

southernrep

For Better STUDY GUIDE

NATIONAL NEW PLAY NETWORK
WORLD PREMIERE

For Better
April 2-27

BY ERIC COBLE
directed by Gary Rucker

starring
Leon Contavesprie,
Aimée Hayes,
Sean Patterson,
Ashley Ricord,
Veronica Russell and
George Sanchez

southernrep

Health experts fear an increase in technology addiction



Posted by [Chris Bynum](#), Staff writer, Times-Picayune April 04, 2008 5:00AM

Fourteen-year-old Chris Tebo sends about 150 text messages a day on his iPhone. His 18-year-old brother, Will, is so practiced that he can text message without removing the phone from his pocket -- a skill he uses at school, where cellphone use is banned.

Their mother's first ritual upon awakening is to brush her teeth and check her e-mail.

"In a way, it's like the smoker who wants a cigarette as soon as he wakes up," Cecile Tebo says in jest.

Tebo's three sons and her husband say she is among the "Crackberries" -- those addicted to their Blackberries.

But in fact, the Tebos -- as dependent as they may be on their wireless devices -- do not exhibit the telltale signs of technology addiction, a growing concern among mental health professionals.

The symptoms of technology addiction are much like those of any behavioral addiction, such as shopping addictions, sex addictions and food addictions, says Dr. Jose Calderon, assistant professor of clinical psychiatry at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center in New Orleans.

"People who are addicted begin to spend time (on their technology addiction) at the expense of social relationships. They become more isolated and therefore aggravate those around them because they are no longer socially available. They lose sleep. They can barely function at work or at school. They cannot pay attention, and therefore their productivity decreases," Calderon says.

"They stop eating well, and their healthy habits change because they are sitting. They may gain weight, get carpal tunnel syndrome, back pain or attention-deficit disorder. Because they engage less and less socially, they drop their social skills, or they lose them, or they don't develop them. In general, this can define addictive behavior."

There also can be biological components in the most severe cases. There have been instances, Calderon says, when people who have checked into recovery programs for their technology addiction have experienced withdrawal symptoms -- depression, anxiety, tremors, lack of sleep, sweats and headaches -- like those associated with substance abuse.

"Technology addiction is not well-defined, but it's a growing field," says Calderon of the addiction to cellphones, computers and the Internet. Currently, Internet addiction does not have a category in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association.

"Technology can offer ways to escape. The Internet is affordable, accessible and omnipresent," Calderon says. "It is also a powerful stimulant with images and sound."

But there are ways to keep technology in your control, rather than letting it control you. The key is to set limits.

Balard Tebo, patriarch of the Tebo family, uses the Internet for his work as owner of a fabrication business for marine vessels, but forsakes it as soon as he leaves the office at the end of the day. Staying connected isn't as important to his job as it is to his wife's job as crisis unit coordinator for the New Orleans Police Department, he says. "There are few emergency insulation calls for ships in the middle of the night."

And he uses his cellphone as a phone, not a text messaging device.

Youngest son Alex Tebo, 12, is much like his father. His cell, Alex says, is a way to stay in touch with his parents and a device that is always with him should an emergency arise.

This gives his mother one less worry.

"For me, it is peace of mind to be able to stay in touch," Cecile Tebo says. "I am just more relaxed if I am accessible to my family and my job."

Still, her most recent new year's resolution was to curb her multitasking by pulling over to park while texting from her car.

EXPERT ADVICE

If you are concerned about technology addiction, create a set of rules for yourself, says Dr. Jose Calderon, assistant professor of clinical psychiatry at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center in New Orleans. He suggests:

Set a certain time of day for using electronic devices.

Limit the amount of time spent.

Define your objective. "If you are surfing the Web, determine exactly what you are searching for, such as the stock reports or information about elections."

Set other strictures, such as limiting the number of times you check your PDA for e-mail, or putting a ban on text messaging during meals.

If the dependence on technology is affecting the quality of your life and the state of your family, seek out a 12-step program, such as Alcoholics Anonymous.

 **Mark Lorando** *The Times-Picayune*

Southern Rep play "For Better" explores love in a digital age



Posted by [The Times-Picayune](#) March 31, 2008 5:00AM

Actress Ashley Ricord plays a bride-to-be who communicates with her betrothed almost entirely through electronic devices.

By Theodore P. Mahne *Contributing writer*

Do you communicate with your beloved more by instant message than word of mouth? Did your text messaging fees cost more than your last dinner date? Is your favorite picture of that special person framed in the 2x2-inch background of your cellphone?

If so, Southern Repertory Theater invites you to set up a real, face-to-face date, as playwright Eric Coble explores love in the digital age. In our plugged-in world, Coble asks in "For Better," can we still just connect?

"It's a romantic comedy that looks at love and marriage and what that is in a digital age," Coble said, "and how these new means of communication have affected how we see love itself."

In "For Better," which has its premiere this week at Southern Rep, the story focuses on a couple attempting to plan their wedding while living in different states, keeping in touch with one another and friends and family largely through e-mails, text messages and cellphone calls. Through the farce that pokes fun at our overdependence on the gadgetry of our modern lives, Coble explores whether our very concept of love and relationships has shifted.

"As more and more people meet online -- and from different places -- we ask, what does it take to be in love today? Can you see each other once a month but stay in touch daily? Is it necessary or even good being in the same room for love to grow?"

In depicting modern relationships, Coble acknowledged that he can't help but be influenced by the society around him. But his approach is more Shakespearean than post-ironic Seinfeldian in its complex plot machinations. As a digital-age farce, "For Better" relies on crossed wires (crossed wirelesses?) rather than slamming doors and carefully timed entries and exits for its laughs.

The heart of the comedy, however, remains the heart itself.

"It is a mix of cynicism and sentiment, but it's still romantic comedy," Coble said. "Even with a sardonic edge, it has to have some real heart to it."

Coble notes that many are still intimidated by the use of technology. They're represented on stage by the bride-to-be's father. The playwright notes that he is in that camp himself, wary of it all but pulled into it by necessity. (Asked if he has a Web site showcasing "For Better" and his other works, he said no. "But someone did put an entry on my name in Wikipedia. I think it was my agent.")

The local production of "For Better" is Southern Rep's first collaboration with the National New Play Network, a consortium to promote and produce new works. The local premiere is part of a "rolling premiere" of the show through the network, said Aimee Hayes, Southern Rep's new executive director.

"It is a truly innovative program," she said. "So often, a play is premiered with a lot of hoopla, and then is never heard from again." Being presented in a rolling co-premiere - the show has been presented in Denver and in Coral Gables, outside Miami -- gives the play broader exposure without having to be presented in a scaled-down or workshop production.

"This gives continued life to new plays," Hayes said, noting that many are not otherwise afforded the luxury of repeated full productions.

"It's a great opportunity for a playwright to see how a show plays in different cities," Coble said.

The steady feedback from audiences and theaters allows the author to make adjustments, while still seeing a fully produced presentation of his work. By participating in the consortium, Southern Rep has access to broader opportunities and works to present, and can have a key part in developing promising new plays. It gives the theater a greater national exposure while introducing local audiences to fresh material.

"I think this is one of the most important things that Southern Rep has done," she said.

BTW, be sure to silence all communication devices before the show begins.

FOR BETTER What: Gary Rucker directs Sean Patterson, Ashley Ricord, Leon Contavesprie, Veronica Russell, George Sanchez and Aimee Hayes in Eric Coble's romantic comedy about the difficulty of true communication in the digital age. **When:** Previews Wednesday and Friday at 8 p.m.; opens Saturday at 8 p.m., with performances Thursdays through Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 3 p.m. through April 27. **Where:** Southern Rep, Canal Place, 3rd Floor Shops Level, 333 Canal St. **Cost:** Tickets \$18 for Wednesday and Friday previews, \$23 for Thursday Young Leadership Council preview. Opening night \$30, with reception. Individual tickets \$20 to \$26 with discounts for groups, seniors and students. **Info:** (504) 522-6545; www.southernrep.com



Francine (Aimee Hayes) and her sister Karen (Ashley Ricord) bicker over plans for Karen's wedding attire.



For Better STUDY GUIDE

1. How has technology (internet, myspace & facebook, cell phones, text messages, etc.) affected you and those you know positively/negatively?
2. How does technology affect each different character in *For Better* positively/negatively?
3. Did the play cause you to evaluate the use of technology in your personal relationships?
4. *For Better* takes place in several locations around the world. What design elements and/or text were used to communicate location in the play? Did these methods work well? What would you have done differently?
5. Discuss your interpretation of the set in support of both thematic needs and practical needs of the play.
6. For the majority of the play, characters communicate without being face to face. How was this a different theatrical experience for you as an audience member? How did this change when characters were together in Wally's living room?
7. Discuss the effect of the director and playwright's pacing, overlap, and repeated text in the group phone scenes.
8. Did any elements of the plot or relationships seem unclear or confusing? Why?
9. What character did you identify with and/or favor most/least? Why?