



FINANCIAL PREPAREDNESS

"One of life's most painful moments comes when we must admit that we didn't do our homework, that we are not prepared." ~ Merlin Olsen

Issue #141
October 20, 2023

Incompetocracy

Have you noticed that *nothing fucking works anymore*? If you're younger, you might assume that this is normal. But if you're a Gen Xer or older, you remember how things generally worked until recent years, and you're likely as dismayed and frustrated as I am.

As a student of the collapse of complex societies, I've spent a long time thinking about how ours might collapse. Popular theories include a nuclear war, a natural disaster, depletion of fossil fuels, ecological contamination, a pandemic, etc. But in recent years, I have come to the conclusion that the reason our society will collapse is because *we can no longer get the little things right*.

We won't collapse because of an obesity epidemic (and the resulting staggering health care costs), we'll collapse because the server at the restaurant failed to include all the food in our take-out order. We won't collapse because of Peak Oil, we'll collapse because when we get done pumping gas, instead of a paper receipt, we get a screen that says "see cashier for receipt." We won't collapse because of fake news from an unbelievably biased and captured media, we'll collapse because reporters can't spell words correctly.

It's the little failures that loosen the screws, make the wheels start to wobble, and eventually—after a series of related, cascading failures--compromise the integrity of the

chassis. The little things *matter*, as the following proverb shows:

For Want of a Nail

For want of a nail the shoe was lost.
For want of a shoe the horse was lost.
For want of a horse the rider was lost.
For want of a rider the message was lost.
For want of a message the battle was lost.
For want of a battle the kingdom was lost.
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

Why has this started happening in recent years? Because there's been a war against meritocracy, and the competent are checking out, retiring, being passed over, laid off, or not selected.

The competent don't stick around for corporate DEI training and Cultural Revolution-style "struggle sessions." They know that things like [rugged individualism, self-reliance, personal responsibility, the nuclear family, the scientific method, objective and rational thinking, hard work, property rights, planning, delayed gratification, punctuality, the rule of law, excellence, winning, action, the written word, stoicism, and politeness](#) are the very things that allow *anyone* to become successful, not something that should be discarded.

Charles Hugh Smith wrote a column called "[What Happens When the Competent Opt Out?](#)" in which he writes, "...the base assumption is that there is an essentially limitless pool of competent people who can be tapped or trained to replace those who retire, burn out or opt out...." This assumption is "no longer valid....A great many essential services that are *tightly bound* to other essential services are cracking as the competent decide (or realize) they're done with the rat-race."

One of the reasons he cites for this is the politicization of the workplace: "...*politicization*, which demands allegiance and declarations of loyalty to political ideologies that have nothing to do with the work being done or the standards of accountability necessary to the operation of the...enterprise....The problem with politicization is that...it substitutes the *ideologically pure* for the competent." Thus, instead of a company's management being laser focused on creating value for customers by providing excellent products and services at a great price, they spend their time, money and energy wondering if they employ enough left-handed disabled lesbian dwarves from Zimbabwe.

I don't know about you, but first and foremost, I want my pilot, surgeon and car mechanic to be *competent*. I don't care if they're purple, polka dotted or have a horn growing out of their head. I think the vast majority of Americans simply want the best. If you manage a company, don't try to signal your supposed virtue to me with some bullshit words or meaningless gestures. If you want to serve a certain minority, make the best widget you can for them and delight them as your customer.

I also think that part of the recent rise of the incompetent may be generational. [Gen X](#) may be the last competent generation, and currently, it's the bubble gum and baling wire that's preventing everything from completely falling apart. Some of the more recent generations are known for things like laziness, not being dependable, and having an inflated impression of their value.

Similar to our current crisis of a lack of self-awareness, Smith notes that as the incompetent take the reins from the competent, they are blind to their own incompetence. I've read about studies that found that people who have the lowest level of knowledge and skill generally believe they have among the highest. The incompetent don't have enough knowledge or experience to know what they don't know, which makes them far more dangerous than they should be. Some of these people become politicians and then try to impose their idiotic ideas on people who have a pretty good idea of what they're doing and how things work in the real world, away from the Ivory Tower and Washington, D.C. In the real world, being incompetent usually exacts a price, but on college campuses or in a government bureaucracy, the incompetent can thrive for decades.

Smith warns us what's next: “By this terminal stage, the competent have been driven out, quit or burned out. There's only *slack-masters* and incompetent left, and the toxic work environment has been institutionalized, so no competent individual will even bother applying, much less take a job doomed to burnout and failure. This is why systems are breaking down before our eyes and why the breakdowns will spread with alarming rapidity due to the *tightly bound* structure of complex systems.” Smith is spot on, and if you don't know how [complex systems](#) work, you had better learn how soon.

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