

Hey Bus Driver!

What happened to good service? Did anyone see where it got off the bus? It was sitting right *there*; right behind the driver when we got on the digital highway back in 1985. I distinctly remember how it calmly turned around and said to the rest of us *Relax* as the driver did his best Andretti and we took off down the long and winding road of life. Back then, good service could be found at any stop along the way; the local gas station or Seven-11. He hung around with his pals *Please* and *Thank You* and *Have A Nice Day*. Cash was their King and smiling eyes the only receipt necessary, and if you got stuck putting together any of that life-pleasuring merchandise you bought down at the big-box store, why good service was only a phone call away – toll free. You could almost see the smile come right through the receiver as a perky voice pronounced with some pride, *Yes, I can help you with that*. But we lost good service somewhere back there on one of those sharp, left-handers back around the turn of the century, just before the earth went flat. Almost overnight, *Yes, I can help you* went to *Well, how can I help you?* And, *I'll connect you now*, went to, *Press-one for sales, two for service, three to hear this menu again*.

Suddenly, everyone was multitasking and balancing their lives on iPod's and Crackberry's. Simultaneously and without a second thought they were uploading tomorrow's PowerPoint presentation while download they're 7th grader's biology report, while seamlessly pirating tunes to knock-off iPhones, while casually surf eBay for bargains on bogus Bennie Babies, while exchanging instant messages with six coworkers about their heavy workloads and how little time anyone had. And all the while droning on about how boring live was. Just another day on the bus.

As soon as the earth flattened out and the bus slowed down, Responsibility and Credibility got off. They just opened the door when the bus started to sputter and jumped off. Hardly anyone noticed, but everyone heard the Andrettiod when he shouted, *Where's the fun in straight 'n narrow?* And he jumped off too. Good service was left to

take care of itself. The bus almost coasted to a stop, until some headless horseman with plenty of pent-up gallop took the wheel and self-serve morphed before our eyes.

Selfish-serve emerged, mumbling, stumbling and barking at everyone while it figured out how to be shifty with the gears. The bus picked up speed and pushed everything out of the way, rode up and over the curbs until it had muscled its way to the front. On top and in charge, Selfish brought New Order to the I-way, and a new respect to road rage, even as the road itself smoothed and flattened out.

Now Selfish drove flat-out, entitled and privileged, endowed with certain inalienable rights like lies, laughter and the taking of schmucks! And Selfish felt just a bit put off with having to take *everyone else* along for a ride. *How dare they!* Nobody rides for *free* on the selfish bus! Everyone's gotta pay, if not before they get on then certainly before they get off, otherwise service is just servitude and selfish couldn't have that.

It was under the dark of night when Selfish filled the bus with day traders, all with individual agendas known only to them. Selfish put Greed behind the wheel but no one noticed because everyone was wearing earbuds, tuned in to their own self-mixed vocals and instruments they call music, played at their level of hearing comfort regardless of who sat next to them 'cause the buds were hi-tech Bose that digitally cancel out the music to anyone else; private concert halls inside private heads. Everyone on the bus is a *Me*, no one is a *You* and *I* gets taken for a ride with all that is possessive.

It's pitch-black outside and Cruise control's in the driver's seat now; Greed's got more important things to do. And still no one takes notice, everyone's too busy worshiping the Golden Bull. No one sees the bus is about to run out of road. Built before the digital highway was but a twinkle in technology's eye, the age-old power grids around the world collapse and melt under the stress of a world multitasking without purpose. The sheer weight of it all splits the digital divide right down the medium.

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Now it's pitch-black *inside* the bus too. No power means more than just no elevators or traffic lights this time, more than just milk is going to spoil, more than ice is going to melt. No credit card transactions requires the sudden need to know how to make change – correctly – in Euros, Yen and Canadian. Hey, meet the new math, same as the old math. A world without electricity shuts down more than just the YahooMail identities all the Crackberry's hide behind, it stops the digital delivery of everything from yesterday's foreclosures to tomorrow's pink slips. Business owners find themselves locked out of their own virtual stores – literally. No need to worry though, because no one else can get in either. Hey bus driver! Where you takin' me? Direct deposits have no direction, voicemail goes silent. More than just airplanes and high hopes are grounded, more than just freeways and Facebook are gridlocked. Just like *that*, carbonless paper is a new rage, receipt pads are more precious than a Corporate Gold Card.

Eye contact with others on the bus is impossible in the dark all Selfish and Greed can remember were the differences that surround them. Differences in nationality and tongue, in culture and dress, sex and age, hygiene and weigh, politics and habits, but only the bad ones. You're not like me, even in the dark that's plain to see.

Will we call out to our old friends, *Please* and *Thank You* and *Have A Nice Day* when the lights go out inside the bus? Will they recognize our voices in the dark?

Hold up there, bus driver! I'm gettin' off here.

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