



This holiday season, consider giving the gift of human connection to enrich your life.

Acting More Human in the Digital Age

*In a survey of 33,000 consumers in 29 countries, the **QualtricsXM Institute** asked what businesses need to do to win their loyalty. The universal answer was “act more human.”*

There are many ways to interpret what it means to act more human. Empathy, compassion, patience, humility and kindness are among behaviors that come to mind. “Human-ness” may include being an active listener, having a good sense of humor, admitting mistakes and asking for forgiveness.

At any given time, the human condition can be in a fragile, static or resilient state. Acting human helps lay the foundation for a strong sense of purpose and personal well-being. Conversely, there are physical and emotional repercussions when people act or are treated inhumanely.

Humanity and Technology

Technology influences human behavior and raises questions about ways in which they intersect. For example:

- Do people have their heads bowed in quiet reflection or have they lowered their gaze to view their smartphone screens?
- From the factory floor to household chores, which jobs are done more efficiently by a machine or device than a person?
- Is it preferable to use artificial intelligence (AI) and an algorithm in a service center or for a caller to converse with an agent?
- Does social media cultivate authentic connections or simply allow people to anonymously insult those with whom they disagree?

In recent years, many companies have strived to accelerate digital transformation in order to drive operational efficiencies and meet demand. This is a reasonable strategy to remain competitive. However, studies show it can also lead to alienation of the people whose loyalty and satisfaction is essential to success – employees, customers and the public at large.

According to the QualtricsXM forecast, 2023 will be the “year to re-balance the scales and bring the best of digital together with a renewed effort to connect on a human level.”

What Can You Do?

You may want to start by taking a personal inventory of your own use of communications technology and how it affects the way you relate with people. Here are 10 suggestions:

1. Practice the art of engaging in meaningful dialogue, even during brief encounters.
2. Listen more and talk less. Strive to understand other people’s needs and aspirations.



3. Ask questions so you can better understand the other person's perspective.
4. Offer advice or solutions to help solve problems once you have the information you need.
5. Be attentive. Make eye contact when conversing in person or on a screen.
6. Remember that widely broadcast messages reach individual people, not "targets."
7. Choose communication channels wisely. Follow ethical standards of practice.
8. Build trust by listening, validating and following up on what you promise to deliver.
9. Reduce distractions that interfere with communication; be in the moment with others.
10. Engage in self-care. Do activities that help reduce stress and relieve anxiety.

Body Language

A first impression occurs in less than 7 seconds. You can make a conscious choice about your tone of voice and the attitude you want to project during that time. Think about how you may come across: upbeat, helpful, appreciative, intimidating or "couldn't care less?"

What you say is equally as important as how you say it. People form impressions based on verbal and visual cues. Without the ability to read body language, experts say, it's easy to miss crucial elements to conversations that can positively or negatively impact the outcome. This is one of the reasons why rapid-fire text messages can easily be misconstrued.

Facial expressions, hand gestures and other non-verbal cues such as crossing arms or legs, leaning in or touching someone speak volumes. It's easy to tell when an audience is getting restless when people start to slump in their chairs or quietly pull out their phones.

Personal Connection

According to an article published in *Forbes*, personal interaction, such as a face-to-face meeting, tends to be more productive than other means of communication, such as a phone call or email, because mirror neurons in the brain mimic other people's observed behaviors, sensations and feelings. This mirroring behavior creates opportunities for personal connection and intimacy.

While AI alters how work gets done and who does it, [experts on collaborative intelligence models](#) have predicted that the technology's larger impact will be in complementing and augmenting human capabilities, not replacing them. Not surprisingly, people are designing AI assistants with increasingly complex and subtle human traits, such as sympathy.

When smart machines are used smartly, they give people the gift of time – more time to focus on higher-level tasks, be creative, pursue fulfilling activities, build on physical capabilities and even to rest.

If you allow technology to run your life rather than being in control of the technology you use, when a disconnection occurs you are likely to suffer. But if you think of AI, communications platforms and hand-held devices as tools you can use to enhance human interactions, your chances of thriving in the digital age are greatly improved.