

Ex-Facebook director's new book paints brutal image of Mark Zuckerberg

Sarah Wynn-Williams' 'Careless People' is a scathing critique of Facebook's top brass in the 2010s

By Stephen Council

As the creator of the world's preeminent social media company, Mark Zuckerberg has faced his share of vitriol from the [public](#), from [Congress](#) and even in a [hit movie](#). But this time, the Meta CEO's criticism is coming from someone who worked with him up close, for years.

Sarah Wynn-Williams joined Facebook in 2011 and ascended to a director role in global policy but was fired in 2017 after alleging her boss, Joel Kaplan, had sexually harassed her. She released a new book Tuesday that excoriates the company's leadership. The title, "Careless People," refers to Zuckerberg and his lieutenants, including former Chief Operations Officer Sheryl Sandberg and Kaplan, the company's newly appointed president of global affairs; the subtitle is "A Cautionary Tale of Power, Greed, and Lost Idealism."

Meta, which runs Facebook, is trying to squash the book's splash. On Wednesday, citing her non-disparagement agreement, the company won an interim arbitration [claim](#) that blocks Wynn-Williams from further selling and promoting the book. It [doesn't appear](#) that the order will extend to her publisher, Flatiron Books.

Meta spokesperson Erin Logan told SFGATE on Tuesday, "This book is a mix of out-of-date and previously reported claims about the company and false accusations about our executives." She said Wynn-Williams' allegations about Kaplan are false, and in a Thursday statement, she called the book "defamatory" and alleged that Wynn-Williams had skipped "the industry's standard fact-checking process." The book's publisher said it was thoroughly vetted in a [statement](#) to the New York Times, and as of Thursday afternoon, "Careless People" was No. 3 on Amazon's bestsellers [list](#).

From a read of the book, it's clear why Meta wants to stop the spread of Wynn-Williams' account: Its chief executive comes off badly. Though many of the

book's larger points have been previously reported, the anecdotes from Wynn-Williams' globe-spanning interactions with Zuckerberg are the fresh, detail-rich stories you'd expect in a tell-all memoir. She casts him as hot-tempered, unaccountable for his mistakes, ignorant about history and — in one cringey board game session — an extremely sore loser.

“You'd hope that people who amass the kind of power Facebook has would learn a sense of responsibility, but they don't show any sign of having done so,” Wynn-Williams writes. “In fact I see the opposite. The more they see the consequences of their actions, the less of a f—k Mark and Facebook's leadership give.”

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Some of the moments she describes were already public. Wynn-Williams accuses Zuckerberg of lying at a 2018 Senate [hearing](#) on data privacy and downplaying the amount that Facebook had worked with the Chinese Communist Party to try to get its app unblocked in the country. The CEO, in a 2015 United Nations keynote, announced that Facebook was planning to bring the internet to UN refugee camps — Wynn-Williams writes that the policy team at Facebook hadn't heard a word of this idea and that it was possibly an “ad lib.”

Other sections are completely new. Over one dinner, Zuckerberg said Andrew Jackson — known for his populist appeal and his inhumane relocation of Native Americans — was America's best president and “it's not even close,” according to Wynn-Williams. One chapter says Zuckerberg told her he didn't often come to their shared San Francisco neighborhood because he couldn't get permission to build a helicopter pad. She accuses Zuckerberg of living in a “bubble,” detailing a moment when he forgot his passport for a 2016 trip to Peru and cast blame on others.

At points, Wynn-Williams grapples with her own impotence before the uber-powerful executive. She describes the flight back from Peru, writing that then-President Barack Obama had lit into Zuckerberg over fake news and

misinformation on Facebook during the 2016 election between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton.

Heading back home, the CEO brooded and apparently accused Wynn-Williams of cheating when she won the board games Ticket to Ride and Settlers of Catan against him. She writes that he then started pondering a U.S. tour, almost like a presidential campaign run, before suggesting Facebook remake the news ecosystem with the company at its center. As the plane descended, Wynn-Williams writes, Zuckerberg asked her what she thought about his ideas — which she describes as a “power grab.”

“Over these five years, I feel like I’ve seen him face so many choices and lose touch with whatever fundamental human decency he had when we started,” she writes, explaining the difficulty of answering Zuckerberg’s question. “Do I say that? How? How can I say any of these things to him?”

Wynn-Williams’ critiques aren’t limited to Zuckerberg. She describes the working culture under Sandberg as so intense that Wynn-Williams felt pressured to send her talking points while in labor, her feet in stirrups. “Open dissent isn’t an option with Sheryl,” Wynn-Williams writes, arguing that people “actively hide bad news or situations” from the executive in fear of being punished.

Kaplan comes off badly too. Per the book, he blocked Wynn-Williams’ hire of a human rights expert to focus on Myanmar, where Facebook, [in its own words](#), didn’t do “enough to help prevent our platform from being used to foment division and incite offline violence.” Beginning in 2016, Myanmar’s army [massacred](#) thousands of Muslim Rohingyas, and hundreds of thousands more fled the country, with incendiary Facebook posts and groups fanning the flames of violence. Per Wynn-Williams’ account, the company didn’t have nearly enough Burmese-speaking content moderators.

“It wasn’t because of some grander vision or any malevolence toward Muslims in the country,” she wrote. “Nor a lack of money. My conclusion: It was just that Joel, Elliot [Schrage], Sheryl, and Mark didn’t give a f—k.”

Wynn-Williams also writes that Kaplan, as her boss, made inappropriate comments to her, including repeatedly asking where she was bleeding from

after childbirth. She writes that, shortly after he called her sultry in front of other co-workers, Kaplan ground into her on a dance floor. She triggered an investigation into Kaplan and writes that she was “almost immediately” retaliated against with a cut in duties before eventually being fired. Wynn-Williams describes the investigation as a “farce.”

Logan, the Meta spokesperson, told SFGATE that Wynn-Williams’s allegations were “misleading and unfounded” and that she “was fired for poor performance and toxic behavior.”

“Whistleblower status protects communications to the government, not disgruntled activists trying to sell books,” Logan added. The company also published a [document](#) calling several of the author’s claims “old news.”

At the beginning of January, Zuckerberg appointed Kaplan to be Meta’s head of global policy — a key liaison between the company and Trump.

Work at Meta or another Bay Area tech company and want to talk? Contact tech reporter Stephen Council securely at stephen.council@sfgate.com or on Signal at 628-204-5452.