What Matters?

A Workshop for Developing & Articulating Our Values

LLAMA Career Institute
librarian.net/talks/llama16

I would like to fill your head full of interesting and possibly conflicting ideas about values, your own and possibly the ones of your workplace.

Outline of the day

I. Intro & basic overviews & definitions

II. Workplace & personal values exercises

III. Discussion about values conflicts and priorities

IV. Lightning exercise about optimism

V. Learning about elevator pitches

VI. Buddying up and farewell

My Personal Values Story

This is about how I learned something about myself by watching myself not get a dog. (story) Think about what your version of not getting a dog is.

"You make what seems a simple choice choose a spouse or a job or a neighborhood—and what you have chosen is not a spouse or a job or a neighborhood, but a life."

–Jessamyn West (not me!)

So values guide us but not always in the ways we think they do. It's easy to say "I value hard work and so I got a job where I can work hard and now I am fulfilled!" but we don't exist in a vacuum and things are rarely that simple. There are other people around us: co-workers, partners, children, and they come with their own sets of values and priorities based off of those values. And so in negotiating those values we learn more about our own. Sounds sort of simplistic but I think you learn more about your own values by seeing others navigate theirs.

So the good news is that you already work with (or want to work with) the public, so you know some of this stuff already. Sharing resources means everyone has to compromise somewhat. So let's back up and look at what specifically we're talking about.

values…

- … are not beliefs

- … can change over time

- … are sort of judgmental (is ok)

let's do a little outlining. So like a belief is something about what you think is true (there is life after death, black cats are unlucky). It doesn't have to have a moral component. A value is ascribing a judgment to that. For the purposes of definition I'm looking at values as these two main things, less so the third thing though the third thing will matter a bit later on…. Values are basically the things that underpin what makes you YOU. Here's a little background on why I am the one talking to you about values.

values

1. How to live your life

2. How to act with others

3. Your secret thoughts and feelings

For the purposes of definition I'm looking at values as these two main things, less so the third thing though the third thing will matter a bit later on….

I learned what I know from

- Moderating a large online community

For ten years ending in 2014, I ran a very big online community or a discussion board. We had a "share something neat you found on the web" part of the site and a Q&A part of the site. I used to say "it's like yahoo answers that doesn't suck". MetaFilter had about 100,000 members and maybe 10000 active ones. When you work online you get to basically do a close read of people's stated feelings AND see their actions, AND get to watch those evolve and change over time. You get a real object lesson about how … values are hard, and doing what you say is hard even for the most sincere people.

I learned what I know from

- Moderating a large online community

- A lot of difficult conversations with a lot of difficult people

The first part led to the second part. Because running our site didn't just mean banning people and deleting comments, it meant trying to help people get along in the community even if they were having trouble for various reasons, or even if they were mad at me.

I learned what I know from

- Moderating a large online community

- A lot of difficult conversations with a lot of difficult people

- Books & therapy (and books about therapy!)

Like many librarians I read a lot about people who are different from me. I've also, for various things, been in and out of therapy. Sometimes it's good to have someone outside of your own social circle give you some feedback when you're having trouble getting unstuck. I think it would be great if we could get "workplace therapy" that wasn't just high priced consultants coming in and trying to sell us something or fire people. But seriously if you find yourself wtht an intractable values problem that you can't tackle. Therapy. There's no shame in it. Now I'm one of those people who meditate who everyone hates. I promise not to talk about it.

Annoying, Well-Adjusted Friend Even F✳✳king Meditating Now

LOWELL, MA—Noting how he piled on yet another healthy practice to his perfectly goddamned balanced lifestyle, exasperated friends confirmed Wednesday that annoying, well-adjusted 32-year-old Ryan Miller is even fucking meditating now. "Christ, the emotionally stable fucker already loves his job, exercises four times a week, and now he has the balls to spend 10 minutes every morning sitting quietly and breathing deeply to clear his

What I'm saying is you can trust me :)

I learned what I know from

- Moderating a large online community

- A lot of difficult conversations with a lot of difficult people

- Books & therapy (and books about therapy!)

- Library school & "our professional values" stuff

Library school was a stroke of luck for me. I thought I wanted to go into law to help people and change the world but I couldn't handle the outfits or the hours. This was good for me to know before spending a lot of money on law school. Library school was cheap and nearby and I'd always loved doing research (and helping people, and changing the world). It was a stroke of luck that I could also do the latter two. I can remember the day, still, when I learned that librarians were anti-censorship and concerned with equality and justice.

What Matters?

- Exploring your values with others

So I'll come back to this meta-list of topics that I think are important as we discuss values at home and in the workplace. Hey, we're doing this right now!

"I chose this."

Back to school… I went to library school in Seattle. It rains a lot there. Then again they don't have real winter. Deciding to live there was a choice I consciously made and was pretty happy about it. BUT there were people, also there by choice, who would look out the window in the morning and be all "Awww raining AGAIN?" and I wondered about them. Making a values-based decision doesn't mean that you have to pretend that the other options didn't exist or that there aren't things you don't prefer about the choice you made, but that most of the time (though not all) this IS a choice you made. That said, I value not complaining, not everyone does.

What Matters?

- Exploring your values with others

- Acknowledging your choices & agency

So when thinking about your own values, it's important to acknowledge that there are things, probably a few more things than you think, that can be changed.

Where do values come from?

- Family
- Community
- Role models
- ??????

- ????
- ????
- ????
- ????

So first excercise-y thing. FILL IN THE BLANKS

exercise

OK back to this guy… and have people from each table report on the library values they picked as top five and bottom five. I'll write them down on the next slide….

Top 5   Bottom 5

- ????

Which decisions were difficult to make? Which were easier to make? Was it surprising that people mostly agreed/disagreed?

Some of my current values

So that's looking at professional values, let's talk about personal ones. Here are mine. Money, but not in the way you would think. I am an inveterate yankee and have a hard time letting go of money. This actually makes me bad at librarianship in some ways *or difficult to fit* more to the point. Because if you get a grant and only spend some of it because you wound up recycling all of the rubber bands instead of buying more, this is a good news/bad news proposition.

Some of my current values

Justice. I'm a person who might be called a "social justice warrior" except that I don't just argue with people on the internet. I do a lot to try to make the world a more equal place for people (that inclusion card, I included it!) in word and deed.

Some of my current values

And … sleep or I guess "health" would be a better way to put it, or lack of stress. I need a lot of rest, I frame my life around this. This is why this talk started after lunch.

Personal Values Inventory

So let's look a little bit at the things YOU believe in. Here's a list of 100+ things you MIGHT value. And the point it not to look at all of these things and think "Yeah those are good things" but to have to make some difficult choices among a lot of good sounding values. This list is available on the website (and I linked to another one) if you want to bring it to work or otherwise make copies.

values inventory

- Circle ten to keep. Cross out ten. Then cross out five of the circled ones. Then cross out two more.

- You can't have twenty "core values." Conflicting values is normal, not aberrant.

- Think about something not just as a concept you like, but one that makes you want to *do something in your life*

As you look over your list, compare it to the list of top values we picked for librarianship. Do they line up? Not line up?

What Matters?

- Exploring your values with others

- Acknowledging your choices & agency

- Being honest about your own capabilities

Personal vs. Professional values

- What does it mean to say an organization has values?

- What is the difference between decision making that is values-based and other kinds of decision making?

So as you look at your list of attributes, ones you think you have, ones you think you might want, ones you don't want and don't have, think about how they would segue with institutional culture…..

We've just endured a week or two of top ten lists and "best of 2015" lists and one of the tricky things with things like "best" is that I'm always being a nitpicker saying "According to whom?" but I think there's an angle and I think you just need to understand who is being talked about and what they care about to get from the "I care about this" part of the equation to the "So I should DO this" part. "Ten best movies for librarians?" I might watch those. This is particularly useful in the workplace.

exercise

Time for some role playing about some library topics.

What Matters?

- Exploring your values with others

- Acknowledging your choices & agency

- Being honest about your own abilities

- The ability to evaluate & make decisions when there is no right or wrong answer

You're not ultimately going to come up with a "right" answer, but you can come up with an optimal answer. Poor leaders decide whose side they're on, good leaders try to find ways to bring the "sides" together and agree on some core concepts. It's tough, it's a lot easier to just decide that people are wrong. (you see this on the internet ALL THE TIME)

Don't let this be you. Go to bed.

Hidden Values

So let's talk a little more about when it's less obvious. Some values are obvious, people tell you about them or they live their lives in ways that some of their choices are obvious (in good and bad ways). It's possible they don't know their own mind/heart but we're less concerned with that. Let's look at ways that values can be obscured…

"If you're honest, you sooner or later have to confront your values. Then you're forced to separate what is right from what is merely legal. This puts you metaphysically on the run. America is full of metaphysical outlaws."

–Tom Robbins

Values are also determined or at least largely influenced by the society and culture that we live in. That is, we learn about what to value through a combination of observing those around us and examining our own moral compass. Conflicts can arise in a few major ways.
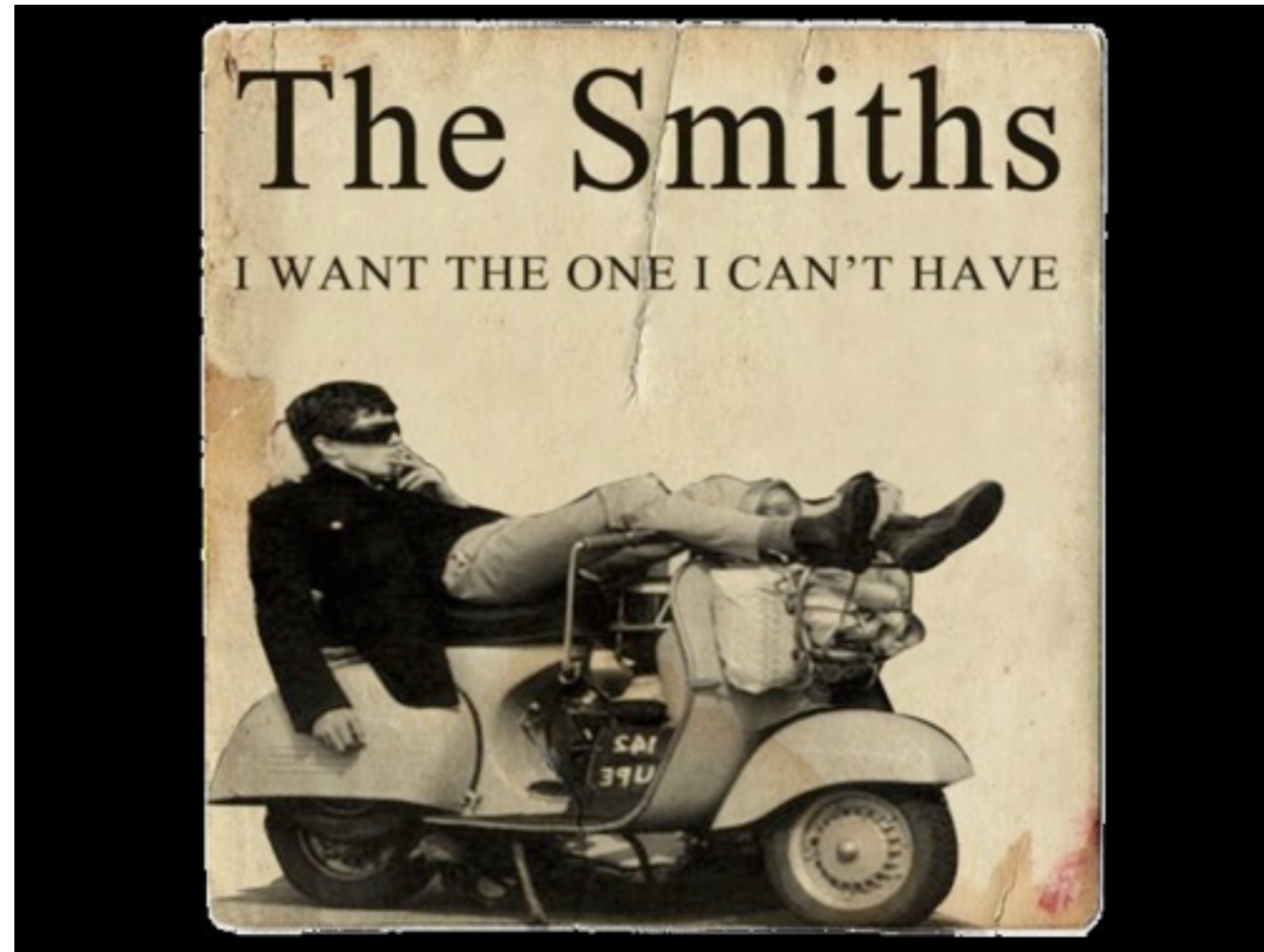
Sometimes what you value isn't valued by society, as a clear example. This Smiths song is about … maybe being gay? Maybe just being in love with a "bad boy." Maybe both. But the upshot is that people sometimes are making choices and decisions for reasons that aren't clear from the outside and possibly aren't always clear to them. Why didn't I get a dog? Why don't I get a haircut? Why is the bathroom at my library sort of dingy? Why is Donald Trump a legit presidential candidate? There are some things we only learn by long periods of exploration and analysis, but there are some useful ways we can approach … unclear values.

This is a side topic but one that I think is essential to a discussion of values, looking at how people express what they think and care about. I grew up in a sort of loudmouthed family where we said what was on our mind. There are good and bad aspects to this approach, I'm not saying it's better just saying it's where I am coming from.

"I'm coming to your city for a few days. Can I stay with you?"

Does it matter if the person is family, friend or colleague?

On Ask MetaFilter (the Q&A site) there was a huge discussion about this general question. A couple had a friend, not a close friend but a decent friend, and she asked them this. The ocuple had a huge difference of opinion not just over whether to say yes to this request but whether this request was beyond the pale in the first place.

It's OK to ask. Answer might be "No."

Ask Culture

So in my culture (again, not the right culture but just where I come from) the right thign to do is ask. People can say no. If you asked if you could stay with me and it wasn't a good time, i would say no, no problem. Sometimes people call this "ask culture"

Only ask if the answer is likely to be "Yes."

Guess Culture

However in other cultures, and this is other American cultures, not people from elsewhere, the idea of asking a direct question about something so personal is very rude. You put someone in a bad position if they have to say no to you, and you don't want to do that so you only ask if you know the answer is probably yes.

"I'm coming to your city for a few days. Can you suggest places to stay?"

This would be more of a guess way of phrasing the same general request. The person can invite you if they want to, they don't have to.

Library example from Peter/SLC people would rather lie than make other people uncomfortable

Ask

- Direct (and/or rude)

- Puts onus on askee to say "No."

- Askee may feel pressured to say yes

Guess

- Subtle (and/or vague)

- Presumes agreement first

- Face-saving

- Works best with single-culture groups

"A charitable
interpretation
would be…."

Manners is just a set of guidelines so that we all know how to interact. One of the things I do when I'm in a situaiton where someone is acting inexplicably is to try to find a way to understand what is up with them. Even if it means I have to make up a story to make the whole thing turn out okay. One of the ways we could (sometimes) turn discussions around in our online community was by trying to see everyone in the best possible light, at least at first. We all have bad days. We all say things we regret. We're not always good at recovering from those things. Let's give people some space…. SO this lightning exercise is called…

So the next time you see something that just … doesn't seem right, think to yourself "Well that must make sense to SOMEONE"

charitable ≠ chump

But also remember not to be a sucker. Assuming people always have decent values behind their behavior only works until you can establish a pattern of them NOT doing that.

What Matters?

- Exploring your values with others.

- Acknowledging your choices & agency.

- Being honest about your own abilities.

- Evaluating & making decisions when there is no right or wrong answer.

- Trying to see people's decisions through their eyes and offering choices that are real to them.

exercise

Why You Need an Elevator Pitch
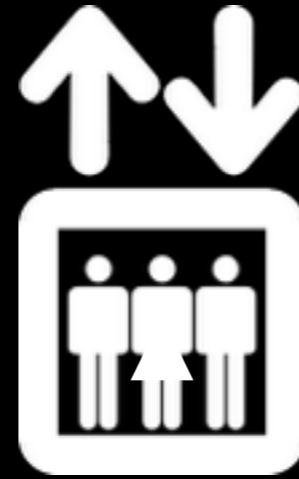
So now we're going to bring it back around and talk about your own positions in your job, job search or your non-job life if that is your thing. We're going to look at what you do and find a way to

You know that saying how you don't know a thing until you can explain it to a child? It's definitely not true for everything but it has applicability to this. The idea is …
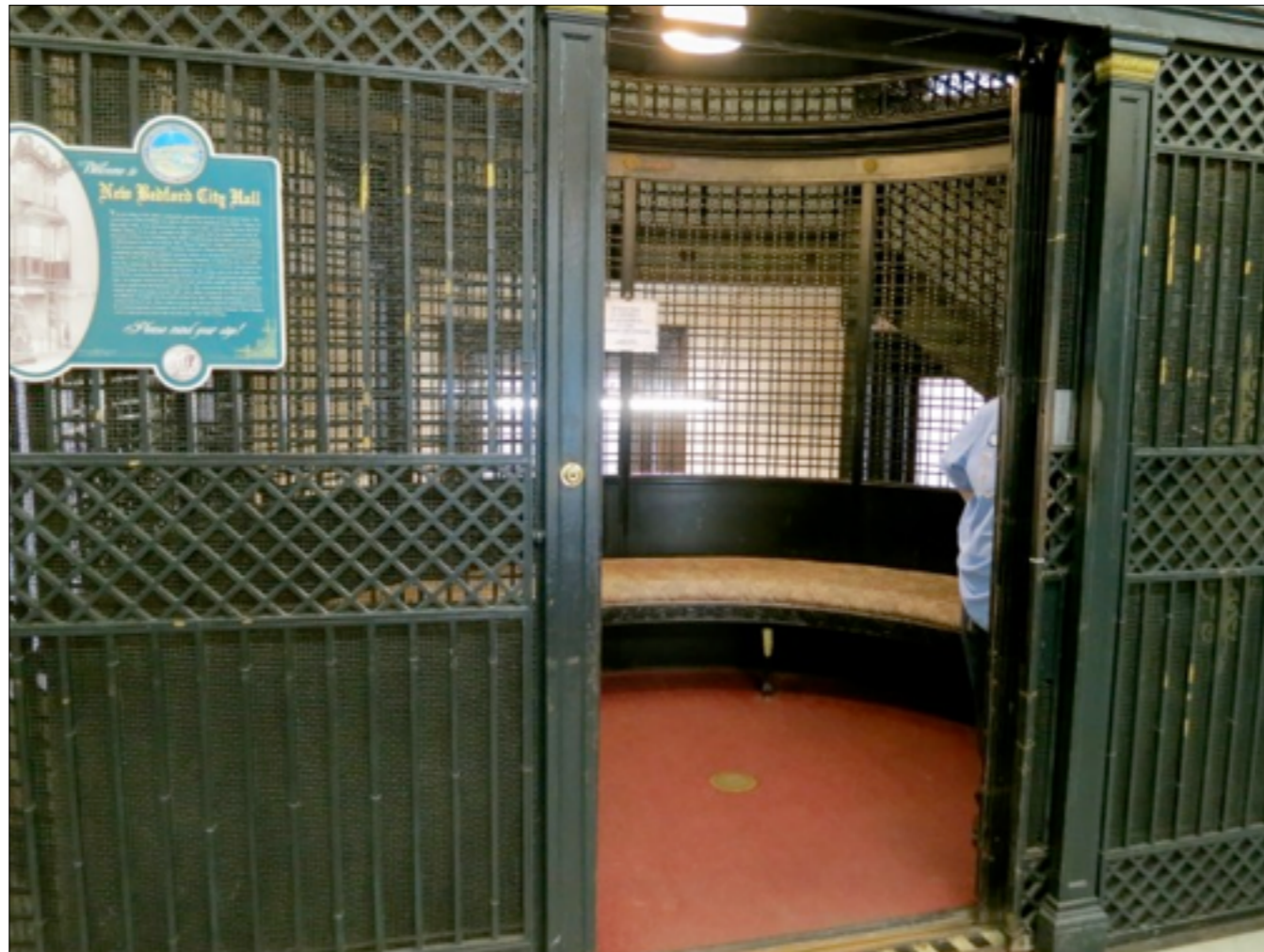
(hey did you know that the oldest continuously operating elevator is in MA? You're welcome) You're in an elevator, someone asks you what you do, you want to let them know in a way that is punchy and useful and, most of all SHORT. Sometimes people say "put it in a tweet" but I'm more about just having it be 15-30 words. A few parts to jam in there.

elevator pitch is...

a quick, succinct summary of what you're doing or making

- Me

- What I do

- What this is

- What happens

1. "What you or your library believes in"
2. "What you or your library does"

"We lend ebooks worldwide for free."

- it's not your slogan
- it's not your mission
- it's not your tagline

My example from the work I do with Open Library. You'll note, it doesn't answer all your questions, but it's not jargon-y, gives you a rough idea of what we do and maybe why it's cool, and doesn't just repeat any of the other verbiage associated with us or the Internet Archive. It should be concrete and not too aspirational (unless it's stated as such).

avoid specifics

- Minimal superlatives
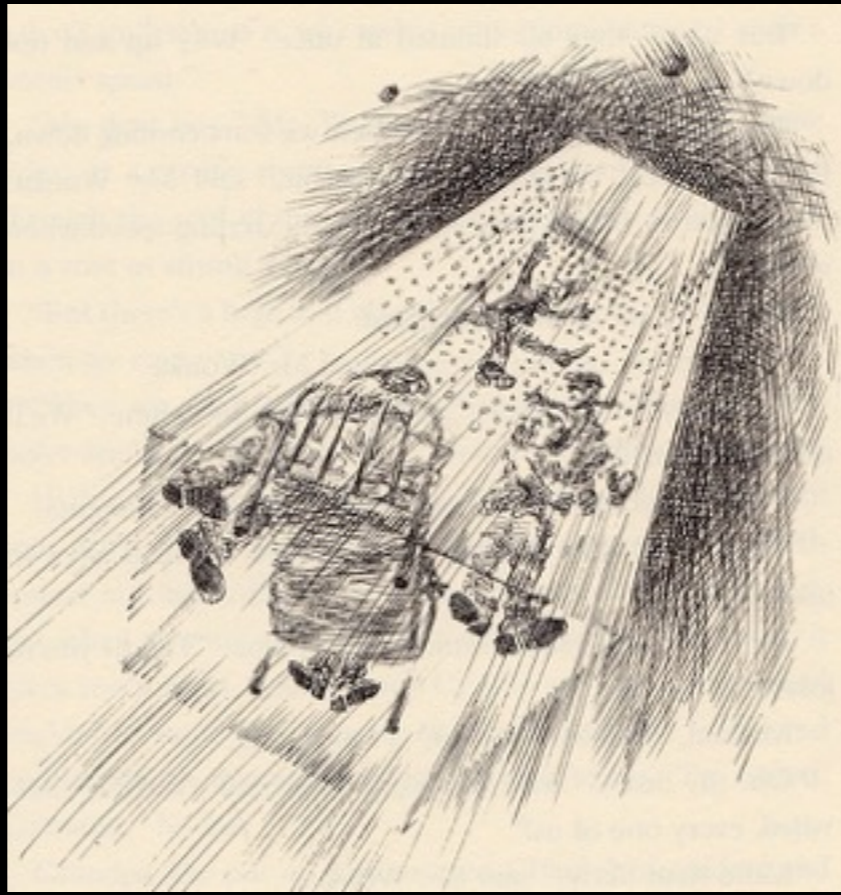
- Focus on one thing

- Differentiate!

now *you* try

- Find a partner.
- Make your pitch.
- Help refine theirs.
- Share in 15 min.

sky is the limit.

So the las tthing we are going to do before we are out of here is…

exercise

buddy system

Just like many accountability programs from AA to swimming in the ocean know that you'll do better with someone else to "hold you accountable" Now only you know what you want to bring back to your workplace or bring back to your home, but here's a quick simple step we'll take to help you with it. Choose a buddy. Exchange email with that buddy. Tell them a thing you want to accomplish, implement or just be thinking about. I'll drop you a note in a few weeks when all the fuss has died down. You contact your buddy and let them know how you've been doing. I've given you a handout.

"Your beliefs become your thoughts. Your thoughts become your words. Your words become your actions. Your actions become your habits. Your habits become your values. **Your values become your destiny**."

- Gandhi

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You matter.