

Missy Lacock

FRIEND REQUEST ACCEPTED UNDER PROTEST

WHEN ADAPTING MEANS COMPROMISING



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Playing Survival Of The Fittest in the 21st century doesn't only mean adapting to shifting job landscapes and technology but also cultural expectations – norms that are undergoing enormous change in this digital era. Having a Facebook account, for example, has become as big a social norm as wearing pants, but I've taken the road less traveled for a decade, thank you very much. And, yes, Facebook-ees have responded with the same alarm as if I were walking around bottomless: "What? Don't you know we post daily updates about our cats and Fun Dip in this country?"

Well, let me tell you something, friends (my real friends): I don't like virtual pokes or statuses about babies or rotating pictures of Starbucks drinks. I've enjoyed the freedom to stand my ground. The problem? That dastardly social media giant has wedged itself irrevocably into our companies, our education, our relationships, and now it's possible to be left behind without joining the crowd.

GIVING IN

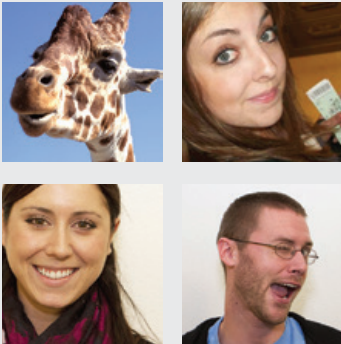
The truth is that I need Facebook to stay competitive in my field. My college program and employers have used Facebook to house documents in closed groups, host industry conversations, coordinate and promote events, and advertise products. As a writer, Facebook is a free way to market my services, increase my readership, and make writing samples accessible to employers. Plus, using Facebook

RECENT ACTIVITY



Llama Bahama likes
SUMMER SELFIE DOG

FRIENDS OF LLAMA BAHAMA



Highlights ▼

4 FURRY FRIENDS Like Bahama Llama



amps my social media prowess and adds a valuable résumé line. So, I've officially logged on and suffered FarmVille invites like a champ, sacrificing my values and adapting to this newest social norm. Caving was the right decision for my bigger career picture.

However, I still have objections to Facebook, and my values aren't easy to forgo. It's not just about annoying feeds and people without a filter (you know who you are); it's about privacy issues and waiving my intellectual property rights; it's about false personas and changing the nature of relationships; it's about conformity and time-wasting. *Forbes* described social media like Facebook as "fast food for the mind," in which we waste our limited cognitive bandwidth on shallow distractions instead of valuable, intellectual material. I'm not judging users – I didn't make a Facebook account earlier because I'm the first to get sucked into the vortex of time wasting. But it's too late now. I've crossed over to the dark side.

AGE OF CHANGE

My scrap with Facebook is only one example of needing to bow to a cultural expectation. You probably have your own. In fact, there are a lot of social norms in flux as this generation undergoes a massive shift to the digital era. In addition to Facebook, our way of life now relies on other social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube; exclusive emailing/texting (forget calling!); online bill pay; online relationships; online news media and blogging; and a shift from hard copy to digital media, like digital cameras, iPods, paperless note-taking, and e-books.

These changes demonstrate this generation's adaptations are largely via a microchip. While Thomas Edison witnessed the Industrial Revolution, we're in the throes of the Digital Revolution, which is really only beginning (the Internet turned 40 last year). It's not only changing job landscapes and how we store material but the way we relate to each other – for better and for worse. What can we learn from historical revolutions? First, changes are inevitable. Second, there are resistance and consequences to every major social change, and just because something's a social norm ("everybody's doing it") doesn't mean it's a good idea (i.e. slavery) or a bad idea (i.e. The Enlightenment). Either way, a social norm only becomes a norm because the masses buy into it, and eventually livelihoods depend on it as it's incorporated into business and education.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ADAPTATION

These changing standards bring up a slew of questions: Is there resistance because people don't like change? What's the line between being an independent thinker and a stiff traditionalist? And on the other side, what's the line between peer pressure and joining the team for the right reasons?

More importantly, when is it worth compromising personal values to conform to new expectations? What values shouldn't be surrendered? When is it too far (Google Glass and the singularity anyone)?

These aren't easy questions to answer, and adapting to social norms is complicated in principle: They're always evolving – and most of us evolve with them, whether we want to or not. Wading into the mess and sacrificing our values may maximize our success, but it doesn't mean our objections will ebb. But the biggest problem with social norms is they are jumpstarted by few and followed by many – and that's a lot of power in the hands of a single trendsetter, especially if it changes the way we interact and do business. Where does original thought come into play?

Either way, adapting at the expense of our convictions or not adapting at the expense of our careers comes with a price. I've chosen to follow the Facebook flock. I just hope it's not headed off a cliff. 💰

37%

OF BUSINESS DECISION-
MAKERS USE FACEBOOK
AT LEAST PARTLY FOR
BUSINESS PURPOSES.

forrester.com

FOLLOWING LIKE SHEEP

After one sheep jumped off a cliff in Turkey in 2005, 1,500 sheep followed suit. 450 of the flock perished following their woolly leader. *usatoday.com*