

Digital Balance

Christopher D. McDermott

Privacy | Security | Minimalism

“ Digital interactions that are safe, secure and support our values ”

- DIGITAL BALANCE

I believe we are at a crossroads. The Internet has brought about some fantastic innovations, however, in some cases technologies that were meant to liberate us have in fact exploited areas of human psychology, leaving many of us addicted to our phones, endlessly checking social media feeds, and comparing ourselves against the carefully curated digital versions of the people we follow.

In addition, privacy is severely under threat as tech companies gather our information online and sell it to the highest bidder. The profits of their social media platforms depends not only on predicting our behaviour but in some cases modifying it too (read my [book review](#) to learn more).

The good news is we can still turn this ship around. Technology is not inherently evil, and with the right philosophy it can provide value and enrich our lives. It's still possible to reap the benefits and rewards of the technologies we use, but in a safe and healthy manner.

This eBook provides a summary of a new philosophy I propose called 'Digital Balance', in which we optimise our use of technology to ensure that all our digital interactions are safe, secure and support the values and ambitions we hold.



Exercise



Sleep



Diet

We all know staying fit and healthy is important in life. Neglecting to do so can affect our long-term health. Making time to exercise regularly and eating well allows us to reap the rewards in future health benefits. Even small changes can encourage us to adopt better habits and contribute to a healthier lifestyle.

In order to achieve good health it is often necessary to eliminate things from our lives, such as smoking or junk food. Other times it is less about elimination and more about finding the right balance. For example, both sunlight and a little stress can be good for us, however, too much of either can lead to health problems later in life.

When we fail to find the right balance it can often lead to devastating results. For example, a poor diet, high cholesterol, smoking and being overweight can lead to the development of coronary heart disease. Over time, a fatty material called atheroma can build up inside our coronary arteries. Eventually, our arteries may become so narrow that they can't get enough oxygen rich blood to our heart. In addition, if a piece of atheroma breaks off, it can cause a blood clot to form, blocking our coronary artery and cutting off the supply of blood and oxygen to our heart muscle. The result can be a heart attack.

In severe cases a heart attack can also lead to cardiac arrest where the person becomes unconscious and stops breathing. When this happens immediate action must be taken in the form of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) which allows oxygenated blood to

circulate to vital organs such as the brain and heart. When performed correctly CPR can keep a person alive until further treatment can be administered and doubles the survival rate of victims of cardiac arrest.

While CPR can be an effective emergency procedure, prevention is always better than cure, and can often create the right conditions for good health and wellbeing. Prevention is about helping people stay healthy, happy and independent for as long as possible. This means reducing the chances of problems from arising in the first place and, when they do, supporting people to manage them as effectively as possible. When we make the necessary preventive measures we are able to achieve balance in our lives, promoting health and wellbeing and enabling us to live happy, healthy and productive lives.

You may be reading this and thinking, I know all of this, and what does it have to do with my digital life? Well, I would like to propose we apply the same principles and philosophy to our digital lives. That we strive to make small preventative measures now, in order to find balance in our digital lives. Doing so, I believe, will enable us to address some of the issues highlighted on page one, and allow us to take back control. To forge a new relationship with our technologies. One in which we extract the benefits technology provides, but mitigate the risks and drawbacks.

On the next page I will map out a philosophy of how we can go about achieving this.

Tips & Strategies:

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Privacy



Security



Minimalism

We saw on the previous page that in order to achieve health and wellbeing in our lives we need to make preventative measures and find the right balance in the areas that contribute to physical health such as food, exercise and sleep. I believe the same is true of our digital lives. That we need to optimise our use of technology to ensure that all our digital interactions are safe, secure and support the values and ambitions we hold.

In order to achieve digital health it may be necessary to eliminate some things, however, as with physical health it is again often less about elimination and more about finding the right balance. For example, both mobile phones and messaging can be useful tools for staying in touch with friends and family, however, too much of either can lead to social problems or issues relating to security and privacy.

As with physical health, failing to find the right balance in our digital lives can often lead to devastating results. For example, social media is a great place to promote your views and meet new people, aid communication, and find new job prospects. However, if left unchecked we can easily become addicted to checking feeds and posting status updates. Neglecting family and responsibilities in the physical world for the fear of missing out (FOMO) on what other people are doing in the digital world. Hours can be lost comparing our digital lives to others, seeking their validation through likes and comments.

In addition, failing to use adequate passwords or posting too much private information online can leave us vulnerable to attack. When our 'Digital Balance' is out of sync the result can be a 'Digital Heart Attack'. One requiring 'Digital CPR'.

And this is where the link can be found between physical health and emergency procedures such as CPR, and our digital lives. We need a new philosophy around technology use. A philosophy which promotes and encourages us to adopt better habits, and enables us to live happier, healthier and more productive digital lives.

We need to be '**Digitally Balanced**'.

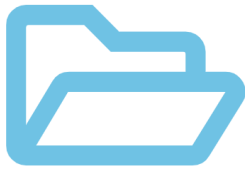
As I stated previously, prevention is always better than cure. And so, to achieve digital balance I believe we need to address three areas: **Digital Privacy**, **Security** and **Minimalism**. The latter you may not have heard of but was proposed by Cal Newport in his book Digital Minimalism. In our physical lives if we only focus on one area such as food, we would not achieve the balance required to promote physical health since we would be neglecting other areas such as sleep and exercise. The same is true in our digital lives. If we focus only on one area, let's say privacy, then we will not achieve true digital health and could still end up experiencing a 'Digital Heart Attack' requiring emergency 'Digital CPR'.

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Compartmentalise



Protect



Refine

While 'Digital CPR' may be required as an emergency procedure, such as when a password has been stolen, it can also be used as a preventive measure also. Here, CPR can be defined to include strategies: **Compartmentalise**, **Protect** and **Refine**. Which when combined to provide balance in our digital lives can improve our privacy, security and time spent using technology.

- **Compartmentalisation** is used to improve privacy and reduce linkability of our digital data points. In short, linkability is the ability to bring two or more digital records together using a common identifier such as an email address or phone number. Using unique credentials for each digital interaction and not recycling passwords is a simple and effective method of reducing likability.
- **Protect** refers to security measures which can be implemented to increase our security and prevent us from becoming victims of cyber attacks or fraud. Examples can be password managers, end to end encryption and secure email.
- **Refine** refers to the adoption of the digital minimalism philosophy where we carefully select the technologies we want to use, refine their use, and eliminate the rest do not provide value to our lives.

More information about each of these strategies, and tips on how to implement them can be found [here](#).

It is important to stress that achieving **Digital Balance** requires us to consider all three strategies. Neglecting an area could leave us at risk, requiring emergency CPR, which is obviously something we are trying to avoid. The symbiotic relationship between the three areas can be demonstrated using the following equation:

$$D = \frac{C + P}{R}$$

Where:

D = Digital Balance, C = Compartmentalisation, P = Privacy, R = Refinement.

Addressing an area can have a direct impact on the other areas and the overall level of balance. To demonstrate this impact we can consider a number of scenarios in which a user interacts on the Internet. Each scenario will consider a different number of digital interactions (digital footprints) and varying levels of compartmentalisation and protection applied.

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Scenario 1:

In this scenario a person uses the same two email addresses for all their online activities (twitter, email, websites) and has taken only two security measures to protect their security online. Their interactions on the Internet have left one hundred digital footprints (tweets posted, email sent, YouTube comments etc).

$$D = \frac{2+2}{100} = 0.04$$

We can see that their overall balance score is quite low (0.04) because they had a high number of interactions and only a small amount of compartmentalisation and protection.

Scenario 2:

In the second scenario a person applies some compartmentalisation now using five email addresses for all their online activities (twitter, email, websites) and has taken a further three security measures to protect their security online. Their interactions on the Internet have remained the same leaving one hundred digital footprints (tweets posted, email sent, YouTube comments etc).

$$D = \frac{5+5}{100} = 0.1$$

We can see that their overall balance score has improved (0.1) because despite having the same number of interactions on the Internet, they have now increased their security and privacy.

Scenario 3:

In the final scenario a person greatly increases their privacy using compartmentalisation, now using ten different email addresses for all of their online activities. In addition, they also implement ten protection methods greatly increasing their security. Finally, they also refine their use of technology eliminating unnecessary interaction resulting in a greatly reducing their digital footprint and leaving only fifty digital footprints.

$$D = \frac{10+10}{50} = 0.4$$

We can see that their overall balance score has greatly improved (0.4) since they have taken measures to increase security and privacy and reduce their overall digital footprint.

Conclusion

This eBook has proposed 'Digital Balance', a new philosophy for how we should use technology. A philosophy in which we use carefully selected strategies to optimise our use of technology, ensuring our digital interactions are safe, secure and support the values and ambitions we hold.

For more information about each of these strategies, and tips on how to implement them visit my [blog](#).

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