

Fair Shake News: New Normal Edition

Hello Colleagues!

I hope you all enjoyed a terrifically reflective day for giving thanks. All of us here, in this Fair Shake newsletter circle, are fortunate to be able to read, and to think, and to care. A lot of people – from all walks of life – miss out on one or all of these mind-expanding and heart-expanding gifts...that we have, and which we can share. I'm grateful to all of you for sharing with me here. We've created a 'new normal' in newsletters, esp. reentry or other 'inreach' newsletters, since we share ideas, reflections, perspectives, book titles, catalogs, writing opportunities, and even recipes with each other through our asynchronous dialog (meaning: we 'talk' with each other, but not at the same time).

Who else does this?

All I know is, I can't do this alone. It takes all of us (ubuntu!) to make this newsletter work! We created this particular 'new normal' together.

I usually find the term annoying, however, because 'new normal' often refers to things we're losing...like hand-written letters in Wisconsin's prisons...but we are expected to accept. Just in time for the holidays (starting next week), the WI DOC will no longer allow the incarcerated (their public name for prisoners is "Persons In Our Care" or PIOC) to receive cards or letters from the folks who send them. They are joining Pennsylvania and a couple of Federal Prisons and, rumor has it, soon FL and MA, in outsourcing mail processing to a private party. The letters and cards the receivers will see are facsimiles...expanding upon the many current dehumanizing practices. Will this perspective spread throughout corrections and become the new normal?

As of this writing a new variant of the coronavirus is traveling around the globe, and countries are responding in various ways. Austria, for instance, has mandated the vaccine with a hefty 7200 Euros (\$8157) fine for those who refuse to get vaccinated. Most of Africa, on the other hand, has not been vaccinated...yet, most of Africa has not received vaccines and the continent has few cases. A lot of us have fear-fatigue. And mandate-fatigue. And tele-relating fatigue.

Fatigue is a new normal.

Employee shortages, product shortages, cheer shortages. We hear news stories about how we are not able to meet our 'old normal' demand for stuff. Perhaps this new normal will help us reflect on how much stuff we need, how creating and transporting so much stuff is tied to our climate and pollution problems, and maybe once again making stuff that lasts a long time.

There is a 'new normal' for every aspect of life: school, work, care (and lack of it), accountability, shopping, dining, etc. Data collection and surveillance is a new normal because we all have devices that track us and share our information. And for close to two years now, we have been keeping our distance from one another to the point that many of us are suffering from lack of interaction.

I have a new normal, too. Since the beginning of October, as many readers know, I've been spending at least half of my time with my mom. My dad had her committed – against her knowledge – to a facility where she has no say in the care she receives. He reminds me regularly of why I ran away from home at 12 and never went back. It was always hard to spend much time with her when seeing her required seeing him. Nowadays, I get to spend the whole day with her to remind her that she's very important and deeply loved. She had a very traumatic life as a child. My dad is very negative. And we're now able to bond in a way we were never able to before. I don't know how long I'll get to do this, so my new normal is to have very long days (I still have a lot of Fair Shake work every day!) with her, to stay in hotels, and to drive 500 miles each week. Like every 'new normal', I can adjust!

If you don't hear from me for a while, it's because of my new normal!

We don't need to simply accept everything that comes at us as a 'new normal'. We have power! We can make curiosity, care, critical thinking, cooperative community-building, courage, agency, and self-determination the new normal. We can shape, influence, create and build what comes next together!

CALLING 'NORMALIZING' BS ON THE NAT'L GEOGRAPHIC

Their recent headline "Fall foliage was disrupted by climate change. It could be the new normal." Is disingenuous and misleading. How will they prove that claim? We have seen years like this before. They are part of the fall cycle. Most of us loved the warm, dry weather that cost us our usual colors, but we're okay with the trade off...and we will enjoy them all the more next fall.

CAN'T FIND GOOD HELP THESE DAYS

If there's one tip that I can give you for positioning yourself as a uniquely terrific employee, it's this: Develop your listening skills, and follow through on what you hear needs to be done. I hear complaints from all types of folks...whether looking for consultants or hourly workers: it's hard to find people that pay attention to what is said and follow through on instructions, requests, or desires from clients or employers. As in all relationships, listening skills are paramount!

BTW: Jobs are still quite plentiful, esp. in service industries! One interesting consideration is that a lot of 'Boomers' decided to retire early because of COVID. And there are a lot of Boomers!

BUILDING TRUST

To start a business, we have to develop trust in our potential customers even though trust is hard to establish. One way of building trust is by demonstrating your intention. Consider Brian Schwartz's story from the NY Post: (generously edited)

When Brian Schwartz was laid off last June from his role as vice president at an advertising agency in Times Square, he did not have a backup plan. He decided that it might be a good idea to start a nonprofit business, mowing lawns for free for senior citizens. Brian said "They were super appreciative. It was a good feeling. It felt nice to help out." In addition to feeling good about helping others, mowing lawns "was also a way for me to keep busy and not have a gap in my resume. There's a correlation between doing something good in the world and figuring out the next step in life. Brian caught the attention of several employers and now he has a great flexible job in marketing with plenty of time left to manage his nonprofit. His mowing business has expanded to 34 states with 135 volunteers!

THANK YOU, DONORS!

Financial donors, information donors, support donors, stamp and envelope donors...you're all greatly appreciated! And thank you to all the folks who shared a reflection about what Fair Shake – and me – mean to you on Thanksgiving. That was a terrific support donation that will continue to provide fuel for my engine into the new year.

THE NEIGHBORS CAME THROUGH!

I received a ton of suggestions for the catalog request that came from a reader. Several catalogs were mentioned repeatedly which, to me, means they are good suppliers. I've compiled the list and will share it with the listings ranked by popularity. If you'd like to receive the list, please start a new email message to me with CATALOG in the subject line!

RECIPE SWAP

Likewise with the recipes! If you'd like to receive the recipe's that were shared, please start a new message to me with RECIPES in the subject line and you'll get the list! Here's a short one to make a treat for the holidays:

Jacob's Peanut Brittle:

Ingredients: 2 bags of butterscotch buttons, ½ of a jar of peanut butter, 1 bag peanuts

Instructions: Melt buttons with peanut butter until smooth, add peanuts. Spread on a surface to cool. YUM! (I love butterscotch and peanut butter together!!)

BOOK OF THE MONTH: THE DAWN OF EVERYTHING: A New History of Humanity

By David Graeber and David Wengrow

The title of the NY Times review of the book asks: "What if Everything You Learned About Human History Is Wrong?" This is a great summary of what one will find in this book. The cover says that the book "fundamentally transforms our understanding of the human past and begins to imagine new forms of freedom, new ways of organizing society. This is a monumental book of formidable intellectual range, animated by curiosity moral vision, and a faith in the power of direct action."

Basically, as many of us know – or at least suspect - for several centuries we have been told a myth that goes something like this: "Our remote ancestors were primitive and childlike - either free and equal innocents, or

thuggish and warlike. We were okay until we developed farming, then there was surplus, then there was great progress and with progress came inevitable inequality." We were conditioned to conform to this view to pass history class. Thankfully, Graeber and Wengrow cared enough about telling the truth that they were not afraid to upend everything we think we know about the origins and evolution of human societies.

QUOTES by the late David Graeber:

"...the ultimate, hidden truth of the world is that it is something that we make, and could just as easily make differently."

"What lies behind the appeal of bureaucracy is fear of play."

"In the years between 1703 and 1751, as we've seen, the indigenous American critique of European society had an enormous impact on European thought."

As you all are well aware, Fair Shake is a 'direct action' project. ~ :)

I'm wishing you all a Happy Holiday Season!

To our successful transitions!

Ubuntu! ~ sue

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