

Tentative plunge into world of social media

At the end of a long day last month, my boss came up to my desk. After a few minutes of pleasantries, he sat down, something clearly on his mind.

"This is the part you're really going to hate me for," he said, after doing a quick sweep of the room for any sharp objects. "I think it might be time for you to get a Facebook."

He sat as my eyes turned black and I fell silent.

"Are you waiting for my positive reaction?" I finally asked.

He risked a laugh. "I ... don't think that's coming."

Why was this such a big deal? More importantly, why, in 2017, was it necessary to have this conversation?

It's precisely because of Facebook's appealing qualities that I didn't want to get on in the first place. I graduated from high school in 2010, and as I considered making a profile for college, I knew that my nosy nature meant one hour on Facebook would quickly become seven. You tell me what's more appealing: schoolwork or clicking through a high school crush's third cousin's photos?

With great pains I stayed away, but as I did my distaste for the site began to grow — not for its distraction value, but for the changes it seemed to have wrought. It could give a person the sense of anonymity, or of instant celebrity. Instant gratification, but also instant regret, the proof of which would last forever.

Outside of its use for personal communication, though, Facebook and Twitter became mediums for news gathering and



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reporting. And as they did, my teachers and bosses began to ask: What kind of journalist are you if you don't have Facebook? Rather, if you're not engaged with the people around you, are you doing your job?

It's a valid question. It's a journalist's job to keep up with, and chronicle, the things going on in the changing world. It's tough to do that if you're excluding yourself from one of the primary ways people now communicate.

There are obvious and significant pluses. Besides allowing people to keep in touch and find long-lost friends, it's a tool — an immediate way to find out what's happening. You can hear from sources to whom you may never have access in person.

It offers a way for people around the world to engage with those outside their immediate circles, which can be a wonderful path to more tolerance and understanding.

It's an equalizer. As long as you have an internet connection (we won't go there today), you can communicate with like-minded people, or debate your views when you may not otherwise have a voice.

Of course, it doesn't always work that way. Many times, social media

serves as an echo chamber. Visit any comments section for any news outlet, and you'll find it riddled with screeds from people who absorbed nothing other than the story's incompatibility with their own views. We experience that in person as reporters too, but many people save their choicest words for us for Facebook.

It seemed like with social media, everything was just too easy. Getting famous. Excoriating strangers with no consequences. "Slacktivism," where people get to proclaim their support for a cause by simply posting about it, but without any obligation to follow through.

And it seemed to me that I could make the same argument at work. I'm not saying I object to anything

that makes my job easier, or that I do everything the hard way. But all my boss' arguments for why I needed one seemed like things I could get around. I could go out and actually talk to people. I could call my sources and check in with them. I could stay abreast of local happenings by attending them.

But you can't be everywhere at once. And while you can try to find someone in the phone book, it doesn't always work these days. Some local agencies now use Facebook as their main line to the public.

I knew all this, and I dug my heels in. I don't like change, and I'd made it this far. Come to think of it, that sentence could describe the way I make a lot of my decisions.

Eventually, my boss got tired of my theatrics, and I got one. It was a terse day in the newsroom, but despite my best efforts, I have gotten some use out of it. On rare occasions I use it to contact sources, and I've found a few stories I'd have missed otherwise.

Resisting any sort of progress is a bit hypocritical. After all, I'm typing this column on a computer. I drive a car to work every day. If I reject one form of progress, where do I draw the line between spurning Facebook and refusing to use a microwave or a flushing toilet, both of which were cutting-edge examples of technology at one time.

But using something and making it a ubiquitous part of our lives "just because

it's there" isn't a good argument either. I admit that toward the end, the desire to not get a Facebook was just stubbornness, but there are things about it people have come to consider indispensable that I maintain are pretty useless and make us all look bad.

It's impossible to make an argument against Facebook that everyone will agree with. But it's worth weighing the benefits of a social media platform against all the noise you have to filter out.

Jayati Ramakrishnan is a reporter for the Hermiston Herald and East Oregonian. Don't friend her on Facebook, but contact her at jramakrishnan@hermistonherald.com

Senior center receives grant; will buy new kitchen gear

HERMISTON HERALD

The Hermiston Senior Center recently received \$20,000 from the Wildhorse Foundation — the maximum grant amount awarded by the organization.

The Hermiston seniors, who are building a new center, will use the money to buy new kitchen equipment.

Having commercial kitchen facilities assists the group in providing essential meal services for seniors and the Meals on Wheels program.

The foundation also announced other third quarter awards, which included 31 disbursements for a total of \$303,584. Other local recipients and the purpose for the grants include:

• **UMATILLA:** Umatilla Museum and Historical Foundation, \$9, 818 for museum energy upgrade.

• **UMATILLA COUNTY:** Start Making A

Reader Today, \$5,155 for SMART reading programs; Umatilla County 4-H, \$600 for Attitudes for Success: Preparing for the Future.

The Wildhorse Foundation manages a community benefit fund established by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

The board considers quarterly grant applications in the areas of public health and safety, education, the arts, historic preservation, gambling addiction services, salmon restoration, environmental protection and cultural activities.

The next application deadline is Jan. 1.

For more information or a grant application, visit www.thewildhorsefoundation.com or contact **Tiah DeGroff**, Wildhorse Foundation Administrator, at 541-966-1628 or tiah.degroff@wildhorseresort.com.

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