



Everything is the fault of social media anymore. That's the perpetual refrain. Our political issues, our polarization, our diminishing self-esteem... you name it, social media has been blamed for it. I've heard it from the right, left, and center, regardless of gender and race. Easy scapegoat, isn't it? Just blame social media. But in reality, social media didn't fail us. We failed us.

I can remember my early days of social media in 2008. It was quirky. It was fresh. It was edgy. It came with the daily question "why would someone seriously care about me pushing out an update on what I was doing?". However, I soon found out that many great people in the cybersphere had some thought-provoking discussions. At the time I was one of a handful of physical therapists that made the initial foray into that strange new world, a trailblazer of sorts in our field.

There was a time when people interacted on these platforms in much the same way that they would in face-to-face discussions. In fact, my first and foremost rule of social media, back in 2006 when I started blogging and brought to the forefront when I embraced social media, was that I wouldn't say anything in an online venue that I wouldn't say directly to your face. With rights come responsibilities. Pretty simple, actually.

There now seems to be a steady stream of complaints about social media. The problem is that you're living in the world of the social media platform, and they've written the rules. And yes, you've signed off on those rules in their Terms of Service. They are a privately-run business and their goal is, like any other, to make money. This shouldn't come as any big surprise. They don't have to be nice to you and you're not entitled to anything. They don't have to allow you to say anything you want because it's their platform and their rules. The Terms of Service are not the First Amendment. You are partaking in the world of a private entity, and that private entity

creates rules of engagement. You don't like the rules? Leave. Pretty simple. That's on you, not them.

But much as we've seen in our society as a whole, social media platforms seem to just be a microcosm of the diatribe and vitriol and all-around lousy human behavior we see on a far-too-regular basis. There was a time when certain behaviors were not publicly acceptable; those days seem to be long gone. What makes it worse is that this behavior extends into our daily, non-social-media world. Everything has become a Yelp review, shrouded in anonymity. Say what you want, say anything, because there is no accountability for your words. You're entitled to say anything you want because, well, that's your right.

I've always believed that the most important aspect of social media isn't monologue but dialogue. It is the ability to communicate across the world in an asynchronous yet real-time environment. It's not about selling your soul online. It's about engagement. That requires time, care, and effort ... and listening.

Social media hasn't failed us. Far from it. If anything, we have failed social media. It came with rights and responsibilities - sadly, I think we often forgot the latter. But that's likely not much different than our current worldview, is it?

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