

April 2018



Alexa: help me think for myself again....

Some people will know full well what I mean by this and some of you will have no idea –that’s OK. Alexa is the name of a device that’s been created by Amazon meant to be an electronic assistant for your life. Maybe some of you have one or maybe some of you want to get one, and maybe some of you are like my husband and I and have no desire to have one.

This is an example of AI or artificial intelligence and it’s of course one of the many things that everyone seems to want to talk about. (This time we’ll leave bitcoin, marijuana stocks and Donald Trump alone, if that’s OK). AI continues to become a bigger and bigger part of every day life and many will say that it’s great. Moving towards self-driving cars, people have everything hooked up to their phones, they can communicate through face book – how great is that right?

I’m sure you know where I’m going with this, as I’ll play devil’s advocate, and I’m sure not everyone will agree with me. I believe that the devices in our lives have quite a few negatives to them, but there are three main ones:

1. A growing reliance on technology is hindering our ability to think and problem solve.
2. A growing reliance and addiction to technology is making us more sedentary.
3. Our fear of missing out on the newest gadget (or anything) is causing people to make some bad decisions.

None of this is new to me and most of you will know that I’ve felt this way for many years. I didn’t participate in any social media platform at first due to a lack of interest. Then, as the years went by I started to see some trends and it appeared that the above points were becoming factual.

It first occurred to me with the mainstream use of GPS systems. If a person just follows their GPS voice instructions to get somewhere they greatly hinder their ability to ever find that location on their own. However, if you find it yourself (through some trial and error, use of logic or lord help us a map) we’ll likely be able to find that location the next time. When we do it ourselves we have to think about what we’re doing, maybe make a plan for a change or watch for landmarks – these are good things. Why is it such a big deal if we get lost for 5 or 10 minutes? I’ve tested this and in my case it’s absolutely true – give it try and see for yourself. To take this one step further, imagine the other things that we no longer feel the need to think about?

So what else? Have you ever noticed that no one can make change anymore? I know I’m a dinosaur but I guess I should be proud of this dying skill – I can make change! I learned as a teenager and it’s stuck. Now people just wait for the computer to tell them how much change to give back – no thought process involved at all. Another very small example, but can be seen in all occupations.



Take this a few steps further and it may seem that fewer people are able to problem solve effectively. In our office we're finding it more and more frustrating when we need something corrected. We used to joke that the people on the phone not only don't know how to fix a complex problem, they don't even get the question that we're asking. It's no longer a joke and is pretty concerning, not to mention that no one wants to speak on the phone anymore!

There have been studies done showing students don't have the same ability to remember as much when they rely on their devices – we can just look it up. Of course, it is great that we can look things up but we have to make sure that we challenge our brains in order to build and maintain our ability to both reason and to remember things.

What about the fitness watches that people wear? When I golf everyone is constantly messing with the stupid things. How many steps did they take, how far from the hole are they – wait a minute before you tee off my watch is re setting (I'm not kidding!) Here's an idea, since the beginning of golf there are markers to tell you how far out you are, and then you eye up the rest to make a good guess – not that tough. And if you walked the course or walked your dog and just enjoyed being outside and the company do you really need to know exactly how many steps you took? We have gadgets, more gyms than ever, hot yoga studios and even special clothes to help pull the sweat away when we exercise, and yet there are more people who are considered obese then ever and diabetes is an epidemic. Are these things really helping?

My last point is around the fear of missing out – and Facebook proves my point. If you are waiting ANYWHERE just watch the people on their phones. Phones are now used minimally for work and are instead the tool to check Facebook posts, tweets, Instagram – you name it. IF your kids live in England and Facebook keeps you closer to them, great, but we all know that is a rarity. The addiction to these applications is also epidemic. The time wasted, the stress that it seems to cause, the time NOT spent with those who are right in front of us and not experiencing things but rather recording them on our phones – how can this be a good thing? What has recently been discovered is that people have unwittingly given up personal information through Facebook. While I see where the regulators are going, I'm not sure I would say unwittingly is accurate.

All of the stores who want us to sign up for points cards and give them our email address want only one thing – to track our spending and our internet searches so that they can market to us. Was Facebook used for other more “evil” uses? It looks like, but even that was information used so that political parties could know enough about people to know how to market to them in order to get their vote.

People need to be more careful and certainly need to be more thoughtful – and by that I mean give these things more thought. Do you care that the grocery store you use is tracking everything you buy and when you're there? If you don't then great, I however; do care and I don't wish to be tracked. Group think, herd mentality and fear of missing out have always been problems in the world of investing. It's because I am so aware of these things that I am forced to try and always think for myself, a

requirement in order for me to be good at my job. My acute awareness of this has me sounding the alarm when I look at the blind acceptance and reliance on technology.

As it pertains to manufacturing and healthcare I know that technology is making our world a better place, but we should be asking ourselves a few questions every time we use a new technology. Is this truly improving my life? Is it making me happier? Am I healthier because of it, both mentally and physically? Does it take me away from the live people in my life, most especially those that I love? It's a social problem, a health issue and now it would appear it's become a security problem. I'm not suggesting that my opinion is going to make a huge difference but it is extremely important to me that I cling to my views and maybe offer some food for thought.

What can we do? We can make sure that we continue to make INFORMED decisions and teach our kids and grandkids to do the same. We can get some exercise, enjoy being outside, maybe read a bit or do something to challenge our brains, talk (both about trivial and important things) and spend time with those we love. If young people today can both speak well and write coherently it would appear that they'll have an advantage.

I think that the Facebook "scandal" has many people talking about social media and new technology but simply placing the blame on the companies is misplaced blame. Perhaps some self-analysis might be in order, if only people could find the time around checking their phones!

Please do not take this to mean that I wish to return to "the good old days". I have a very deeply held belief that our current days are the good old days. We live in a better world than we did and I am truly optimistic for the future. What I am, is concerned by what can sometimes appear to be mindless acceptance of the new before making an informed decision – is it better or is it simply new?

So, don't follow us on Twitter or Instagram and don't look for us on Facebook because we aren't there. What you can do is call us or even drop in, we're here 5 days a week and we plan on being here for many more years!

Jane Kaminsky CFP FMA
Janston Financial Group
Mutual Funds provided through Olympian Financial Inc.