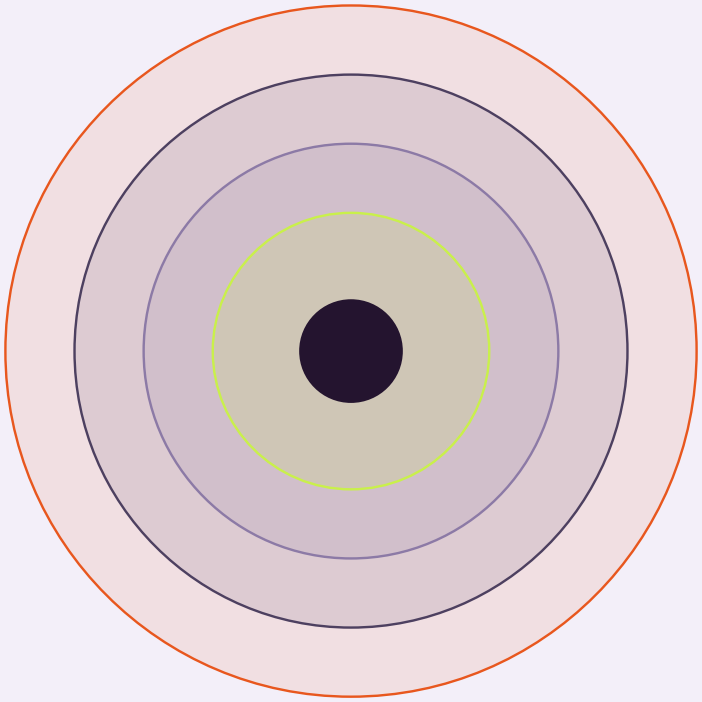
NOVEMBER 6, 2026



Careless People: A Cautionary Tale of Power, Greed, and Lost Idealism

A reading of the book by Sarah Wynn-Williams (2025)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of Careless People: A Cautionary Tale of Power, Greed, and Lost Idealism, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Sarah Wynn-Williams is a New Zealand lawyer and former diplomat who worked in public policy at Facebook from 2011 to 2017, rising to director of global public policy. Careless People is her memoir of those years. She argues that the company's leaders gained great influence over politics and public life around the world while, in her account, paying too little attention to the harm their choices could cause. The book follows her work with governments, including the company's role in Myanmar and its efforts to enter China, and gives her view of the culture among senior executives. Meta disputes the book, calling its claims false or out of date, and in March 2025 won an emergency arbitration order that limits her ability to promote it.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Carelessness is rarely one bad act. It is many people deciding that a cost belongs to someone else.

The title borrows a phrase from The Great Gatsby, about people who break things and leave others to clean up. Wynn-Williams applies it to the leadership she worked with, as she saw it. The useful lesson for any reader is that harm at scale is usually built from small shrugs, not one villain.

2 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Scale turns a small gap in attention into a large harm.

Wynn-Williams writes that Facebook became central to public life in Myanmar while the company had very few people who could read Burmese. In her account, warnings about hate speech against the Rohingya went largely unheeded. A product that reaches millions makes every blind spot millions of times bigger.

3 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

If the people who live under your rules cannot read them, you have not really made rules for them.

She describes pushing to have the platform's community standards translated into Burmese and finding it harder than it should have been. The point travels well beyond tech. A policy only protects the people who can see it, understand it and use it.

4 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Work kept on a need-to-know basis is also kept from the people most likely to object.

Wynn-Williams writes about a restricted internal effort to enter China, which the book calls Project Aldrin, including tools that could have limited what users there saw. Meta has said it does not operate its services in China. Whatever the full story, secrecy inside an organisation changes who gets to weigh a decision.

5 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Who was missing from the room shapes a decision as much as who was in it.

Many of the choices she describes were about countries and people far from headquarters. When the people who bear the cost have no voice in the meeting, their cost is easy to underrate. Asking who is absent is one of the cheapest checks there is.

6

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Idealism needs guardrails, or it slowly becomes a way to excuse what you are doing.

Wynn-Williams joined believing the platform could do real good in politics and diplomacy, and the book traces how that belief wore away. A mission can make it easier to wave off harm, because the goal seems to justify the cost. Write down in advance what you would not do for the mission.

7

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Access to power can grow faster than the judgment to use it well.

Much of the book is set in meetings with presidents, ministers and summits. In her telling, the company's reach into governments outpaced its care for what that reach meant. Rapid influence is a reason to slow down and ask more questions, not fewer.

8

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Insiders are part of the story too, including the one telling it.

A former Meta policy lead, reviewing the book for Rest of World, argued that it glosses over the author's own part in the decisions it criticises. That is a fair lens for any reader: the same pressures she describes act on everyone inside a system. Ask what you are going along with at work right now.

9

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Read an insider's account as one witness, not the final verdict.

Meta disputes the book and calls many of its claims false or old news, and an arbitrator has limited what the author may say about it. A memoir gives you one person's memory and judgment. Read it next to other reporting before you settle on a view.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Audit one live decision
- [ ] Name who is not in the room
- [ ] Write the front-page paragraph
- [ ] Start a warning log
- [ ] Read your rules as an outsider

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Ask who pays before you say yes
- ◯ Answer warnings within a week
- ◯ Read a second source on every tech story

30 days · Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

Audit one live decision

Pick a decision you are about to make at work or at home.

Run it through the careful-or-careless audit on this page and copy the summary into your notes.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

Name who is not in the room

For that decision, list every group it affects.

Circle the ones with no voice in the discussion and ask one person from that group for their view before you decide.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

Write the front-page paragraph

Describe the decision in five sentences as a fair reporter would.

If any sentence makes you wince, change the decision or the way you are making it.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

Start a warning log

Make a shared note where anyone on your team can record a concern, with a date and the response it got.

An empty log after a month is a sign people are not speaking up, not that all is well.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

Read your rules as an outsider

Take one policy, set of terms or house rule you are responsible for.

Ask someone outside your group to read it and explain it back, and fix what they misread.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Ask who pays before you say yes

Before agreeing to any request this week, ask yourself who carries the cost if it goes wrong.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Answer warnings within a week

When someone raises a concern with you, reply in writing within seven days, even if the answer is no.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Read a second source on every tech story

When a story about a tech company catches your eye, find one other report or the company's own response before you share it.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
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December 2026

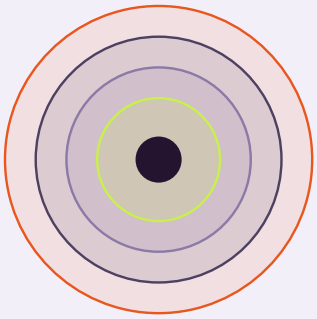
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



A decision is careful when someone has asked who pays for it, and has listened to the answer.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER SARAH WYNN-WILLIAMS