**Notes on the Book**
**Careless People**
**Author of Book: Sarah Wynn-Williams**
**Author of Notes: Bill Gasarch**

AI disclosure: I asked AI to do notes for me on three themes: (1) The Incompetence of Facebook, (2) Immorality of FaceBook, (3) Her personal story. I used those as a starting point. I also include my own thoughts which do not fit into those categories.

# 1 My Note

1. The title *Careless People* is from the following quote in *The Great Gatsby*

   *They were careless people, Tom and Daisy–they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that keep them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made.*

2. Impressive that she talked them into creating a job for her. Hard to believe they didn't realize they needed an expert on international politics.

3. Sarah is honest about the following: In Indonesia they saw Joko Widodo, a good president, get elected and break through because of Facebook. She liked that. She admits that she did not see the possibility of a bad person using Facebook to get elected.

4. Most of the good she did seems to be obvious—urging Mark to engage with Foreign leaders and to show up. The book does not say much about what she actually DID.

5. When she is pregnant for the second time and there are health issues they ask her to travel by airplane. She does not want to. They reassure her that the stewardess has had *some nurse training*. Really! Not comforting!

6. Sarah says how everyone was upset that Facebook helped get *Trump* elected. It is unclear to me how she and the others would have felt if it

had helped get *Hillary* elected. Was it the principle—Facebook should not have that much power—or the result-Trump. She would say it was the principle but I am not sure.

7. I did not know how much Facebook helped Trump directly, working with his campaign. How come Hillary didn't use Facebook as much? I asked Google that said Hillary and her team didn't realize just how powerful a tool it is. I asked Google about the Biden-Trump election and Facebook. Facebook had some rules in place making it harder to have Facebook help directly. And Biden and Trump both used Facebook a lot.

8. Struck me: Sheryl claims that she missed her flight, which crashed, so she was lucky. None of this is true. She told the story just to make an interesting story and get attention. This seems like the kind of lie which does get attention and nobody is going to check on, so it is effective.

9. Struck that Sheryl didn't care about the Women's March in Washington DC and also didn't care about sexual harassment. She ruled by intimidation. Asking Sarah to share her bed—I don't think it was sexual, but it was still creepy.

10. Mark Z wants Sarah to arrange a riot. Or a peace rally. Hard to tell.. Mark Z is not sure what he wants.

11. The following quote on page 373 struck me since I am not sure if the part I make bold is true.

    *It really didn't have to be this way. I can't state that strongly enough. If I had to sum up what the last seven years of watching people running this massive global enterprise taught me, its that something else was possible. they really could have chosen to do it all differently and fix so much of what's been destructive about Facebook. At every juncture, there was an opportunity to make different choices. China, Myanmar, elections, hate speech, vulnerable teens. They could made it right again. A different path was possible.* **And in the long term, it would have been in their own self-interest too. Facebook, the business, the brand, and the company, would be better off. We all would be better off.**

(a) **Money** Would Mark Z and Facebook have as much money as they have now had they been more ethical. One counter: allowing dangerous posts has generated traffic and money.

(b) **China** They ended up giving the Chinese gov almost everything they wanted but they are still banned in China (I talk about that later).

(c) I suspect that what they pay out in lawsuits is nothing compared to what how much money they made.

(d) **The Future** Will Facebook become more regulated or lose customers because of their behaviour? I think they still have a monopoly- everyone uses it because everyone uses it. Will that change? I asked Google what percent of the market does Facebook have. The answer is odd since nothing on the list does what Facebook does: (Percent is percent of people on earth over 16)

Facebook has 56.3%. 3 billion active users

YouTube has 55.3%. 55.3%. 2.5 billion users

Instagram 54.6%

WhatsApp 54.4%

Messenger 36.9%

TikTok 36.0%

Telegram 32.6%

X 28.1%

I asked if any of the non-Facebook ones do what Facebook does. The answer is NO:

i. On TikTok or YouTube you follow creators. On Facebook, you connect to people you actually know.

ii. No other site has groups like Facebook groups. And Facebook groups are very diverse: people with the same hobby, people with the same politics, people who went to the same summer camp.

iii. Facebook marketplace has replaced Craigslist (which is ironic since Craigslist replaced newspaper classified).

iv. Coordination of events on Facebook.

I'm reminded of Google so I asked Google what percent of searches are from which search engines

Google: 91%

Bing: 4.8%

Yahoo!: 1.18% (syndicated results powered by Bing)

Yandex: 1.14%

Duck Duck Go: 0.64% (syn results powered by Bing)

Baidu: 0.42% (I am surprised- thats the one used in Chine. See later)

Other ones: the rest

I wondered why Baidu only has 0.42% when China has 17% of the worlds population. I asked Google this. (1) Bing is used by about half the people in China, (2) There are some local search engines for local business's, (3) hard to count some of the uses of Baudi that are internal to other systems.

ANYWAY, I think that just as Google will not be overthrown, neither will Facebook.

12. Mark Z seemed to have begun as a non-political idealist. The turning point seems to have been the Trump election. He went from not wanting to believe that Facebook elected Trump to realizing how much power he had.

13. Facebook's response to the book. They have sued and taken other legal action. This has caused a great increase in sales. *The Streisand Affect*: You should think that **the founder of Facebook would know about the Streisand Affect!**.

14. I used to cut Facebook some slack since Content Moderation is a hard problem. But they DO have rules about taking down posts that are dangerous and they DON"T take them down (see Myanmar) even in clear cut cases. And they don't care. They are careless people .

# 2 Reviews

1. From The Spinoff:

   `https://thespinoff.co.nz/culture/24-03-2025/when-zuck-snubbed-key-careless`

2. https://justinchill.com/careless-people.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

3. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/mar/13/careless-people-by-sarah-wyn utm_source=chatgpt.com

4. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/mar/16/careless-people-a-story-of-w utm_source=chatgpt.com

# 3 Facebook Is Incompetent

1. Mark Zuckerberg often seems uninterested in meeting political leaders. Sarah describes arranging a meeting with New Zealand prime minister John Key, only to have Zuckerberg say he did not want to meet him. When they did meet, Zuckerberg appeared annoyed and barely engaged.

2. The company's grand plans could outpace its ability or willingness to carry them out. Sarah describes Zuckerberg announcing at the United Nations that Facebook would bring internet access to refugee camps, while the company had no intention of delivering that promise.

3. (This item is under both incompetence and immorality.) Facebook seemed unable to handle foreseeable problems with its own platform. The book describes the company failing to respond effectively to hate speech and misinformation in Myanmar, including a lack of adequate Burmese-language moderation. The result was a platform that could be used to spread dangerous material while the company struggled to manage it. Afterwards they DID NOT try to fix the problem.

4. The leadership's priorities often seem erratic. Zuckerberg is portrayed as turning from one sweeping project to another—from connecting the world, to political influence, to the metaverse—without taking enough responsibility for what the company had already set in motion.

# 4 Facebook is Immoral

1. The China effort put access to a huge market ahead of privacy and political freedom. Sarah says Facebook explored a China-specific service

with censorship tools, including a "chief editor" who could review posts and shut down the service in a region. Internal plans also considered access to user data, including data from Hong Kong. These were plans and negotiations described in the book; they do not mean Facebook launched the proposed service in China.

**Update** The plans to get into China never worked. The book told of how Mark Z was quite willing to allow censorship and collect private data for the Chinese government but they still did not allow him in. Facebook is not, and never has been, allowed in China. Facebook still makes some money from China from ads that Chinese businesses place outside of China (I think thats fine).

I wondered why China turned Mark Z down. Google tells me the following:

(a) The Chinese government wants ABSOLUTE control.

(b) In 2009 there was a riot in Beijing organized using Facebook. China demanded data on the protesters and Facebook refused. (Facebook was accessible to anyone inside the country with an internet connection. After the riot it was blocked.)

(c) Protectionism and Trade wars.

2. Facebook failed to act adequately on the risks of anti-Rohingya propaganda in Myanmar. Sarah presents this as one of the book's gravest moral failures: the company knew the platform was being used to spread hate and incite violence, yet its response was inadequate. And afterwards they did NOTHING to fix the problem.

3. The company helped political campaigns use Facebook's tools to reach and influence voters. The book describes Facebook staff embedded with Donald Trump's 2016 campaign and the use of political advertising and targeting. Sarah portrays the company as more focused on serving powerful clients than protecting the integrity of political discussion. Would she have minded if they helped Hillary win? This is a broader question, what I call *The Obama Problem*. What if Obama really was born in Kenya and not allowed to be president, but was a GREAT president. Would we mind?

4. Facebook's stated mission could be used to disguise commercial motives. Sarah describes initiatives such as Internet.org as being presented as ways to connect the world, while also serving Facebook's interest in gaining users and expanding its reach. I would not find this troubling if Internet.org worked better.

5. When politicians began talking about regulating Facebook, rather than Facebook amending it policies and negotiating with them, they instead offered politicians ways to use Facebook to win elections. Sarah thinks this is immoral. Mark Z thinks its effective. They are both right.

6. The following sounds really bad: If Facebook finds out that a teenage girl is deleting her selfies they deduce she is self conscience about her looks and will send her ads for beauty products. On the other hand, if they see me browsing books on Ramsey Theory and send me ads for such books thats okay. Not sure where the line is.

# 5 Sarah's Personal Story

1. The memoir opens with her childhood shark attack. Sarah recounts being badly bitten as a teenager and nearly dying. The experience helps explain the idealism and sense of purpose she brought to her work: she wanted her life to matter and believed Facebook might help people. Also- she boldly went back to the beach.

   If I had been attacked by sharks I would never go to the beach again. I might never get wet again.

2. She arrives at Facebook as an idealist. Her background in diplomacy leads her to see the company as a new kind of global power—and to believe she can help it deal responsibly with governments and political issues. Over time, that hope gives way to disillusionment.

3. She describes sexual harassment and a difficult response from management. Sarah recounts reporting misconduct by her boss, Joel Kaplan, and says that after she reported another incident, the company did not give her the support she expected. She was surprised that Sheryl didn't care.

4. Pregnancy and childbirth make the company's treatment of her especially personal. She describes being sent on work travel while pregnant, nearly dying in childbirth, and being contacted about work during her recovery. After returning, she says her performance review criticized her responsiveness, including because colleagues could hear her baby on calls.

5. The private-jet bed incident feels "icky" because of the power imbalance. Sarah says Sheryl Sandberg repeatedly invited her to share the bed on a flight. She does not describe the invitation as sexual, but the situation was uncomfortable: Sandberg was her powerful boss, and Sarah says she felt iced out after declining.

6. Her personal story connects the book's other themes. The young woman who wanted to make a difference becomes an insider who sees both the company's blunders and the consequences of its choices, while also experiencing its workplace culture herself.

7. Sarah while giving birth still working for Facebook from the hospital! Sarah says *Push Send* to send an email when they want her to *Push* so the baby comes out. Surely maternity leave policy should be the kind of thing Sheryl cares about, but she doesn't.

8. Joel saying that Sarah was hard to engage with during the time that Sarah had just given birth and had complications. Hard to believe his happened in the 2000's.

# 6 Mark Z's Competence (not in the book)

Since Mark Z looked incompetent in the book I was curious how he did as well as he did. I asked Google about this. Here are their answers, edited.

1. His initial product was only for Harvard students and then expanded slowly. This allowed them to build a tight-knit base before expanding. Like doing a trial run or a pilot project. To many companies expand to fast.

2. MySpace relied on anonymous profiles. Facebook insists on real identities.

3. (Not on the list but I'll say it) Mark Z's vision of connecting the entire world is bold and at the time innovative. Only obvious in hindsight.

4. Mark Z and his colleagues were great coders and engineers.

5. Mark Z adapted. For example, from desktops to cell phones. Many companies don't (I'm looking at you Blockbuster VIDEO).

6. Merges and acquisitions; buying a tiny company called Instagram for 1 billion dollars was bold and paid off. (I wonder what he did that was bold but did not pay off.)

7. He values speed over caution. This is a mixed bag.