

Can We Cool It With the “Hot Takes”?

We live in amazing times from a technological standpoint. A little over 20 years ago, people were just starting to navigate the Internet like a nervous driver's ed student. Now, our phones have more computing power than the PCs we had back in the 90s. But no matter what era of technology we are in, there are two constants. One is porn. The other is people being stupid on the platform, which sometimes goes hand in hand with the first.

Today's technology in the area of social media has given rise to on-the-spot reactions to events both important and mundane. But it has also given rise to users thinking their words are somehow vital to the culture and must be heard. That leads to what is mockingly called “hot takes,” which are comments and ideas that are so unnecessary and/or stupid (again, hand in hand) that you have to wonder if the people making them have any self-awareness whatsoever.

Within the past couple of days, we have seen takes so hot you need get firefighting gear just to experience them live. The death of Senator John McCain, the shooting at a video game tournament in Jacksonville, the Brett Kavanaugh nomination for the US Supreme Court, and untold other stories bring out the worst of those who could have left well enough unheard.

Of course, there will be some who say it's their freedom of speech and they have a right to say what they want. For the most part, they're right. But the freedom of speech comes with a responsibility to use it wisely. Yelling “Fire” in a crowded theater isn't protected because there is actual physical harm that can come from it. Granted, calling the late Senator McCain a douchebag won't usually cause physical damage (unless you say it to the face of a McCain supporter who is a former

Marine and is now an MMA fighter), but it isn't advisable unless you want to be seen as the douchebag you called the late Senator.

Of course, there are people out there who love to stir up drama because it gets them noticed. Which is what they want. Even negative attention is attention to them, which feeds their egos and sustains them like a parasite. These people can be hard to ignore because they play on your emotions to garner a passionate/vitriolic response. This cycle continues until one party of this parasitic relationship gives up. These folks are annoying, but ultimately harmless.

The real scary ones are those who aren't posting to rile someone up, but actually think their poorly-thought-out ideas are intellectual gold. Everyone from *New York Times* reporters to the teenage girl down the street have had moments where they posted something and then wondered why people didn't like them. These are the types of social media users who have made me think humanity is doomed.

And there are many more of them than there are of the posters looking to get a rise out of people. Here's how bad it's gotten. People literally have to take time out of their days to try to figure out if someone's being serious. When you can't tell the difference between a joke and reality, it's time to admit we have an issue. And the issue is we have people with egos hopped up on steroids and the self-awareness of damp wash cloth.

This is going to come as a shock, but I believe not everything I think needs to have a platform because I have had some really *dumb* ideas. Wanting to date a semi-attractive drug addict? That was me. Thinking a woman with severe mental issues might be a good fit for me? Yep, that was me. Thinking the whole Mighty Morphin Power Rangers thing was just a fad? You got it!

As a result, I've learned when to express myself and when to just think what I want to say. It's kept me safe and employed for a number of years, so I say it's working out pretty well. We need to take the same approach to social media and communications technology because there is always an audience somewhere who might stumble upon our musings and take offense. (Granted, that happens these days with the frequency of a Starbucks customer getting overcharged, but the point stands.) Behind every Twitter handle, Facebook status, or Instagram account there is a human being with feelings, ideas, and desires that may differ from yours, so it's important to weigh your words carefully before sending them out to the world. Once you hit Send, it's eternal.

In the world of social media, it's better to be smart than quick.