

Skytime over Screentime

I have a love/hate relationship with screens. My other half would say I have an unhealthy relationship with them. And that's probably true. As it is for most people.

The thing is it's complicated. It always is isn't it?

The advent of smartphones allowed me greater freedom than I could ever have imagined. When I started working in a law firm nearly (gulp) 20 years ago, we had desktop computers and brick phones. If you needed to send out a document or an email, you had to stay at your desk to do it. Even if that meant unproductive hours waiting for someone else's input or feedback. I remember plenty of evenings sat at my desk, takeaway food container in hand, waiting for some partner or other to grace me with comments that I could then turn and send out to other equally sad bogs sat at their desks across the world. When smartphones arrived (blackberries first), we were unleashed from our desks. Don't sit around here, meet your friends, go to the gym, send that email from home. Stay connected wherever you are. When I went freelance, that ability to respond from anywhere was a game changer. Like so many others I embraced it as a brilliant tool to let me get stuff done wherever I was.

Free-ing. At first.

Inevitably, the tiny computer in your pocket then becomes a ball and chain. If it's there all the time, then there's no stopping when you can deal with whatever ails you. There is no off switch.

This is a well trodden path. When you find yourself replying to emails from bed or scrolling mindlessly, then it's probably too far gone. Also well documented, you don't need me to document it here.

The disconnect is total. The focused blue light emanating from the screen is the antithesis of the bright natural light that we need. Looking down instead of up. Drawn into a virtual world rather than the big beautiful real world around us. I try very hard to spend several hours a day outside and while my phone joins me (usually for pedometer and photography purposes) I try incredibly hard to avoid its lure. I'm getting there.

And yet it's complicated. Because this little computer in my pocket has also allowed me to connect across the world with likeminded people. It's allowed me to research in a couple of seconds something I've seen on a walk when I didn't know what it was. Thinking recently, a quick search on YouTube for the lifecycle of frogs allowed my son and me to watch an animation of just that half an hour after watching tadpoles in a local pond. I love the phrase in the title of this point. Skytime over screentime. Sums it up really. If you can make the first greater than the second, then you'll almost certainly feel better for it.

