It's none of my business

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This week, I was speaking to a handful of strong, smart writers who were on their way to publishing major books, but they were nervous about entering the Wild West World of the Internet. **How were they going to handle the criticism they would have to endure?**

One of the wonderful things about being on the Internet is the immediate interaction. Certain posts have an energy that careens and bounces, and we can be sure it will garner likes, tweets, retweets and shares. There is a certain satisfaction from getting such a quick response from writing. Writing is somehow intensely solitary *and* social. The social aspect used to be a delayed response, based on a publisher's excruciating schedule. Now it doesn't always have to be.

For many writers, there's a certain alchemy in that digital currency. Please don't misunderstand me. Aside from one or two, I don't know any religious writers who are cashing in piles of gold, but when publishers look at how much you're worth on the marketplace of ideals, our digital presence one of the many things they examine.

Sometimes, the more hyperbolic you can be in your title, the better. On this site, the post that gets the most hits is a pretty random blog entry about whether youth groups are destroying the church. The provocative title draws us into the question, even though the post's content is not as well developed as many of our other stories. (To be clear, I'm not criticizing the content. It was not meant to be a well-researched dissertation. It was a blog post and true to its genre.)

Sometimes lists draw people to the site. If you're standing in the grocery store line, and you want something to read about other than the Kardashian's latest divorce, you might want to read 10 reasons why your church marketing doesn't work. The lists make the content accessible on mobile devices (which is how and where a lot of us digest our information).

But what about the darker side to all of this? What about the attacks and criticisms we endure? Church leaders understand the stress of constant fault-finding. We are lambasted often. For most of us, it's the worst part of our jobs.

Yet there is a difference between handling criticism on the web and criticism at church. People say things on the web that they would never say to our faces. I think it might have to do with the dehumanization. At church, people see my husband and I trying to negotiate rides with our one decade-old Honda. On the Internet, often people don't understand that most writers don't make a lot of money. At church, we can't always hide the tears. On the Internet, people don't know that we cry when we are attacked. At church, people care about the faith of our children. On the Internet, we worry that our kids will see the heinous comments sexualizing us or calling their mom a liar. My daughter and I are very close, and most commenters realize that she's reading over my shoulder. I worry it will destroy her faith. In all of these ways, I'm not sure that people know we are human behind the screen. It is like we have erected digital images of ourselves, and they become effigies, made up of ones and zeroes, ready to be burned. I particularly worry when the fear of the Internet misogyny becomes a reason for women to not publish.

My biggest bit of advice in the midst of all of this? I think it came from a twelve-step program:**It's none of my business what people think about me.**

That's it. As soon as I heard the cliché, I grasped on to it. I started walking away when people tore me apart. I quit vanity-googling. I read reviews from friends, but I ignore many reviews from strangers. If comments get out of control on some of the other sites where I blog, I dismiss myself from the conversation. I respond to criticism, when it's respectful, but I don't engage in massive battles. Because it's none of my business what people think about me.

I have watched people let the Internet destroy them. They feel they must defend themselves when each comment or criticism arises. But it doesn't have to be that way. Close the computer, walk away, and preserve your voice. The world needs your words.