

Defining the Essentials

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As human beings continue to distance themselves from each other with every advance in technology, new generations of children are being denied essential direct interactions that are necessary to achieve success in both the workplace and the family home. Young people prefer to communicate digitally, even dating people contacted online whom they never had any interaction with at school, work, or social settings.

My generation was taught to write in cursive with pen and pencil, now young people only learn to text or type into a computer keyboard. Direct meetings compel some restraint before insulting people or inflicting other cruelties upon them. Now, bullying and cruelty are committed casually and often anonymously by text or internet posting.

As a man who worked 20 years hiring, training, and mentoring people as an operations manager, it has been hard to replace the daily interactions I experienced with so many people, not to mention my family. Now, other than my one dear visitor, my human interaction is limited to my mail correspondence. I marked 20 years on death row in 2017.

Correspondence is defined in the instant sense as "communication by letters." My letters to family members, while critical, are limited to only two people. My three children, now grown, have been alienated since 1998.

And so, it is my correspondence with pen pals that has been a vital source of nourishment for my heart and soul. A pen pal is defined as "a friend made and kept through correspondence." That restrictive definition does not suffice.

I always hope to advance a pen pal to a friend. Friend is defined as "one attached to another by affection or esteem." Now, isn't that more preferable?

In order to fully realize correspondence, you need to elevate it to the equivalent of a conversation. Conversation is defined as "an oral exchange of sentiments, observations, opinions, or ideas." When you have a conversation face to face, you utilize all five senses – sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Senses are defined as "a specialized function or mechanism by which we receive and respond to external or internal stimuli." The next time you have an "in person" conversation with someone, really contemplate that notion.

When I compose letters to people, I try to engage them in an exchange of sentiments, observations, opinions, and ideas.

When I read a letter from someone, I try to visualize how they would appear if they stood in front of me, having a photo sent to me helps. I also hear their voice, accent, and inflections in their written words as how I imagine. I inhale the scents of the places and things they describe. I savor the taste of the foods and beverages often described, it is not seen as insensitive to write about such things. I imagine the tactile sensation of a hug, a kiss, or a handshake of my friend as if we existed in the same physical space.

However one defines it, correspondence is a conversation. Strive to utilize all five senses when you write. Allow a pen pal to become a friend. Don't allow technology to extinguish basic humanity. Perhaps you can redefine and revitalize your interactions with family and friends. Perhaps you might share this concept with our young people as well.