

# Resisting Achievement Culture with Slow Librarianship

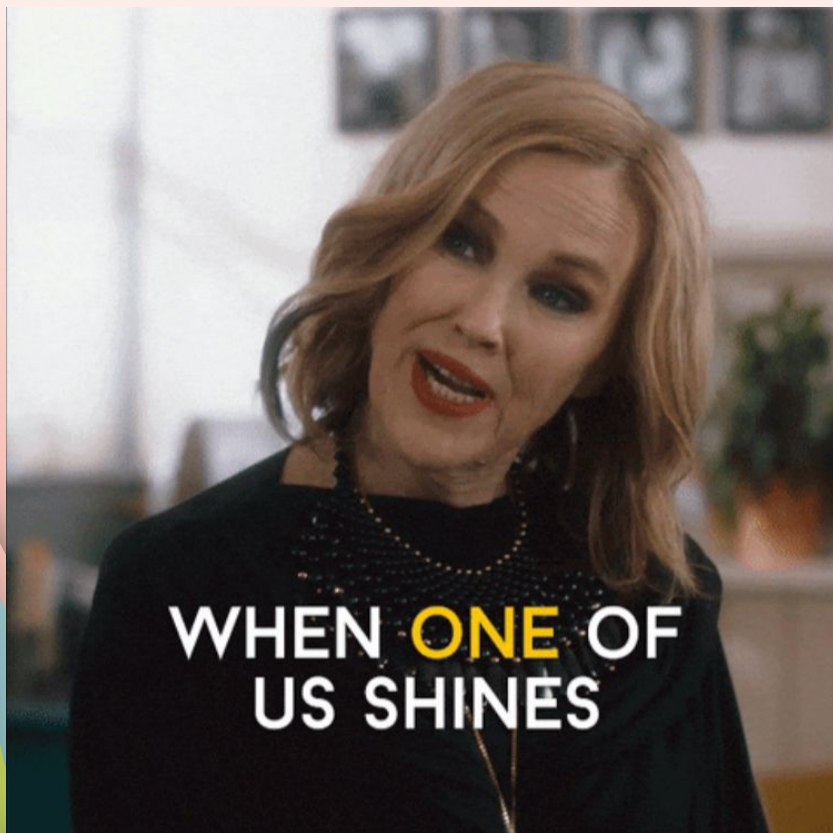
Meredith Farkas  
Portland Community College  
<http://bit.ly/farkasola>



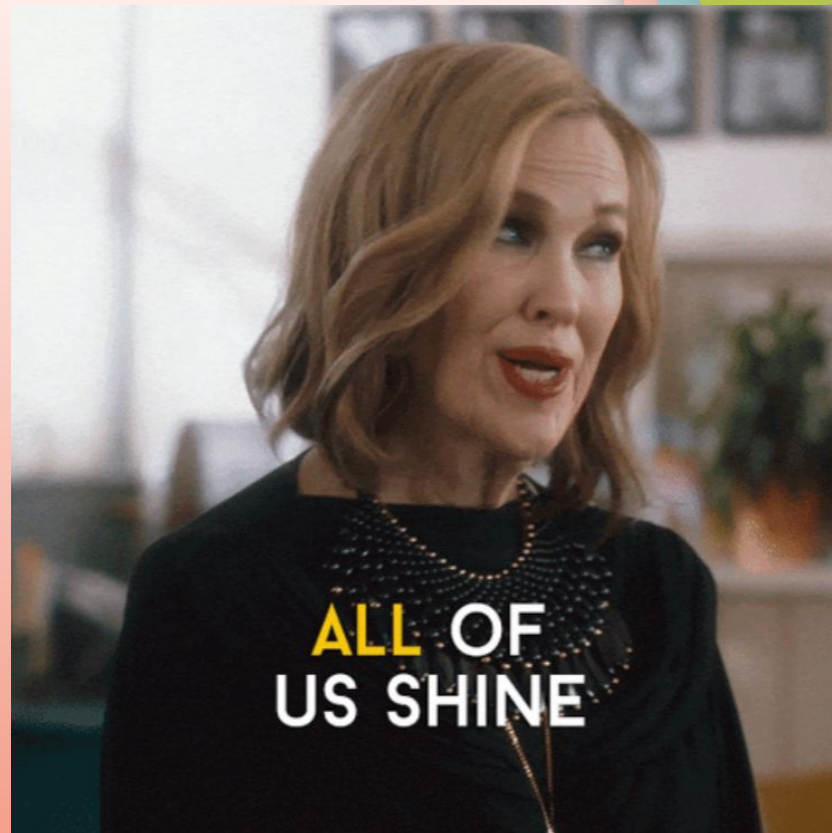
The pandemic has  
revealed a lot about our  
society



**THE**  
**SYSTEM**  
**ISN'T**  
**BROKEN**  
**IT WAS**  
**BUILT**  
**→ THIS WAY ←**



WHEN **ONE** OF  
US SHINES



**ALL** OF  
US SHINE


HUSTLE

@GARYVEE

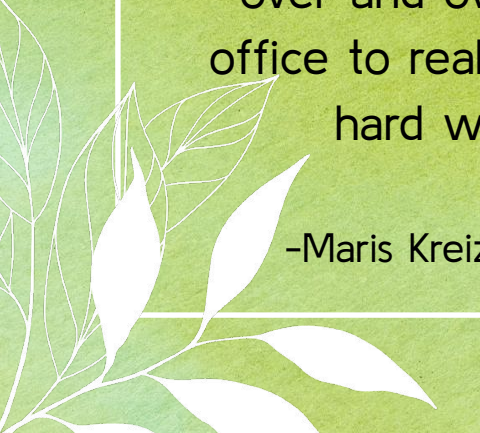


I PULLED MYSELF UP BY MY BOOTSTRAPS!

ON BECOMING A GOD  
in Central Florida  
SHOWTIME



“Where does ambition go when jobs disappear and the things you’ve been striving for barely even exist anymore? And what if the things for which you’ve been striving no longer feel important because they’re the spoils of a rotten system that needs a complete overhaul? I still want to create and get paid for it... but our opportunities seem to be narrowing, the world becoming a little smaller each time. The scope of our ambitions must be downsized, over and over again... It only took a few years of working in an office to realize the idea of meritocracy is a lie and the only thing hard work guarantees is unpaid overtime, not success.”



-Maris Kreizman, “Where did my ambition go?” Gen.

# Hello!

I'm Meredith (she/her)

Librarian at Portland  
Community College

Columnist, *American Libraries*

Author: *Information Wants to  
be Free*

Former child & family therapist

Recipient of white privilege



## Also me

ACRL-Oregon Award for  
Excellence, 2014, 2020

PCC Learning Assessment  
Council Exemplary Assessment of  
Student Learning, 2017, 2019

ACRL Instruction Section  
Innovation Award, 2014

WISE Excellence in  
Online Education Award,  
2008, 2011

LITA/Library Hi Tech award for  
Outstanding Communication in  
Library and Information  
Technology, 2009

Library Journal Mover and  
Shaker, 2006 \*rejected in protest,  
2020





## Also me

Anxiety

Depression

Invisible disability

Work addict





“

*Work addiction... is a  
socially-acceptable  
addiction...you get a lot of  
reward and external  
validation."*

*-Morra Aarons-Mele*

*The Anxious Overachiever*

# What is achievement culture?

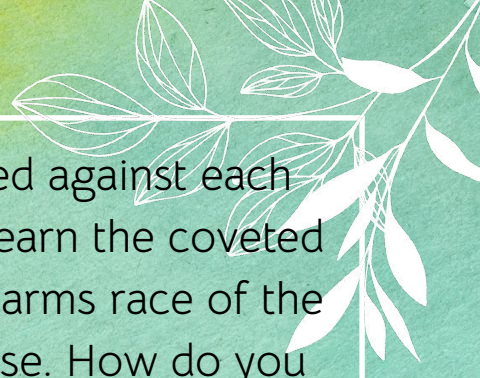
- ▶ An organizational culture focused on producing short-term wins, visible results, maximizing productivity, and collecting accolades.
- ▶ A personal focus on self-optimization and external validation.
- ▶ Predicated on the myth of the meritocracy.

MORE!

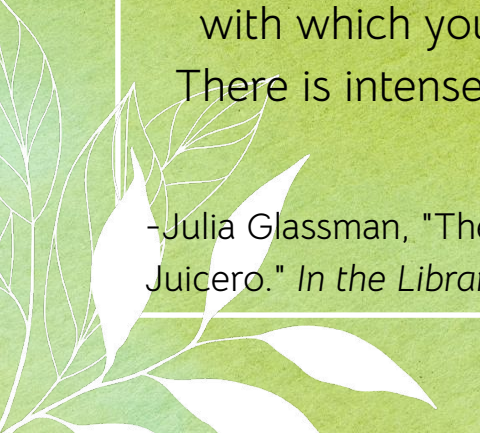
MORE!

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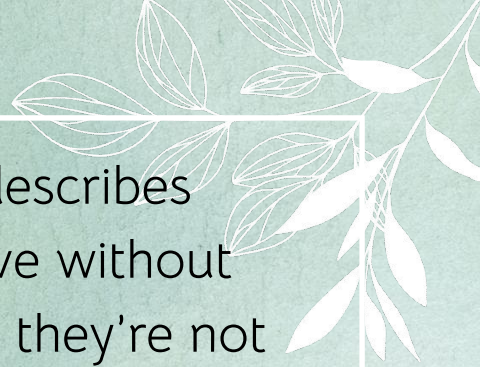




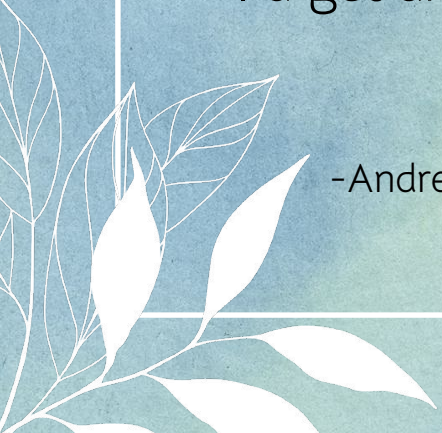
“Since the members of each year’s peer review cohort are judged against each other, and it has been made clear that only a select few can ever earn the coveted marker of ‘exceptional performance,’ the process has become an arms race of the biggest, most impressive accomplishments librarians can showcase. How do you play up the fact that you’re a talented and beloved teacher when you have a colleague who has just overhauled the entire information literacy curriculum for their subject area and deployed a brand new series of online instructional modules? Sure, that approach may not have been appropriate for the departments with which you liaise, but think about how these two stories look side by side. There is intense pressure to constantly innovate, to throw out the old and invent something new.”



-Julia Glassman, "The innovation fetish and slow librarianship: What librarians can learn from the Juicero." *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*



“In his book *Excellent Sheep*, William Deresiewicz describes the current generation of strivers as ‘driven to achieve without knowing why.’ And then they become paralyzed when they’re not sure how to proceed. I jokingly call the hang-ups associated with a drive to achieve as ‘the Achievement Demons.’ When I was growing up, I’d study for days trying to get good grades. When I’d get an ‘A,’ I’d feel elation for about 30 seconds, and then a feeling of emptiness. Rinse and repeat.”



-Andrew Yang “The Dark Side of Achievement Culture” *Quartz*.

A close-up, low-angle shot of a person's feet on a treadmill. The person is wearing white sneakers with red accents and black soles. The treadmill belt is dark blue with white diagonal stripes. The side rails of the treadmill are visible, featuring a perforated metal design. The background is bright and slightly out of focus, suggesting an indoor gym or studio setting. The text "You are not enough" is overlaid in a bold, red, sans-serif font in the center-right of the image. There are decorative, colorful, wavy borders in the top right and bottom left corners, featuring shades of green, blue, yellow, and pink.

**You are not  
enough**






**HERE IT GOES AGAIN!**




“

*Then there is the human  
cost of turbo-capitalism.  
These days, we exist to  
serve the economy,  
rather than the other way  
round.*

*-Carl Honore  
In Praise of Slow*



“The antiquated belief that some groups of people are better than others distorts our politics, drains our economy, and erodes everything Americans have in common, from our schools to our air to our infrastructure. And everything we believe comes from a story we’ve been told.”



-Heather McGhee *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We can Prosper Together*

# Vocational awe

- ▷ Coined by Fobazi Ettarh
- ▷ The idea that librarianship is sacred and beyond critique
- ▷ Encourages overwork and martyrdom

Ettarh, Fobazi. "Vocational awe and librarianship: The lies we tell ourselves." *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (2018).



**Enjoy  
Every  
Moment  
of Your  
Life**

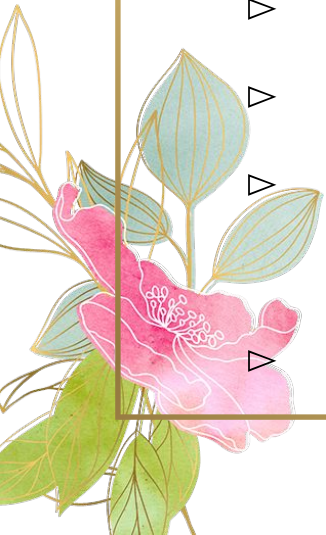


# Cult of Productivity / personal optimization



# Consequences of achievement culture

- ▷ Competition rather than cooperation
- ▷ Isolation, anxiety, depression
- ▷ Overwork / work addiction
- ▷ Transactional relationships
- ▷ Toxicity, abuse, neglect, low-morale, and burnout (read Davis Kendrick!!!)
- ▷ White supremacy, inequity, exclusion



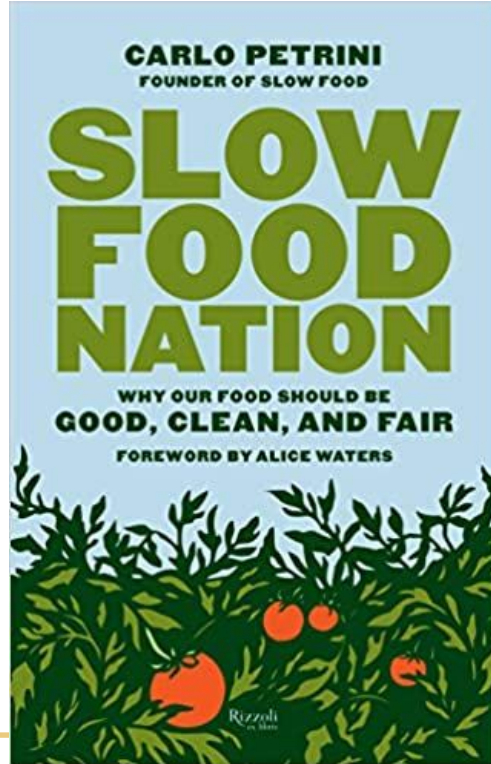
# What is “Slow?”

and how does it apply to librarianship?

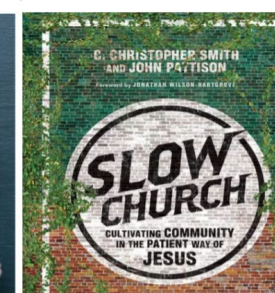
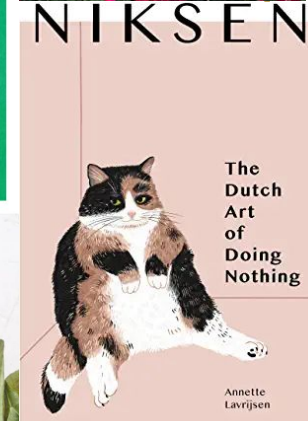
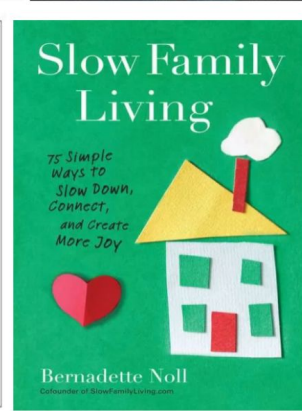
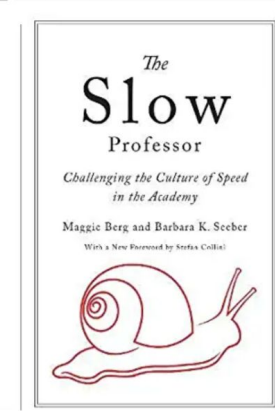
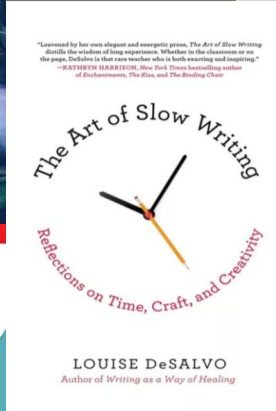
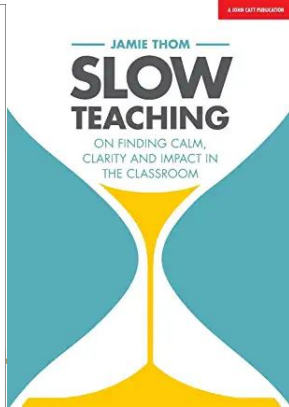
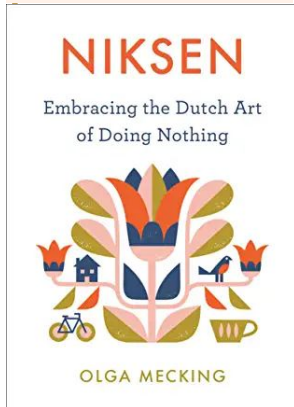
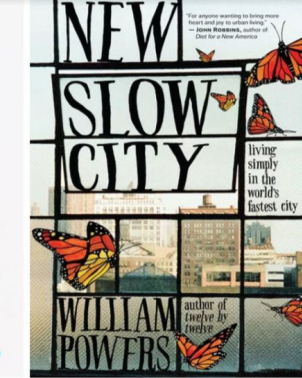
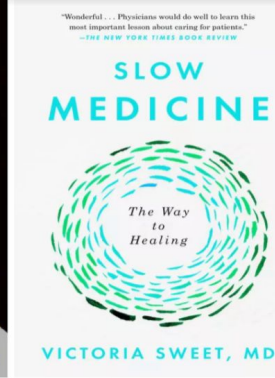
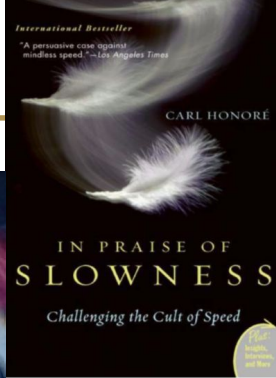
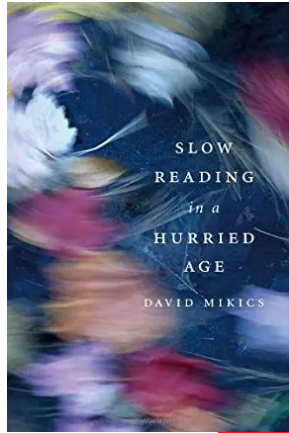
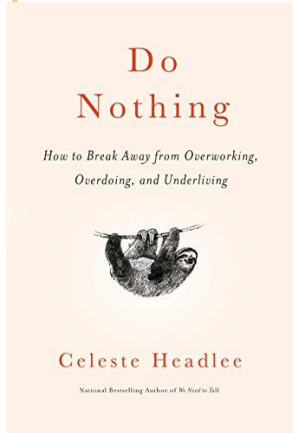




# Slow food



# The slow revolution!



2017  
OCT  
18

Julia Glassman  
6 Comments

# THE INNOVATION FETISH AND SLOW LIBRARIANSHIP: WHAT LIBRARIANS CAN LEARN FROM THE JUICERO

## “ *In Brief*

*This essay reflects on the effects of capitalism and corporatization on the work habits of librarians, and critiques the profession's emphasis on innovation for its own sake. First, the essay compares Juicero Inc., a Silicon Valley startup that faced criticism for producing an expensive machine that squeezed premade packets of juice, to projects undertaken by librarians for the purposes of career advancement and prestige that may unnecessarily complicate the services provided to patrons. The essay then outlines the burgeoning Slow Movement within libraries and recommends that librarians leverage the movement's principles to push back against corporatization in librarianship.*

By Julia Glassman

## The Juicero: A Parable

In April 2017, the Internet had a good chuckle over a start-up gaffe worthy of a *Silicon Valley* subplot, which centered on a device that claimed to be the Keurig of juicers:

Glassman, Julia. "The innovation fetish and slow librarianship: What librarians can learn from the Juicero." *In the Library with the Lead Pipe* (2017).



“

*Perhaps, if we reject the capitalist drive to constantly churn out new products and instead take a stand to support more reflective and responsive practices, we can offer our patrons services that are deeper, more lasting, and more human.*

*-Julia Glassman*

# A slow library is

an antiracist, responsive, and values-driven organization where workers are focused on relationship-building, deeply understanding and meeting patron needs, and providing equitable service to their community. Internally, the culture is focused on learning and reflection, valuing all kinds of contributions, and supporting staff as whole people.



# Characteristics of slow librarianship



# Good

- ▷ Critically evaluate the assumptions and power structures that undergird library services, structures, collections, information organization, and goals
- ▷ Antiracist / anti-oppression
- ▷ Values-driven priorities
- ▷ Focus on meeting patron needs equitably

# Good

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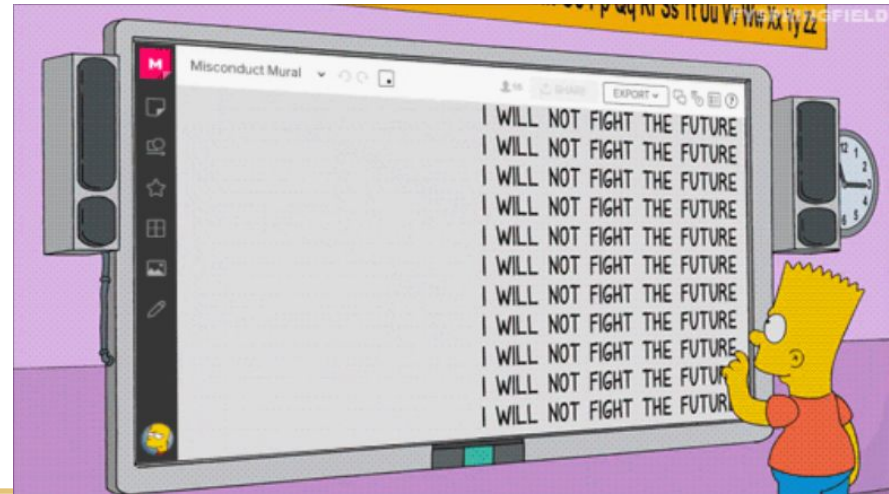


# White Supremacy Culture in Organizations

Dismantling Racism Works & Their Sources	05
Adapted by COCo	06
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>07</b>
<b>How to Use This Document</b>	<b>08</b>
<b>Perfectionism*</b>	<b>09</b>
A Perfectionist Culture	10
Worship of the Written Word	12
Only One Right Way	13
Either/Or Thinking*	15
<b>Concentration of Power</b>	<b>17</b>
Power Hoarding	18
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Defensiveness	23
<b>Right to Comfort</b>	<b>25</b>
Right to Comfort	26
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<b>Individualism*</b>	<b>28</b>
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<b>Progress is Bigger/More*</b>	<b>32</b>
Progress is Bigger/More	33
Objectivity*	35
Quantity over Quality*	37
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<b>Learning Organizations: An Antidote</b>	<b>41</b>

# Good

- ▷ Values-driven priorities
- ▷ Focus on meeting patron needs equitably



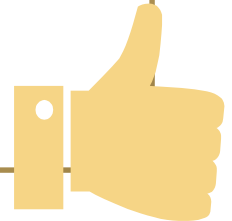
# Human(e)

- ▷ People first organizations
- ▷ People bring their whole selves to work
- ▷ Boundaries / leave work at work
- ▷ Rejecting the cult of productivity
- ▷ Valuing connection and deep listening
  - to patrons and colleagues
- ▷ Valuing teamwork



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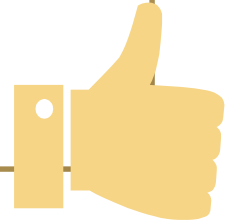
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# Human(e)

- ▶ Valuing teamwork



# Thoughtful

- ▷ Valuing process over product
- ▷ Learning culture
- ▷ Valuing time taken for reflection
- ▷ Gratitude and recognition are norms in the organization



# Thoughtful

- ▷ Valuing process over product
- ▷ Learning culture
- ▷ Valuing time taken for reflection





# Thoughtful

- ▶ Gratitude and recognition are norms in the organization



## For the individual: embracing slow

- ▷ Work on your attention and reflective practice
- ▷ Figure out your most deeply-held values
- ▷ Figure out what success looks like **for you**
- ▷ Consider how you uphold white supremacy culture
- ▷ Ask for what you need at work, set healthy boundaries, pick your battles, protect yourself
- ▷ Foster a culture of appreciation and gratitude
- ▷ “Waste” time, build relationships, Slow down!!!



“

*“I am personally unsatisfied with untrained attention, which flickers from one new thing to the next, not only because it is a shallow experience, or because it is an expression of habit rather than will, but because it gives me less access to my own human experience.”*

*-Jenny Odell, How to do*

*Nothing*

*43*

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- ▷ “Waste” time, build relationships, Slow down!!!





# Thanks for listening!



## Any questions?

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Slides at <http://bit.ly/farkasola>

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