

Careless People

A story of where I used to work
Power. Greed. Madness

Sarah Wynn Williams

Sarah Williams was a young diplomat in the New Zealand Diplomatic core , she was inspired to work for Facebook and pursued Facebook for some time before she got the job involving public policy and governments.

My job at Facebook started as a hopeful comedy and ended in darkness and regret

It was idealism that led me to Facebook

When I was working for the New Zealand diplomatic corps, I believed that Facebook was going to change the world.

The vastness of the data Facebook collects would be unprecedented, data about everything, data that was previously entirely private.

As best as I could tell, Facebook sees itself as a way for people to waste time on the internet.

**When I joined Facebook, my title was
Manager of Global Public Policy.**

As a diplomat you learn to keep your thoughts and feelings to yourself.

Facebook perks are tenure based rather than title. So assistants and junior staff who have been around are often worth a lot more than their bosses.

At Davos Sheryl Sandberg tells me that the punishing schedule at Facebook is by design. The logic is that staffers should have enough so that time is not wasted.

The Facebook offices are like never ending kids birthday party, all meals are provided, endless free snacks, game arcades, laundry service. I love the perks but am deeply conflicted by them.

My first e mail from Mark Zuckerberg was 4 words long:

I am overruling you

When you are a company that makes no physical product, then your most important asset is people , and they might just pack up and leave.

Javi is a senior manager and I realize that he and his team are perfectly happy to bend the rules, to the extent that rules exist.

In October 2012, we are celebrating one billion Facebook users, the junior level employees get the many goodies.

We tussle in the company on educating politicians and regulators who don't understand the complexities of our technology.

When Lean In is launched in march 2013, Sheryl moves from COO to celebrity and everything is about the book. A lot of us in office are actively helping to promote the book, which is not technically correct.

Around the office, some of the older women think that lean in is a bullshit book, a way to get more out of nothing, the younger women are uniformly star struck about Sheryl's celebrity status.

**Like most of fakebook's senior managers,
Sheryl rarely posts on Facebook**

I knew about Sheryl's temper but what I couldn't fathom is its arbitrariness. One can never predict what will trigger an outburst from Sheryl, which makes things unnerving

The expectation at Facebook is that mothering is invisible. The more skilled you are at it, the more invisible it is.

Facebook says bring your authentic self to work, but has a “ don’t mention the children “ understanding”.

There is a big reality gap between what people at Facebook say and what they do especially about children.

At one point, Facebook tried to take more control of its destiny by launching its own phone – launched in 2013, it was a disaster.

The company still says – move fast and break things and ask for forgiveness and not permission.

Travelling with Marks inner team makes me feel like an outsider.

Mark is always hung up about the size of the crowd, he wants a public rally of more than a million people

When we met Joko Widodo in Indonesia, he said, “ I was not supposed to be president, I am a carpenter, I am a Facebook President(meaning Facebook helped me talk directly with my target audience)

I don't agree with the company strategy of using and sharing Hong King data to get entry into China. This involves asking the Hong King users to accept a new terms of service. This came to the fore because a lot of criticism of China was coming from HK.

My boss Marne leaves her role to become COO of Instagram.

In her place we get Sheryl's ex boyfriend from Harvard Joel Kaplan. There are many of these friends and family connections in the company.

**A web of people all entangled as
bridesmaids, best friends, neighbors, and
exes.**

Shortly after he joins Joel Kaplan starts hiring a political sales team. He wants politicians to become advertisers. The idea is, if politicians depend on Facebook to win elections, then they will not do anything to harm Facebook.

Facebook is constantly getting pressure to pull down content that ruling parties don't like. Facebook has two rules to handle this:

1. There is a credible threat to block Facebook in the country

2. There is a risk to Facebook employees (arrest etc.)

When politicians start calling, all decisions are now taken by Mark and this creates a struggle in the company. Everyone is unhappy that mark is getting involved when we have clear policies.

We send touchy issues to Sheryl and mark for their decision, but its mark who always decides.

Facebook is an autocracy of one

Mark spends a lot of time coding into the night and has a strict rule that he will not attend meetings before noon. This creates many problems with heads of state.

Davos is the annual meeting of high flying people who think they run the planet.

Davos is a festival for the important and the self important.

I haven't learned the difference between knowing when to quit and when to persevere.

Sheryl wants us to address the growing hatred towards Facebook and the threat of taxes. Facebook has an ace that other tech companies do not have, Facebook is essential to electoral success.

This shift to pandering to politicians has far reaching consequences.

After this Facebook invests heavily in campaigns and elections around the world. We employ sales teams whose job is to coach politicians on how to use Facebook for electoral success.

By April 2015, Internet.org a pet project of Mark Zuckerberg stalled. We rebranded it as free basics and it still didn't work. The TRAI in India banned it.

Only 9 countries have rolled out the app!

At a white house state dinner, Mark asks President Xi if he would do him the honor of naming his unborn child. Xi refuses.

A few weeks before Mark is in China and posts a picture where Xi's face is not seen. That infuriates the China government.

I get a slot for Mark to speak at the United Nations. As he speaks, I now realize that Mark is now saying things that sound good, posting things because they look good. I regret having enabled this UN speaking slot.

The problems in Brazil are bad but the problems in India are worse. We spend millions of dollars to get the government to approve , we talk directly to consumers to get them to put pressure on the government. It doesn't work.

Mark's favorite Roman emperor is Augustus, basis this Mark wants pro Facebook activists, he wants protests.

We have an India action plan, where we want to galvanize public support. So we have op eds, user stories etc.

I realize how things with politicians are changing for Facebook when Cameron and Osborne talk to Sheryl about garnering support against the Brexit vote.

By 2016, a few weeks before Davos we were picking signals from politicians that Facebook was being used by terrorists and being radicalized. They wanted Facebook to do something about it.

I thought Mark interacting with Presidents and Prime ministers would lead to more responsibility and accountability on his part. He disappoints again and again.

In internal presentations, we were talking about how powerful Facebook is, we started believing that we were in the “business of democracy”

Max weber said that dealing with the unintended consequences of your actions is what political responsibility is.

Mark leaves his passport at home before a flight to South America and I am thinking “this guy cannot take responsibility for his own passport”

Facebook embedded staff in Trump's campaign team in San Antonio for months, alongside Trumps campaign programmers, ad copywriters, media buyers , and data scientists.

The Chinese government wants to know what Facebook will do about Guo Wengui, an exiled activist billionaire, we cannot respond effectively.

In 2017, China blocks Facebook and a few weeks later Facebook blocks Guo.

We don't have a local subsidiary in China, in effect the people reporting to me from China are operating illegally.

**By now Facebook is lurching from one
dismaying shit show to the next. Mark and
Sheryl seem focused on promoting new
books, speeches etc.**

In April 2017, there is a confidential document leak that shows that Facebook is offering to target young teenagers on Instagram etc.

Facebook's advertising team had made this presentation for an Australian client.

Trust is gone between staff and leadership at Facebook after helping Trumps campaign, the lack of contrition about what Facebook was doing. People no longer are proud to work at Facebook.

In a new interns meeting, they ask all these questions. Sheryl despairs and says that the new interns are focused on the wrong things.

At Facebook, the veil of civility is very thin.

In issues concerning Myanmar, it looks like we are flying blind.

The research clearly shows that Myanmar would have been better off if Facebook hadn't entered Myanmar.

I raised a sexual harassment case against my boss, the enquiry was a cover up. I was fired later in a performance review.

We live in an era when intelligent weapons can automatically identify and kill human targets without human input.

We live in the world that's been shaped by these people and their carelessness.