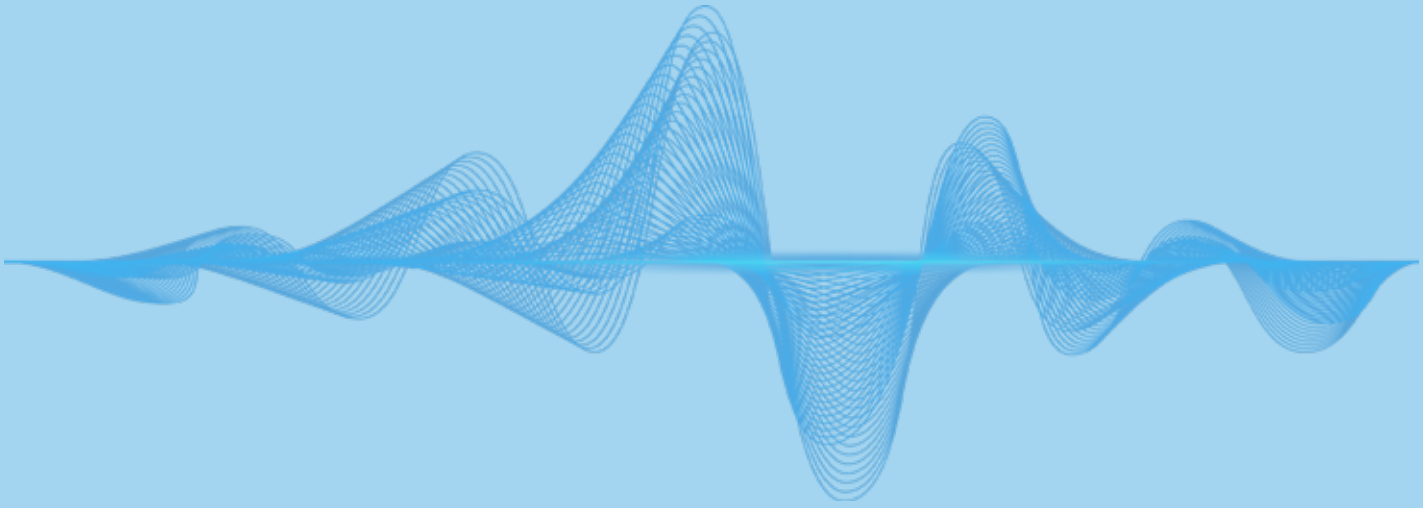


Signal from noise

HOW TO TUNE INTO A WORLD FILLED WITH UNWANTED DISTRACTIONS, AND HOW TO CAST AWAY MEANINGLESS NOISE.

Recently, a friend of mine was visiting New York with a Kenyan Maasai warrior. They were near Times Square when the Maasai came to a sudden halt and asked my friend if he could hear the crickets singing. Taken aback by this outlandish claim, his answer was a confident "no". The Maasai led my friend to a nearby bush, gently parted its leaves and revealed the noisy offending cricket going about its daily business. In shock, my friend asked how could anyone hear such a faint murmur in the midst of downtown Manhattan? The Maasai simply replied: "It is what your ear is tuned to that determines what you hear."



Kamal Bengougam says one must be able to switch off and escape noise in order to focus on onself.

We live in a world filled with inescapable noise – traffic, people, cell phones…most of it useless brouhaha preventing us from hearing what really matters. Pearls of wisdom lost and submerged in the depth of savage seas.

I remember growing up with a single television channel – black and white of course – a world where the main source of information came from a local radio station. No social networks, no cell phones, no LED lights and far less road and air traffic. I often reminisce about those long evenings spent talking, reading or playing board games with loved ones, developing communication skills and through that, community. I also remember the clarity of a night sky devoid of polluting lights. I genuinely felt I could stretch out a hand and touch the stars.

Today, confronted with the onslaught of decibels, watts and bytes, people are turning into silos, hiding behind virtual walls, devoid of life skills, and feeling isolated and lonely. They rely on apps to find everything from a sandwich through to meaningful relationships. The mobile phone has become the accessory of choice. Rather than walking the streets holding hands on a date, couples grasp their metal boxes. There are even dedicated lanes in Shanghai for people who walk while browsing. New words have been created like Wi-Fi, and bytes. New forms of communication have evolved through Twitter, Facebook and emojis, and new best friends have been created through Amazon's Alexa and Microsoft's Cortana digital assistants.

Through progress and evolution, creation has had to adapt itself to this new world and shelter its senses from this daily intrusion of sound and light. However, today's business world expects executives to be available and contactable at all times through mobile/digital technology – weekends, evenings, holidays…. How can upward mobility/career and a private life co-exist and where do the boundaries lie?

How can we tune out this beastly interference so we can hear the things that give us real purpose, nutrients for mind and spirit, and help us advance on this ladder of life with peace and

serenity, or even rest? Do today's business people not realise that excessive activity or noise is often the enemy of productivity? That creativity is born out of silence, space where the mind opens itself to the universe of untold possibilities, allowing creation to deposit the gift of an idea.

In the world of coffee, we should be able to escape with ease. Coffee is associated with the Italian dolce vita or sweet life. People sitting on an outside terrace sharing laughter while watching the world go by. In the business of coffee, we often share opinions and thoughts, make presentations and sales pitches surrounded by the glorious dark brew. We have the privilege of mixing business with pleasure, sipping concoctions that take us back to origin, and connect us to scents, colours and noise from faraway lands.

Even as manufacturers of espresso machines, we spend our days driving quality, deep in dialogue with all departmental stakeholders. Minute movements of the grinder, deflections in temperature and 'smart' tamping perpetually tease our eyes, nostrils and taste buds. Our eyes transfix on two tiny streams of liquid espresso frantically trying to escape the confines of a brew chamber within the accepted +/- 24 seconds norm, releasing the amazing potential confined inside a simple bean. This is the reason why we love what we do. The world and business of coffee is a great place to be.

However, one must be able to escape even this pleasant world, isolate from all noise and focus on oneself. Are you able to switch off your phone, live in a noise free zone? It is my belief that very few people could. There will be a time in the not so distant future when people will have to be treated for digital addiction and suffer withdrawal symptoms from phone deprivation. Maybe governments should be involved, and implement a levy or tax on noise, to remove cell phones as a penalty for affray, or even ban phones altogether, like alcohol, on Sundays? Restaurants should have phone-free zones and Wi-Fi should be abolished on airplanes.

In my life, I try to protect myself from information overload by being extremely selective with what I watch, listen to, or get involved in. In my opinion, the core problem



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with noise is not that it disturbs but that it transforms. Our minds are like sponges and they absorb information at all times, outside of our control, like hungry predators consume their naïve preys. If you cannot control what goes in, how can you predict what might come out? Sheltering ourselves from noise should not just be done in self-defence, it should be prioritised as an act of survival, protecting our psyche from negative inputs as ideas, like seeds, tend to germinate and grow. The voices in your mind may not be just your own or that of those you trust and love, but they too can affect your thoughts, actions and behaviour, and impact your destiny.

Signals on the other hand are like other fine things in life, rare and life enhancing. They reinforce in us all that is good and noble, help us live lives that make a difference, lives that promote purpose, fulfilment, joy, legacy, and therefore matter. Mothers can always hear when their child is crying. There is a reason for that.

Back in New York, the Kenyan Maasai decided to try an experiment. He gathered a handful of coins and threw them up in the air. As the metal hit the pavement, the world around them came to a standstill, eyes darting in their direction.

The truth is that we do listen to what our ears, minds and hearts are tuned to. **GCR**