

It's summertime

Get connected the right way

• BATYA L. LUDMAN

Upon being discovered stuck under the table, Chewy was promptly rescued and gently returned to his home in the corner of the room. An hour later, his owner, making dinner, shouted out to Alexa to please set the timer for 40 minutes. Alexa pleasantly responded that she did.

If you're a member of the millennial generation you are probably smiling. If you are a Luddite like me who 17 years into the new millennium remains challenged by technology, you are probably wondering what I am talking about.

Chewy is my married children's floor-cleaning robot that "wakes up" every morning before they do and "happily" goes about his business, returning to his corner to rest and recharge when he is finished. Alexa is their robotic personal assistant that turns on music, sets a timer, checks the news, weather and traffic, and does a myriad of other things when asked.

My children have wholeheartedly embraced the robotic era and in doing so anthropomorphize their new "helpers," and are proud of their capabilities. These same children, who work very long hours and have limited time, enter the Internet world and in seconds find what they're looking for. They shop for virtually everything on line – to be delivered to their apartment.

People attribute human traits and abilities to "things" all the time: they talk to their cars and beg their cakes to rise in the oven. Human beings, in general, have a strong need for relationships and this is reflected in our personifying inanimate objects. An interesting study might compare who we talk more lovingly to – our possessions or our families.

Large department stores, once the icon of American prosperity, are closing all across America, exemplifying that face-to-face encounters around the globe are disappearing, a sign of today's diminishing connectivity with others. I suspect the world our children and grandchildren will experience in another 25 years will look very different from what we have today. With driverless cars, the perfection of online commerce, many of the jobs of today becoming obsolete and a focus on a myriad of interconnected "things," there will be less need than ever to leave the comfort of home and engage with others.

Even I already do online counseling to Australia, North America and beyond, and with telemedicine progressing so quickly, you might just come to know your trusted physician as a face on a screen only.

This week when shopping for baby toys, I discovered a set of rubber blocks that – in addition to the numbers and letters that one might typically see on the face of the blocks – was embossed with the "@" (at) symbol. I guess it is a sign of the times with the ubiquity of technology in our lives. Should we feel grateful or sad that we are introducing email into our children's lives at such an early age?

I believe that nurturing the feeling of connectedness with, and kind behavior to-



(Jeff Durham/MCT)

wards, others can be the foundation for both our own personal happiness and that of the greater society. The way that we choose to respectfully treat others – the stranger on the street, our pets, and even inanimate objects, strongly reflects our own values and mores – teaching directly and indirectly an invaluable lesson to the next generation as to just what is really important in life.

With formal education taking a backseat to parental guidance over the long vacation break, I leave you with some thoughts to ponder and discuss with your children, and some suggestions for getting them out of bed, off their devices and into the realm of real connection with others.

1. With summer upon us, try encouraging your children to go out of their way to offer the street cleaner, and others in the hot sun, a cool drink. Remind them to thank him for the work he does and to make sure at the very least to always say hello. Have you discussed with your children why all of this is important?

2. Have your children think of others who they interact with on a daily basis that they might say hello to – the guard at the mall, the bus driver. Consider making a card together to say thank you or even bringing a small treat as a gesture of appreciation.

3. It is important that we collectively look after one another. Is there time in your busy schedule to volunteer, along with your children, to help others? Would your children want to visit a nursing home, offer to help out at a soup kitchen, or read a book to a younger child or an adult with poor eyesight?

4. Is there someone in the neighborhood who could use a little help? A new mom, someone who recently moved onto your street, an elderly person? Whether it is bringing over fresh muffins, picking up a few groceries for them when you shop, dropping off a child for a parent who is busy or has no car, walking a dog or even entertaining a young child for a short time, there are countless activities that you could do with or encourage your child to do as a gesture of caring for someone else.

5. Would your younger children consider setting up an old-fashioned lemonade stand? You'd be surprised at how much a young entrepreneur can learn about saving and spending as well as understanding the intricacies of human nature while working with others.

6. Is there a teenager in the house who could take responsibility for pushing someone who is wheelchair-bound to synagogue on Shabbat? Is there someone homebound who could appreciate a visit, just to chat or play an occasional card game?

A good way to get children to reach out to others is to involve them in coming up with ideas. You might be surprised to discover that they really do want to get involved. They may just not have thought about it and need your gentle direction to get going.

The writer is a licensed clinical psychologist (PsyD) in private practice in Ra'anana, and author of the book Life's Journey: Exploring Relationships – Resolving Conflicts. ludman@netvision.net.il; www.drbatyaludman.com