Ask A Genius 58 – AI Advisors, Life Strategies, Neural Plasticity, and Built-Ins
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Scott: The AI assistants are primitive now, but they should, just given technology trends and computer science sophistication, increase their domain generality and utility. How is this likely to going to play out into the future – stuff with AI assistants?

Rick: We already have in-home helpers like Cortana and Siri. They aren't that helpful. Mostly, Siri frees up your hands when looking for stuff. You can yell stuff at her while you're driving to look stuff up for you.

Those types of butlers or helpers are going to become increasingly helpful. They'll become good at giving life advice. One area where people are particularly clueless is middle and high school, and applying for college. It has a bunch of moving parts. Social media functions as rough advisors for teens now.

But it is not the best. Teens have always been clueless, and miserable because of it and search for ideas on how to live their lives, but not very hard. Teens wallow in misery. It is a rare teen that does the makeover, which is a popular theme in high school movies.

The teen that is unhappy with his/her social position and does a radical transformation of his/her self. Mostly, teens don't know how to ask or take advice. Teens are like most people. Most people don't want to take advice. Most advice isn't good, and most people don't want to drastically change.

But there will be an increasing market for increasingly good expert advisors as people see that the expert advice can really help them. I would think that the teen market would be a good place for that. The best advisors for teens, who are lucky enough to have them, are older siblings.

If you get advice from an older sibling, whether you want it or not, they will tell you you're stupid or not, but not everyone can have a cooler older sibling. But there will be devices that perform some of those functions, which will ask people to reconsider their appearance, behavior, and life strategies.

You'll be able to program your personal advisor to give you the degree of input that you might want, and a personal life monitor can give you all sorts of helpful advice, like you're mansplaining, or interrupt a lot, and can give a report on the quality of your conversation if you're concerned about that.

It'll tell you if you're being too interrupty. It will monitor other people's faces. It will advise you if your language is either too high level, or too low level, or too many "uhms" or "you knows." And this specific thing is one example of working with external computation.

And having that kind of thing will be a huge advantage for people who get good at working with that kind of thing, but then you have the external computation that is even more intimate.

External computers that ride really close to your brain and may follow a more direct pipeline than just talking to you.

Google Glass failed, it fed information into you via your optic nerve, your eyes. At some point, there will be a wearable form of computation that feeds users information more or less continuously and doesn't freak people out.

We've talked about contact lenses linked to computers, like the *Terminator* eye display. That is fairly intimate. Eventually, computation will be more intimate and people will have more built-ins or jacked-ins. People might have actual jacks that link up or allow neural-type feeds, directly into the brain.

You already have things that really, really roughly work like that, where, for blind people, glasses that can give a rough picture of the world via your tough, maybe, or else directly to the back of your eyeball.

Digital hearing aids that provide hearing assistant directly to auditory nerves, or just cochlear implants. The brain is super plastic it turns out. The old picture was you were born with a certain amounts of neurons. That's not entirely true.

That's not the entire picture because the wiring in your brain is not neuron based, but dendrite based. All of the tendrils coming off of each one of your neurons, and those tendrils are constantly being re-engineered, which is at a crazy rate. An insane rate that the dendrites are rejiggering themselves.

The brain is greedy for efficient neural connections. The brain is super eager to rewire itself to the most efficient it can be relevant to the tasks it is being asked to do, and because of that people building add-ons for your brain will not always have to know the brain's wiring.

Because if you give the brain additional computational resources, it will tend to rewire itself given those resources. This is an overstatement, but you can slap any old crap on the brain and it will rewire itself to be able to use the information coming from that crap, if it can gain access to that information.

The future won't be war between the humans and the robots. The future will be scrambling among various people who are better or worse at adapting to various forms of external information. It is like war between the humans and the half-bots, which is a better kind of war.

Because anybody who is sufficiently motivated can become a half-bot by learning how to exploit external computation better. A half-bot, some kind of super-digital asshole.

(Laugh)

People are still pissed at the way people in the 90s had cellphones. Not everyone had a cellphone, people who did, didn't know how to use them in a way that didn't annoy people. On an annoyance scale from 0-10, somebody with a cell phone was likely to come in at a 6.

Someone talking loudly in the bank. Now, it is a low-level annoyance. Everyone is at a low-level annoyance. It is about a 2 for everyone. People think, "This is how it is now." Everyone is distracted and driving stupidly because it is pervasive.

The annoyance level is down to a 2. We will see the induced annoyance lowering. With Google Glass, it was seen as a 6 if people knew what you were wearing. People were ready to think you were a butthead.

And especially if they knew you could be recording video of them without explicit knowledge at any point with the glasses, so if you went into a bar with anyone that is tech savvy with the glasses, they might hassle you.

They might think you're a douche, and a douche who is taking video of them. The annoyance they cause was too much to overcome any kind of benefits from the Google Glass. But at some point, the wearable digital helper, the annoyance level in other people associated with them will be lower, will have more benefits than annoyance. In the same way, it was lower over time with the cell phones.

There will be all sorts of advantages to be had with the advancements in technology. There will be the gentleman billionaire who can't afford to be jacked in, but surrounds himself/herself with a bunch of tech jockeys who are providing the gentleman/gentlewoman with the latest insights from the devices.

That will allow them to take advantage of the technology without having to partake of it himself/herself. There will also be the gangs of people who jack into each other plus all of the added technology, to become specialized in a certain area. It isn't a tech thing, but Judd Apatow has, I believe, the most effective model for writing comedy movies right now.

Which is the multiple table readings, Judd Apatow is friends with all of the best comedy writers and comedians in LA, when he's got a project in development he brings in everybody to read the script. 20 people at a time, I guess. They sit around a table.

I do not know about this personally because, I guess, I am not one of the best comedy writers in LA. Apparently, you bring in 20 really funny people. At different points, people chime in a joke. I've been in comedy writing rooms. I have worked in them for years.

Somebody throws out a topic or something under consideration, then everybody tries to get their brains to think about the jokes on the topic under consideration. Apatow works and works his stuff under this methodology.

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