

□ *The following speech was delivered by U.S. Representative Mike Quigley (IL-05) to graduating 8th graders at Blaine and Bateman Elementary Schools during the month of June:*

“Teachers, faculty, parents and graduating 8th graders: thank you for asking me to speak today.

First let me congratulate on successfully completing the first leg of your educational journey. In four years you will be graduating from high school—and four years after that from college.

You’re about to enter a fascinating time in your lives. You’re hurtling toward adulthood at a speed that will amaze you-- and terrify your parents. Trust me on that.

And as you face this time of change and challenge, I have two words of advice: Look up.

Look up from your smart phone; look up from your iPad; shut the lid on your laptop, hit the “off” switch on the desktop monitor.

Put away the Android, stow the X-box, power down the iPod. Stop tweeting and texting. Forego updating your Facebook page every five minutes.

Look up.

If you don’t, you might miss something really cool.

Now don't get me wrong. I have an iPod and an iPhone and I love them both.

Of course, I can't work them nearly as well as you do. It was just a couple of months ago that I learned how to get Blackhawks updates on my iPhone.

I get it. These devices are terrific tools that let us stay in touch like never before. They give us access to unparalleled amounts of information. You literally have entire libraries of data at your finger tips.

But as cool as these clever assemblies of carbon fiber and tempered glass are, they worry me.

It seems these wonderful gadgets threaten to become proxies for reality—sleek, seductive escapes from the noisy and often troubling world that surrounds us.

I worry these amazing devices are keeping us apart rather than bringing us together.

And that's surprising. You'd think with nearly one billion Facebook users—each with lots of “friends”—the world would be a cozier, more understanding place.

I'm not sure that's the case.

Experts who study these things, point out that we've become a nation accustomed to “being alone together.”

You know what I'm talking about.

On the L, in the school cafeteria, walking down the street, in an elevator or even at a Cubs game, we’re texting, surfing, tweeting.

We’re surrounded by people, but we’re isolated in our own little digital world. And while we may be communicating, we’re not talking.

I wonder that in the near future, Siri, the talking helper on the new iPhone, will be the only one we actually talk to.

The clever Apple ad would like you to believe that she—or “it”—is all you need: is there ever another human being in those ads other than the actor and their iPhone?

But even if Siri can find you the nearest drycleaner or help actor Samuel L. Jackson cook risotto, you can’t have a personal relationship with your smart phone.

And you never will.

All of our wonderful devices give us the illusion that we’re communicating; the illusion that people are actually listening.

But *really* talking to people—takes more work than a 140 character tweet.

It’s messy. It’s complicated. There’s no delete button. You say something, it’s out there. There’s no taking it back.

There’s no editing, no mute button...it’s real time and it’s reality.

We need to remember that friendships—like families-- are not as well engineered as iPods and laptops.

Friendships are filled with a sort of buyer’s remorse. They crash; they let you down.

Families can be even tougher—and more complicated than any app you’ll ever download.

But you have to get over it. Even with all the flaws, real relationships, real conversations with real people in real time are satisfying in a way no E-reader will ever be.

But I think we’re in denial about the importance of talking and listening.

I know. I’m a member of Congress.

As a nation, we’re living lives that have become increasingly insular— driving alone in our cars; living isolated from our neighbors.

And our smart phone or iPod lets us take that isolation with us wherever we go.

I can’t get this image out of my head: a couple weeks ago I saw a guy riding his bike down Ashland Ave., wearing ear buds, glancing at his smart phone, while traffic whizzed by.

This person, in an electronic cocoon, was at that moment either the most wired guy in the city or the most alone.

He certainly wasn’t paying attention to what was going on around him.

A T-Rex could have been rollerblading down the street; the space shuttle could have been circling overhead; Justin Bieber could have been parachuting into Wrigley Field—and this guy would have missed it.

Don't be that guy. Don't be the person walking down the street, eyes glued to the glowing 2-inch missing the sights and sounds around you.

There's too much to experience with your own senses...don't accept a digital substitute for reality.

The fact is we need you engaged—now more than ever.

Your generation will be called on to confront some of the toughest problems we've ever faced as a society.

And the fact is texting your BFF won't help find a cure for heart disease. Tweeting won't solve climate change. Mastering Angry Birds isn't going to keep us safe from terror attacks or eliminate the energy crisis.

As many of you know, I love and still play hockey--and I am a serious Blackhawks fan.

Out on the ice is the only place I know of these days where people aren't checking their blackberries.

There's a reason for that. Hockey requires total focus and complete attention. You have to respond in real time to an ever changing set of circumstances—or land on your backside.

In that way, it's a lot like the world you're about to face. You have to pay attention; know what's real and what's not.

I've had more stitches than I can count from playing hockey. I didn't get those scars playing virtual hockey on a laptop or downloading the latest NHL App.

And I don't want you to settle for experiences and personal relationships that are digital rather than real.

A couple of weeks ago, my daughter graduated from Boston University—it was a very proud moment for me and my wife, Barbara.

The Commencement speaker was Eric Schmidt, the chairman of Google.

Not surprisingly, Mr. Schmidt said the fact that we are all connected via the internet is “a blessing.”

There was a lot in Mr. Schmidt's speech that I didn't personally agree with, but he made a couple of very good points.

He noted that while computers have memory, speed and amazing circuitry, they don't have heart.

And he also said that life is not about “your friend count—it's about the friends you can count on.”

Heart, family, friends—isn't that what today is really about? Isn't that what life is about?

So hug your parents, high five your classmates and thank those special teachers who have helped you get this far.

And put down the smart phone for awhile—it won’t hug you back.

You’ve got a lot to learn; a lot to offer; and a lot to experience.

Just remember: Look up.”

