

FS News: FREE AGENT Edition

Happy Fourth, Everyone!

I hope you are enjoying our long season of gratitude. From Mother's Day through Independence Day, we have many reasons to be grateful for who we are and what we have.

We're just two years shy of celebrating the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In that time, we have become a very complex nation with unique citizens and complicated struggles.

"Prisons and other institutions are a thermometer that measures the sickness of the larger society. The treatment society affords its outcasts reveals the way in which its members view one another - and themselves." - Thomas Murton (the man that the "Brubaker" story was based on)

In 1975, former Warden Murton wrote a book called "Shared Decision-Making as Treatment Technique in Prison Management." He was hired to reform an Arkansas prison farm but, as he found out, only to a point. I believe that "shared decision-making" describes the very foundation of democracy!

I wonder why, when we study our history, we are required to remember names, dates and places from our past, but we don't learn about citizenship, stewardship, listening to others, weighing values, critical thinking, or engaging in public service.

The world sees us as one of the richest nations, but many of us have yet to see the wealth 'trickle down'. In fact, on average, "in 2022, CEOs were paid 344 times as much as a typical worker in contrast to 1965, when they were paid just 21 times as much," according to the Economic Policy Institute.

Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps, with 350+ employees, is one of the few companies committed to sharing the profits with the workers and the planet. For more than 25 years they have been committed to capping the top executive salaries to 5x the lowest paid, fully-vested employee (a 5 year commitment). David Bronner describes the company philosophy like this: "We're trying to set an example of just being reasonable. For us to prosper, everyone needs to prosper." I see this as "ubuntu in action." Their grandfather, Emmanuel "Dr." Bronner, used to

say that on Spaceship Earth "We're All One or None!"

Despite our enormous flaws, the US has some terrific characteristics. For instance, most Americans believe we have the power to become the person we desire to be. In the US we can, and many of us do, believe in free will. Our favorite story (according to the books and movies we enjoy) is the Redemption Story. And we are home to the coolest music in the world: Jazz and Blues. (yes, I'm biased ~ :)

My favorite American characteristic of all is owning our democracy. If there is something you want to change, you can jump in with both feet and work on it...and you might even attract others to work on it with you! And, as we've already seen in our lifetime, we can bring about huge changes to reduce suffering and increase freedom. (Same-sex marriage, for example!)

I started Fair Shake to provide valuable reentry information that most prisons do not, but I needed support to make it work. Many of Fair Shake's newsletter subscribers are now dedicated donors. THANK YOU! This is how democracy works! It's not choosing from two bad options, it's working together to build the world we want to live in.

For those of you who read it, you know the "How to Watch TV" document helps us decipher the steady barrage of misleading headlines, half-reported stories, and 'famous people' distractions that keep us from really knowing what's going on. Even though, as the Washington Post stated last week, 7 out of 10 people don't trust the media to report on politics accurately," people continue to rely on 'the news' for information, and it has become extremely difficult to talk with them about the state of our prisons, or the state of education, or our national mental health crisis.

Malcolm X famously said: "The media's the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power...because they control the minds of the masses." He also said: "If you're not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing."

One of the most important things that we are not taught in school is how to defend ourselves against the distractions and half-truths presented in the media.

Speaking of schools and media hype, have you been able to take advantage of the PELL roll-out? According to the Vera Institute website: "More than 750,000 people in prison are eligible to enroll in a post-secondary program" (notice they do not say "a Pell-funded program") and "More than 70% (of them) are interested in enrolling" (they do not say in what) and "All 52 jurisdictions (States, Puerto Rico & the BOP) are ready to accept 'prison education program' applications." WOW! That sounds wonderful! I hear a different story from the learners, however. Most of the folks who contact me say the grant has yet to reach them. The final claim on their Pell Restoration page states: "The impact of Pell restoration is substantial: filling employment gaps, putting families on new economic trajectories and ending the cycle of incarceration." That's quite a claim! In 2023, about 17,000 people around the country participated in the program and about 7,000 received degrees (334 Bachelor's, 1600 Associates and 4000 program certificates. If it's so powerful, how can we scale up to reach everyone?

WORKFORCE NEWS: Anyone want to work in the Semi-Conductor Industry? Despite \$500 billion in investments, and factories that are ready to produce, the US semiconductor industry is waiting to get started because of a skilled-worker shortage. Online and in-person schools are now becoming available to offer the necessary programs. Veterans can receive the training for free at these schools: AZ: Rio Salado College and Arizona State University; CA: Southwestern College and U of CA San Diego; GA: GA Piedmont Tech College and GA Inst. of Technology; and VA: Tidewater Community College and Norfolk State University...and soon: Tompkins Cortland Community College and Cornell University in New York; Columbus State Community College and Ohio State University in Ohio; and Tarrant County College and University of Texas at Arlington Unfortunately, registration is online, but if you have a supporter with internet access, they can learn more here: <https://www.cneu.psu.edu/military-ed/>. If this sounds interesting to you, check with your Ed. Dept. to see if this training will be available to you through the Pell Grant! Starting pay is between \$35,000 and \$41,000, but the average pay is \$106,250.

Calling all ARTISTS! In the next newsletter I'll have information to share about an entrepreneur that wants to help you learn how to sell your work. I don't have contact info yet, but the owner wants to help you build your entrepreneurial skills in the art business, too, so you can continue growing your business after release. I will send out the next newsletter as soon as I have the details.

WI READERS: Since we don't know when the Corrlinks service will end, please remember that you can continue to receive the FS news when you send me a SASE (address below). Or, if you have support folks, they can download the news from the FS website: <https://www.fairshake.net/fair-shake-newsletter>. Unfortunately, the new tablets do not provide a way for me to send the newsletters electronically.

NEED TO DE-STRESS? Try BOX BREATHING!

1. Breathe out slowly, releasing all the air from your lungs.
2. Breathe in through your nose as you slowly count to four in your head.
3. Hold your breath for a count of four.
4. Exhale for another count of four.
5. Hold your breath again for a count of four.
6. Repeat for three to four rounds.

WHAT DRIVES OUR BEHAVIOR?

Most programming in prison is based on a belief that you have a unique inner drive called 'criminogenic needs.' This perspective (or bias) claims that certain people have a propensity to commit crime. Like a moth to a flame, or an ant to sugar, your special 'need' will pull you toward unlawful behavior and the best that you can do is to perpetually 'desist', or push against it.

The Risk-Needs-Responsivity formulation, created in response to this 'need,' is the foundation for the programming which delivers a whopping 17% success rate! (sarcasm) and uses sciency language to hold people in their social place. (Which explains why the Martha Stewarts and Bernie Madoffs are excluded from the programs.)

Since I was a child-in-the-system I've pushed back on the idea that exposure 'causes' a person to behave a certain way. Was I 'influenced' by my parent's 'rewards and punishments'? Yes. Did the influence cause me to behave like them? Hell, no. Specifically, because of my experience, I knew I wanted to be nothing like them.

Carrots and sticks may work for a short time, but they do not have a lasting effect. Our beliefs are what drive us: beliefs about ourselves, about others, about the value of things, about the future, etc. It's our beliefs that pull us through very difficult times and it's our beliefs that drive us to take enormous risks like building new relationships, starting a business, or even taking out a loan!

Psychology and philosophy are finally opening up to what really drives people. Studies today turn these stagnant beliefs on their head. Predictive processing, which is included in Lisa Feldman Barrett's study of how our emotions are developed, plays a crucial role in the study of perception. Cognitive scientists now see how our minds rely on our predictions from our past experiences to limit the options and opportunities available to us in our current situations.

There is no funding currently for the view that we can create more satisfying lives by expanding our predictions about ourselves and the meaning behind our emotions, but that does not have to stop us from taking the reins and studying these areas for ourselves!

If you're hoping to change your world, start by aligning your values and aspirations, and then let knowledge help move you in that direction. - Tom Asacker

I have two documents to offer this month. One, called "Start with Water" is from Tom Asaker who reminds us to put our core beliefs at the root of our goals. You can check out his other writings here: <https://unwindingwant.substack.com/>)

The other is from Anil Seth, who wrote a book called Being You: A New Science of Consciousness. (possibly available through the free book organizations?!) I will share the majority of the text from his TED talk on how our brains create our unique reality (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyu7v7nWzfo>).

If you'd like to receive Tom's piece, start a new message to me with Water in the subject line, and if you'd like to read the transcript from Anil's TED talk, start a new message with Being You in the subject line.

BUILDING THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Predictions of personal effectiveness had a powerful influence on the creation of our nation. Despite the mountain of flaws in the "Empire-

Building" way of thinking, the 'can-do' spirit became an important characteristic of our culture. It is this faith in ourselves that can bolster you during a job interview, in building new relationships and in supporting your community.

"We can do it!" - Rosie the Riveter

RANDOM QUOTES:

Democracy is a way of personal life controlled not merely by faith in human nature in general but by faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and action if proper conditions are furnished." - John Dewey, 1939

"Freedom is real when we experience it. It is not something merely to be argued about or shelved because our debate (about free will) hasn't yet been resolved." - Daniel C. Dennett

"There is nothing wrong with America that cannot be cured by what is right with America." - President Bill Clinton

There is no distinctly American criminal class - except Congress. - Mark Twain

"Pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding" - Kahlil Gibran

"None but ourselves can free our minds." - Bob Marley

Happy Interdependence Day!

Ubuntu, ~ sue

As always, remember to find support in your phone-gizmo: Fairshake.net & National Reentry Helpline (24/7): 844-916-2577

FREE REENTRY BOOK: "Mapping Your Future"
Write to: Education Justice Project 1001 South Wright Street Champaign, IL 61820

Newsletters are available to read or print at FairShake.net.
And you can watch Fair Shake tutorial videos as you explore the huge reentry website.
Visit the Building Mental Strengths page to bolster your spirit during difficult times!

Fair Shake PO Box 63 Westby, WI 54667