

# Reading group questions: Careless People by Sarah Wynn-Williams

## Icebreakers and first impressions

- **Initial take:** Before reading, what did you think about Facebook/Meta and Mark Zuckerberg? Did this book change, reinforce, or complicate those views?
- **The 'Careless' theme:** The title comes from the following quote about Tom and Daisy Buchanan, characters from F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*: "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy - they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made." In what ways did the author illustrate her opinion of 'carelessness' in the actions of Facebook's leadership? Do you think the comparison is fair?
- **Favourite 'WTF' moment:** The book is full of surreal anecdotes – from the shark attack to the 'gentle riot' request. Which moment made your jaw drop the most?

## Facebook's culture and leadership

- **Mark vs Sheryl:** How did the book portray the different leadership styles of Mark Zuckerberg and Sheryl Sandberg?
- **The 'Cult' of culture:** The author says workers were pressured to fit in, work long hours, and care about 'connecting the world' more than anything else. How do you think this intense work culture helped the company succeed, but also lead to its mistakes?
- **The 'Lean In' paradox:** Sarah Wynn-Williams describes how she perceived a disconnect between Sheryl Sandberg's public 'Lean In' persona and her actual management style. How did this affect your view of Sandberg?

## Global impact and responsibility

- **Move fast and break nations:** The book details the fallout of Facebook's platform in Myanmar, the Philippines, and elsewhere. The author considers that Facebook's leadership was recklessly indifferent. What do you think?
- **The China dilemma:** Discuss the lengths Facebook went to in order to enter the Chinese market. Were you surprised by how the company appeared to compromise its stance on free speech?
- **Democracy on the line:** The author describes how Facebook's tools were used in elections (Brexit, Trump, Duterte). Do you believe social media platforms have a responsibility to police political content, or should they remain neutral platforms? What can be done?

## The personal story

- **The author's journey:** Sarah starts as an idealistic believer in Facebook's potential. Did you find her journey from 'true believer' to whistle-blower relatable?

- **The personal cost:** The author shares very difficult moments, including a near-death experience in childbirth and workplace harassment. How did sharing these raw, personal stories make her criticisms of the industry feel more powerful or serious?
- **The 'Bad Apple' vs the barrel:** Do you think the issues Sarah faced were due to a few individuals, or was the whole system broken?

## **Big picture and future**

- **Can it be fixed?:** After reading this, do you think Meta (Facebook) should be overhauled? Does Meta have a responsibility to public safety and democracy – or just to its shareholders?
- **Regulation:** The book ends by saying someone needs to be held responsible. What rules do you think would actually work to control big tech companies?
- **Your use of social media:** Has reading *Careless People* changed how you use social media?