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The RELATIONSHIP issue

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Tiffany Shlain

Acclaimed Filmmaker, Founder of the Webby Awards, Co-Founder of the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences, and Mother

by Ariane Moore
photo by Marla Aufmuth

You won't see this super hero mom in a cape and spandex tights, but her signature fedora and camera in hand, are just as recognizable. Award winning filmmaker and co-founder of the Webby Awards, Tiffany Shlain, has taken the technology world by storm. Having been honored by Newsweek as one of the "Women Shaping the 21st Century", it's no surprise that Shlain was also invited to advise former Secretary of State Hilary Clinton on the internet and technology. Now Shlain has taken the ever-evolving discussion of technology one step further as she explores what it means to be human in the 21st Century in the clever and witty AOL original series, *The Future Starts Here*. We were able to catch up with Shlain to discuss the new series and how she juggles it all.

NCW: How did you become a filmmaker?

TS: When I was a kid I always loved going to the movies with my family every Sunday night. We would have the best discussions after movies - the films were triggers for deeper conversations. I never thought I could become a filmmaker, and was actually set to be a doctor, but then I went to UC Berkeley, and had one of those professors who change your life. She was a History of Film professor and was amazing at conveying the power of film on culture, and I was hooked. I studied a lot of film history after that, then ended up doing a summer program at NYU Film School. I mostly learned how to make films by cutting old films together, because I couldn't afford to go to grad school.

NCW: Your new series, *The Future Starts Here*, is a hit. What about it do you think resonates with so many people? What do you hope people take away after watching it?

TS: I think it speaks to people because, I hope, it makes them think about the good and bad potential of being connected in the 21st century. We're all moving so quickly. Our first episode about Technology Shabbats is the most popular episode, and talks about how my family and I unplug one day a week. As amazing as technology is, I think we need to be more mindful about how much we use it.

NCW: How did this opportunity present itself, and why did you feel it was something you wanted to explore?

TS: I received a call, out of the blue, in January from a wonderful woman at AOL who loved my work and wanted me to do a show. I was apprehensive, but they offered me creative freedom! I had a great team making the films, and I think we're up to 11 million views. I love that people don't just want to be entertained (even though it is an entertaining show, there is a lot of humor), but also want to think about bigger ideas about society.

NCW: What is a "Technology Shabbat"? How has implementing this into your life affected your family dynamic?

TS: A Technology Shabbat is when one day a week we unplug from technology, from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. It's such a wonderful thing that we just focus on each other and all distractions fall away.

NCW: What is "Tech Etiquette", and what are some basic rules everyone should know?

TS: In the series, I kind of call myself and other people out about pet peeves about technology. A couple of basics would be: 1.) Don't write long emails. Keep them under 100 words. 2) When you're with a circle of friends, don't pull out your phone.

NCW: What are some other topics that you plan to discuss on upcoming episodes of *The Future Starts Here*?

TS: There are so many topics. I'd love to explore the importance of letting one's mind wander. There's some interesting neuroscience about how it's good for creativity... I have a whole list of 30 topics that could be episodes.

NCW: How has being a mother influenced or inspired you in your career?

TS: Being a mother makes me think about time very differently. Now, I value working more efficiently, but with more impact: scaling my work down and really having a good chunk of time when I'm not working. In my 20's, I worked all the time. But now I love having time to stare at butterflies and clouds with my kids.

NCW: What advice do you have for other working moms trying to balance everything? Is technology part of the solution?

TS: I think they should try a Tech Shabbat. Doing it every week makes me feel like a better mother and person, and it's just a wonderful experience for family - one day to reconnect every week, that you know you're going to have. It's nice to do at the end of a workweek. Call it whatever you want, but definitely have a ritual moment when you turn off all your screens and light a candle. Just create a special space to be together with your family.

NCW: What is next for you in the New Year?

TS: We're going to be doing a "Global Cloud Premiere" on Feb. 5th for our new 8 min. film, "The Science of Character," which is perfect for families and schools to discuss the best ways to develop character strengths and best develop who you are. We are offering the film for free, with curriculum and posters for schools... and you'll hear from experts about new ideas for character development. It will be great for kids in middle and high school!

*To catch more from my interview with Tiffany Shlain visit ncw-magazine.com. Be sure to check out the original series *The Future Starts Here* on AOL On at on.aol.com*

