

Being Too Much in Love with Technology

Ed Bell

Although technology has improved society in many ways, we use it indiscriminately, not distinguishing the good uses from the bad. We could talk about cell phones, oversized SUVs, fast food, or a variety of other advancements. But the cool air and falling leaves of autumn bring to mind the leaf blower—a monster whose decibel level far exceeds her practical value.

While I'm willing to admit that under certain circumstances the leaf blower can be useful, I think most people are missing out on the natural benefits of using a rake:

1. Raking does just as good a job as blowing.
2. If it actually does take longer to rake (a fact of which I'm not certain), the time "saved" and used otherwise would in many ways have been better spent raking.
3. Raking provides more exercise—the necessary physical movement our twenty-first-century bodies are lacking.
4. Raking makes only the most wonderful sound as it scratches across the leafy ground.

As for point one, beautifully raked yards existed long before noisy leaf blowers—there's no denying that it is, at the very least, possible to rake leaves and not have to blow them. As for point two, how many Americans who argue they don't have time to rake all those leaves will stand there blowing them, then rush off to the health club to use a rowing machine or a stair-climber? How long will it be until the most popular workout machine is the one that simulates leaf raking? But if you don't rush off to a health club (no doubt because you don't have the time), you're probably too busy working. After all, you have bills to pay: the new leaf blower, the new cell phone, the new computer, the new car, and that badly needed vacation to get away from it all.

The man who blows the leaves on my campus wears special equipment—big spaceman goggles for his eyes and headphone-like muffs to protect his ears. His get-up alone indicates a problem to me: If you can't gather up leaves without protecting your own eyes and ears, perhaps there's a better way of doing it. Stop and compare the man with the rake to the one with the leaf blower. Which one is better off? The rake is simple; it stores easily; it doesn't cost much; it is quiet and doesn't bother the neighbors; it encourages necessary body movement; it's not very dangerous; and so on. But the leaf blower is bound to break down; it takes up more space and, combined with its cousins (the weed-whacker, the electric hedge trimmers, and so on), it will eventually convince you to build a bigger garage; it (and machines like it) costs more money; which is why you are working too much to rake leaves; it is loud, which is unpleasant, if not for you,

for the neighbors; it is apparently dangerous—I'm assuming this because of the equipment the man on campus wears.

Technology is likely to come along and solve all of these problems. It's not hard to imagine a quieter leaf blower someday. Of course, the old-fashioned leaf-blowing folk will long for the good old days when a leaf blower could be heard for blocks away. But soon enough they'll all have the newer, lighter, more ergonomically correct models too. And then, of course, we'll have another problem to deal with—a problem that we can't even imagine until it occurs. Through all of that, however, two things will remain true: (1) We should not make too much noise around other people and (2) we should get our bodies moving. We should, I suggest, use our technology more discriminately—instead of just using it because we can.

Topic: Ed Bell uses an extended example about leaf blowers to argue that contemporary Americans should use technology more discriminately—"instead of using it just because [they] can." To what extent do you agree with his view? Support your thesis by using specific examples from your personal experience, your observation of others, and any of your reading, including "Being Too Much in Love with Technology."