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Privacy Issues

As our privacy vanishes, the desire to transfuse the values of our age with new meaning increases. "Catching up" is a way of coping with changes that we have no choice but to accept. We spend too much time thinking about the good old days and take far too long to accept new things.

We are in the middle of a chaotic struggle to protect privacy. While a digital world has formed and stabilized, the making of valid laws for this world is still in a very early phase. New technology has left the laws and regulations far behind. Our concept of privacy is a compromise between collective social values and individual legal rights and there are still major issues to be addressed. For example, what happens if there is a conflict of interests? Law enforcement versus personal freedom and the protection of privacy versus freedom of speech are just two examples. In addition to our legal rights, there are many other social, economic and cultural issues concerning privacy.

Redefining Privacy

The number one threat to privacy is the government. More privacy necessitates less governmental intervention, so when we ask the government to do something about privacy protection, we should be aware of the paradox. What kind of role should the government play in protecting people's privacy? What function and power should the government have? Although personal privacy is a human right, it can be limited, or even sacrificed, in the interests of the general public. But who draws the line between privacy and public interests?

Just as revolutionary technologies have completely altered our way of thinking, new values replace the old values over the years. How can we remain flexible and adaptable to the ever-changing world, without losing the principles we always believed in?

Showing and Peeping

Privacy issues relating to the Internet are even more complicated. Information that used to be available only to powerful institutions can now be accessed by the general public on the Internet, and many unconstrained amateurs have developed a taste for prying, controlling and manipulating information. In addition to this, it is possible to adopt a wide variety of identities in the virtual world. Inhibitions may fall, to a certain degree, and online personas give vent to repressed, subconscious emotions. Internet voyeurism, for both active participants and passive spectators, has become a new kind of group therapy.

Keep Smiling and Face the Challenges

The dramatic increase in urban population has been accompanied by an increase in the restrictions imposed by modern urban planning. The result is fenced communities and a prison-like environment. We don't trust people and are too afraid to allow our kids to play in the streets. We don't know what kind of lifestyle we should choose, how we can compete or cooperate with the rest of the world and how we can prosper in this almost transparent society. In his book *The Dilbert Future* Scott Adams ironically describes a decent world. In this world there cameras are everywhere. Everybody can connect to any of these installed cameras and enjoy a wonderful aerial view of the city. We are safe in this city, because the eye of the law watches our every step and sees every crime. However, the close surveillance in this city means that everyone, including every policeman, is being treated like a potential criminal. Or are we enjoying the publicity previously reserved for the superstars? Let's keep smiling then as we walk along the red carpet of stardom.

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