

Our dependencies

Life up here at 7,400 ft. in the mountains can be a bit of a challenge. And I'm not only speaking of the weather in case you're wondering, though that can be challenging, too, especially when the county snowplows treat our roads as 'optional' after a big storm. No, I'm speaking about those of us who have one foot firmly planted in the technological world and one that's off the grid.

Let me explain. There are many folks like me who are small businesspeople and operate service businesses from our homes and depend on modern communication like a reliable Internet connection to push our data out beyond the hills and into the hands of our customers. And when it goes down like it did for an entire day like today (thanks, T-Mobile), it can put us off our game and make us wonder why we chose life up here. But that's the tech side asking the question.

We've chosen to live on the cusp of the grid for many reasons, not the least of which is a desire for privacy (from too much human contact) and a close proximity to nature and animals. We haven't chosen this lifestyle because we're anti-social. We just want the ability to decide for ourselves our own level of social contact instead of being forced to share a fence with someone who's living 15 ft. away and whose bedroom faces ours. It's also because we value peace and quiet in our lives.

There's nothing so great as sitting out on your deck, surrounded by trees, sipping a morning cup of coffee. Time passes at a whole different pace up here, and many mornings can go by in the blink of an eye...or at a snail's pace. It's all up to the observer and how much you feel like absorbing in one gulp. Watching hummingbirds gather and drink at their feeders or catching a glimpse of a woodpecker tapping out his morning song on a nearby tree is calming. And when it rains, the trees literally stretch to their full height to meet every earthbound morsel. Ground squirrels have a built-in 'early warning system' about Spring rains, and up from their burrows they peek to sample the raindrops before the big rains fall.

Morning walks are the real blessing up here. There's something rejuvenating about rising early and walking silently through a dense forest. If you're truly one with nature you try to be quiet and respect every living thing that may still be asleep or that is going about its business like foraging for food. It can be a lowly insect, a deer or a coyote. Each should be respected. I'm reminded of Henry David Thoreau when I take my constitutionals. He said, "It takes a man to make a room silent." He understood how disruptive we humans can be to our natural surroundings by our unnecessary tramping about. Being quiet is a challenge for city folk. So when we have visitors from the big city, we encourage them to tread softly as if they were walking down the main aisle of a church or through a large bedroom with sleeping children.

We can actually heighten our sense of hearing and sight when we go into 'quiet mode.' I often find myself whispering to the trees, asking them what the last storm was like. Did any of their neighbors get hit by lightning? Or what about bark beetle infestation? Do they know of any victims? I have my favorite tree conversation partners that I speak with during my walks. I enjoy observing how they've grown from one year to the next and if they're sporting any nests.

There are times when I walk with my head bowed, fixed on the path and other times when I'm transfixed on the sky. There's something wonderful about being in what the Buddhists call 'the present moment.' I have a favorite Buddhist author whose name is: Thich Nhat Hanh. He's a Vietnamese Buddhist monk and one of his best books is, "Present moment wonderful moment." In it he talks about meditations for everyday activities. One of them is walking. "The mind can go in a thousand directions. But on this beautiful path, I walk in peace. With each step, a gentle wind blows. With each step, a flower blooms."

We modern people who want to stand in both worlds and enjoy the advantages of technology and the serenity of remoteness must realize that this is unattainable unless we're willing to see beyond both of them and accept their shortcomings as part of the 'package.'

My Internet will probably be up tomorrow and I will once again be connected to the digital world, but the forest never fails me. It is always there, waiting for me, and it has much more to tell me than Mr. Google or his friends.

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