

Trust, Hope and Loneliness

The advanced electronic technologies that many of us helped develop enable people to do many things and to connect to each other more often and in more ways. But for many people these technologies have reduced face to face interactions and sometimes they connect people to the darker sides of human nature, eroding trust and hope and even leading some to antisocial acts.

Our new technologies have led to a new type of loneliness. We are connected with each other virtually but not physically, but we are physical beings and we need human physical contact.

Studies suggest people living in dense urban areas like London or New York City are typically lonelier than those living in the country, often miles from their nearest neighbor. In many fast-paced cities, people create barriers between themselves and others to avoid being overwhelmed with interactions. That and other factors contribute to the lack of a sense of community. For such people, their virtual connections may be their only real human interaction.

In addition, these virtual interactions can be faked using modern emulation techniques and these issues might be even more convincing with future direct interfaces to the brain. Political entities collect information about us that they can use to influence our thinking about issues and causes the same way the commercial sector uses harvested information to get us to buy products on impulse. We may or may not be interacting with whom we think we are, and we can be misled to think something is true, when it is not. Distrust of media, whether established or social, is widespread and growing.

Our technologies can bring us together and inform us to make better decisions, or separate and deceive us. How can we seek our better natures? I would like to suggest that being part of and participating in a professional organization, combined with a full family and social life, can help us feel better connected with each other and fend off feelings of loneliness.

Being part of such communities provides opportunities for physical as well as mental interactions. If we approach each other with open and authentic interest, this can lead to new insights for deal with the world's troubles and thus create hope for the future. Also, together we might be able to discuss and help mitigate some of the world's biggest issues, including verification of on-line identities and information. Also, we can keep our knowledge of the world around us fresh and continue to contribute to making the world a better place.

IEEE is a large and diverse professional association, led and driven by our volunteer members. Its many activities attract people to volunteer and participate in many important activities, from writing papers, editing publications, organizing chapter and section meetings, creating standards or generating public policy documents, to name only a few possible activities. There is a home for everyone who wants to be an IEEE volunteer.

But you don't have to be a volunteer to find a community of persons with shared interests, whether those interests be technical, professional or purely social in nature. You can create those personal connections locally in your IEEE section, as well as nationally and internationally as a member of an IEEE technical society or by engaging with IEEE's Collabratec supported communities of interest.

For many of us, our technical skills have allowed us to contribute to the growth of knowledge and useful things. Being part of a professional society, like the IEEE, can also help us achieve recognition within our professional community and the public-at-large for our technical achievements and for what we have contributed to help make the world a safer, more trustworthy and less lonely place.



Tom Coughlin