

This is the first post of a new Substack called The Do-Gooders' Playbook. Welcome!
Please start with the Read First and About sections in the menu line above to get the big picture and purpose. Here we go...

1. Are you a humanist?

Make your values matter

Were you told as a child that you could do anything, be anything, fix anything, and the world would follow? There would be peace on earth and economic growth forever in a world where cars, coal mines, trees, and flowers could live in perfect harmony.

Were you told that you could be the best at anything you chose to do as long as you put your mind to it?

Were you told that people are always good if you have faith in them? Everyone, deep down, is responsible and dependable once you show your trust. Each and every person on this planet has the potential to be self-actualized and self-fulfilled. Given the right circumstances, every person can be a contributor to the welfare of mankind.

That's what I've been told.

You too?

Still think that – or at least hope for that?

Do you still have faith in your fellow humans? Do you still believe there is hope and opportunity? Do you believe in human rights, civility, and collaboration?

If you do, then you are a humanist. This Substack is for you and your efforts to do good, do well, and make a difference. We will examine strategies for using your humanistic values in a complex and dangerous time for democracy, human rights, and plain old-fashioned civility.

Consider this: How do you define a humanist? Do you consider yourself a humanist? Why?

2. Do you want to make a difference?

Humanists are needed more than ever

Once upon a time, landowners became the kings. For most of human history, this has been the case. For the last two hundred years, our leaders have had new types of competencies. The great industrialists became our formal and informal leaders. They built our railroads, drilled for oil, and financed the infrastructure for urbanization.

Businessmen once reigned over politics, but then came the lawyers and regulators, who still have a major influence over society today. There was also a period when engineers, urban planners, and builders had significant influence over the development of society. This was complemented by economists and financial experts who have greatly influenced commerce as well as the circumstances for individual wealth. Now we have giants of technology quickly gaining influence, oversight, and entering the realm of politics.

My message in The Do-Gooders' Playbook is that now is the time for the humanists to take a step forward.

A humanist is a friend of the arts, of democracy, and of human rights.

A humanist may come from many backgrounds, but a true humanist has faith in the potential of all humans, irrespective of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexuality.

A humanist can take many forms and engage in various professions. Surely some humanists are lawyers, bankers, and politicians. Many humanists have professions such as teaching, social work, psychology, art, and social science, which typically don't involve entering politics or running large firms.

I believe that the audience for the Do-Gooders' Playbook will be writers, artists, musicians, creators, innovators, and others who aspire to bring out the humanity in themselves and others in order to build a more humane, just, and egalitarian society.

I assume you are a concerned citizen and, like me, are extremely worried about the state of the world and the direction many leaders are taking us. You worry that we are going backwards and are concerned that in the USA we now have a landowner who is a would-be king as president, a bully with a mafia-style leadership, concerned mostly with his own status and wealth.

We humanists are needed more than ever, and this Substack is my small effort to help us believers in civility, democracy, and human rights move us in a more positive direction. I will give you encouragement, hopefully a few insights, and give you suggestions for strategy and reflection under the subheading, "Consider this."

Consider this: On a scale of 1-10, how great is your concern for the state of society? Do you believe it is time for the humanists of the world to take a step forward?

3. Can One Person Make a Difference?

What to expect from The Do-Gooders' Playbook

Do you think of yourself as a do-gooder, a person who wants to make their mark on the world and help others at the same time? Then, the messages in this playbook are for you. You wish and hope that your own actions still make a difference in this complex and often frustrating world.

I am one person hoping to make a positive impact. I am one person with much self-doubt, anger, hope, and energy, trying to use my capabilities to both move myself forward and to encourage you to use your capabilities to move yourself and the people around you forward.

I will write about humanistic leadership, humanistic education, humanistic psychology, personal growth, politics, societal struggles, what it means to be successful, what it means to be “good,” and what it means to be a humanist. I will give you encouragement, strategies, and examples of questions to ask yourself and others.

One warning, however - I am not a positive thinker. I try to think of positive behaviors, but, to a large degree, I am turning into a grumpy old man. Still, I so want to remain an optimistic humanist with faith in our potential. Just don't expect cute “believe” messages to ensure everything works out in the end with enough mindfulness, yoga, or positive affirmations.

Naïve? Yes, I am definitely naïve. Always correct? Hardly! Annoying? Yes, you will be annoyed at me, to be sure. Earnest? Well... absolutely. I am a serious and empathetic person, luckily with a sense of humor. Short, sweet, and to the point? As often as I can.

I am not a philosopher, linguist, historian, economist, politician, theologian, or ethicist. I am an educator, author, lecturer, and encourager. I am here to ask you to keep the faith.

Please have faith in your importance to not only yourself, but to other people.

Please have faith in your contribution, that your skills and wisdom can influence the direction of society,

Please have faith in your possibilities, despite life's obstacle course.

Please have faith in your fellow travelers, who wish to make better lives for themselves and others.

Have faith.

In the end, I am Just John, still doing what I was told to do—trying to make a positive difference. I assume you want to do that, too.

Let's take this journey together. Let's build a community of humanists who want to do good, do well, and take a step forward.

Let's gather and share stories of humanists, Do-Gooders, positive influencers, and constructive, uplifting leaders.

Let's encourage the creators, educators, entrepreneurs, writers, and artists to use their humanistic values in their efforts to bring more beauty and compassion into the world.

Let's look for new ways to educate ourselves and our youth on the meaning and challenges of democracy, decency, and dignity.

Consider this: What is the main way in which you are trying to be a positive influencer in the world? It may be through your profession, but there are many ways every day you can be a helper, an encourager, a creator, a mentor, and a leader. If you'd like, please share a story of one of the ways you are a DoGooder or a humanist on this Substack for others to read. [Submit a story through this email link.](#)

4. What are the themes and subjects in the Do-Gooders' Playbook?

A preliminary table of contents

Having come to post no 4, you are already familiar with my larger purpose and some of the themes of this Substack. Here is more of what you can expect.

- The role of politics and policy for personal and societal development
- What does it mean to do good?
- What does it mean to be a humanist?
- Why human rights and believing in everyone's potential are fundamental.
- Religion as both a positive and negative force.
- Why the Golden Rule should rule!

- Where are you on your pyramid of “success”?
- Why are personal growth and policy so intimately connected?
- The balance between individual initiative and governmental policy.
- Why collaboration is more important than competition.
- What is humanistic psychology? Revisiting the human potential movement.
- What is humanistic education?
- What is humanistic leadership?
- Eight misunderstandings about education.
- Designing schools and learning for a new type of student.
- Why self-awareness is the key to self-development and collaboration.
- Designing dignity. Living your values. Values clarification.
- Macro-micro management and leadership.
- Why small things can have a great impact. Focusing on everyday politeness.
- How to step back and restart, reframe, and break a negative loop.
- What are the key values that influence your life and behavior?
- How to engage in a brief-time, strength-based four-minute coaching conversation.

Yes, they seem like serious topics and they are. One of my strengths is explaining a serious topic, theory or concept in a simple way. You’ll see!

The first section of posts will be an odd combination of personal growth/success and politics/policy. The second section of posts (there will be 40-50 posts in each section) will focus on educational innovation, AI in education, and the purpose of education. The third section of posts will focus on values, values clarification, and value-based leadership. And there will a lot in between.

Occasionally, I will include a short film, a guest writer, and a complimentary mini-course. See the Eureka Moments in the menu on the homepage for an example of a mini-course. Many of the photos (often sourced from Unsplash.com) are from scenes of nature, which I do not write about, but serve a purpose in conveying my message. A tree and a forest are excellent examples of metaphors for growth, stability, and beauty.

I appreciate your willingness to follow along on this adventure to Do-Good and follow your humanistic values.

Consider this: Please suggest other headlines, topics or questions that you think may be relevant to the theme of this Substack. Thank you.

5. Are you “Woke”?

Recognize the role of policy and politics

Alright... Let's get this out of the way. If you don't agree with me or want to understand my perspective, then read something else or go play a computer game. I will start with a question. Have you ever read a self-help book or attended a self-help course where the author or teacher discussed the role of politics and policy in your personal journey of self-improvement?

I am guessing the answer is hardly ever. Well, that stops now. I am a politically engaged person. In my mind, there is a direct correlation between politics, policy, personal growth, and business success.

It is a badge of honor to be called Woke, especially in an era where being Woke is associated with being naïve, hopelessly liberal, and out of touch with reality.

Here is my interpretation of woke. Woke (awakened and conscious) is the ability to understand how politics and society have or have not laid the groundwork for personal development and self-betterment. Woke is being aware of and having an understanding of how government policy and our government institutions have laid the groundwork for opportunity - or not. A woke person also has a deep understanding of history and is open to other cultures beyond their own.

Let's take an example from my field of endeavor, educational psychology. In the middle of the 18th century, the USA was the first nation to provide free public schooling for everyone. You undoubtedly understand that free public education has been one of the building blocks of prosperity and opportunity. This was a political policy decision.

Another example would be redlining during the long Jim Crow period after the Civil War in the USA. Redlining and exclusionary zoning restricted where people of color could live, limiting their access to wealth-building opportunities and quality education. Yes, policy affects opportunity.

These are two American examples, but I am sure you can find examples in any country. It will be hard to find a clearer example of the government's role in providing opportunity than the switch from the Obama-Biden years to the Trump administration – think health care, research funding, climate policy, work safety, voting rights, criminal justice, etc. The paradox is quite obvious – a political party that believes in bootstrapping (every individual is responsible for their success and well-being) is using policy to limit personal opportunity.

I asked AI (Perplexity) to give a brief background on the term Woke and to define its meaning. Here is its answer:

The term "**woke**" originates from African American Vernacular English (AAVE), where it initially meant being awake or alert, particularly to issues of social and racial injustice. Its earliest documented uses date back to the 1920s and 1930s, with figures like Marcus Garvey and the folk singer Lead Belly urging Black Americans to "stay woke"—to remain vigilant against racial discrimination and violence.

Over time, "woke" evolved into an adjective describing someone who is aware of and actively attentive to important social issues, especially those related to race, inequality, and injustice. The term gained renewed prominence during the Black Lives Matter movement in the 2010s, where "stay woke" became a rallying cry for awareness and activism against systemic racism and police brutality.

In recent years, however, "woke" has been co-opted and politicized. While it still positively denotes social awareness and progressiveness in some circles, it is now often used pejoratively—especially by critics on the political right—to mock or dismiss progressive values, identity politics, or perceived excessive political correctness. Thus, its interpretation varies widely: for some, it signals empathy and social consciousness; for others, it is a catch-all insult for left-leaning or liberal attitudes.

Being woke means understanding how policy affects opportunity. Americans are indoctrinated in the concept of bootstrapping. If you want to change your life circumstances, it is up to you – do the work, persevere, and work your way up. That's fine, but if your starting block is twenty yards behind almost everyone else, it is hard to catch up.

Either you believe that government policy should be an equalizer of opportunity, or you do not believe the government's job is to do that – that it is solely up to the individual.

In my mind, you cannot write about self-help or humanism without understanding and talking about policy, and therefore I will not talk about self-help or societal development without talking about policy.

It's your choice – stop reading now or keep reading with the understanding that this guy is not going to shut up about politics, policy, and public institutions while writing about well-being, success, personal growth, humanism, and human rights.

Consider this: Do you see yourself as “woke” and do you consider this a badge of honor? How do you interpret the term “woke,” and does being woke and being a humanist basically mean the same thing?

6. Do You Believe in Human Rights?

The fundamentals of being a humanist

You either believe in the potential and dignity of each individual, or you do not. You either believe in human rights, or you do not. You either believe people should have equal opportunity, or you do not. Either you think that race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality have nothing to do with one's ability to contribute, collaborate, be a good person, and do good, or not.

And if you believe these things, then you also think that governmental policy should support giving people the opportunity to educate themselves, grow, and contribute.

This is fundamental.

So is prejudice, which I consider a natural instinct. Even the most woke person in the world has prejudice. I know I do. I am prejudiced towards people who lack an understanding of how policy affects opportunity and, indeed, towards people who have values, habits, or opinions that are very different from mine.

I have my prejudices, as do you, about people from different cultures and backgrounds. Yet, that is not an argument to discriminate, eliminate, ignore, or limit their opportunities. It is natural to feel uncomfortable in settings miles away from your way of thinking, believing, doing, and being. But that is a far cry from ethnic cleansing, discriminatory laws, or other laws that exclude opportunity from something as basic in a democracy as voting rights, to something more abstract like freedom of speech or freedom of religion.

It is one thing to have prejudices and another thing not to be aware of them. Being a humanist involves acknowledging your own prejudices, weaknesses, and mistakes. A humanist can see beyond culture, religion, and race to see the individual – their struggles, the roadblocks they meet, and their way of navigating this complex world. A humanist supports democracy and believes that people from diverse backgrounds can work together effectively.

Being a humanist means respecting the choices of others, even if you disagree with them. That doesn't mean giving up your efforts to change policy or your desire to reduce your prejudices. It just means understanding that other people have their challenges and the right to their own culture.

Consider this: Do you agree that some basic attitudes define a humanist? Do you agree with my statements about what is fundamental?

7. Are we following the Golden Rule?

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you

As far as I understand it, almost all religions have the same basic teaching: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

It works for policy as well. If you are a policymaker, such as a politician or business leader, you need to ask yourself: if this policy were to be implemented and affect my life in the same way it would others, would I agree to support it?

If this policy would affect the quality of the local school my kids attend, would I pass that policy? If I knew that this policy would affect the quality of water and air in my local community, would I agree to those regulations? Suppose I knew that this policy would affect my ability to investigate facts, events, or the effects of policy decisions. Would that be acceptable to me as a journalist or an individual wanting to know the facts? If I were a scientist and my ability to investigate the effects of a specific medical treatment and explain this to others were limited by the government, would that be acceptable? If science, in general, is limited only to the likes of the current politicians in power, would that be agreeable to me?

The hypocrisy in the current political climate is truly astounding. There is an acceptance that what WE can do is not allowable if the OTHERS do it. WE can break the rules, like using political office for personal financial gain or claiming judges who don't agree with my political policy should be removed—well, that seems to be okay.

As strange as it might sound, this is breaking the Golden Rule, normalizing US to do harm to OTHERS because we do not agree with them, like their policies, opinions, research, or their cultures.

Surely, just like prejudice, we all are hypocrites at times. It is also a part of human nature. However, just like prejudice, we need to acknowledge it, recognize it, apologize for it, and strive to apply the Golden Rule to the best of our ability.

Consider this: It is hard to follow The Golden Rule. How well are you doing, and how can you improve? Do you agree on its importance?