The Lost Phone
by Graeme Kapono Urlich

While I was in Hawaii recently, I left my phone behind at a workshop venue. I've only ever lost a phone once before, about thirty years ago.

I didn't notice until I arrived at the next place I was staying. I contacted the owner and asked if someone could look for it, maybe the cleaners had found it. Later, a few comments were made about how "chill" I was about it — but it wasn't chill as much as calm. Many people would have lost their minds, because most of their lives are stored in their phone. For many it is a single access point to finances, medical, shopping, contacts and so on.

But I wasn't calm because I didn't care. I was calm because, through experience, I had learned panic and anger weren't useful — they cloud judgement and make thinking through the options much harder.

I had a reasonable idea of where the phone was. The owner suggested I could go back that evening and look, but on the way I got a message that the room was locked so I had to turn around. Again, while a little inconvenient, it wasn't a reason to get upset. The owner had said he would look for me the next day.

While waiting to hear the result of the search I began to think about what I would need to do if it *wasn't* found. I also didn't want to cause inconvenience for the owner. There's no point fighting the reality of a situation like that and I was happy to wait a day. The phone would be there or it wouldn't.

All good if it was — which it was. I was able to meet the owner at the venue the next day and I got it back.

Also all good, if a little inconvenient, if it hadn't turned up.

Coming from a generation with no mobile phones initially, and only basic phone functions when I first got one, I had developed habits that didn't rely on having a smart phone to run my life. So losing it didn't feel like losing *me*. That's one of the risks of putting so much of our identity outside ourselves: when the device disappears, it can start to feel like we do too.

Dialling a rotary phone (or even punching in a keypad) also taught something we've mostly lost: how physical action helps ingrain habits. When you had to *do* the number — repeat it, feel it, and sometimes even correct it— the sequence lodged in memory through use. Over time you simply knew the numbers that mattered: home, close friends, work, and emergency contacts. Now we tap a name or hit speed-dial, the body does almost nothing and the mind doesn't need to hold much either. It's wonderfully convenient, but it's another example of how we outsource a basic capacity to a device — and when that device disappears, we suddenly discover how few backups we have inside ourselves.

It also struck me that a phone can become a "how life works" device. If it's gone, everything feels gone. That's a lot like having a fixed idea of how the world *should* be. When the phone disappears — or when enough people disagree with us — life can feel like it's falling apart until we either rebuild the system or change the way we're trying to live inside it.

In my case, the system was simple: accept what's real, think clearly, and take the next sensible step. If the phone is there, great. If it isn't, you have the old one disabled, set up another one and carry on.

Reality doesn't require panic. It requires adjustment, flexibility.

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