

The wildest details in the Facebook memoir Meta is trying to bury

Sarah Wynn-Williams doesn't hold back in 'Careless People.'

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Sarah Wynn-Williams joined Facebook in 2011 when it was very much in its “move fast and break things” era. A former United Nations diplomat, she had aspirations of helping Facebook boost its standing on the global stage.

Over nearly seven years at the company, she had a front-row seat to some of Facebook's most consequential (and controversial) moments. Last week, she published [*Careless People: A Cautionary Tale of Power, Greed, and Lost Idealism*](#), a memoir about her time at the company and how she slowly became disillusioned about Facebook's role in the world.

Since it was announced, Meta has thrown the full weight of its PR machine against the book. The company initiated arbitration proceedings, which resulted in a ruling that [now prevents](#) Wynn-Williams from promoting her own book. Meta spokesperson Andy Stone said the arbitrator's decision “affirms that Sarah Wynn Williams' false and defamatory book should never have been published.” He said that “urgent legal action was made necessary by Williams, who more than eight years after being terminated by the company, deliberately concealed the existence of her book project and avoided the industry's standard fact-checking process in order to rush it to shelves after waiting for eight years.”

Her publisher, Flatiron Books, said in a statement it was “appalled” by Meta's actions, noting that “the arbitrator's order makes no reference to the claims” in the book, which “went through a thorough editing and vetting process.”

After reading the book, it's easy to see why Meta PR has made such a fuss. Wynn-Williams worked closely with the company's top executives, traveling around the world with Mark Zuckerberg and former COO Sheryl Sandberg as they met with foreign leaders and shaped the policies that would define Facebook. She also delivers many firsthand accounts of what Zuckerberg, Sandberg and current Chief of Global Affairs Joel Kaplan did and said behind closed doors. Much of it isn't pretty.

Here are some of her most shocking claims:

Zuckerberg requested to be “gently mobbed” during a visit to Asia

Wynn-Williams was often tasked with organizing the meetings various Facebook executives took with heads of state and other government officials. One of the more bizarre details is Zuckerberg’s request ahead of a three-week long trip to Asia. According to Wynn-Williams, Zuckerberg requested that she arrange either a “peace rally” or a “riot” during his visit. Facebook’s CEO never explains the request, but Wynn-Williams speculates he wanted "to test out how effective his product is in turning Facebook’s online tools into offline power."

At first, I think he's joking. Peace rallies are not my area of expertise, and-to be frank-I've never been asked to organize a riot before. Especially one for a tech CEO. I assume something has been lost in his communication-that it's some sort of mix-up. "Riot" and "peace rally" are such completely different things. Then Debbie emails to say that she ran into Mark and he told her that he wants a peace rally or a riot and we need to come up with some ideas that will enable him to be surrounded by people or be "gently mobbed."

Zuckerberg refused to take meetings before noon, even with heads of state

Zuckerberg apparently had a “strict” policy about not taking any meetings before noon. This policy applied not only to internal meetings with others at Facebook, but heads of state. Wynn-Williams recounts how Zuckerberg’s “refusal” to take morning meetings almost derailed a planned meeting with the president of Colombia. That same year, she said she was forced to reschedule Zuckerberg’s address at the UN to a later time slot because, according to Wynn-Williams, “the United Nations isn’t important enough for Mark to do an event before noon.”

Meta built Zuckerberg a special room to protect him from Zika

Facebook took “extreme measures” to protect Zuckerberg from Zika during a visit to Peru for the APEC conference. To protect the CEO, who was apparently hoping to soon conceive his second child, the company opted "to build a ‘controlled structure’ on the site of the APEC conference center where ventilation, exposure to others, and bug

mitigation can be overseen by Facebook.” Wynn-Williams dubbed it “operation perfect sperm.”

Zuckerberg’s “desperate” attempts to talk to Xi Jinping

Wynn-Williams spends a lot of time delving into Facebook’s plans to bring the social network [to China](#). She also details Zuckerberg’s attempts to get face time with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

In 2015, Zuckerberg flew to Seattle for a “longer than normal” handshake with Xi (who was in the city for a tech summit Zuckerberg was not invited to). He later caused a “diplomatic crisis” when he posted [a photo](#) of that handshake, which only shows the back of Xi’s head.

The following year, Zuckerberg and his team hoped to surreptitiously get the CEO in front of Xi at APEC in Peru. Facebook arranged for Zuckerberg to give a speech directly before an appearance by Xi, which meant the two men would be in adjacent dressing rooms. The goal, according to Wynn-Williams, was to engineer a “spontaneous encounter” during which Zuckerberg could make his pitch to get Facebook into China. But when Xi arrived, he was flanked by “dozens and dozens” of men in military uniforms who created a barrier such that, according to Wynn-Williams, Xi didn’t even have to “risk making eye contact with Mark.” She says that Zuckerberg was “hurt” by the demonstration.

Sheryl Sandberg wanted Facebook to promote organ donation

Not long after starting at Facebook, Wynn-Williams says she was told that “Facebook’s first proactive initiative to build relationships with governments around the world will be organ donation.” The idea was apparently Sandberg’s, who ran into a former Harvard friend and transplant surgeon and “offered to help him source donors.”

But when Wynn-Williams brought up the logistical and legal issues that generally make it difficult to transport organs between countries, she says Sandberg was “indignant.”

“Do you mean to tell me that if my four-year-old was dying and the only thing that would save her was a new kidney, that I couldn’t fly to Mexico and get one and put it in my handbag?”

Facebook would later add [organ donation](#) to the “life events” users could add to their profiles.

Sheryl Sandberg and the plane crash that wasn't

In 2013, an Asiana flight from Seoul to San Francisco crash-landed on a runway, killing two people and injuring more than 100 passengers. Sandberg, who was promoting her book *Lean In* at the time, was also traveling from Seoul to San Francisco that day.

Following the crash, she posted [on Facebook](#) that she and several Facebook colleagues were originally meant to be on that flight but had “switched to United so we could use miles for my family's tickets.”

Sandberg's supposed near-miss generated multiple headlines, which isn't surprising, as Wynn-Williams claims Sandberg was personally briefing reporters about the incident. Wynn-Williams was baffled by these reports. She writes that the Facebook COO “always flies United” and “never considered Asiana.” In her recollection, she and another colleague remarked to each other how “weird” it was for Sandberg to do this.

Why Zuckerberg and Sandberg's Facebook posts get so much engagement

Wynn-Williams heavily implies that there may be some behind-the-scenes manipulation of Zuckerberg and Sandberg's Facebook posts. She doesn't offer any proof that this has happened, but says that a meeting attended by “someone from Mark's personal communications team” raises the possibility.

According to Wynn-Williams, “Sheryl's assistant describes his job as managing ‘engagement for Mark and Sheryl's social media using all of Facebook's tools.’” When Wynn-Williams asks directly if they are “gaming” the site's algorithm, she says the assistant replies that “you don't want to know.”

Joel Kaplan needed a geography lesson

Some of the most telling anecdotes in *Careless People* involve Kaplan, who joined Facebook's policy team in 2011 and was [promoted](#) to Chief Global Affairs Officer earlier this year. She writes that Kaplan, who was a deputy chief of staff in the George W. Bush White House, was “surprised to learn Taiwan is an island” and that “often when we start to talk about pressing issues in some country in Latin America or Asia, he stops and asks me to explain where the country is.”

Kaplan slow-rolled Facebook's response to problems in Myanmar

By now, Meta's failures in Myanmar, where hate speech and misinformation on Facebook helped incite [a genocide](#), are well documented. Wynn-Williams, who early in her tenure flew to Myanmar to try to sell officials there on the company's connectivity projects, describes her futile attempts to get more resources for content moderation in the country.

She blames Kaplan in particular. She says she "started this long process of trying to hire someone for Myanmar in 2015" and found a human rights expert who fit the bill in May 2016, but Kaplan blocked her from making the hire in February of 2017. He allegedly told her to "move on and get over it." She later concludes that "when it came to Myanmar, those people just didn't matter to him."

(Meta had broadly labeled Wynn-Williams' claims about Facebook's actions in Myanmar as "old news," saying in a statement that "the facts here have been public record since 2018, and we have said publicly we know we were too slow to act on abuse on our services in Myanmar.")

Kaplan's alleged harassment

Wynn-Williams also accuses Kaplan [of harassment](#) and other inappropriate behavior. After complications while giving birth left her in a literal coma, she writes that Kaplan asked her over one of their "regular" calls during her maternity leave "where are you bleeding from" and got angry when she didn't answer. Later, when she returned to work, he gave her an unofficial performance review on her first day back, saying that she wasn't "responsive enough."

Wynn-Williams eventually reports Kaplan's behavior and an investigation is opened, but that "very quickly it seems to switch from an investigation of Joel, or the facts, to an investigation of me." She's fired at her next performance review.

Meta has disputed Wynn-Williams' allegations. "This book is a mix of out-of-date and previously reported claims about the company and false accusations about our executives," a spokesperson said in a statement. "Eight years ago, Sarah Wynn-Williams was fired for poor performance and toxic behavior, and an investigation at the time determined she made misleading and unfounded allegations of harassment."