

*Teams with free riders are rated more positively by their managers than teams without them. Because conscientious workers overcompensate for free riders, these teams actually do more work than the teams without them.*



BOOK EXTRACT

When your time is their business

*From co-workers, acquaintances and friends of friends, people who try to wear you down and steal your time are on the rise. In jinks at Work, Toxic Coworkers and What to Do About Them, Tessa West outlines why this trend is happening, how to spot the time thieves coming and what you should do about it.*

The travel industry, as it currently operates, isn't sustainable. A 2019 study by the International Council on Clean Transportation found that airline emissions had increased by 32% from 2013 to 2018 – 70% faster than the United Nations had anticipated. As a result, by 2050, aviation emissions could account for a quarter of the global carbon budget that we'll need to embrace to limit global warming to 1.5°C. To reverse climate change and regenerate our soils, oceans and land, we must move beyond sustainability – and fast.

Some carbon sequestration solutions suggested by environmentalist Paul Hawken's Project Drawdown include reforestation and fostering gender equality; through these, tourism can act as a vehicle to reverse climate change. Take the Oxy Hotel in Tuscany, which was born to conserve the biodiversity of the WWF-affiliated nature reserve where it's located through agriculture, breeding and scientific research. It's also developing a forest fund for the active protection of Italian woodlands. Hotels and destinations everywhere could implement such practices.

Unfortunately, much of the travel industry has been disconnected to people and place. Regenerative travel builds a framework that re-establishes that core experience, which is non-extractive and inclusive, diverse and equitable. Regenerative principles are emerging as the future of tourism, with the potential and capacity to create better conditions for people and life to flourish. In Hawaii and New Zealand, lots of destinations are already adopting regenerative recovery strategies.

A solution to reverse climate change is to replenish and repair the damage we have done to our environment and communities. Travel has the capacity to inspire transformation and each hotel or destination can help. As an industry, we have a responsibility to rebuild in a way that makes it easy for people to make sure there's a better relationship between vacation and values. 🌱

● *Aminda Ho is the co-founder and CEO of booking platform Regenerative Travel.*

THE THREE CS

You aren't destined to have a free-riding problem if your group has one (or more) of the Three Cs, but you are at risk. Does this mean that you don't have to worry about free riders if you work alone? Nope. Lots of free riders target individuals. They are outsiders or newcomers, looking for a quick way to get ahead.

They target the most generous people at work, the bleeding hearts who feel guilty saying "no." I call these free riders "time thieves." For all types of free riders, prevention is about early detection and putting steps in place that signal to opportunistic free riders: "You won't get away with that shit here." It's also about setting boundaries not only for your free rider but also for yourself.

Conscientiousness is one of the biggest predictors of success at work. If not in life. Everyone wants to work with conscientious people. They are reliable, disciplined and good at redirecting the group when people get distracted. And, if you get a group of them together working on something they came about, they dominate. They also make the perfect nesting spot for an opportunistic free rider. Why? Conscientious team members almost always compensate for free riders instead of making them do their fair share. Imagine a beehive that was just torn apart by a hungry bear. The go-getter bees, solely focused on the task at hand, will quickly get to repairing the hive, compensating for the lazy bees. In fact, they might even overcompensate, building a beehive that's stronger than the one they had before the bear came along.

The same thing happens at work. The group goes above and beyond what they would have done if they didn't have a free rider. For conscientious people who are afraid of failure, slackers are strong motivators.

One outcome of this process is that teams with free riders are rated more positively by their managers than teams without them. Because conscientious workers overcompensate for free riders, these teams actually do more work than the teams without them.

Groups need cohesion to survive. Without it, interactions are fraught, painful and rarely productive. At work, cohesion usually protects groups against free riders: the closer people feel to one another, the more motivated they are to work hard for the sake of the group. But, sometimes, when we work well together, task goals give way to social goals – we slowly spend less time working and more time socializing. It's only natural that people who work well together will also want to play together. In fact, between 10% and 20% of us meet our romantic partners at work. But, when you get along well

with the people in your group, it's easy to let your guard down, allowing socially skilled free riders to rest comfortably on their laurels. Lastly, cohesion makes it hard to confront free riders. We don't like calling out the people we like.

In 2018, Vasily Taras – a professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's Bryan School of Business and Economics – and his colleagues identified 77 free riders whose team members all said they did little to no work on a team project. Even though each person was shown strong evidence of their own free riding (such as multiple weekly complaints by all their team members), only 35.1% fully admitted to making no effort; 42.8% said the reports about them were not entirely true; and 22.1% denied them completely. It's hard to get free riders to own up to their behavior.

Vasily and his colleagues' free riders had decent excuses for their behavior. Many told the team that they were overwhelmed with other work; others had a hard time accessing whatever communication tool the team was using. You might expect these free riders to emerge out of groups with conflict, but that was not the case. In fact, only 7.8% of free riders in their study experienced any form of interpersonal conflict. Generally speaking, these teams were full of people who got along – we're friends, even.

COLLECTIVE REWARDING

In the past year or so, I've noticed a huge trend toward rewarding the collective at work. In fact, more than half of all public companies use some version of collective pay for performance (PPF), where people get paid based on how well their team did. Comparing individuals to one another, the logic goes, encourages Machiavellianism, reduces people's willingness to admit mistakes, and fuels resentment.

Rewarding the collective motivates people to work harder. Some of this is true. Once people realize that, despite working as a team, only one of them will get the bonus, they tend to turn into the boys from Lord of the Flies. The worst version of this happens when companies leverage peer feedback – the ratings that team members give of one another – to single out one person to get an extra bonus or higher raise than everyone else. This strategy sabotages team dynamics. Rewarding the collective seems fair, especially if everyone contributed equally to the group's success.

But what happens when you can't tell who did what? You lose what social scientists call evaluation potential: the ability to sort out what each person contributed to a group's final product. Low evaluation potential is one of the strongest, most

consistent predictors of social loafing – or free riding – in teams. Once people realize that their individual contributions aren't kept track of, they tend to slack off.

This might seem like an obvious point, but I've heard many bosses claim that individual contributions shouldn't be used to evaluate people if the team can't make it work as a whole. This is a dangerous move, especially if you have team members who lack intrinsic motivation or feel dispensable. It also makes your team vulnerable to credit stealers – the other jerk at work who takes advantage of ambiguity around people's contributions.

It's not inherently bad to reward the collective, but it is bad to lose track of individual contributions. Teams that have one or two stars are especially susceptible to social loafing. In this context, the free riders realize that the stars will carry the team across the victory line and they won't need to break a sweat. And, with no one keeping track of their share of the workload, why should they have to?

#### WHEN IT'S TIME TO COAST

Silicon Valley has a problem. To retain top talent, tech giants such as Google offer huge salaries to their best engineers to prevent them from working for competitors. The talent sit on their asses all day, and companies lose money retaining them.

They call it the 'rest and vest' culture. As one engineer at Google put it, 'What incentive do you have to work harder when you are already making \$500,000 in salary, and there is no more upward trajectory?'

Sometimes leaders fall in love with talented people. They think that putting out all the stops to keep their favorite genius happy means that person will never lose their drive or run out of ideas. In other words, policies such as these are born from the idea that greatness will stay great. But, unfortunately, all of us have slacker potential within us – even geniuses.

Over-rewarding people for staying at a job without putting steps in place to keep them working is like giving your kid a candy bar before he's finished his homework. What incentive does he have to work once the chocolate is already in his belly?

#### THE TIME THIEF

Not all free riders work in teams. They can also be co-workers, acquaintances and friends of friends who try to steal your time.

My husband, Jay, does a lot of favors for these free riders. I look at his calendar and it stresses me out. There's something called 'lunch with startup guy' on there. His best buddy from college has a friend who is in New York for the weekend and wants advice about his startup. There's a half-dozen 20-minute phone calls with vague descriptions. Suffice it to say, Jay has a time-chief problem.

When you're successful and have a reputation for helping people, the free-loading requests are endless. Jay is the only person I know who responds to every request he gets.

Part of this problem is one of pluralistic ignorance – he assumes that everyone at work is this responsive. The other part is that he's more giving than most people. I remind him that the majority of people at work are like me: socially aloof enough to give off 'leave me alone' vibes. I also have thousands of unread emails full of random requests. Jay has none. Jay's time thieves come from every walk of life. Some are co-workers too lazy to figure out how to do things on their own, so they bug him for help. These people are easy to deal with. Just send them an email with a description of how to use Google. Yes, it's snarky, but it gets the point across. Others are go-getters who want advice or feedback on how to improve their status, so they reach out to every high-status person in their network. I don't blame them; many have been operating under the assumption that pressing the flesh is the first step toward making a name for themselves. Many are playing a numbers game, like the guy at a bar who hits on every single person he meets. Eventually he'll get lucky, and someone will say yes.

If you're spending too much time dealing with these free riders, put yourself on a diet. You're allowed to respond to a certain number of random requests a month and once you've hit your quota, you're done. The biggest hurdle you'll face in sticking to your diet is guilt. Who's going to help these people if I isn't you?

It turns out, lots of people. You probably know of up-and-comers who have something to gain by helping others – people who are looking to build their social network or want to become known as an expert. Connecting your time thief to one of these people will reduce your guilt and help someone else make a name for themselves. You'll feel like you're helping multiple people at once.

After you've said 'no,' don't get into a back and forth with your time thief. The smart ones are like telemarketers – they know that the longer they keep you on the phone, the better chance they have at getting money out of you.

I've spent a lot of my life making excuses for well-liked charismatic people who have difficulty with time management or with handling the everyday stressors of work. Once you learn how to identify what factors make your team vulnerable to free riders – some of which are surprising, given that they are usually considered strengths – you can put strategies in place to prevent it from happening in the first place. 🌱



This is an edited extract from **Jerks at Work: Toxic Coworkers and What to Do About Them** by Tessa West (Penguin).

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