Mark Lucernas

Michael Zimmerman

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Workplace Doldrums and Unspoken Corporate Secrets

The musty taste of your morning breath, the ceiling that seems to be lowering down each morning you wake up, your body seems to weigh a thousand pounds as soon as you realize it is another day at work. We have all been there. Rushing into our day doing the same thing as we always do, get a good beating, do something to escape the reality, the escape that seems to dull every instance, then return to bed and dread the next morning. In the novel *The Warehouse by Rob Hart,* it portrays a futuristic mega packaging delivery business that stands on top of the food chain in a desolate world. As promising as the company sounds, like any other company, it bears secrets and unspeakable issues that only insiders are familiar with. Too familiar in fact. Although, some of the critical issues are exaggerated in the story, however, there are some truths to these issues well reflections of real-life situations. Among of which are: The illusory advancement opportunity that pressures workers to work harder without guaranteed compensation, learned helplessness or the shackles ingrained in the minds of people dissuading to question the status quo, and the negative effects of too much approbation towards an individual in power.

ILLUSORY ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITY

There is nothing else we strive for more than a career advancement, higher salary, or that elusive word of approval from our bosses and colleagues. Compliments such as “Good job on that proposal” or “Congratulations on your new promotion!” that motivates you every single morning you wake up, hoping today will be your long awaited break from your career. As human beings, it is coded into our DNA to seek validations from people and, naturally, there is no person in this world who does not want financial freedom. In the novel *The Warehouse*, The Cloud company owned by Gibson Wells demonstrates this issue in a unique way.

To put things into perspective:

the Cloud company has a work-life environment, similar to a military lifestyle, in which employees work and live at the same place. Every Cloud employee is required to wear at all times, even off-shift, a CloudBand, multi-purpose companion device that serves as including but not limited to: a virtual “butler” that tells the user everything pertaining to their functions and role in the Cloud, a master key that gives access to facilities within the scope of their position, and a navigation device that points direction via vibrational technology, which also meant it locates every employee around the clock. In addition, They have this system called “employee rating system” (p. 79) run by an algorithm that evaluates every individual worker’s performance based on their productivity or daily quotas hit, then gives real-time assessment in terms of number of stars displayed in the CloudBand. Five as the highest performance rating and one star being the lowest which will result in immediate termination.

It is mentioned in the book that achieving a five-star rating is close to impossible, and no apparent reports regarding employees being bumped up to five stars. The algorithm is designed to keep employees on pursuing the highest rating while giving them the illusion of a chance to achieve it. Similar to the story about a donkey chasing a carrot hanging down in front of it controlled by the owner to constantly propel the mounted carriage forward. Wells reported in his blog, “Even when I brought home four-star ratings, even knowing five stars was pretty much near impossible, [my dad] wanted me to reach for that.” (p. 80). This tactic is indeed effective in motivating workers to keep at their toes and there is no doubt that it contributes to the success of the Cloud, but this ploy is not all too perfect. Besides the occasional “Fuck you’s” from frustrated workers like Zinnia from the book, people look for compensational comforts such as the case with the Oblivion drug overdoses, an addictive feel-good drug. Also, some get so caught up in their zone, they “climbed up, not bothering to engage [their] safety harness.” and incur some permanent injury like in the case of Cynthia, who lost both her legs from her fall accident, but still works in a wheelchair as a support staff.

LEARNED HELPLESSNESS

People like Paxton in the book, who lost everything and eventually threw away his pride to work for the company that was mainly responsible for his downfall. At first, Paxton only wished to work there until he mustered up enough money to start a new life, a new business perhaps. But as he stayed longer working for the Cloud as a security guard in a special task, making him feel important, the harder for him to pull away and get more involved than he planned to. Gibson Wells once told Paxton a story about a harmless baby elephant caught in the wild that was tied up to a tree. “That baby elephant fights and thrashes to break free, but it’s not strong enough. Within a couple of days, it gives up.” (p. 333). Then as the elephant grew bigger, more than capable enough of breaking out of its bind, it never attempted to do so knowing how it struggled its first few attempts to no avail. “It’s called learned helplessness. ...people who don’t think the rope will break.” (p. 333), Wells proudly remarked. From an outside perspective, it is easier to say that one will never stop trying or even involve themselves into a similar situation like the predicament of the elephant, but people like Paxton, who is only trying to make a living, are shackled by their failed attempts to have courage to try once more.

EFFECTS OF TOO MUCH APPROBATION

Gibson Wells’s business has thrived consistently throughout his years and made an empire of a company. The Cloud grew like a snowball and people started admiring him for his political and environmental efforts to make their dilapidated world somehow a better place. His childhood idea of having drones deliver packages in the sky came to fruition, and wiped most, if not all, his competitions and some gladly worked with his company. There is no denying that Gibson Wells from the book is a great personage that made some difference in his time, but an elongated exposure to limelight ought to disorient a person’s judgement, especially those who wield great responsibility and power.

Towards the end of the book, Gibson Wells confessed to Zinnia in their exchange about the Cloud’s discovery of the state-of-the-art *cold fusion* that would change the dynamics of energy processing in the world, “I’m going to offer it to any country that wants it, free and clear, in exchange for privatizing the majority of their services and letting us run them.” (p. 331). Zinnia infuriatingly questioned Wells’ reasoning for his plan, to which Wells retorted, “No. I’m the one to do this” and then he followed with an air of condescension, “Because I am exceptional” (p. 331). Wells started his company in a mission to provide people cheaper products and help the environment. But his vision changed over the years as he lobbied successful acts that changed how businesses work, to which also the general public and private companies benefited from, and his company gained immense popularity. Consequently, Wells gained undue confidence to expand his domain and aim to take over the world, an ambitiously enormous responsibility more than a man can handle.

Gibson Wells' character reminds me of the *Avengers by Marvel Comics*, a fictional comic book superheroes story. In its penultimate movie adaptation *Avengers: Infinity War*, Thanos, a supreme leader with an overwhelming power from a planet that was driven to extinction due to lack of resources, was trying to fulfill his self-proclaimed destiny to wipe out half the entire population of the entire universe. He believes that by wiping out half the existence of all creatures, knowing resources are finite, civilizations will flourish and there will be more resources for everyone “It’s a simple calculus”, Thanos. Similar to how Wells feels the obligation to change the world, take charge and change what he thinks is wrong about the world, he acted upon his own will fueled by accolades and approbations, similar to how Thanos unstoppably collected all the infinity stones and wiped out half the entire population as he believes it is the only way to save the whole universe from inevitable extinction. Power gives a person an ability to make a difference in the world, but the extreme sensation can also change the heart of the wielder.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, such issues arise not only in fictional novels, or movies for that matter. We live in a world full of emotional people catering to their own selfish needs. It is human nature to desire something, either for yourself or for others, to feel stuck and wanting, or feel helpless or powerful. The book somehow reflects on the current economic state and social and political issues in the United States such as racism, corporate glass ceiling and sexual harassment, capitalism, and more. In our everyday life, we act upon our plans for the future and work hard to get closer to our goal. The book teaches us to be vigilant and always be on our guard with everything that is happening, not just only within the scope of our work, but also higher up the ranks of our workplace while actively keeping the status quo in check.

Works Cited

Hart, Rob. *The Warehouse*. Crown. Kindle Edition.

*Avengers: Infinity War*. Directed by Joe Russo Anthony Russo and Anthony Russo, 23 Apr. 2018.