the benefits are obvious. My garden is tidy, I've read heaps of books, and I've spent time with my family and friends. I'm not always thinking that I'm missing out, or ignoring something. The balance between my real life and my virtual life feels like it is much more equal. And for me, that's a good thing. I'm going to keep going on this new life with a reduced emphasis on Facebook and see what else I can do with my time. The world is my oyster.

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