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Digital communication stands in the way of face-to-face communication and interpersonal relationships.

# Does Texting Affect Emotional Intelligence?

BY PATRICIA HARMON

**T**he single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place. —George Bernard Shaw

B @ mtg b&e Wed. C U @ 9

No, this is not a new programming language or a secret code in some clandestine society; it is a sample of communication sent through texting.

When the message is translated, it says, “Be at meeting bright and early Wednesday. See you at 9 o’clock.”

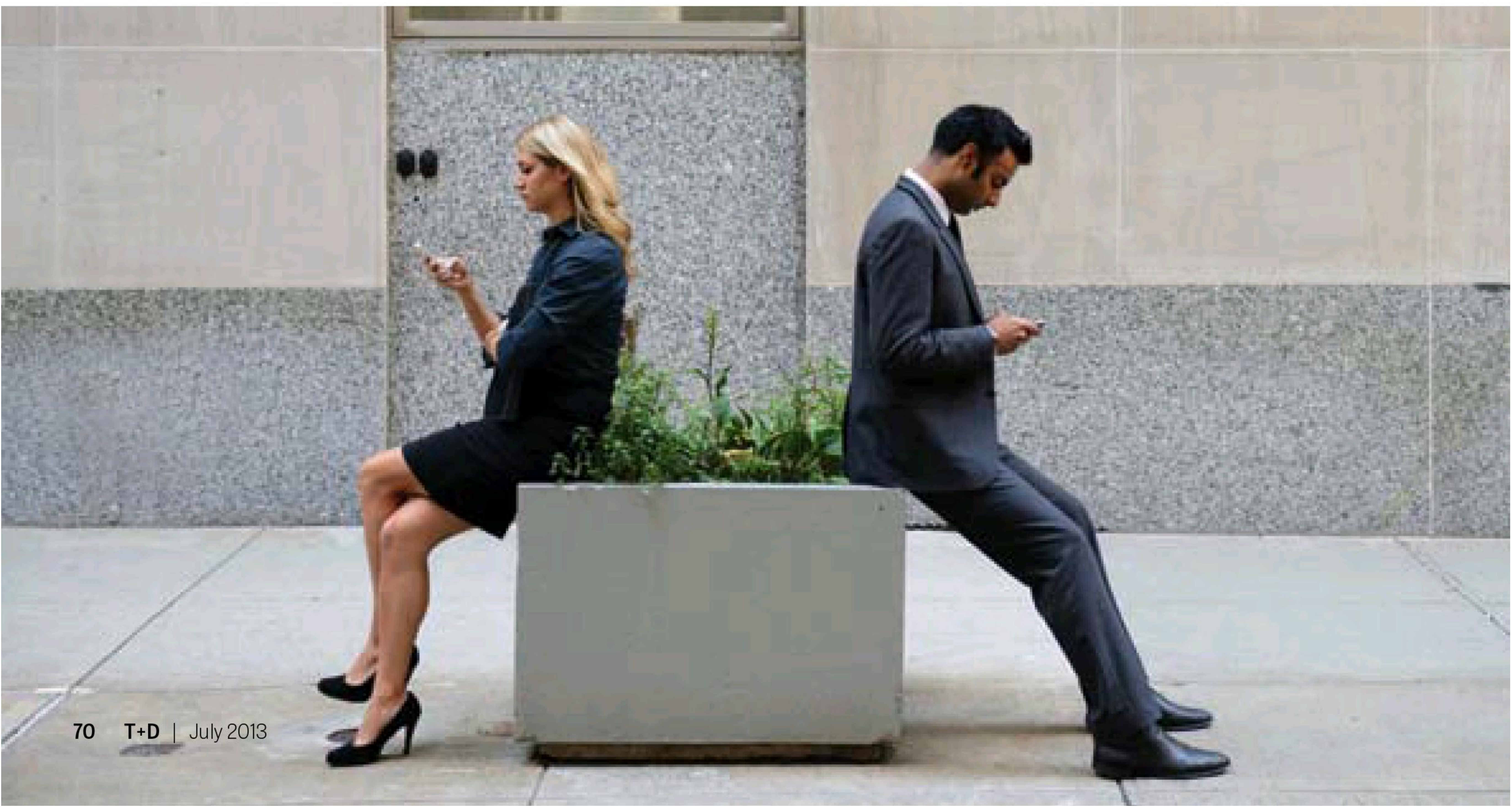
There’s nothing wrong with texting if your objective is to communicate quickly and informally. In fact, it has become the preferred method of communication for kids and young adults.

With the rise in the number of people texting, however, researchers are finding that overtexting is contributing to a significant decline in the quality of communication in the workplace.

Email, thought by many to be the first cousin of text messages, is equally impersonal. Although email often is

longer in length by comparison, both methods have led to decreased civility, compromised interpersonal relationships, and even aggression. It is ironic that email has the potential to be more thoughtful, yet it often provokes the opposite tendency to be immediately reactive.

Up to 93 percent of communication is conveyed in tone of voice and body language, while only 7 percent is conveyed in words. With those statistics, it is no wonder that digital





communication can be misinterpreted or be offensive inadvertently.

### The appeal of digital communication

Researchers say that digital communication is not just for efficiency. It is a way to communicate with protection. Texts and emails allow you to hide your tone of voice, facial expressions, and feelings. You also can avoid dealing with the feelings of others. In comparison with traditional methods of communication, digital messaging is superficial and keeps a distance between you and others.

It is well known that humans are social animals, so perhaps it is not surprising that the use of emotional icons (emojis) has increased in tandem with the increase in digital messaging. These begin as punctuation marks to portray a person's feelings and can include numbers and letters. Maybe it's just our human reaction to satisfy a

need to express emotion.

There are still psychological and physical consequences to digital communication. One psychological consequence is the over-reliance on digital messaging, which can compromise the ability to develop the emotional intelligence skills associated with interpersonal relationships.

People who rely on digital messaging do not learn to exhibit, or read, the emotional cues that aid in understanding one another. Without the practice of day-to-day conversations, they lose their ability to modify their tone and style depending on to whom they talk. This, of course, can affect interpersonal situations such as job interviews, conflict management, and problem solving with others. The effectiveness of every relationship depends on emotional communication.

In the meantime, it is well known that people with high emotional intelligence have stronger interpersonal relationships. Generally, they are better able to cope with life's demands and have a better quality of life.

### Maintain your emotional intelligence

Learning this complex set of skills begins early on in life through face-to-face communication and continues to be learned over time. Since digital communication is here to stay, here are five tips to help ensure you maintain a strong level of emotional intelligence.

**Use digital messaging only for non-emotional issues.** Emotion has a great deal of context, and context is too easily misunderstood through text or email only.

**Use digital messaging when you want to broaden your communication, not deepen it.** Communication platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, have undoubtedly positively affected the

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extent of our reach to others, but it is no substitute for the immediate, multisensual conversation during which we pick up emotional cues through our eyes, ears, and sixth sense.

**Set boundaries as to when you will communicate through text and email.**

This tip is similar to some time management techniques for which you allot specific times of the day for different activities. Following this guideline will decrease your thought interruptions and allow more time for real-time interactions.

**Practice reading emotional expressions.** Doing so will sharpen your interpersonal skills, specifically empathy and your ability to read others. Watch a TV program or movie (with good actors) and turn off the sound. This exercise will increase your attention to facial expressions, and your accuracy will improve over time.

**Set an example.** Return messages by phone when you can. You'll probably have a more meaningful discussion and decrease the unnecessary back-and-forth messages that add no value to the discussion.

Like muscles, interpersonal skills are strengthened with continued use. Practice using those important listening skills that you won't get in texting or emailing.

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