

JEFF BEZOS' MANIFESTO OF IMPOTENCE

The second richest man in the world believed he could reverse the damage he already did by writing an op-ed.

That was his first mistake.

Jeff Bezos starts his column by pointing to the decline in trust in journalism. Seemingly including himself, the second richest oligarch in the world, in the profession of journalism, Bezos complains, "Our profession is now the least trusted of all."

Bezos then deigns to explain (it's not clear whether he believes he's writing for disgruntled subscribers or his employees who actually *are* in the profession of journalism) via analogy: Newspapers, like voting machines, must not only *be* accurate but must be perceived as accurate.

Bezos then attempts to defend this analogy, but in the process, asserts – without presenting any evidence – that perceived bias is the reason "most people" distrust the media.

Most people believe the media is biased. Anyone who doesn't see this is paying scant attention to reality, and those who fight reality lose. Reality is an undefeated champion. It would be easy to blame others for our long and continuing fall in credibility (and, therefore, decline in impact), but a victim mentality will not help. Complaining is not a strategy. We must work harder to control what we can control to increase our credibility.

There's so much logical collapse that gets papered over in this pablum. Which parts of "most people" believe the media is biased? More importantly, do *they* believe in or value "reality"? Because if many of them don't –

spoiler alert! the people squawking most loudly about media bias do not believe in empirical reality – then you’ve wildly misdiagnosed the problem. Those people won’t decide whether to trust voting machines based on anything the vendors do – just ask Dominion about that! They’ll decide whether to trust voting machines based on faith. And no amount of pandering will change that until you change the foundation on which their faith in propaganda is built.

Reality is *in fact* on the ballot this year, the race remains neck and neck, and you, Jeff Bezos, decided to go down without a fight.

Having declared that, “We must work harder to control what we can control to increase our credibility,” Bezos does a number of things to piss away his own credibility:

- He attributes his last minute decision to spike presidential endorsements and only presidential endorsements to “inadequate planning.”
- He naively disavows any quid pro quo because his Blue Origin CEO Dave Limp “didn’t know about” the meeting Trump would schedule immediately after Bezos spiked the Kamala Harris endorsement “in advance; the meeting was scheduled quickly that morning,” as if Bezos and his executives are helpless in the face of Trump’s manipulation.
- He admits that, “Every day, somewhere, some Amazon executive or Blue Origin

executive or someone from the other philanthropies and companies I own or invest in is meeting with government officials,” but doesn’t consider whether *that’s* a credibility issue more pressing than presidential endorsements.

- Rather than doing something to address those credibility risks, Bezos instead asks his still undefined reader to just trust him. “I assure you that my views here are, in fact, principled.”
- Bezos again conflates lack of credibility with a market for views that pointedly don’t aspire to reality. “Lack of credibility isn’t unique to The Post. ... Many people are turning to off-the-cuff podcasts, inaccurate social media posts and other unverified news sources.” Even as a business proposition, Bezos is unaware of what product he is selling, of what product competitors eating into his market share are selling.
- Denying, again, any motivation of personal self-interest, Bezos then asserts – the same week his own

boneheaded decision (if you believe reality) or failure of adequate planning (if you believe Bezos' excuse) led to 200,000 subscribers fleeing the paper – that “allow[ing] this paper to stay on autopilot” is what will lead it to “fade into irrelevance.”

Dude: You just did something that made both the paper itself irrelevant (by spiking the work of its leaders) which then led longtime supporters to flee. *You* did that. It's not autopilot that is making the WaPo irrelevant. It's Bezos-pilot. It is your misdiagnosis of the problem and boneheaded decisions based on that misdiagnosis.

That's why it irks me that Bezos doesn't adhere to basic standards of disclosure. He is tagged on his byline as nothing more than, “the owner of the Washington Post.” And while he admits in his column that he owns the company whose CEO naively took a last minute meeting after Bezos spiked the Harris endorsement, and admits that there is some uncatalogued group of “other philanthropies and companies” that leads him and his executives to “meet[] with government officials” on a daily basis, he does not disclose what they are in his bio.

He doesn't reveal that if Trump wins he'll get massive tax cuts that will let him further accumulate wealth. He doesn't describe that he owns a massive network of warehouses whose labor fights will be decidedly more contentious under a Harris Administration. He doesn't mention the cloud contracts that led to a sustained conflict with the cronyist Trump Administration.

Now you may believe that none of those things would influence the boneheaded decision Bezos made or the way he implemented it. But he's not going to address them – like a voting machine

operator would – by laying out those possible conflicts according to the standards of journalism.

Nope. Instead, Bezos is going to claim he's nothing more than a humble little newspaper owner. He's just going to ask you to trust him at his word. "I assure you that my views here are, in fact, principled."

It's that pabulum paragraph, unworthy of a college freshman, that's the real tell, though. "Reality is an undefeated champion!!" "Those who fight reality lose!!"

The fight against fascism is substantially a fight to defend reality over propaganda. The reason to make an endorsement, this year, is precisely to defend a reality that needs a vigorous champion, not to capitulate to the Substackers offering listeners what their faith in a strongman leads them to want to hear.

Ah well. Instead of joining that fight, the second richest man in the world confessed, right there in print, that he believes reality will win without a fight.

Update: I added the line about faith in voting machines after I first published.