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Some free advice to **@elonmusk**, from someone who has studied content moderation and the public impact of social media platforms for more than a decade. Buckle in. Because you clearly do not understand how this works.

Forget about content moderation for a sec, we'll get back to it. You're an expert in designing complex systems, so they say? Technical systems. But Twitter is a technical system and a social system, and social systems don't work like technical systems do.

At Tesla, you may have innovated how batteries and engines interact. But when you built self-driving cars, you weren't just making them navigate, you were designing a system in which drivers, and rules, and fears, and histories, and freedoms, and impulses had to interact too.

First person killed by a self-driving car, people freaked out. Why? From a technical view, it makes no sense: people die on the road all the time, this is still such a safe alternative. But the social understanding of safety isn't solely based on numbers. **https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jun/15/tesla-us-car-carashes-driver-assist-systems**

The difference between one death and zero is meaningful socially, even if it's not statistically. Tesla is also rebuilding people's assumptions about cars and safety. And sometimes the social dynamics of driving will constrain your system as much as the physics of electricity.

You have to build a technical vehicle that works. But you also have to build a social system where, at the same time, drivers feel they have agency AND somehow also coordinate their behavior so that the collective endeavor works. Sound familiar?

But social systems have their own dynamics. And those cannot be ignored, or engineered away.

You, and all the libertarians and pundits and trolls who sound like you, think it's fine to be the bully on the playground. But the playground only works - even for the bully - if someone is maintaining a few basic ground rules. Let's call them the adults.

Knowing that those ground rules exist gives everyone the freedom to move around, to say what they want, to play as they choose. That's freedom: a sophisticated understanding of how freedom works collectively, on the ground, in a sustained way. Ground rules make room for freedom.

A democratic town hall needs ground rules too. They should be light and fair. But knowing there are ground rules means you know you'll have a moment to be heard. You can't dominate or abuse others, but no one gets to dominate or abuse you.

The people who run platforms may have thought their job was to build playgrounds. Fun! But it turns out their real job is to be the adults, to set the ground rules. Not fun. But you can't build a free-for-all and hope it'll all work out - that's the view of a child.

That's why content moderation is necessary. Platforms like Twitter imagined they could be playgrounds, and discovered that playgrounds have ground rules. Freedom sounds like it should be unlimited. But real, sustained freedom happens within ground rules, because of them.

How you design the entry points to this system also sets the terms for who gets to dominate the space. We love to treat social media like a meritocracy, a marketplace of ideas. But building the playground can mean determining who plays, and sometimes who wins.

Should Twitter privilege those willing to pay? those willing to abuse? those who can game the system? those who already have microphones of their own? These are profound societal questions, whether you take them on or brush them aside.

"Twitter is an amplification machine... When Elon Musk and his fans talk about free speech on Twitter, they're actually talking about loud speech. Who is allowed to use this technology to make their message very loud, to the exclusion of other messages?"

https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2022/10/elon-musk-twitter-disastrous-weekend/671942/

Charge more for priority access, and you'll get a platform tipped toward those willing to pay. And we already know who that is: advertisers, scammers, and well-funded crackpots. That's not a playground or a town hall, that's late-night cable.

https://twitter.com/mmasnick/status/1587575610221555712?s=20&t=VI8V5KK977F5blaStjdjpg

So **@StephenKing** was right when he pushed back on your plan to charge 20$/mo for verification etc. He said you should be paying for his labor, and he's right, because his tweets are part of Twitter's value. But paying him in $$ is not the only option...

https://twitter.com/StephenKing/status/1587042605627490304

In a way, Twitter HAS been paying him, and all of us, by designing and maintaining a system we can count on: a responsive system, and a responsible one. That's what all that content moderation is for. It makes Twitter a place where we can rely on the basic ground rules.

And there's money in this. Free speech? We could all go make web pages and say whatever we want. We need social media platforms to get what we say to the people who might want to hear it. Which means the gathering place matters: the playground has to work.

https://twitter.com/aidanpobrien/status/1587450510549852160?s=20&t=4NViQkcb4HQ9BCwGbfK1_g

That's the difference between shouting on a street corner and speaking in public. Being part of a public means I have a way not only to express my opinions, but to do so where they might be heard. But it comes with obligations, both for me and for the keepers of that public.

It's why I called my book Custodians of the Internet. Platforms have been "custodians" in the janitorial sense, taking out the trash. They need to be custodians in a deeper way: protectors of the gathering space they made, the adults setting ground rules.

https://bit.ly/CustodiansOfTheInternet

That's not to say that you, or Zuckerberg, or Wojcicki should be the sole architects of these rules. Maybe well-written policy could help, maybe communities of users could be invited to help. But even then, you're the architect of the way we will govern ourselves.

That's an enormous responsibility. It's not sexy. It could be profitable... but it is the work that is required. (Glad to see you consulting with experts, that can only help.)

https://twitter.com/JGreenblattADL/status/1587814728696582145?s=20&t=CvosEaFbTxr4fW9JdinwmA

As a user, you got to play in Twitter's playground, without much regard for how that freedom was actually afforded to you. Learn what Twitter's T&S team has had to learn. Be innovative in how the ground rules are crafted and imposed. But don't just bat them aside like a child.