

FS News - Pandemic: 1 Year Later edition

Hello Fair Shake readers ~

It seems that winter – which showed its frigid face in unsuspecting parts of our country and around the globe – is finally loosening its grip. Today, in western Wisconsin, the sun is shining, the snow is melting and we are again able to spend time outdoors without fear of frostbite.

Warm weather gets my mind very excited for spring! I start to think about gardening and outdoor activities, even though I know that the messiest part of winter is still to come. I engage in the bias of "wishful thinking" because it temporarily lifts my spirits, gives me energy and brings me joy. I allowed myself to pretend that it is spring because I have been looking so forward to being warm and spending time outdoors.

A cognitive bias is, in the memorable words of Shakespeare, neither "good or bad, but thinking makes it so." (pun intended) It may be harmless and fun, as it was today, but biases also cause anguish, disappointment, frustration and difficulties in understanding.

Since we have not yet crossed over into spring and are still in the season for reflection and deeper thinking, this edition of the Fair Shake news aims to provide exercise for our minds. It is easy to forget that our minds need exercise just like our bodies. We lose strength and flexibility when we let our thinking abilities atrophy.

Before we really dig into thinking about thinking, I want to take a moment to reflect on a couple of things...

THANK YOU! to the donors for making the newsletter possible!! Esp. last month, when close to 400 readers requested to read Amanda Gorman's brilliant poem. That lovely piece of writing provided us with the powerful gift of "social propinquity"; or the feeling of closeness, as we shared our enthusiasm for the poem and our reflections about her inspiring words. I felt like we were smiling through our correspondence. I sure was! She might be small, and she might be young, but I look up to her; she reminds me that I have power! And that WE have power! "If we're brave enough..." Close to 400 other requests were sent out for the lists of COVID-19 Writing Outlets and the FS's 2021 Recommended Reading.

I am also grateful to the readers who share news with me. I trust very little of what is offered as 'news' and am very grateful for the real deal when folks can spare a minute to share it.

On to the NEWS:

I know I that I don't have to tell you that vaccines are starting to make their way to prisons and jails around the country. What a relief! I'm very happy to know that the people who have been hoping to get vaccinated will soon have greater peace of mind.

I've heard, however, that people inside and outside of prison are postponing or declining to receive the vaccination for a wide range of reasons. According to a new survey from the Kaiser Family Foundation, 51% of non-incarcerated people are refusing it while 41% want to get vaccinated as soon as possible (plus, 6% of the respondents had already been vaccinated). I see that Dr. Fauci has now increased his forecast for "herd immunity" numbers from 75% to 90%. My question for Dr. Fauci is: did your perspective change with new information or a new administration?

Although news outlets whine about the sad state of journalism and polarization, they contribute to problem by offering only one side of the story while demonizing the other side with names like 'anti-vaxxers' and 'sheeple'. Today it is very risky to simply ask questions or vocalize unpopular perspectives,

which exacerbates social anxiety and contributes to tribal conformity. We are expected to take a side and start throwing stones. This blunt instrument of "with us or against us" (regardless of which topic we are exploring) hurts us all and keeps us from being able to listen and build solutions together.

For example, this blunt instrument crushed a difficult and nuanced conversation about raising the minimum wage, stagnated at \$7.25/hr. since 2009. While several of our elected representatives argued that \$15 per hour was too high, all Americans got shorted by their refusal to discuss a compromise. Are you curious what these representatives, who steadfastly deny our citizens a living wage, earn? All senators and Congress-people receive a salary of \$174,000 per year, while a minimum-wage earner receives about \$15,080. The bill goes to the Senate now, where there is little hope that the \$15 minimum wage will remain part of the package.

Why are we not included in this deliberation? We should, at the very least, be able to share our thoughts through a poll or questionnaire.

The above "complex issues" provide a nice warm up for the BRAIN GYM!

Since we all know about 'thinking errors', and since our thoughts inform our beliefs and our feelings, let's explore them!

- to gain more clarity about why every person has them, and actively engages them!!
- to understand why we are blind to most of them, especially our own!!
- and to learn to actively and intentionally develop an HONEST BIAS to reduce suffering and confusion from the unavoidable truths above.

EXPLORING BIASES by Buster Benson (with slight edits by me ~ :) author of Why Are We Yelling? Before we begin, it is important to note that there is no way to become completely unbiased. The best we can do is maintain an honest dialogue with our blind spots and commit to identifying and repairing inadvertent damage caused by them as efficiently as possible. All efforts to this end are about continuous maintenance; there is no permanent fix.

Benson offers four steps toward developing an Honest Bias; we are going to explore two this month. If you would like a list of Cognitive Biases, please start a new email to me with BIAS in the subject line and I will send it to you!

Step 1: Opt-in. Developing honest bias requires us first and foremost to wake up to our own blindness and to stop trying to pretend it doesn't exist. Only you can decide if you're up for the challenge of taking it on.

Step 2: Observe. Take steps to reduce the amount of time and energy you spend trying to hide or ignore your biases and blind spots. Get familiar with the variety of biases! Notice when your defenses are triggered and check whether you're in existential danger, and if there's an opportunity to learn from a new perspective (even in a small way).

The 3 Conundrums & 13 Strategies That Generate Biases

No matter what we do, we can't escape these conundrums; and 13 strategies help us think within their constraints.

**3 CONUNDRUMS** for our "fast-paced world overwhelmed by complexity and choice" (Tom Asacker)

1. There's too much information (so we must filter it).
2. There's not enough meaning (so we use stories to make sense).
3. There's not enough time (so we motivate towards action).

The strategies below help us compensate for the 3 conundrums by overvaluing one possibility and undervaluing everything else. Each strategy is a collection of cognitive biases and mental shortcuts.

### 13 STRATEGIES Thinking shortcuts that generate biases

#### 1-5 HELP US FILTER INFORMATION

1. We depend on the context to figure out what to notice and remember.
2. We accept what comes to mind, and don't worry about what doesn't come to mind.
3. We amplify bizarre things.
4. We notice novelty.
5. We seek takeaways to remember and forget the rest.

#### 6-10 HELP US MAKE SENSE OF THINGS

6. We fill in the gaps with stereotypes and generalities.
7. We favor familiar things over the non-familiar.
8. We treat experience as reality.
9. We simplify mental math.
10. We are overconfident in everything we do.

#### 11-13 HELP US GET THINGS DONE

11. We stick with things we've started.
12. We protect existing beliefs.
13. We will opt to do the safe things, all other things being equal.

Here are 13 questions to help us investigate our blind spots:

1. Out of context: What have I missed because options were hidden from my perception?
2. Out of mind: What have I not considered because it didn't come to mind?
3. Lackluster: What have I missed because something else grabbed my attention?
4. Expired: What options have I neglected because they were not shiny and new?
5. Irrelevant: What have I undervalued because it didn't fit my expectations?
6. Untypical: What options have I missed because I projected stereotypes and generalities?
7. Unfamiliar: What have I passed over simply because it didn't feel familiar to me?
8. Unrelatable: What options have I dismissed because they didn't match my experiences?
9. Ambiguous: What options have I dismissed because they felt less certain or more risky?
10. Underestimated: What have I ignored because I overestimated my control?
11. Costly: What options have I ignored because they would require changing my plan?
12. Threatening: What have I omitted because I wasn't ready to accept that I might be wrong?
13. Unpopular: What options have been pushed aside because I was afraid to stand out?

#### REFLECTIONS ON AUTHENTICITY

I receive the monthly newsletter of author Tom Asacker (Business of Belief - which I highly recommend) and this month he asked his readers "What does it mean to you to be authentic? Please let me know." I met with Tom in 2016 and described to him what I do. I want to send my answer to this question, of course, but I want to send yours as well! Please email me with your brief reply (5 sentence max) so that I can share all of our responses with Tom, and also with all of the readers here next month! (I will share my response, then, too!)

#### READING RECOMMENDATION: THE BUSINESS OF BELIEF by Tom Asacker

Long-time subscribers may remember that I recommended this book before. Since the book is so important, so easy to read and offers many relatable stories to impress important points, I figured it was

time to share a new review. Asacker says that the book "will fundamentally change the way you think". It is a guide for our "fast-paced world overwhelmed by complexity and choice" and will "give you invaluable insights"..."to motivating behavior, both in ourselves and others". It is only 121 pages, but nearly half of the text in my copy is underlined! Such as "we choose what we choose because we believe in it. And those beliefs are driven by our desires." And "Belief is nothing more than working assumptions", "a personal construct, an emotionally-colored fusion of imperfect mental processes like perception and memory...influenced by a host of factors including idiosyncratic (particular to you) factors, including our present circumstances, our mood and personality." Finally, "our minds don't reflect reality"..we create reality "from our sensations and impressions, colored by our past experiences and our unique understanding of facts and events." There is so much more! These ideas give me greater ownership, compassion, and patience.

Quotes:

The individual has always had to struggle to keep from being overwhelmed by the tribe. If you try it, you will be lonely often, and sometimes frightened. But no price is too high to pay for the privilege of owning yourself. - Friedrich Nietzsche

It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are. - e e cummings

Growth is a 2-step process:

1: Overcoming naivety - learning what it means to live your best life.

Key skills: humility, self-reflection, openness to negative feedback

2: Overcoming bad habits - actually living that best life.

Key skills: inner strength, undying determination

- Tim Urban

Every (hu)man, wherever (s)he goes, is encompassed by a cloud of comforting convictions, which move with him/her like flies on a summer day. - Bertrand Russell (gender-corrective edits are mine. – sk)

To our successful transitions! Ubuntu! ~ sue

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2-1-1 AuntBertha.com Fairshake.net HelpYourselfTherapy.com

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