

Forbes

The WorkEcology of Social Media - Income, Benefits and Work that Nourishes Your Life

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I met Lavina recently when she commented on my most recent DOMA piece. Her concern was with the way that benefits, such as health care, are often tied to corporate employment, which is not everyone's ideal work mode. I asked her to expand on her thoughts in a guest post, which she has kindly provided.

Lavinia Gene Weissman has authored an architecture to make a new form of workEcology real through the workshops, coaching and journalism that she has authored over the past decade. It is now available through her journal, theStoryofMeaningfulUse.com.

Steve Jobs created in real time fashion the dream of a life style for a social media linked human being that can establish work to support self and family and care for all that implies. Jobs facilitated the design of the tools. However, the opportunity today is for people to learn how to use the power of social media to learn how to maximize use of social media as a platform for building their portfolio of work and a mechanism by which to manage their personal and financial assets to resource their income and benefits. What is hidden in social media behavior (not the tools) is a self-selected gathering of people of all ages, grappling to build solutions to today's economic challenge. It is within this web-based geography that people are finding each other to find solutions to better learn how they need to work wisely to live in health and sustain.

These people are asking for new rules – a working infrastructure to reform how we are compensated, receive our benefits and generate value that can lead to innovation and sustainable measures that put a new order to work and living. The 20th century full employment model as collapsed and failed the 99%. Very simply, the way we determine payment for our work contribution has to change. Income and benefits must now be harvested in a very different format based on accomplishment rather than hourly wage or salary for staffing a function. This leads to a new form of work that Charles Handy described in the early 90's in *The Age of Unreason*, as a workforce constructed from "portfolio work." This frontier introduces a new format of workEcology that is more responsive to our modern work world than the full employment model. The communities in which I navigate and participate are creating this workEcology. They have moved beyond the institutional boundaries of politics and economics to redefine a new method of income and benefits.

Who are these people living and working to form the new ecology?

These people befriended each other in Facebook and other social media gathering places, and, grapple with their spirituality, work, and lives to seek answers to questions that go beyond the angst of the frustration currently being expressed in the OCCUPY movement. They can't afford to accept that the current great recession is giving way to a great stagnation described by Aaron Cramer, CEO of Business for Social Responsibility. They appreciate the political and ethical analysis provided by grassroots leaders, e.g. Amy Goodman, Chris Hedges, Michael Moore, and David Suzuki. All these great sages are pointing to aspects of what Michael Moore describes as most critical, replacing capitalism as we now live it. This thought leadership may sound new in this present moment. Yet, for the last 15 years or more, political leaders and ordinary people have been pointing to the collapse we are now struggling with. Within social networks thought and lay leaders have been forming invisible neighborhoods, pointing to a design for a new infrastructure of digital community.

Why are we in need for new formula for compensation and benefits?

Between 1996 and 1997, two leaders from opposite political parties stepped up to the stage to point out the inequality that has formed this massive disruption. Collin Powell spoke out about this inequality as a keynoter at the Republican National Convention in 1996 that was fueling poverty, when he spoke these words:
We must be firm, but we must also be fair. We have to make sure that reduced government spending doesn't single out the poor and middle class. Corporate welfare, and welfare for the wealthy must be fired in line for elimination.
Former Secretary of Labor, Robert Reich in 1997, at the time of his resignation from the Clinton Administration, pointed out how income inequality tops out the political agenda for economic growth.
During the same time period, I drew from my own personal network through the Bionomics Institute. I listened to a new emerging thought leadership that was bipartisan and not centric to one political party. As a result of my participation, I learned about the movement to privatize social security, building medical savings accounts and alternatives to the dumbing down of our educational system. I saw hints of a new educational format of life-long learning where ongoing learning assures a person the ability to to retool for the changing ways in which we work that respond to market forces

that embrace evidential based science and related practices that insure health of the environment, people, habitat and economy.

The roster of people, who educated me included:

Bill Shireman, President and CEO of the Future 500

Virginia Postrel, Former Editor-in-Chief of Reason Magazine

Steve Forbes, CEO, Forbes, Inc.

Rich Karlgaard, Publisher, Forbes Magazine

These thought leaders presented at conferences that I attended hosted by the Cato Institute, the Democratic Leadership Committee of CA, Progress and Freedom Cyberspace Summit and World Business Academy.

But somehow all this thinking did not accelerate initiatives of change from an economic, political for practical application that one would think possible.

How did I find a cluster of innovation that is reshaping America today?

Parallel to this, I found myself participating in virtual conferences that preceded Facebook that united clusters of people on a path to find resources that were not in their ordinary view. Many of these people were angry and determined to learn to live their lives creating practical scale innovation to how they earned, sustained and assured their health. These people freed themselves from relying on institutional values that eventually formed into today's banking crisis, foreclosure epidemic and reduced value of health insurance and other corporate benefits that serve the wealthy no matter their choice to be employed or not.

These clusters now have taken form on Facebook especially. The people participate in these forums respecting a spirituality based on neighbor helping neighbor through knowledge share and the discovery of solutions that come from applied thought leadership that assures application of the values and knowledge. Through these communities, I discovered as recently as last week grounded results of this workEcology (or whatever the right way of capturing the 'essence' of your message):

Families united to serve children with seizure disorders and learning disabilities, who found alternative formats for education while threatened with disparity and lost income;

Solutions for healing that assured a better quality of life for people living with the struggle of neuromuscular or neurological diseases, e.g. MS and FMS or brain injury;

Alternative resources to build virtual and local neighborhoods of families who have built home school activity to insure their kids the best education possible;

Alternative income methods for self-employed that value credentials and a history of performance in a corporate setting;

Access to entry points for lab tests with cost savings as much as 50% – the fees are based on internet access where the overhead is not inflated by institutional overhead;

Alternative treatments for cancer provided by community-based clinicians and alternative practitioners based in evidence-based scientific research shared digitally;

These examples are a small sampling of what I learned.

Can this experience translate into a new economy?

My personal imagination is fueled by professional and social experience, so I seek out these clusters of value that are not formalized or offered in compensation and benefit plans. For example, my wide experience due to life circumstances such as the following has created a kaleidoscope of competencies not easily captured. My career includes a very grounded vision after deploying as a team member in health care the first automated medical record system in an ambulatory health care. My social background as a member of the sandwich generation including my struggles with downsizing, care of a special needs child, and parents with complicated end of life stages that included lengthy hospitalizations, experiences with mis-medication and much more.

To some my dream of what was possible in ordinary ways was a myth I authored that was not of value or even possible to achieve. To me it was a project that sustained my sense of hope and faith in front of me and carried me through the difficulties of downsizing or a life threatening illness (my own or a family member).

How can this experience be organized into "value cluster?"

Verna Allee, thought leader, has over the past 15 years in parallel with my own research, defined an understanding of the economy that is created from value networks and value clusters. Our mechanistic view of economy that grows from a view that you have to sell a product or service as a product stands in our way of building value, for the harvesting of knowledge shapes intangible knowledge into something of value. Verna with others created the frontier for this thinking.

What does the economy need now to become more ecologically balanced?

This economy needs more structure than the organization of Facebook can provide. It requires an organization that builds new structures for calculating livable wage. The design of this structure will permit people to work wisely by gaining the ongoing life long education it now takes to sustain income at a cost that people can afford. At the same time it will create a system of managing personal wages and personal benefits to assure your health and funds at a time of a transition. While the type of transitions may change, they will continue to grow out of shifts in markets and politics, struggles with life threatening illness in the family or a real-time plan to retire and enjoy life in a different mode of work.