

Introduction:

All employment is a reciprocal relationship. The following is based on my perceptions and my opinions grounded in my experience as a Tier One employee at Amazon SDF8 in Jeffersonville, Indiana, since July 2014. SDF8 is a fulfillment center focusing primarily on apparel.

Tier One employees are the labor force of the company, the lowest paid hourly workers. Amazon associate, worker, Tier One employee are synonymous and can be used interchangeably in this document. As an Amazon Tier One employee, I am also a team member. I am for the company, not against it.

I have been working at Amazon for over two years under the conditions I will be describing and that have been documented in other forums. Social scientists will want to study the effects on the human psyche or human psychological system of working in Amazon's fulfillment center environment under current policies. As a layman, I would suggest consequences such as depression, weakened social bonds, substance abuse, emotional-stress related physical ailments, sleep disorders, reduction of cognitive faculties, all of these with expansive societal implications.

Integrity initiation:

Integrity Staffing is the service that feeds SDF8 with temp and temp-to-hire workers.

When I got out of school in May 2014, I needed a quick job and paycheck. Amazon always seemed to be hiring, so I drove to the off-site Integrity office and applied. I was given a few simple tests, offered a job, and assigned a start date. A week later, I arrived on my start date about five minutes early at the SDF8 Integrity office. All the new-hire temps were directed to sit in a small conference room. The integrity worker called me with a few other new-hires to the desk and said we could go home, all the positions for that day were filled. I told the Integrity worker that I understood I would be starting work that day. He told me that sometimes all the new-hires don't show up, so the company hires more than it needs and employs first-come. If I wanted to, I could go to the off-site Integrity office and talk to them about it and get a new start date.

I drove down to the Integrity office. The worker there was entirely familiar with my experience, although no one mentioned this first-come, first-serve policy during any part of my interview and hiring process. She gave me a new start date and said she would personally ensure I would be a priority hire and would start work on that date.

I arrived on the new date a little early. The same thing happened. I told the Integrity worker that I had already been turned away at my first start date, and I had made new arrangements. He said he was sorry, but he didn't have any record of it.

I drove to the office and asked to speak to the manager. The manager was pleasant and apologetic. She gave me a twenty dollar gas card, a new start date, and the same assurances that I would be starting work on that date.

In the interim I discovered that Amazon SDF8 was hiring directly. Being a direct hire is almost always preferable to being a temp-to-hire. A direct hire employee makes a tiny bit more pay, receives most benefits immediately, and generally enjoys overall better treatment and job security than SDF8 Integrity employees.

The Amazon Tier One hiring process is done mostly online. I filled out an application and was given an orientation date contingent on a successful background check.

I went to the paid orientation. I submitted to a mouth swab, filled out some tax paperwork, sat through about 4-6 hours of videos and speakers, signed some confidentiality clauses. Then I was assigned a new department, AFE (Amazon Fulfillment Engine), a new shift, a new start date.

My Integrity experience illustrates an alarming recent trend where a burden normally shouldered by a solvent, thriving, incorporated business is placed on the shoulders of a struggling, possibly insolvent, independent, unemployed or employed worker. This is the first such example, even before walking through the door, "because people don't show up," the company says, the burden is placed on the job-seeking unemployed. (If this practice is not illegal, it is certainly dishonest.)

To an unemployed worker seeking an eleven dollar-per-hour temp job, the expense of finding work might take a relatively large portion of the worker's financial means.

My Integrity experience was distasteful, but a fitting introduction into the world of being an Amazon employee. In the May 2016 issue of *inSTALLments*, SDF8 announced, "Integrity Staffing will now be taking over the direct hiring for Amazon." It is unclear whether these deceptive hiring practices will be extended by Integrity to the direct hiring of Amazon SDF8 employees. I doubt they will, because SDF8 is somewhat desperate for employees given its poor reputation within the community, its massive turnover rate, and its planned attrition processes for long-term employees.

AFE (Amazon Fulfillment Engine):

AFE was a real culture shock. I have worked as a laborer most of my life, but I have never experienced a work environment where employees are pitted against each other as they were in AFE in 2014 . There have been some ameliorative changes made through 2015, but the foundational system of AFE remains brutal.

AFE is a hyper-efficient order packing system involving three general operations--sort, re-bin, and pack. I will not go into detail about the operations as AFE is a proprietary system closely guarded by Amazon. Tours are not allowed to see AFE.

I was assigned to AFE pack. Pack tables are very long, with packers working side by side at workstations. Packers are expected to pack at or above a highly efficient, set rate, for a ten hour shift with two fifteen minute paid breaks (officially shortened to ten minutes by walk time), and a thirty minute unpaid lunch. For eleven hour shifts during peak season, an extra five minutes is added to last break.

AFE operations are monitored by AMs (Area Managers) and PAs (Production Assistants). In 2014, spreadsheets of worker's individual rates were posted four times per day (first break, lunch, second break, end of shift) on a bulletin board at the AFE stand-up area (the area where workers gather for morning and after-lunch mandatory stand-up meetings). The rate lists were delineated by all workers at or above expected rate and all those below rate. A worker could be talked to, or written up for falling below rate for as little as a few hours. These two forms of reprimand were not automatic, but were always looming for a worker who was not working fast enough. AFE sort, re-bin, and pack have their own rates, as do most SDF8 operations.

AFE workers generally internalize these rate expectations, so that not making rate worries the employee: "I better pick it up, so I can make my rate." I noticed right away, and many employees have said to me, "Amazon is the only job I've ever had where to show up and work hard all day is not enough."

Often, making rate is based on factors beyond an employee's control. A packer relies on a fast and accurate re-binner, who in turn relies on a fast and accurate sorter. All rely on an adequate amount of work being generated from the pick department. For packers, large orders (a bin with a fifteen item order, for instance, vs. a bin with a two item order) can help bring up the packer's hourly rate. For this reason, packers, working side by side on a wall, would often try to select the larger orders to pack. This trend pitted packer against packer as a matter of self-preservation. Sometimes the reverse would happen--if an employee who was comfortable with her rate noticed that a fellow employee was falling behind, the first worker might begin offering the larger orders to the slower employee to help him catch up. I sometimes tried to do this for slower packers, but I generally knew that these employees would not be with the company long.

The posting of individual rates every quarter-shift as well as write-ups for failing to meet rates for a quarter-shift was abandoned around April of 2015 in favor a new program of monthly rate evaluations that never really came to fruition. PAs continued to reprimand Tier One associates for not meeting rate expectations for random time periods, and in the June 2016 All Hands meeting, the company announced a new program to post daily rates of all Tier One employees with three "categories of performance management." I will discuss this new program below.

The results of this environment are disillusionment, low morale, high turnover. Many of my hire group quit in the first week, month, or few months. Several thousand full-time Amazon SDF8 employees have come and gone during my short tenure. Their enthusiasm and excitement turns to sullen capitulation, then they are just gone. I know of only one member of my hire group other than me who is still employed at SDF8. There could be others, I don't know.

I asked a PA in 2014 about AFE rates. I walked her over to the posted rates and showed her the current postings. At that moment, only about 25% of packers were making rate. (This was really low. Usually it is much higher, maybe 70% to 80%.) She said most of those people were new. She said the expected rates at the Amazon facility she transferred from were much higher, and these rates should be easy to make. The rates were obviously not easy to make--the data was right before our eyes. She had many explanations, but no desire to speak rationally about the rates. This experience became the norm when I have tried to talk to any manager or HR rep about unfair policies. Managers will not vary from script, no matter how diligently an employee tries to engage them in a rational interpersonal discussion. I have only recently been able to get a manager or HR rep to even acknowledge we have a high turnover rate.

Internal marketing campaign, tag lines:

In late 2014 and early 2015, Amazon SDF8 began rolling out some new internal communication programs designed to disseminate information to Tier One associates. Some of these programs are network-wide, but SDF8 is apparently a significant pilot facility for the testing of new programs, policies, and procedures. The company uses these channels associatively, in a kind of cross-channel marketing campaign directed at employees. I am listing eight of these communication channels below:

1) Stand-up meetings

Each department has stand-up meetings at the beginning of shift and after lunch. An Area Manager or Production Assistant usually gives a short address to the employees regarding expected rates (goals) for the day, and safety tips. Often, new policy changes are announced briefly in stand-up meetings with the understanding that more information will come later through other channels. For instance, Connections questions were first announced, to me, in AFE stand-up sometime during peak season 2014. Then, Connections questions would be promoted in *inSTALLments*, *A to Z magazine*, bulletins, All Hands meetings, etc.

2) Connections questions

When one of my managers announced that we would be receiving daily questions on our computer screens or scanner screens at the start of shift, I didn't think much of it--just another attempt by the company to push its brand of internal communications. I noticed immediately that

the questions were simplistic (impossible to give a nuanced answer), loaded, personally and psychologically invasive, extremely patronizing. I recall some of the early questions focusing on mood, maybe even, *Are you depressed at work?* These early, invasive questions have been toned down a bit since then. One we get frequently now is, "I feel motivated at work." To which the employee must choose a response from: "Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree."

The manager said that participation would be optional, that it was just a way for the company to help improve the workplace. I went to him and asked, "When you announced the start of the start-of-shift questions, you said they would be optional. How do I opt out?" He said he didn't know, that he didn't think the questions were any big deal, I might ask HR, maybe they could help me. I never asked HR. I adopted the policy of simply pressing "enter" twice when any question pops up (sometimes they pop up on my scanner when I log in at start of shift, sometimes at other times during the day). This sequence, "enter/enter", does not register a non-answer. It simply highlights and registers the first answer as default, which is usually "Strongly agree" or some other wording of highest degree of affirmative. So, when the question is, "Does your manager deal with problems in your department effectively?" my default answer is always "Strongly agree." And if the question is, "Would you recommend Amazon to a friend or relative as a great place to work?" my answer is always "Strongly agree." And if the question is, "Do you plan on leaving Amazon in the next thirty days?" my answer is "Yes". And if the follow-up question is, "If you leave Amazon, will you still be an Amazon customer?" my answer is, the first or default answer in this case being the negative, "No." So the company never had a straight opinion from me for Connections questions because my personal thoughts and opinions at work are my own, unless I decide to offer them. Every once in a while the question has been, "Do you know you can scroll down to give other answers?" And, of course, my answer would be the first and default answer, "Yes."

I do not know what the law is regarding unsanctioned, mandatory psychological testing of employees. (One cannot begin working until one gives a response because the screen will not advance.) I do not know if there even is a law that would cover this kind of testing, but I suspect the company is pushing the boundaries of such law with little scrutiny from anyone.

These questions are disconcerting. What is the company up to? What is it doing with the information it is gathering from and about its employees? My fellow workers have varied opinions about the meaning of the questions. One said, "Oh, I like to answer them the best I can, try to help them out." (He was fired shortly after making the above statement for failing a random drug test.) Another employee said, "I think they use them to weed out people who are dissatisfied, troublemakers, kind of. You know, I think that's why they move people around so much here--so they won't get together and talk about unions. If you're never in the same place with the same people, if people are always moving around, then it's really hard to keep relationships, you know?" (I don't believe the woman who made the above statement is still with the company either.)

More recently, an employee wrote this:

From the VOA board (Voice of Associate) 12/28/15: "Whatever happened to Connections being voluntary? Can't you have people use kiosks instead of forcing me to answer 1 sided questions where there aren't any other choices?"

The company response from a Senior Operations Manager on 12/30/15: "The goal of Connections is to collect enough information to make it value added. Please understand that this is one avenue we use to become a better Amazon every day. Thank you."

Another employee wrote:

From the VOA board 7/15/16: "I would like to see applicable answers (connections questions) to allow for disagreement or N/A. The results are inaccurate if there are only agreeable options."

The company response from an HR manager on 7/16/16: "Thank you for your suggestion."

I began to compile a raw list (ConnectionsQuestions.pdf) of Connections questions in the fall of 2015. This list contains all the questions I have to this date. (I have not selected them.)

The company promotes Connections questions in many forums. I'll give just two examples:

From the week of August 10th, 2015 *inSTALLments*, under the tag line, "Your Voice, Your Amazon": "Did you know your Connections feedback is confidential? . . . Feel confident in answering the Connections questions and speaking freely with Connections Advisors. All responses and conversations are kept confidential. . . . Connections needs to see your responses for two reasons. By seeing where you work, the Connections Team can identify successes or opportunities specific to a site. Connections also needs to identify you if they want to invite you to speak to a Connections Advisor."

From *inSTALLments* the week of November 30, 2015, again under, "Your Voice, Your Amazon": "Will Connections questions be asked during Peak? . . . You will continue to participate in Connections and receive the questions of the day. . . . We also recognize that peak is a busy fun time of the year. You're working hard and we appreciate your contribution! You will receive messages that recognize your efforts."

The company also selects, interprets, and appropriates Connections questions and employees' answers, then redistributes them to employees. A few examples:

Again from the week of August 10th, 2015 *inSTALLments*, under the tag line, "Your Voice, Connections": "SDF8 Question: 'If I could switch managers today, I would.' Favorable 70%, Unfavorable 30%."

In the above example, "Favorable" and "Unfavorable" were not available responses to the original Connections question posed to employees. The possible responses were: "Strongly

agree, Agree, Too new to assess, Disagree, Strongly Disagree." The interpreted responses are unclear as to the meaning of "Favorable" and "Unfavorable." Does "Unfavorable" mean that the employee wishes to switch managers or that the employee views switching managers negatively?

From the week of August 17th, 2015 *inSTALLments*, under the tag line, "You spoke, We listened": "SDF8 Question: 'Do your co-workers make you laugh?' Yes 83%, No 17%."

The possible answers to the above question are less ambiguous, yes or no. However, the question only indicates that the employee answering "yes" enjoys his co-workers. It says nothing about how the employee feels about the working environment of SDF8. SDF8 workers I have spoken to almost unanimously say the thing they like the most about their jobs is the people they work with, but they just as unanimously take issue with Amazon's labor practices. They also believe, overwhelmingly, that there is nothing they can do about these practices other than find another job. Long-term employees, those who have been with SDF8 from its opening in 2012, lament the current labor relations and think about finding a new job often. Many, of course, have already left.

These two examples alone are relatively insignificant, but within Amazon's labor communications system, re-appropriation, re-interpretation, and general spinning of information, including information gathered from employees, is the norm, not the rarity.

It is at the company's discretion how it creates, collects, interprets, and distributes this information gathered from employees. The answer choices never include "None of the above" or "That's personal." In a labor system where every idle second counts against the employee's rate, she cannot begin working until she provides a response. There is a wide disconnect between Connections questions (often statements) about valuing employees and actual policies that devalue employees. This is in no way "Your voice, Your Amazon." Many associates already understand this disconnect, and that their answers to loaded questions are being appropriated by the company for manipulative purposes. I chose to withdraw from this fake dialogue with the company and begin my own dialogue.

3) *inSTALLments*

inSTALLments is a weekly flyer the company started posting sometime in early 2015. The flyer is a one sided 11 x 17 multi-colored document hung horizontally, targeting a captive audience. The employee reads it while occupied in the bathroom. In the men's bathroom, *inSTALLments* is posted above the urinals and in the bathroom stalls.

inSTALLments usually contains four columns of block print with different headings or taglines followed by some company information. For instance, the March 21, 2016 edition (week 12) contains the following headings:

"DID YOU KNOW? . . . During our 2015 Peak Amazon provided over 178,700 cups of free coffee to SDF8 associates . . . "

"DID YOU KNOW? . . . Amazon fulfillment centers MKE1 and MKE5 in Kenosha, Wisconsin welcomed the United States Speaker of the House Paul Ryan for a tour followed by a town hall with associates. During the visit, associates taught the Speaker how to pack a customer order, including labeling, shipping, and inventory."

"REFERRAL BONUS . . . Amazonians get \$125 Bonus for each person they refer to work here at SDF8 . . . "

"YOUR VOICE. YOUR AMAZON . . . SDF8 Associates were recently asked these connections questions: . . . "

"SAFETY TIP NOSE OVER TOES . . . "

"UPT AND PTO . . . It is the associates responsibility to be an owner of his/her UPT . . . "

"WELCOME TO AMAZON! . . . Direct Hires 63, Conversions 14, Integrity 21"

inSTALLments nearly always contains the "Welcome to Amazon" heading listing hires for the week. The listing is one way of tracking SDF8 turnover. A "conversion" converts an Integrity temp to full-time Amazon employee. In the above week, the actual new Amazon employees would be $63+14=77$. When one considers how many extra employees SDF8 had on deck during peak 2015, and the rate at which it was still hiring in the first half of 2016, it creates a powerful anecdote regarding the rate at which SDF8 hires and loses employees.

(Addendum: The "Welcome to Amazon" heading was omitted from the September 5, 12, and 19 [week 36, 37, and 38] 2016 *inSTALLments*. Amazon SDF8 appears to have discontinued this weekly hiring update.)

"CUSTOMER CORNER . . . That moment you order something from @amazon and it's delivered within 24hrs. #amazonforthewin" ("Customer Corner" is always a customer tweet.)

Lastly, there is always a joke at the bottom left corner spoken by a little cartoon character named Peccy with a hat and scarf: "Astronomers got tired of watching the moon go around the earth for 24 hours, so they decided to call it a day."

4) All Hands meetings

I first thought All hands meetings were held every month or so. I believe they are held something like quarterly now, with special meetings held when deemed appropriate by management. It takes a lot of employee hours to get every associate into a meeting for an hour or so. The meetings are held in the large main break room. Employees attend according to when their shift is scheduled. The meetings are mandatory, and workers are scanned in for attendance as they pass through entrance lines.

The company uses All hands meetings to convey information to employees regarding new programs, policies, procedures, organizational changes, pay and benefits, company successes, etc., along with feel-good music, videos, jokes and other fluff.

The meetings are heavily scripted with PowerPoints. Senior Operations Managers, HR managers, and usually the General Manager will take turns with presentations. The meetings are a lot like political conventions, not a lot of alternative viewpoints. Questions are taken at the end of the meeting, but dissenting questions are quickly dismissed or ignored by managers.

I will go into some detail regarding three particular All Hands meetings further below, the April 1st, 2015, the February 3rd, 2016, and the June 15th, 2016. These three meetings are significant for a few reasons.

The April 2015 meeting was the first time I spoke with Matt, the SDF8 General Manager for most of my tenure, now the General Manager CMH1, Columbus, Ohio . It is also the first and last time I heard any member of management mention the word "union"--this was in a short PowerPoint presented by Matt.

The Feb 2016 meeting offered a lot of information about the successes of peak 2015, and a lot of information about the current state of SDF8. This information is useful to bring us up to the present concerning SDF8 programs and policies. A significant organizational change was announced during this meeting: Matt will be transitioning out to a new Amazon robotics facility in Ohio. Sunender, the former SDF8 Senior Operations Manager, will be transitioning into the SDF8 General Manager position.

The June 2016 meeting highlighted ongoing SDF8 successes, operational changes, and introduced a significant new labor performance evaluation program I will talk about.

5) Bulletin boards, VOA, VOB

The VOA board (Voice of Associate) is a large, ruled dry-erase board hung near the east breakroom, and another hung near the west breakroom. Associates can write comments and questions on the left side of these boards which will solicit a written response from a member of management or HR on the right side. There are rules regarding what can be posted, but for the most part, management is fairly liberal as to what will be allowed to remain. The questions and response remain for a few days before being erased to allow room for new. The old questions and comments are recorded in a book.

The VOB (Voice of Business) board is a similar dry-erase board hung next to the VOA board. Managers and HR can write posts on this board concerning issues relevant to associates, for instance, if a road wreck caused a significant number of employees to be late, the tardiness might be excused for all employees for that morning.

6) *A to Z magazine*

A to Z magazine is a 9 x 13 tall, glossy, in-house, sixteen page magazine published quarterly. The company began producing this in-house magazine in early 2015, and promoting it through other communications channels. It is jam-packed with fluff concerning Amazon successes and global initiatives like: "Amazon Launches Fleet of Branded Trailers," "Amazon Robotics Launch in Europe," "Amazon Studios Wins at the Golden Globes," "Holiday Season 2015 Made History," "Prime Air," "Amazon Books."

There are pictures of smiling employees with quotes about their favorite Amazon Leadership Principle, a picture of Jeff Bezos smiling on one knee next to a Make-a-Wish Foundation participant, stories about the Connections team, and reprinted Connections questions with employee responses.

7) Calls to home/voicemails

During 2015 peak, the company began making several calls to all Tier One associates to convey several types of non-emergency information. I found these calls to be annoying, if not disturbing. Generally, all hands phone calls have been reserved for major weather incidents or other emergency information such as a water-main break that temporarily closed the facility.

The first of these calls came on November 26, Thanksgiving Day, 2015. I was at home, in the kitchen cooking Thanksgiving dinner with my family when I got a phone call with the following recorded message:

"Hi, this is Matt ____, General Manager of SDF8. Just a quick message to say happy Thanksgiving. I'm so thankful for your hard work and dedication to our customers. Looking forward to our record breaking peak this year, and don't forget our peak incentives are in full effect. We'll have prizes for working your shift like gift cards and Kindle, and on Black Friday and Cyber Monday, lunch is on us. Have a great rest of your day." Then a group of managers or HR reps in the background yelled, "Happy Thanksgiving!"

I was astonished. I don't know who at Amazon thought it would be a good idea to call me at my home when I was spending Thanksgiving with my family to wish me Happy Thanksgiving with a recorded message. We are not that tight. We are not family. It rings insincere.

What is it about Amazon's labor environment and its relationship with labor that allows it to be comfortable calling employees on Thanksgiving? Amazon employees do not exist for the company outside of their production role, so that even a sacred period of private family time such as Thanksgiving is not off limits for the company. This employee non-existence allows the company to adopt policies by which the employee is a production instrument with delineated cost, delineated production value, and delineated service life.

On November 29, 2015, I received this message:

"Hello, this is ____, Operations Manager at Amazon SDF8, calling to remind you that on November 30th, Cyber Monday shift, all Inbound, ICQA, and learning shifts will start promptly at 6 pm, and all Outbound shifts will start at 6:30 pm. Please be aware that we are currently on eleven hour scheduled shifts. Thank you, and have a great evening. Take care."

And on December 11, on my first day off after a gruelingly physical 59.5 hour week (again, I was with my family), I got this call:

"Hi, this is Matt, the director of operations at SDF8. First, I want to give a big thanks to each and every associate for the absolutely fabulous peak you're delivering for our customers. SDF8 has broken just about every record in both Inbound and Outbound, and we're about to do it again. Next week is the biggest week of the year, and we need everyone focused on crushing it. On Monday, we'll start our crush it week, with Orange Crush at change of shift. We also have several other fun activities throughout the crush it week. Another special announcement, we have a UPT [unpaid time off] earn-back incentive for the next two weeks. Every Amazonian who works their entire shift will get five hours of UPT deposited in their account over the next two weeks, so you can earn a total of ten hours UPT for perfect attendance. Please note that you can have only a maximum of eighty hours in your account at any given time. Lastly, I want to remind all Amazon associates that November VCP [variable compensation pay] will be paid out early, on the 12/18 paycheck, and SDF8 has had the best VCP payout of the year, with a six percent productivity payout, and an average of over ten percent. Thanks again for dedication and hard work. Our customers truly appreciate it, and I'm proud of the peak you are delivering."

All the above information was available through multiple, redundant, on-site channels.

Sunender pointed out during the February 2016 All Hands meeting that the shift reminders help employees understand when to come in so we can operate. If this is true, I want to point out that if we were a stable workforce, we would not be so novice as to not even know when to show up for our shift. We have stand-up meetings twice a day. Shift reminders are posted everywhere, and there are large, standardized shift notification boards at entrances.

8) Signs

There are random signs posted all around the facility, like: "As Big as 28 football fields," "Cyber Monday 36.8 million items ordered," "Over 90,000 jobs created in the US."

Pick paths:

In the first quarter of 2015, I was able to transfer from AFE pack, nights to the pick department, days. I generally prefer to pick. I like to walk and keep moving, rather than stand at a pack station for ten hours.

SDF8 has two pick mods--east mod and west mod. Each mod has four floors. I always prefer 4th floor because it is more open with vertical space. The first floor is hard concrete--much harder on the body than the upper floors, which are plywood. A picker can move several floors or pick areas within a mod during a session or a shift. All pick paths are generated by computer algorithms.

A picker is generally assigned to one side or the other, as walking back and forth would take a lot of time, but pickers might be moved from one side to the other during the day if volume requires. I usually pick in the east mod. Each mod has its own stand-up area for stand-up meetings described above, and I report to the east pick stand-up area for start of shift and after lunch.

A picker, when beginning work, logs in to her hand-held scanner (or "gun"), submits an answer to a Connections question if there is one, then reads her first location--first, second, third, fourth floor, aisle, bin location. She walks up steps to that floor, obtains a push cart and a yellow plastic tote to place on the cart. Then she walks to the first pick location specified on her gun. She scans the bin location, identifies the item, scans the item, places the item in her tote, reads her screen for conformation of a successful pick, reads new pick location, walks there, makes new pick, continues. When her tote is full or her gun says batch is complete, she takes her tote to the nearest conveyor, drops it off, and continues with new tote.

The algorithms used to develop pick paths take worker stress into consideration last. They are designed (sometimes questionably) for optimal storage space and systematic-mechanical efficiency. For instance:

pick aisle 157 to 108 to 130 to 117 to 106 to 128 to 134 to new pick area, then 108 to 104 to 119 to 131 to 133 to 176 to 178 to 185 to 194 to 220 to 221 to 228 to 245 to 225 to 221 to 228 to 245 to 225 to 221 to 213 to 201 to 197 to 190 to 191 to 188 to 180 to 168 to 168(2) to 167 to 158 to 158(2) to 134 to 130 to new pick area, then 123 to 120 to 119 to 119(2) to 119(3) to 241 to 108 to 163 to 208 to 151 to 205 to 215 to 216 to 249 to 201 . . .

Some pick paths are better, some worse than the above. This path would be recognizable to any picker as a standard path he might encounter during any given work session. I have never measured aisle widths, but I believe they are about eight foot on center. Pickers walk a lot. Nearly everyone who works at SDF8 walks a lot on hard concrete.

Because pick paths vary, there are not specific pick rate number expectations. Individual hourly rate expectations are manufactured by the same algorithms creating pick paths. Workers rates are

evaluated as a percentage to that goal, so the actual pick rate number is less relevant than the percentage of rate. I might, on a slow day, be picking at 90% of rate. On a good day, 120% of rate.

If I walk at a normal pace, I will not make my rate. If I hustle--walk fast, pick fast, focus intently--I can do well. Herein lies an interesting dynamic of Amazon--I don't mind moving fast and working hard. I'm not averse to it, I'm inured to it. I enjoy the healthy use of the body. In fact, after a month of walking through cornfields as a farm laborer, I feel like Superman; not so with Amazon labor. I've done construction, farm labor, etc. I've worked every kind of labor job from small company to large. I'm a Bukowskian factotum. But I've never seen anything like Amazon's physical + psychological manipulation. Amazon has the X-factor of an unhealthy labor environment. Not physically edifying, it breaks the body and the spirit down.

"Time to pick" countdown timer:

At the bottom of the picker's scanner screen, there is a "Time to pick: x seconds" countdown timer with a large exclamation point icon to the left and a diminishing progress bar to the right. The "Time to pick" countdown timer resets for every new pick. It might read 29 seconds for a nearby pick. It might read 112 seconds for far away pick.

For me, when I am moving quickly and trying to make my picks as efficiently as possible, my scanner will still read "Time to pick: 0 seconds" many times throughout the day for any number of reasons. I find this discouraging.

What does "Time to pick: 0 seconds" mean? Amazon believes a computer algorithm is more adept at deciding how long it takes to make a pick than the employee. The employee cannot be trusted to make the pick in a responsible, timely manner without the scanner screen prompting the employee on each pick to move at a preset pace or fail company standards for each pick, giving the employee a pass/fail tolerance limit hundreds of times per day--a pass/fail imperative based often on factors beyond the employee's control, creating an environment of mild neurosis.

It is a demoralizing journey when I have to walk a long way to a pick location, and the countdown timer reads "Time to pick: 0 seconds" before I even get to the destination. I still have to scan the location, rifle through the bin, obtain the item, scan the item.

The countdown timer is revealing in a number of ways. The employee has done her job diligently, yet the timer reads "Time to pick: 0 seconds." How can this be? Good, hard work is not enough. This system removes agency from the employee who intends to do her job well. In fact, even when she is applying all necessary effort, diligence, and skill she can still be chastised by a nameless computer screen or a Production Assistant or Area Manager who might or might not know her name and whose name she might or might not know.

The company does not allow the employee to seek, discover, or explore her work potential on her own behalf, on behalf of her fellow employees, and on behalf of her employer. It coerces the employee to make rate through constant pressure and manipulation using an never-ceasing stream of messages and warnings. While Amazon has created an relatively efficient SDF8 production environment, I believe, overall, Amazon workers aren't more or less efficient than any other workers. They are just more demoralized, hate their jobs more, and want to leave more than any other group I have worked with in other high efficiency environments.

The "Time to pick" countdown timer, for me, is a constant reminder of how little autonomy I am allowed to do my job well of my own volition, and how little trust the company grants me as a Tier One associate. If I were not thoroughly invested in improving the wages and working conditions of all SDF8 Tier One employees, the "Time to pick" countdown timer alone would be sufficient reason for me to find a new job.

If a picker is actually taking the time to look at the "Time to pick" seconds countdown timer for each pick, he is using time. Besides the above issues, it just seems counterproductive, a distraction, unnecessarily intrusive, actually inhibiting the ease and flow of good work.

There are many, many ways in which Amazon attempts to control every second of an employee's day in the interest of production efficiency. Taking in the whole picture, which is difficult to do, it appears that many of these policies are actually antithetical to production efficiency when one factors in low morale and high turnover. I have suspected for a long time that Amazon is wildly successful in spite of misguided labor practices, rather than because of them. Amazon knows more about its turnover rate than anyone else, and it is obvious that the company does, indeed, think it is cost effective. However, it is not at all cost effective for SDF8 workers and their families, and these workers will want to balk at this way of thinking and ask Amazon to develop workforce policies in line with the Amazon Leadership Principles.

National Labor Relations Board Order:

I have obviously been disillusioned by my experiences in both AFE and Pick. But I have always been intrigued as well by what I consider an awesome, dynamic company. I had considered using my two degrees (BA, MA English 2014) to advance within the company. (I don't think about advancement anymore; my focus has shifted to creating this document and stabilizing labor relations.) I felt the pain and despair of being an Amazon employee, but I also wanted to figure it out. What's going on here? Why does it feel the way it does? Is this system effective? These aren't easy questions to answer.

I began to wonder if anyone had made a run at unionization at Amazon. Doing a quick search, I discovered that the company had quelled a union attempt

(<http://fortune.com/2014/01/17/amazon-union-push-practically-built-to-fail/>) by a small group (that nonetheless would have had significant reverberations) in 2014.

I also discovered an interesting story (<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-11-18/amazon-settles-labor-board-complaint-on-workers-rights>) regarding an Amazon worker in Phoenix, Arizona, and The National Labor Relations Board.

The result of this worker's complaint was an agreement with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), Case 28-CA-126028, that Amazon will acknowledge and reiterate (what are already federally codified national labor policies) that workers have certain rights regarding forming unions, and that the company is legally forbidden to interfere in these activities.

The agreement was ordered and distributed as a two page Notice to Employees, "Posted Pursuant to a Settlement Agreement Approved by a Regional Director of the National Labor Board, An Agency of the United States Government."

The wording of the document is interesting, as are Amazon's actions and inactions subsequent to its ratification.

The document includes several assertions by the company like: "WE WILL NOT announce or maintain a directive or rule directing you to refrain from engaging in concerted activities." "WE WILL NOT in any like or related manner interfere with your rights under Section 7 of the Act." (Refers to the National Labor Relations Act, enacted 1935.)

Regarding informing employees of the Settlement Agreement, it says this:

"WE WILL furnish all of our employees across the United States with: (1) inserts for the current employee handbook that advise them that the overly-broad rules described above have been rescinded, or (2) the language of lawful rules on adhesive backing that will cover or correct the overly-broad rules in their employee handbook forms, or (3) publish and distribute revised handbook and employee acknowledgement forms that do not contain the overly-broad rules."

I was an employee on 12/9/14 when the document was ratified, and I am still an employee at the time of this writing in September 2016. I was never made aware of any of the three options listed above. The way I became aware of this case and this document was through my own research. When I learned about the case, I looked for the document at SDF8, and I found it. It was hidden in plain sight, posted on the United States Department of Labor bulletin board containing posters about equal opportunity, minimum wage, etc., that no one ever looks at or reads. At SDF8, there is one of these DOL boards in each of the two large breakrooms and one in the ERC (employee resource center) computer room. Sometimes these DOL bulletin boards had furniture stacked in front of them. (I don't believe this was by design; it's just that no one cares about or pays attention to these boards.) So, I believe, three copies of the Settlement Agreement were posted at SDF8. To my knowledge, the company never attempted to inform associates about the Notice in

entrance-way bulletin boards, stand-up meetings, All Hands meetings, *A to Z magazine*, *inSTALLments*, Connections questions, calls to home, signs, or any other communications channel. As far as I know, I might be the only SDF8 Tier One employee who has ever read the Settlement Agreement. It is possible that the company failed to meet NLRB requirements regarding the Agreement.

There is small print at the bottom of the document stating that "This is an official notice, and must remain posted for 60 days." The Agreement Notice was not removed until sometime in February 2016, meaning the company allowed the Agreement Notice to remain posted much longer than it was required to, about a year.

April 2015 All hands meeting, "Letter to Matt":

Matt is an excellent public speaker. I have always enjoyed listening to him address employees at All Hands meetings, regardless of subject matter. He is composed, well prepared, knowledgeable about every aspect of the company, large or small, and fields questions with fluidity. It is hard to throw him a curve ball. Personally, he is disarming--professional, amiable, attentive.

I had never spoken with Matt personally before the April 1, 2015 all hands meeting. I had not gone into that meeting intending to speak with him, but something came up in the meeting that compelled me to do so.

I wasn't taking any notes or documenting anything at the time, so I don't remember any of the minutes from that meeting. It was, no doubt, standard fare. But towards the end of the meeting, Matt presented a short PowerPoint regarding Amazon's stance on unions. I believe it was accompanied by some stock photos or videos of Amazon workers happily doing their jobs, and some discussion about how unions are contrary to the company's production objectives. He ended the short presentation with something like--*It's not that we're against unions, we just don't believe they fit in well with our business model.*

Now, I had just discovered the National Labor Relations Board Agreement, and I was fairly familiar with its language. I was astonished by Matt's presentation. It made me think three things: the company has really big balls, the company is willing to walk a very fine line between legal and illegal activities, the company is willing to thumb its nose at the National Labor Relations Board.

Matt didn't write this presentation. It was undoubtedly scripted in Seattle. I might have imagined it, but I thought I noted an almost imperceptible faltering in his steadfast manner during the speech, as if he understood, as well as I did, the significance of what he was saying.

There was only one other time that I thought I noticed a similar hesitation from Matt. That was in his office, when I said to him, "It seems like Amazon spends a lot of resources manipulating employees rather than dealing with them honestly and directly."

When Matt was giving his *it's not that we're against unions* speech, I decided to speak with him after the meeting, if possible. After the meeting, still in the large west breakroom, he appeared to be free, so I walked up to him. He easily turned and focused his attention towards me, as he does with any employee who attempts to engage him. I hadn't thought about what I would say, but I said this: "What's the turnover rate here?" He said, "We generally don't discuss that." We spoke for a few minutes. I told him, "People are miserable here." He asked, "Why are you here?" Now, I don't believe the question "Why are you here?" is ever an appropriate response to a worker's grievance, but in Matt's defense, I was putting him on the spot pretty heavily, and he remained professional and friendly. The answer I gave was: "Well, the obvious answer is, I have to eat. But, also, I haven't given up on Amazon."

Matt's non-anti-anti-union speech directed to a captive audience at a mandatory All Hands meeting in April 2015 was the last vestige of the thick-headed, old anti-union message--clumsy, overt. The company has gotten much smarter, hired some occupational psychologists, changed to a psychological approach, revamped the whole program: Befriend workers with rhetoric and psychological manipulation. Gauge their mood with discreet daily psychological testing and intensive worker data analysis. Dominate dialogue. Minimize dissention. It wants to say--*You're important to us, and you're proud to be here. You're an important part of the team.*

Matt agreed to meet with me to discuss the issues we had touched on. I asked him if I could have a few weeks because I wanted to consolidate my concerns in written form. He said to make an appointment with his assistant in three weeks. I began writing "Letter to Matt." (LetterToMatt.pdf) I had originally intended that document to be a kind of union manifesto, but I thought better of it and changed the tone for a number of reasons: I have to eat. The company appeared to be making some changes. A union run would be a suicide mission. I thought I might even get a job offer out of it.

I made the appointment and met with Matt in his office, April 30th, 2015. Mostly, at that point, I just wanted to hand him the document. We had an interesting conversation. Matt, more than any manager, has been willing to speak with me a little more openly about the challenges the company and the workers face together, but, as much as I like him, he has a script, too. And for Matt, varying far from that script would change the very nature of his position with the company.

Two weeks later, we received a raise for the exact amount I had suggested, bringing starting wage from eleven up to twelve dollars per hour. (I can't take any credit for this. It had obviously been in the works already, but I believe the company saw the same problems I was seeing: a terrible reputation as an employer in the community and ridiculously high turnover [even by Amazon standards] was making it difficult to bring in enough employees to maintain operations.)

The timing of this raise is significant. SDF8 usually makes its "annual wage survey" and any adjustments in the fall. In the fall of 2015, SDF8 made no mention of its "annual wage survey" or adjustment, other than to point to the raise employees received in June. So, this was not an extra raise, but an early raise. I believed, and many new and seasoned employees repeated the sentiment, that it would have been good for labor relations had the company offered another small raise in the fall.

Matt later remarked, "Your paper was spot on." I met with him privately two more times in his office. I never got a specific job offer. We had some discussion of that, and I think Matt and some HR managers were trying to accommodate me, but as I mentioned above, my focus was changing, because the programs the company was implementing seemed to be designed, not to change actual policies, but to change the perception of those policies, both internally and externally. The last thing Matt said to me when I saw him on the production floor, shortly before he moved to his new position in Ohio, was, "You should come by my office, and we'll talk about where you want to be at Amazon." I never did. And when the Learning Department Senior Operations Manager, who knows I have an English degree, recently asked me, "Why didn't you apply for the open Learning Coordinator position?" (I was up on the mezzanine packing--transferred from pick for the day. Mezz-pack is a quieter pack area than AFE where each packer has his own separate workstation.) I said, "Look around at all the sad faces." He acknowledged this, and told me he had seen a young woman lying down on the floor of her workstation earlier that day. I said, "I don't want to perpetuate this. I want to fight this."

Physical environment, FC (fulfillment center) size:

The fulfillment center is austere, with utilitarian coloring and crushingly uniform design.

Workers constantly race--to their stations, at their stations, to their breaks, back to their stations, to the bathroom, to the door at end of shift.

Almost everyone stands, all day, except during very short breaks. Amazon employees stand, even when it doesn't seem to be a requirement of the work they are doing. It has always seemed to me that Amazon employees stand almost as a capricious rule.

Music is not allowed, no mp3 players, no books, no intellectual stimulation. These are not allowed past security. (I brought a book in once to read on break. I was stopped by a security guard while leaving the facility. He photographed the book, filled out a report, asked me where I got the book. I said, "Um, I think Amazon." He let me take the book and leave, and said not to bring books into the facility, they're not allowed.)

The fulfillment center is fairly cool in summer, warm in winter. It is widely theorized that this is not due to concern for employee health, safety, or comfort, but because Amazon has begun selling food and candy.

Many Amazon employees operate at a very high pace for ten to eleven hours per day, forty to sixty hours per week. Much of the work is on hard concrete and can wear a body down physically in short periods of time, leaving the employee little recourse.

Amazon fulfillment centers are big. The more efficient the work becomes, the less human it feels. Of course, Amazon is shifting much of the work to robots as quickly as it can. I haven't considered the conditions or implications of this shift in great detail. My focus is on SDF8, where the work is done by humans.

After I transferred to the Pick department, I saw a fellow worker from AFE. She had transferred to ICQA (inventory control quality assurance). ICQA can function as a haven for workers who are trying to relieve themselves of the constant physical demands of the fulfillment center. What these workers do more than anything is count items in a bin to verify inventory data. In AFE, my fellow worker usually re-binned. I said, "You used to really hustle over there." She said her feet would swell and then wouldn't heal by the next shift, so it had a cumulative effect. Her back bothered her. She said, "No one should do AFE. All that should be automated." In AFE, she had been a real go-getter, the kind of employee Amazon loves. She is strong and athletic, a young woman in her twenties. She wears athletic-type clothes. Her revelations made me think that many Amazon employees suffer their pains quietly.

Breaks, burden of time:

I don't believe there are any laws in Indiana regarding break times for employees. So, as far as I know, Amazon SDF8 does not have to offer its employees any breaks, other than an unpaid lunch. However, from my experience, standard practice would prescribe two fifteen minute breaks for an eight hour shift, and an extra break for a ten hour shift.

As I mentioned above, SDF8 employees get two fifteen minute breaks for a ten hour shift, shortened to ten for walk time. For an eleven hour shift, the second break is twenty minutes, shortened to fifteen for walk time.

So, not only are breaks shortened by walk time to and from workstations and pick mods, the time worked between breaks is excessive. In my opinion, these excessively long work sessions, coupled with inadequate break times, are important factors effecting worker fatigue, burnout, low morale, and turnover.

I noticed during peak, the second break of twenty minutes, shortened to fifteen for walk time, felt unusually relaxed. Another employee noticed it too, "If they would just give us fifteen minutes

instead of ten, it would be so much better. Everyone would benefit." As a solution to breaks, for our regular, ten hour shift, as well as the peak eleven hour shift, I suggest two twenty minute breaks, shortened to fifteen for walk time, and a third break of fifteen minutes, shortened to ten for walk time. This break schedule places the burden of walk time back on the company, where it must lie, and allows for reasonable rest periods for human workers moving continuously and repetitively for ten to eleven hours per day, four to five days per week.

As with many Amazon policies, the sacrifice is to be made by the least paid, already heavily burdened, most stressed employees. It is a general company strategy to compel Tier One employees to sacrifice in the spirit of vague customer-centrism. Employees are expected to maintain a high rate all day with no rests until break. Break is then shortened by walk time. It makes for a grueling day, day after day. HR issues, administration issues, scheduling and pay discrepancies, ERC (Employee Resources Center) issues, HUB issues, password issues are all expected to be taken care of during the employee's two ten-minute-per-day breaks, half hour lunch, or off the clock. If a worker wishes to deal with these issues during work time, it is time off task and subject to disciplinary action.

Scan to scan, pick to pick:

Break times are further eroded by an absurd rule by which the company insists that break times begin at the last scan and end at the first scan. Managers can easily track employees by the second on laptop computer spreadsheets. What makes the rule absurd is that the employee has work to do after making the last scan and prior to making the first scan.

For instance, at break time, a picker scans last item to begin break. If he is following procedure, he has scanned the item at 10am for morning break. His break has now officially begun. But, he is still standing in an aisle in the pick mod with an open bin drawer and a full tote. While officially on break, he replaces any items in the bin, closes the bin, pushes his cart to the nearest conveyor, presses "F/enter" on his scanner to finish the tote, places the tote on the conveyer, logs out, drops off his gun, walks to the breakroom or another chosen break destination. (Workers are not allowed to take breaks at workstations, and they are not allowed to sit at workstations at any time.)

In order to return from break on time, he will need to scan his first item by 10:15. While officially still on break, he leaves the breakroom, obtains a scanner, logs in, answers any Connections question, assesses location, walks up stairs to correct floor, obtains cart, obtains tote for cart, scans tote, walks to location, scans bin, scans first item. His break has now officially ended. He is on task.

A packer scans SP00 label on the last item she packed. Her break has now officially begun. (SP00 stands for Shipping Package #. When the SP00 label is applied to the package and

scanned, the package is ready to be addressed and shipped.) She places package on conveyor, walks to breakroom or another chosen break destination.

While still on break, she exits the breakroom, walks back to workstation, logs in, answers any Connections question, scans tote (or bin), scans item or items, scans packing slip, builds box, packs box, adds dunnage, seals box, affixes SP00, scans SP00. Her break has now officially ended. She is on task.

When break time and work time overlap one another, the burden is placed on the employee to reduce break time to meet work time expectations. I have been verbally reprimanded for being one minute late in AFE and two minutes late in pick. The manager who reprimanded me for being one minute late in AFE got an earful. I told him it is bad policy for a manager to hassle solid employees (I wasn't the only one), who show up day after day and do their jobs well, over such trivial matters. He walked away shaking his head, saying, "OK, sorry man." It is extremely rare for PA or AM to say, "Sorry, man." The burden is almost always placed on the Tier One employee to explain and defend herself for rate and TOT. The majority of these incidents would have been excused or should have already been noted as excused by a PA or AM. The majority of employees forced to defend themselves are average, hardworking employees who have no intention of abusing the system or putting one over on the company. In a nutshell, Amazon systematically hassles good employees for no good reason. This hassling results in resentment, fear, apathy, low morale, and possibly, "docile bodies."

I have gone round and round with managers over the scan to scan issue. I mentioned it fairly forcefully to Matt in "Letter to Matt." However, the policy always seems to creep back in. I am always a little bewildered when a manager says at stand-up meeting with a straight face, "Remember, break times are from last scan to first scan. This means your last pick is at 10:00 and your first pick is at 10:15."

UPT, VCP:

There are three types of time off for an Amazon Tier One associate: PTO (personal time--48 hours per year); UPT (unpaid time off--20 hours per quarter/80 per year); and Vacation (40 hours first year). PTO and vacation are distributed incrementally, a few hours per pay period. UPT is dispersed on the first day of the quarter in 20 hour chunks. Personal time and unpaid time off can be used anytime. Vacation must be requested twenty-four hours in advance, must be approved, and cannot be taken during blackout periods (peak and prime day). Full-time shifts at SDF8 are ten hours, so, forty-eight hours of personal time is not six days off per year, it is 4.8 days off. A full-time associate's weekly shift is four ten hour days, with a fifth day of mandatory overtime called at the company's discretion. If a worker is late or absent for mandatory overtime, she must cover the absence with PTO (personal time) or UPT (unpaid time off), unless she has been previously approved for vacation. An employee can accumulate a maximum of 80 hours

UPT in her account. If an employee falls below 0 hours of banked UPT, it is grounds for automatic dismissal.

The following examines UPT (unpaid time off) as it relates to VCP (variable compensation pay):

Any time the company discusses Tier One employee compensation, it always points to VCP (variable compensation pay) and stock as part of the employee's total compensation. The company knows that only a percentage of employees receive some VCP payouts, an even smaller percentage receive large or maximum VCP payouts, and an even smaller percentage ever receive any stock. (More on stock below.)

At orientation, the company shows new employees cartoon character videos of a hypothetical scenario where an associate, working for two or more years with the company, by combining base pay with VCP (variable compensation pay) and stock, is actually making [x] dollars per hour. The company, throughout the year, will re-show the video during some All hands meetings. In this way, Amazon explains to its employees how it reaches its figures regarding an employee's "total compensation package."

VCP (variable compensation pay) payouts are affected by two factors: 1) individual employee attendance, and 2) facility site to plan production goals. Monthly maximum VCP payouts for an employee, during the first three quarters of the year, are 8% gross pay from the previous month. For the fourth quarter (peak), maximum payouts are doubled to 16%, generally making December and January payouts pretty decent. So, in a normal month with a possible 8% VCP payout, 4% is based on an individual employee's use of UPT (unpaid time off) and 4% is based on attainment of facility wide production goals set by the company (which the individual employee has no control over.) If an employee uses one instance of UPT, the portion of VCP based on attendance is reduced to 2%. For the second instance of UPT usage, the attendance portion is reduced to 0%. The site to plan portion of VCP payouts is sometimes a full 4%, sometimes 2%, often 0%.

Most employees are aware of the relation between VCP (variable compensation pay) and UPT (unpaid time off) usage. Most employees start out determined not to use UPT. But most begin using it after some time as the employee will feel the need to extract herself from the work environment for periods of time in excess of regular (sometimes minimally scheduled) time off, even though the employee understands that it is a costly proposition.

What the company terms abuse of UPT can often be an act of desperation. The employee feels compelled to use UPT even though she understands that she will not only miss paid work hours, but she will have to pay back VCP (variable compensation pay) to the company for using those unpaid UPT hours. Using UPT (unpaid time off) becomes part of an employee's strategy for maintaining health, family obligations, life obligations, and work obligations.

UPT/VCP is a bit of sleight of hand by the company. I don't have the statistics, but I suspect this program takes millions of dollars a year in would-be pay and puts it back into Amazon capital.

It costs the employee. The employee has to pay the company to use it. Is VCP (variable compensation pay) pay? or benefit? or bonus? If the company is representing VCP as part of employee compensation, then it should be irrevocable, not subject to penalty for using company sanctioned, much needed time off. This is sleight of hand pay for real-as-it-gets work.

One employee put it this way: "UPT, people think it's a good thing, but it's not. They should just give us ten days a year personal time."

My suggestion to the company would be to eliminate forfeiture of pay for using UPT (unpaid personal time), and my suggestion to employees would be to demand this. Further, I would suggest eliminating VCP (variable compensation pay) in favor of a standardized living wage that I will discuss below.

October 2015 mass exodus:

At the beginning of 2014 peak, Amazon SDF8 deposited ten hours extra UPT (unpaid time off) in every employee's account. At the time, I assumed it did this because so many employees were falling critically low on UPT, that it was afraid of losing too many employees. I don't know. It might have just been a bonus to compensate for so much overtime. (Of course, UPT costs the company nothing other than missed, unpaid hours. In fact, the company recoups money, in the form of unpaid VCP.)

As I have indicated, UPT hours are distributed in blocks of twenty hours on the first day of each quarter. Often, on this first day, or during the first week of these unpaid time off distributions, many employees take advantage of this new allotment to leave for an hour, hours, or a day. Often, this many employees using UPT will trigger mandatory overtime later in the week. It creates a vicious circle. The employee depletes his UPT to get some much needed time off, only to be scheduled to work on his day off later that week or the next.

The fourth quarter 2015 UPT was distributed on October first. I knew a lot of people took off using unpaid time off that week, and then, mandatory overtime was called for virtually every shift. But I didn't know exactly how many until I read the following exchange on the Voice of Associate board:

From the VOA board 10/10/15: "Why can't we get 10 hours UPT like last year for working so much overtime? It's not fair to us, don't you think?"

The company response from Matt on 10/11/15: "Last year the FC [fulfillment center] went into MOT [mandatory overtime] in mid-August and did not come off until January. Since Prime Day

the most MOT for any shift has been 3 instances. The MOT called for this week is directly related to the 25,000 hours of UPT used for the first week of October. Please do not expect to receive any further UPT this year and plan accordingly."

SDF8 might have had roughly three thousand employees at the time. If so, this makes an average of 8.3 UPT hours used per employee during the first week of October 2015. This means, on average, each SDF8 employee used 41.5 percent of his allotment of UPT for the next three months in the first week.

The above event is telling. Employees are desperate to get out of the facility, and only a little more desperate to keep their jobs. I thought the October mass exodus was funny. Management seemed pretty miffed about it. (Tier One employees did, contrary to what Matt wrote in October, receive 10 more hours of UPT at the end of 2015 as part of the peak incentives, saving the company a considerable amount on the December [payable January] VCP payout, the heaviest payout of the year.)

The company sometimes strategically offers extra UPT during peak and Prime Day periods, as an ostensible employee incentive, in order to keep attendance high, knowing that when employees use the UPT within the same month, it will save the company from making large VCP payouts the following month that might have been accumulated during these high employee-hour periods. For instance, for Prime Day season 2016, the company offered an extra 2 hours UPT (unpaid time off) for each week of perfect attendance June 19th through July 30th. A single hour usage of this UPT by the end of July, would cost an employee a 2% VCP (variable compensation pay) payout of his gross pay for July which will have included a considerable amount of mandatory overtime pay. Two instances of UPT usage will cost him a 4% VCP payout, his entire attendance VCP.

Stock, shareholders:

New Amazon Tier One employees receive a small number of restricted stock units (RSUs) within the first month of hire. These shares are set to vest after two years of continuous service. For every year of continuous service, an employee receives another small number of shares of restricted stock, always vesting two years of service later. For example, I received four shares on 8/27/14 set to vest on 8/31/16. I received four more shares on 4/2/15 set to vest on 7/1/17. I received three shares on 4/7/16 set to vest on 6/16/18.

Like VCP (variable compensation pay), these restricted stock units give the impression of compensation with little actual payout. I received my initial four RSUs on 8/27/14. At the time, they were worth in the neighborhood of \$325 each, around a thousand dollars total, yet with zero vestment, their value was and remained zero until I made it to two years of continuous service. After two years of service, the shares were distributed to me on 8/31/16, free and clear, after

considerable tax penalties. The stock price at that time was \$765. RSU distributions are heavily taxed, at around one third. So, my net distribution was \$1,927. It appears there is no way to roll over the entire value, deferring taxation. So, after two years, I received net stock worth around four week's gross pay or about \$963 per year or about \$80 per month. Or, at a conservative estimate of 2,200 hours per year, about \$.44 per hour.

I have noted above that very few Tier One employees ever make it to two years of continuous service. Few Tier One employees ever claim their stock shares. In orientation and All hands meetings, the company gives examples of the employee who has worked for two years and receives large VCP payouts and stock. Both of these are rare, but the stock payouts are exceedingly so. Anecdotally, I would put the number of new-hire full-time Tier One associates who ever receive vested stock shares at less than five percent. I don't have the data.

The company uses the illusion of company ownership to attempt to manipulate employees. Managers will often note in stand-up meetings, "We are all shareholders in the company." And, "Good news for everyone! Today Amazon stock is up to [x] dollars per share!"

One manager confided in me that he hates it when he has to say Tier One employees are shareholders. Interestingly, he said this, not because so few ever receive stock, but because it is a token amount that is then heavily taxed.

Amazon VCP and RSUs are code for: *We're going to pay you on the back-end, not on the front-end, and there is a good chance you are never going to see it.*

I was glad to receive my stock on moral principle alone. For me or any other Amazon employee who sticks it out for two years, it is a small reward, but I'll take it! Amazon Tier One employees are generally not in a position to roll these insignificant stock distributions into investments. Several employees I know have sold their stock shares to pay for badly needed vehicle upgrades and family emergencies.

For the very few workers who last two years at Amazon, getting a few shares of stock is great. Who wouldn't want it? But the restricted stock program should never replace or interfere with a living hourly wage for Tier One hourly workers. Hourly workers need immediate compensation for immediate work provided to the company. RSUs, for the hourly employee, should always be supplemental to, not a replacement for, a living wage. Amazon should compensate Tier One employees with a living wage even if it means discontinuing the RSU program for Tier One employees. The RSU program, for the majority of Tier One workers, is already meaningless.

Young men managers:

Floor managers at SDF8 (Area Managers and Operations Managers) are overwhelmingly young men. (I differentiate between these managers who are salaried and PAs [production assistants])

who are Tier Three hourly employees. [There is no tier two designation at SDF8--it has been eliminated.] Tier Three production assistants act as managers, make a couple dollars more per hour than Tier One workers, and are underpaid. There are many women PAs.)

I only have minimal contact with one woman AM (Area Manager), and she has been with the company less than one year. All Operations Managers (superior to AMs) are men, as far as I know.

(Addendum: The company announced in the September 2016 All hands meeting that between June and September 2016, Amazon SDF8 hired fifteen new Area Managers, seven of whom are women, and promoted two internally, one of whom is a woman promoted from Area Manager to Operations Manager. This is a drastic hiring ratio change.)

Young men managers are hungry, enthusiastic, mobile, pliant. They follow orders without asking too many questions about policies and repeat the same script with no variance as if they are trained to do so. And, let's face it, these young men, like Tier One workers, simply need a job.

"The Offer":

There has been considerable publicity regarding Amazon's "The Offer" program. CBS did a story on it. (<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/amazon-pays-employees-5000-to-quit/>) CBS reports that "Amazon said it got the idea from Zappos.com" This relation to Zappos' "offer" is well documented, as is Amazon's 2009 purchase of Zappos. But Amazon's "The Offer" is related to Zappos's "The Offer" in idea and name only. To say that Amazon's pay to quit program were inspired by Zappos's would be misleading.

Zappos made "The Offer" to new employees in the first weeks of employment. Zappos's "The Offer" indicated a long-term investment in employees and extended an open, sincere hand of trust. Zappos's early philosophy made the highest customer satisfaction and the highest employee satisfaction interdependent goals. "Zappos executives set long-term goals for 2010: achieve \$1 billion in sales and receive inclusion on Fortune's list of The Best Companies to Work For." (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zappos>) No such wording regarding employee satisfaction exists in Amazon's Leadership Principles, Global Work Tenets, or mission statements. Amazon's philosophy reverses Zappos's: The highest customer satisfaction necessitates a difficult work environment with stressed employees.

Amazon extends "The Offer" to Tier One employees once a year, right after peak season. Workers with one or more years of service are eligible. During this post-peak period, the company probably has an excess of temporary workers ready to replace any outgoing, seasoned full-time workers who might take "The Offer."

Amazon offers the employee a small payment to leave and never come back to any Amazon facility or subsidiary, even as a temp through Integrity or other channels. Accepting "The Offer" ends employment eligibility with the company forever. When I mention this aspect of "The Offer" to friends or coworkers, the reaction is almost universal, "That's cold."

The payment is \$2000 for one to two years of service (marked by number of peaks worked), \$3000 for three, \$4000 for four, \$5000 for five or more. These payments are taxed at a much higher rate than regular income, particularly relative to Amazon Tier One employee tax brackets--I believe at almost half. For the one or two year employee, the net payment would amount to about two week's pay. "The Offer" is widely understood by Amazon employees to be a "bad deal." I know one employee who took "The Offer" and regrets it. He said the payment after taxes was minimal, and he can never work for Amazon, even as a temp during peak. This particular employee, incidentally, was an amazing worker with rates off the charts.

It appears that Amazon accomplishes two goals with "The Offer." It removes inveterate employees whom the company might consider a liability and an unnecessary expense so it can replace them with fresh new-hires at starting wage with no tenure regarding benefits. It saves the company money in stock payouts, 401k payouts, regular and overtime pay, vacation pay, VCP payments, other benefits. In this way, "The Offer" payout is quickly recovered, and what remains is all savings to the company.

Amazon saves money at any time when an employee accepts "The Offer." But there seems to be an optimum target employee-attrition-date-range for the company to achieve the greatest benefit--possibly around one and a half to three years. I'll use myself as an example:

"The Offer" will next be available to me in February 2017. I will have been with the company for around two and a half years and will have worked through three peaks--2014, 2015, 2016. Having worked through three peaks, I will be eligible for a \$3,000 gross payment from Amazon in early February 2017 to quit and never return to any Amazon subsidiary, as stipulated by the rules of "The Offer." If I were to accept this deal, how much will the company save?

Amazon has a 4% company 401k match program that is zero vested until three years of continuous service, when it becomes fully vested. A conservative estimate of that company match portion of my 401k vesting in 2017 will be \$1,500. The company will never pay this portion if I take "The Offer" in February 2017. The above mentioned four restricted stock units I received on 4/2/15 set to vest on 7/1/17 will be forfeited, as well as any future stock payouts. At a conservative price of \$750, this will save the company a gross stock payout of \$3,000 in 2017. At the current pay scale, my wages for 2017 will be \$13.00 per hour, and \$13.50 starting in August. (\$13.50 is topped-out at SDF8.) The starting wage of for a new-hire who will replace me is \$12.00 per hour, and \$12.25 after six months. By replacing me with a new-hire, Amazon SDF8 will save conservatively \$2,000 in regular-hour pay, and conservatively, \$150 in overtime pay in 2017. These figures combine for a conservative estimate of \$6,650. Subtract Amazon's

\$3,000 gross "The Offer" payout it will have made to me in early February, and the net savings to the company for 2017 if I accept "The Offer" would conservatively be \$3,650. This figure does not include savings in paid vacation, VCP, or any other soft savings. This figure only includes Amazon's savings for 2017, not future years. One can see that when Amazon replaces seasoned workers with new-hires, it saves the company a lot of money. If the company churns employees, continually replacing its workforce with new-hires, and in turn, employing those new-hires for limited tenures and then replacing them, it's a labor windfall.

(Addendum: Amazon SDF8 announced the results of its "annual wage survey" during the September 2016 All hands meeting. The pay scale was unchanged for new-hires and employees with under one year of service. Employees with over one year of service received a small raise ranging from \$.25 per hour to \$.90 per hour. So, the starting wage remains \$12.00 per hour, and the topped-out wage [for three years of service] is now \$14.40 per hour. This new pay scale increases the company's labor attrition savings and continues Amazon's strategy of offering future rewards to employees who will not be here. By forming a collective bargaining unit [a union], hourly employees can negotiate their wages with Amazon, rather than relying on the company's "annual wage survey.")

"The Offer" is a way of getting rid of higher paid employees with stock set to vest, etc., and getting rid of burned-out employees, the inevitable condition of employees in the Amazon fulfillment center work environment. It twists the spirit of Zappos's offer into a cost effective way of removing long-term employees.

The company announces "The Offer" each year in stand-up meetings, *inSTALLments*, All hands meetings, etc. In the January 18, 2016 (week 3) *inSTALLments*, it gives this explanation:

"Amazon offers a unique program called The Offer, designed to ensure that we employ individuals who share our customer-centric philosophy, and who are committed to improving all aspects of the Amazon customer experience. . . . "

The above statement appears to be a watered down version of the "best interests" language prohibited by the National Labor Relations Board Agreement, and indicates to me that the company is not letting up from this language. It says: *If you don't agree with the company, the company doesn't want you here.*

The philosophy of customer-centrism dictates that low wages, harsh working conditions, employee manipulation, and short tenure are essential to the highest standards of customer service. The employee is asked to commit to a philosophy of her own instability.

Further down in the same *inSTALLments* explanation, the company lists the payout amounts per peaks worked. One employee added his own message to the *inSTALLments* flyer posted in the men's bathroom with black pen. Beside each amount, he wrote, "1/2," and beside that, he wrote, "Don't forget about telling them about the taxes coming out."

Living wage:

Employees do not work at Amazon to unconditionally support the company, any more than vice-versa. Workers have taken a hit over the last ten, twenty, thirty years. At one point, a full-time job with a large, successful company was the recipe for a comfortable living (if not the American dream). It is not so at Amazon. The respect and dignity the employee receives for her role in getting the customer her order is in question. Any group of citizens can either accept this phenomenon as the order of the 21st century, or it can choose to disagree, and to reject the idea that this instability is the inevitable condition of working at Amazon.

By paying its workers a living wage, Amazon would be better positioned to elicit the kind of efficiency and dedication that it demands. It will value its employees, rather than following the current strategy of squeezing them, using them up, and replacing them.

My suggestion for this living wage is sixteen to seventeen dollars per hour. I encourage the company to err on the high side. This living wage would ease much of the burden currently faced by SDF8 employees and would indicate the company acts on the value of the employee commensurate with company rhetoric. Some SDF8 employees feel this figure undervalues them and falls short of comparable wages for comparable work environments. I will defer to the majority. For now, I am advocating sixteen to seventeen dollars per hour as the starting wage at Amazon SDF8 arrived at through labor contract negotiations. Without a labor contract, Amazon is free to increase wages and later lower them. Amazon SDF8 has, indeed, lowered the Tier One topped-out wage in the past.

It is understandable that the company does not want dead weight. It wants to remain fluid, dynamic, and efficient at every level. Pay for this! Be honest about these conditions right up front with workers. Demand the highest standards, but compensate for these demands fairly, not deceitfully.

Amazon doesn't want a union. This is why I believe the company should raise wages, strengthen and streamline its workforce, and continue to move into the millennium without cumbersome, outdated workforce relations problems.

The sixteen to seventeen dollars per hour figure meets several thresholds: provides equitable compensation for a low skilled job that requires an intense level of commitment from the employee to the employer; demonstrates a symbiotic relationship rather than an adversarial and exploitative relationship; provides immediate compensation for work and sacrifice provided to the company, not a distant, intangible reward, or token games and bonuses, that, more than likely, the employee will never receive. The sixteen to seventeen dollar figure takes these jobs out of the range of misery and puts them into the category of "a good job with benefits."

There would be a higher demand for these jobs, and Amazon can begin to be the employer it projects itself to be. Turnover rates would be greatly reduced. Employees, relieved of much of

the burden of low income and familial stress associated with being an Amazon associate, would be more inclined towards true customer-centricity. Management-employee relationships would improve. Amazon would begin to generate a desperately needed aura of authenticity.

One thoughtful and insightful employee whom I particularly enjoy talking to, and who, I believe, has an intuitive understanding of the Amazon worker relations dynamic, said to me, "They are exhausted, they do not receive compensation for being there all the time. They need money to work on themselves a little bit, travel a little bit, maybe go to the theater, maybe not go to the seaside every year, but maybe every other year."

Employees/customers, employee-centric/customer-centric:

What is Amazon's responsibility to its Employees? Then, what is Amazon's responsibility to its customers regarding the company's employees? Does the company have an obligation to its patronage to treat its employees with respect and dignity? What Amazon does not give its customers, in terms of service, is the gratifying experience of doing business with a company that believes in the value and dignity of its employees.

I've been an Amazon customer since 2005. I have bought a lot of books, and a lot of other cool stuff from Amazon, for myself, family, and friends. I am on my third Kindle, although, all three have been gifts. (I prefer reading traditional, printed books, although I like the convenience of the Kindle in certain settings.)

As a long-term customer, I, for one, say, yes, Amazon does owe it to me to pay the workers who fill my orders a living wage and provide them with a healthy, secure work environment. As a customer, I am willing to pay an extra \$.25 per item to ensure this, and I am willing to remove my business if it is not ensured, even if I suffer a little inconvenience in finding other companies to fill my orders, of which there are many. Or, I can drive downtown to a store. In fact, even though I get a limited ten percent employee discount, I just don't buy much from Amazon anymore.

Customer-centricity among Tier One workers is a myth. I have never heard a Tier One employee mention the words. Employees care about working, getting paid, and going home to pay a few bills and spend a couple days with their families and friends.

Many SDF8 managers know my name because I am a squeaky wheel. I think one has to be a squeaky wheel at Amazon, or one just has to take what it gives you. Possibly, the only way to resolve these issues is for all of the hundreds of thousands of Amazon employees to squeak together. It is my belief that Amazon has the ability, power, and resources to be an employee-centric company to the very extent that it strives to be a customer-centric company. That is, a no-holds-barred, unfaltering commitment to the employee. It is also my belief that this commitment

to the employee can only strengthen the company's commitment to its customers worldwide. Employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction are not mutually exclusive. Every company chooses how it will manage both.

Labor commodity, negotiate:

When all the rhetoric is cleared away, every Amazon employee should understand the basic foundation of her relationship with the company. Amazon wants to get the most labor out of her as it can, while paying her the least amount of money it can. This is Amazon's labor relations one basic principle.

Given this knowledge, there is no reason why every employee would not want to get as much pay for her labor as she can--negotiate a higher pay in the same way Amazon negotiates for everything it buys or sells with every vendor. One employee negotiating is laughable, an unhappy joke. But, by law, the company has to negotiate with an organized group of employees (a union of employees), and, by law, the current wage is the starting point of these negotiations. It can't go lower.

There is nothing impolite about asking for more money. Amazon is a business, and an employee's family is a business.

It is obvious from its practices that Amazon is not an employee's friend, does not want to be an employee's friend, but stands to profit by giving that impression. Having a friendly relationship with an employer is great. I've had that before, but I believe Amazon is about the last place on Earth for that to happen. In fact, Amazon is very open about its use of data--that each employee is a number--a data point. The employer-employee relationship is a business relationship based on performance, and that is all. The employer and the employee have the prerogative to negotiate the best terms for this relationship. Amazon already does this--its goal is to achieve the most production from employees for the least cost with few other considerations, and it does this using a variety of strategies that I have outlined, and surely some I have missed. The employee, however, within the current system of labor relations practiced by Amazon, does not speak, doesn't engage, she can take it or leave it, and that is about it. Most leave it after a short time. Others stay, until, they too, have had enough. It is entirely within their power to implement new terms to their employment that are more edifying to themselves and their families.

Mandatory overtime, families:

Mandatory overtime removes parents from children's presence for substantial periods of formative years, infant to teen, but parent-workers cannot pay for normal expenses without

overtime, creating a vicious circle, a hamster wheel effect, and family stress for workers at Amazon.

Overtime requirements puts the employee on unpaid on-call every week and also puts the family and children of the employee on-call for the parent to be absent ten hours per week. This on-call requirement protects the company regarding volume fluctuations. Overtime is mandatory. If an employee misses it, he must forfeit UPT, personal time, or vacation. Mandatory overtime can be called as late as the end of shift the day before. Frequently, mandatory overtime is called for the week, and then cancelled at the last minute.

Family members, particularly the worker's child/children know that the worker might be called to work for a ten hour overtime day, every week of the year. The cumulative effect of these absences is incalculable.

An Operations Manager gave these statistics for SDF8 Inbound department at the February 3rd, 2016 All hands meeting. (Pick and pack are Outbound, but I would imagine the figures are comparable.): 2015 Overtime--8 weeks (3 consecutive); 2014 Overtime--24 consecutive weeks (if my notes are correct). These figures might indicate the company is aware of excessive overtime requirements and has been making efforts to alleviate this problem. However, mandatory overtime in 2016 has been extremely high. As of 6/8/2016, the DB3 shift had worked 13 weeks mandatory overtime. My shift, DA5, had worked 6 weeks mandatory overtime. Often, it is the luck of the draw, depending on the employee's shift assignment, whether the employee is forced to work on his on-call overtime day. Company production volume requirements always supersede worker life obligations. The employee must appear or forfeit time-off hours. Mandatory overtime has been exceedingly high in the third quarter of 2016 as well, leaving employees already tired and burned-out leading into peak season.

When not assigned mandatory overtime, many Tier One associates find it necessary to volunteer for overtime to make ends meet. Maintaining a reliable vehicle, buying groceries, paying utilities, phone, gas, insurance, housing, medical bills and dental services--these obligations become extremely difficult to manage on a regular forty hour paycheck. These problems are certainly systemic in the United States and world economies, but I am focusing on SDF8 in Jeffersonville, IN, USA.

Employees try to maintain lives outside of Amazon. It can be difficult to find time for exercise, kids, sleep, housework, pets. Social life is severely restricted. Employees have to work overtime just to pay for life's basic necessities. They do not use the extra money to get ahead, only to stay afloat. Parents might have a feeling that their relationships with their children are falling out of their grasp.

Sometimes, management hints that mandatory overtime is the associates' doing, implying that employees create mandatory overtime for themselves. A manager said in stand-up, "You need to work hard and make your rate to reduce MOT." Matt certainly implied UPT abuse was at the

root of the October 2015 labor-hour crisis, without addressing the greater issues implicit within that event.

Amazon will adjust an employee's schedule for school, but not for parental obligations. I believe school is the only thing it will make accommodations for. The company rolled out new, liberal maternity/paternity leave policies in 2015. I applaud it, but once the leave is over, the parent is on his own.

Cell phones are not allowed for Tier One employees. In today's culture, families rely on cell phone connectivity for everything. Tier One employees leave these communication channels at the door. Tier Three, salaried managers, HR, facility technicians can carry their phones.

Young people:

It is sad for me to see how visibly demoralized young, vibrant workers become after a very short period of time in the SDF8 work environment. While I'm not convinced unionization is the only way to solve the company's labor problems, as a civic exercise for young people, I think it would be awesome. And if the young people of Amazon choose to engage in such a venture, I've got their back. This exercise would require the power of social media. This power harnessed with the power, enthusiasm, and cool factor of the young would make for an interesting, if not doomed, effort.

Latinos, immigrants:

There are many immigrants working at SDF8--Mexicans, Cubans, Eastern Europeans, Middle Easterners, Nepalese, Africans, many others. What will their role be at Amazon? They seem to come and go at similar ratios as the general population. Their positions seem equally precarious, maybe more so, given the difficulties of language integration and cultural integration. It is my desire to help these individuals any way that I can.

Anti-union, propaganda:

Many young people don't even know what a union is. They are susceptible to anti-union propaganda that masquerades as impartial information such as the web site [unionfacts.com](https://www.unionfacts.com). (<https://www.unionfacts.com>) Employees should always consider the source of the information they are receiving. I feel fairly confident saying that information suggesting unions hurt labor originates from corporate sources, and information suggesting unions help labor originates from labor sources and public entities whose mandate is to protect workers. In other words, groups who have to pay for labor in contrast with groups who sell their labor and protect labor.

Probably the safest and the most balanced information is available from the above mentioned National Labor Relations Board (<https://www.nlr.gov/>) and the United States Department of Labor. The DOL's Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that median weekly wages in the transportation and warehousing industry in 2015 were roughly 30% higher for union employees compared to non-union. (http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.t04.htm#union_a04.f.1)

I haven't heard the company mention unions since Matt's statements at the All Hands meeting April 2015, but I don't believe it feels the need to. It has developed initiatives to deter such developments. But if Amazon feels that the associates of SDF8 or any other Amazon facility are leaning towards unionization, it will bring out the big guns. Amazon has in place well-oiled and well-financed anti-union machinery.

Union fight:

With SDF8 hiring two-thirds new people every year, two thousand in 2015 to maintain a (growing) roster of three thousand, it seems almost impossible to form a union, but not entirely.

Amazon knows as well as anyone that a fast and high turnover rate, coupled with internal movement, makes organizing a union very difficult. But, I don't think it is inconceivable. The culture created by the work environment makes organizing a union desirable for employees. This desire to change the SDF8 labor horizon might be enough to counteract this difficulty.

Amazon employees should talk openly and frequently about their working conditions, wages, benefits, and whether they believe together that an SDF8 union is something they want. Talking openly every day is not only a federally protected legal right, it is essential, in order to drastically reduce the turnover rate, bullying, and manipulation by the company. As I have indicated, it is my opinion that Amazon has strategically designed a system where this free exchange is limited.

It is my estimation that the company would brutally beat down any such movement and anyone involved in it, and afterwards a company spokesperson would issue a statement like:

“With today’s vote against third-party representation, our employees have made it clear that they prefer a direct connection with Amazon. This direct connection is the most effective way to understand and respond to the wants and needs of our employees. Amazon’s culture and business model are based on rapid innovation, flexibility and open lines of direct communication between managers and associates.” (<https://time.com/956/how-amazon-crushed-the-union-movement/>)

I know Amazon doesn't want to deal with the layer of bureaucracy that a union might interject into its operations. By nature, this interjection limits the company's ability to quickly form and implement new policies regarding its workforce and operations. Of course, this might be a good thing in certain scenarios.

One pro-union employee said, "There is no way the company would allow it. Amazon leases the SDF8 facility. If there were a successful union vote, the company would just close the facility and move it across the river, saying it wants to be closer to the airport." (He is referring to a move across the Ohio River from Jeffersonville, IN to Louisville, KY, a few miles away.) I have no knowledge of the terms regarding Amazon's lease of the SDF8 facility, but I believe this employee is correct in at least one way. It appears that closing up shop and moving a group, department, or even an entire facility under any pretext has become the default trump card for an organization that does not wish to legally recognize a union.

Another Tier One employee said, "They'd fire us all."

A facilities tech said, "They'd shut the building down." Another tech said, "That's a forbidden word around here." (Facilities techs are the technicians who maintain the building, conveyors, and industrial systems, as well as more mundane tasks such as repairing push carts and building shelves. They are somewhat insulated from the conditions I have been describing, as their department enjoys a certain level of autonomy. The technicians are fairly well paid, they work at a comfortable pace, and there is little turnover. At the same time, their department is vulnerable, because much of their work could easily be shifted to subcontractors.)

It is apparent from these workers' comments that the prevailing perception is that Amazon does not allow free and open exchange regarding unions, and, whether this perception is accurate or not, all of these workers feel that Amazon SDF8 would not allow them to form a union and keep their jobs.

However, if it were to move the facility because of a union vote, even a company like Amazon might have a tough time explaining that move away. SDF8 is a new, record-breaking, flagship fulfillment center. In the February 3rd All hands meeting, the company offered some statistics regarding how successful SDF8 has been. I will discuss these statistics below. Also, of course, Amazon is already on the NLRB's radar.

I have never felt compelled to write about any labor issues at all before becoming employed by Amazon. If my fellow employees were to support unionization openly, I would support it and put everything I have into making it happen. We would have to come with some serious game, because the company would pull out some nasty shit for that fight.

In the past, in response to any hint of union activity, Amazon has held special All hands meetings to explain why a union is not good for Amazon and its workers. A Tier One employee who has worked at SDF8 since it opened related to me one such event. The employee said, "They called all of us in there and told us, 'There are some people out in the parking lot that are going to ask you to sign some papers, don't you sign anything.' It turns out it was a false alarm, because those people were looking for another facility. They weren't even trying unionize here." (These are the employee's words, and I am sure he is paraphrasing, as the meeting took place in 2013.)

Considering Amazon's past opposition to unionization, these kinds of meetings in the future will be, by nature and action, an attempt to "discourage" employees from organizing. What else could these "information" meetings be? The meetings certainly aren't meant to encourage or support labor organization. The company certainly can't claim neutrality. I don't believe these kinds of heavy-handed interventions in union activity should be tolerated by workers or the National Labor Relations Board. However, I do understand that they exist by precedent.

While these meetings are marginally legal, provided the company follows specific rules (which remains questionable) regarding what it says to employees, the meetings certainly violate the spirit of the NLRA (National Labor Relations Act). Specifically, the employees are held as a captive audience in such meetings, and the information provided advances Amazon's corporate position only. Every employee should understand the exact nature of these meetings. Amazon holds union "facts" and "information" meetings because it does not want to negotiate pay, benefits, and working conditions with workers; it wants to dictate pay, benefits, and working conditions to workers. Every SDF8 Tier One employee I have ever spoken to understands the current system: Amazon dictates; employees submit, quit, or get fired.

Union how to:

Employees have said to me, "If we were to do something, I don't even know how we would do it. How do you even form a union?"

I have never started a union, but it seems pretty straightforward to me. The National Labor Relations Board has the facts. The NLRB is the federal organization that governs unions, and it is this organization that will conduct any union ballot at SDF8, should the associates decide to raise such an initiative.

The NLRB "Employee Rights" are posted in each breakroom. This poster has definitive information about what employees and the company can and can't do regarding labor organization. Any employee can read this poster and have a good understanding of federal law regarding unions. It states, for instance, "Under the NLRA, you have the right to: Bargain collectively through representatives of employees' own choosing for a contract with your employer setting your wages, benefits, hours, and other working conditions."

It also states, among other things, "Under the NLRA, it is illegal for your employer to: Question you about your union support or activities in a manner that discourages you from engaging in that activity."

It also states plainly, "Illegal conduct will not be permitted. If you believe your rights or the rights of others have been violated, you should contact the NLRB promptly to protect your rights"

There are several wikiHow pages with what appear to be no-nonsense descriptions of how to form a union. On the surface, it seems about as easy as a group getting together and saying, "Let's vote ourselves a union." When the company says, "Oh, you shouldn't do that," you say, "No thanks, we're going to do it anyway." Vote yes, and then enter into negotiations for wages, benefits, hours, and working conditions.

There are many steps, but I see three to focus on, fail on any one of the three, and risk failure on all: 1) Sign cards of intent. The law requires, in essence, a two-step vote. First, the employee must sign a card of intent, then the actual vote to ratify the union comes after. Many successful card initiations have gone on to fail at the final vote. 2) Vote yes. All the preparation, all the organization, all the excitement (or apprehension) means nothing without a successful vote. I would guess that most promising union beginnings fail at the vote for two reasons--inadequate organization and pressure from the company. 3) Negotiate a contract. A successful union vote will not, in itself, satisfy the needs of the employees. An equitable contract will need to be negotiated. The employees will want to elect or hire savvy representatives for this process. I could see this third step possibly being the trickiest of all the steps.

Talk openly about what you think the goals of labor should be in terms of wages, job security, benefits, safety. Wear union themed clothing if you wish.

Always consider the source (as well as hidden sources) of the information you are receiving, and ignore company fear mongering or fake smiles.

Ignore company rhetoric as if it were background noise; it only has meaning if you give it meaning. Do not be fearful. Do not be scared to lose your job.

Do not fear. The law is on your side. The NLRB has your back. It is the company that is afraid of you. You need not be afraid of it.

Stand together. Amazon is a corporation with tremendous resources. Only as a group can you negotiate with it. It will do everything it can, "mobilize its entire arsenal," to convince you that a union is not in your interest. All you have to do is decide that it is.

Stand up for your co-workers and their families. Show them love. Do not let them fall.

Fear of losing your job is a weakness on which anti-labor interests will be sure to capitalize. Consider what is at stake, and be ready to forfeit your job.

I have been focusing on company fear-mongering, but also consider that Amazon might take an opposite course, attempting to demonstrate how open and friendly the company is. It might even offer a small pay raise or begin allowing mp3 players to appease employees. Follow your own beliefs in this regard.

I want, here, to make a small preemptive argument regarding union dues:

A common concern of non-union employees is that after a union is ratified, they will be forced to pay union dues. Union dues are small payments that are deducted from union members' paychecks and deposited in the union treasury. Union dues are necessary and insignificant when compared to substantial wage increases and protections a union will offer SDF8 hourly employees. To me, these union dues are simply a non-issue and something I gladly and voluntarily *want* to pay.

Union dues are a favorite argument of anti-union consultants--firms companies pay massive fees to conduct anti-union offensives. This is a suspicious argument. Consider the source. A company that desperately wants to pay you less money will tell you: *A union only wants your money.*

Union dues go to administrative costs and strike pay among other various organizational and operational costs. Dues are a good investment directly benefiting the workers who pay them. I want to be part of a strong union, and I want it well funded.

Despite federal employee protections, I believe Amazon will stop at nothing to prevent a union, maybe even go as far as closing the facility under specious pretext. So, expect that to lose your job is a real possibility, and move forward without fear, following whatever convictions you have. This lack of fear will give you tremendous negotiating power.

February 2016 All hands:

The meeting began with up-beat music and the a video of the Nintendo 64 kid freaking out over his Christmas gift. The company added a caption: "You get to be a part of this." (This ubiquitous video was recorded in 1998 and has nothing to do with Amazon.) Another video followed, with a "huge thank you for all associates" from Jeff Bezos and members of corporate management.

A Senior Operations Manager took the floor and went over a list of successes for the year. He reiterated the one dollar raise Tier One associates received in June. SDF8 hired 2,000 full-time Amazon employees and 1,000 Integrity in 2015. The SOM listed a few of the 2015 peak incentives offered to Tier One employees by the company such as "pie a manager," "balloons," and "Crush It Week," where managers handed out Orange Crush sodas at shift changes. "Crush It Week" also contained a clause that if the facility broke production records, specifically, if employees shipped 700,000 units per day for two days in a row, Matt would shave his head. (This was ironic, because Matt always wears a crew cut, and when, indeed, employees were shown a video of Matt having his head shaved, it was simply buzz cut with electric clippers.)

Employees understand the discrepancy between the value of these ridiculous, grade-school incentives and the massive revenue workers help create for the company with the following production numbers:

Apparel is one of the fastest growing segments for the company. SDF8 saw production records shattered during 2015 peak. The one-day Inbound record of 736,202 units was a 21.5% increase over the previous record. A one-shift record of 389,986 was a 26.9% increase. One-week of 4,346,357 was a 17.5% increase. A one year Outbound record of 105,090,901 units shipped was a 29% increase over 2014. The SOM categorized these production figures as "huge," and said SDF8 is a "record breaking facility."

Matt took the floor and went over "The Offer." He said, "Of the 3,000 Amazonians we have currently, two-thirds have not had 'The Offer.'" "The Offer" is available for 7 days. "The Offer" is a "voluntary resignation" rendering you "ineligible for rehire." He concluded, "We don't want anyone to take 'The Offer' . . . We want people who want to be here . . . Taking the offer severs your relationship with the Amazon."

Sunender spoke after Matt, first focusing on Connections questions. He noted that Connections collected 3.1 million responses across the network during peak, emphasizing "team spirit." Positive responses to the "two top questions," "Is your manager willing to help you?" and "Do your team members make your work more enjoyable?" "highlight change in culture" from 2014.

Sunender announced current organizational changes: A young man manager will be the new Outbound Senior Operations manager. Another young man manager will be the new Senior Change Manager. Another young man manager will be the new Inbound Senior Operations manager. Most significantly, Matt will be moving to launch CMH1 in Columbus, Ohio. Sunender will be Matt's successor as the new SDF8 General Manager.

Sunender also announced a new SDF8 program to recruit at local high schools. This is a bit heartbreaking to me, knowing what these kids will face at Amazon and what their chances will be of making a successful run as an Amazon employee. Jobs for young people are not always easy to come by, but because of the exploitative nature of SDF8 employment, I suggest to local high schools in the Jeffersonville, New Albany, and Louisville areas to not allow Amazon access to our students unless it makes policy changes effecting drastic turnover reductions.

There are two distinct atmospheres existing simultaneously at All hands meetings. Always, there is a lot of enthusiasm from managers. Managers want to say--*Everything's great!* From Tier One employees, there is mostly blank skepticism. With the massive turnover at SDF8, there are always new employees who have never been to an All hands meeting. Even with their limited experience with the company, they still understand that all is not as it seems in these meetings. As for long-term employees, they have seen it and heard it before. They know what's up, but they understand there isn't much they can do about it. They have a job, so it goes.

Bathroom breaks:

Going to the bathroom is sometimes a dilemma to be navigated by the SDF8 Tier One employee. Recently, SDF8 has, in its continual drive for maximum time efficiency from workers, been intensifying its efforts to regulate and reduce bathroom break times by cracking down on time off task for bathroom breaks. Of course, bathroom breaks count against the worker's rate as well. This issue has incited considerable flak from employees.

From the VOA board 5/12/16: "Are we expected to only use the restroom on breaks/lunch? I was told by my manager that he could only excuse 18 mins of my TOT [time off task] for RR breaks. 18 mins for a 10hr shift is RIDICULOUS. It takes that long for 1 RR break from the 4th floor!"

The company response from Blake, SDF8 Assistant General Manager on 5/13/16: "You are welcome to use the restroom whenever needed. It is a suggestion and try to use the restroom around breaks/lunches to reduce the potential for long periods of time away from the work area. 18 mins is the standard time used at this point but we take each situation into consideration."

Blake's response is coded language. The AGM does not state unequivocally that the employee should use the restroom whenever needed. He suggests that the employee regulate his bathroom times and restates SDF8 policy that the employee is allotted eighteen minutes of time off task for bathroom breaks per ten hour shift. He then states that "we take each situation into consideration," meaning, the employee defends his bathroom break time off task, and the company decides if the time off task merits disciplinary escalation. The "18 mins" figure the manager mentions is misleading. As the employee indicated, the "18 mins" includes walk time to and from the bathroom break. I'll speak more about this walk time presently.

From the VOA board 5/13/16: "In re: BR breaks/TOT--I second that it is ridiculous, especially when major, unknown barriers exist like both men's bathrooms @ seasonal breakrooms being out of order. No exemption for that is borderline unforgivable."

The company response from Blake on 5/13/16: "Thank you for the feedback and conversation. We will continue to work with Centaurs [facility cleaning workers] to ensure bathrooms are not closed or backed up at the wrong or extended times."

The AGM's response indicates that he went to the employee on the production floor and spoke with the employee face to face about the issue. SDF8 management often does this when the VOA dialogue appears to be becoming incendiary. Then, the manager always posts a response similar to "Thank you for your feedback and conversation," implying that the issue has been resolved to the satisfaction of the employee, when, in fact, it rarely has. Consider the following:

From the VOA board 6/6/16: "DO NOT TELL ME HOW LONG I Have to use the Restroom that is OSHA Regulations"

The company response from an HR manager on 6/6/16: "I will follow up with you on 6/9, your next available working day."

The morning after I read the above 5/13/16 VOA board response from Blake regarding eighteen minutes daily time off task for bathroom breaks, I did an informal test regarding my own bathroom breaks, recording the time it takes using my digital wristwatch. I was indeed picking on the fourth floor. At 9:37am, I stopped picking, pushed my cart to a stairwell, walked down to the first floor and then to the closest bathroom. On return, I walked back up to my cart on the fourth floor, then back to my pick location and made a pick. The total time was eight minutes, seventeen seconds. My next bathroom break was before lunch. Again I was picking on the fourth floor. The total time of the second bathroom break was seven minutes, twenty-one seconds. So, on that day, I had used fifteen minutes and thirty-eight seconds of bathroom break time off task before lunch.

There is an irony at work here. SDF8 is a massive building, with a lot of employees. Bathrooms are simply inadequate. Several central bathrooms are dispersed about the facility on the ground floor. Most employees have to walk a long time to get to one. Then, if there is a problem with the bathroom (no open stalls or closed for cleaning), the employee faces the dilemma of either waiting, or walking a long way to another bathroom area. For either of these choices, the time off task clock is ticking, and the employee's rate is falling. This long walk to and from the bathroom would only be a minor inconvenience to the employee, no big deal, were SDF8 management not continually scrutinizing employees over time off task and rate. Then it becomes a big problem. I believe many Amazon employees have lost their jobs as an indirect result of using the bathroom and other factors beyond the employees' control. Bathroom breaks are generally understood to be a dilemma for the employee, and bathroom break regulation is generally rationalized by SDF8 management as a normalized requirement of the Amazon production environment, like many company practices, insidious in that it is presented without human empathy.

I have never had a job in my life where bathroom breaks were an issue of the slightest consequence. So, at least from my experience, the dehumanizing bathroom break dilemma is unique to the Amazon environment. Amazon would simply prefer that the Tier One employee use the bathroom on the employee's time, not the company's, and it wants to say--*What's wrong with that? We're just trying to maintain production goals.*

Bathroom space, physical and temporal, is sacrosanct in an unspoken way for all but prisoners, and yet, SDF8 workers are finding themselves pushed to speak of this issue often.

I find it particularly distasteful that within the SDF8 management dynamic, young men managers are charged with the task of engaging women employees regarding bathroom break TOT. I'm not speaking about isolated instances. This is strategic policy. Again, these women are hard workers with no intention of abusing their breaks or cheating the company.

When I was on the mezzanine packing, I overheard a young man manager reprimanding a young pregnant woman about time off task for a bathroom break. I asked him about it afterwards. He was reluctant to discuss the event with me, I assume to protect the woman's privacy. I was able

to engage him by saying, "It seems like the company almost always hassles people over bathroom breaks just to keep pressure on employees rather than because of any real problem. Actual bathroom break abuse seems rare as far as I can tell." He said that he isn't trying to hassle anyone. He can usually tell when looking at the labor tracking spreadsheet data when someone is just using the bathroom. In the young pregnant woman's case, she had used the bathroom right after her normal, scheduled break, causing an extended break time. He told me that he advised her that she should have gone to her workstation first and logged in, then walked back to the breakroom to use the bathroom. That way, her scheduled break would not have run long. I cannot really abide his logic. To me, the pregnant woman gets the benefit of the doubt every time.

More mandatory overtime:

I discussed mandatory overtime above and some of the ways in which it encroaches on employees' private and family obligations. Mandatory overtime has been a perennial issue for my entire tenure at SDF8. Employees periodically express their frustration. Below are some recent such expressions posted on the VOA board along with company responses.

From the VOA board 5/20/16: "Why are we getting so much MOT?"

The company response from a Senior Operations Manager on 5/23/16: "SDF8 continues to process the largest growing area in Amazon--apparel. We continue to see volumes increase."

The employee's simple and short question expresses his exhaustion. Mandatory overtime supersedes his other obligations. He is poorly compensated for his role and his sacrifice creating the company's success. In fact, he is disposable. The SOM's response ignores his pain and frustration and offers no empathy.

From the VOA board 5/27/16: "Fed up with unnecessary MOT. Morale is low and you're treating it like peak season. It's not necessary. It's preventative."

The employee refers to peak season, generally Thanksgiving through Christmas, when mandatory overtime is understood by all employees to be constant and essential. But here, he is questioning the level of mandatory overtime he is required to work during non-peak periods.

The company response from an Area Manager on 5/28/16: "MOT is based off customer orders expected and forecasted. I B [inbound] volume, We will continue to use HUB to allow associates as much time as needed to be notified if MOT is not needed."

The manager's response is, again, dismissive of the employee's frustration. He then uses the opportunity to promote the Amazon HUB, the data linkage to the company from hourly worker's homes and mobile devices that the company has been aggressively implementing.

From the VOA board 6/3/16: "Pre-peak 2016 for NB3"

The company response from an HR manager on 6/4/16: "Next week volume for customer orders is projected to increase by 187,000 units this is driving the MOT for next week. Be sure to refer any friends to take advantage of the referral bonus."

The HR manager, again, uses the company's *VOA board* response to promote another SDF8 initiative--employee referrals. I have indicated that SDF8 faces difficulties in keeping bodies on the floor because of the company's questionably conscionable practices, so, through the employee referral program, the company asks employees to help maintain an adequate workforce by referring friends and family. For each referral who lasts 60 days with the company, the referring employee receives a \$125 bonus.

Sunender, the current General Manager, described the employee referral program this way during the June 2016 All hands meeting:

"Refer associates. If you refer associates, of course, it's easier for us to contain all the volume that we have. . . . This is how you can get a hundred and twenty-five dollars. . . . It's easier for you to collect the money, help us succeed, help us reduce the MOT . . . People within the community will work here . . . more of them are going to work here. It's your choice, to collect a hundred and twenty-five dollars for them working here. I assure you, we will convince them to come. It's your choice if you want to have some money in the meantime. Obviously, if you do that, it will make it a lot quicker. It's hard for me to convince all of them. It's much easier if everyone is doing the convincing with me."

From the VOA board 6/4/16: "NB3 = Sick of overtime yall"

The company response from a Senior Operations Manager on 6/5/16: "We are working on borrowing labor from other depts and having to cope with the increased volume, and keeping the production up is also helping to eliminate MOT. Thank you for your hard work serving our customers."

This SOM's response is a little more nuanced. He indicates that the company is conscious of the problem and doing its best to "cope" with volume demands through labor sharing, etc. He thanks the employee, references the customer, and places some of the responsibility back on the employee, indicating that "keeping the production up" will mitigate employee overtime requirements.

Open door policy:

What's interesting about the open door policy and the Voice of Associate program is that an employee can debate with managers almost endlessly. Managers will listen, listen, listen--over

and over and over--and nothing, nothing, nothing will happen. When new policies are implemented, it is always to the company's strategic advantage, squeezing more from the employee, but often with an air of benevolence, framing these policies as symbiotic, benefiting employees, whom the company often refers to as shareholders.

The open door policy offers the illusion of voice. Amazon is very comfortable in allowing a mediated voice to the associate. It is very uncomfortable allowing wages, adequate breaks, autonomy, agency.

I found particular interest in a recent exchange posted on the VOA board that I will relate here:

From the VOA board 5/23/16: "Being grateful is wonderful, and I feel people should always try to look for the positives in life, even if the only one they can find is 'at least I have a job' Gratefulness does not, however, excuse poor treatment, and unorganized departments. It merely makes it somewhat tolerable. That's my view, anyways."

The company response from an HR manager on 5/23/16: "Tolerable \neq world class. I will reach out to you to gain your perspective on how we can make SDF8 world class."

I was moved by the employee's voice. She is not bitter. She acknowledges Amazon offers her paid employment. She is grateful. This quiet plea is met with exuberance from management, a mockery of her intent.

The company not only imagines itself benevolent, but is excited about its benevolence, creating an absurd, surreal feeling of loss, helplessness, and zero communication for the worker. It is as if she and the manager are using two different languages. She is defeated before she has begun to speak.

This scenario is played out over and over again within the SDF8 open door policy. The company wants to say--*We hear you! We hear your concerns! But no, you cannot earn more pay. Yes, you must submit to scrutiny regarding time off task, breaks, bathroom breaks, and rates, for the better of the company, of which you are an important team member. And if you don't share our values, you are free to go. That's OK. Working here isn't for everyone.*

Almost all the managers I have come into contact with are pretty decent guys; it is the error of policies that I take issue with. I engage managers for a number of reasons: I want to push back at these policies, testing their efficacy and their rationale. I am interested in these young managers--to see if the ideologies they learned in college or their personal beliefs match up with the company's dogmatism. I believe the lives of Tier One employees are certainly as important as the company's growth and revenue. I would like to see a true symbiosis, starting with higher wages and lower turnover.

Safety:

The company controls and interprets its own safety information. The real safety hazards at SDF8 are the sustained physical, psychological, and economic stresses placed on the employee. These hazards are very difficult to quantify and document, so, according to Amazon's records, it has a stellar safety track record, and it is right to say so, within the parameters in which it records safety data, using its internal auditing system, its internal medical staff, and its internal safety incident reporting thresholds. The danger, in my opinion, is not from an immediate incident. It is from the chronic, cumulative effects of the Amazon labor system on the health and well-being of the employee, the health and well-being of the employee's family, and the health and well-being of the employee's community.

Generation Z, the Founders:

Amazon is pushing to make things even more difficult, more pressured for the Founders. These young citizens will presently be asked to offer up a contingency of themselves to function as the next wave of Amazon SDF8's disposable working poor. Founders are a wildcard. They like to buy stuff, but they won't play by the same rules. They have deep, unique, unprecedented ideas about fairness and equality. They are smart, savvy, lightning fast. If they perceive that Amazon is exploiting their own generation, they will possibly speak out and reject Amazon's philosophy.

June 2016 All hands, APEP:

The meeting began with upbeat music playing over a video of happy workers with the caption, "Amazonians care about the communities where we live and work."

I have already mentioned some of the policies and initiatives presented at this meeting. I want to discuss one in particular, the new APEP program announced by Blake, the Assistant General Manager. APEP is an acronym: "Attacking Processes, Engaging People." The program consists of three "categories of performance management" to be evaluated weekly.

The first category will be "meets or exceeds expectations."

The second category will be the "supportive coaching zone." Within this category, "your leader comes out on the floor and is attacking barriers, and engaging you for opportunities." Individuals within the supportive coaching zone "will have that conversation with their manager." The manager will address barriers to "help support you to get to that next level."

The third category will be "bottom five percent." For individuals in this category, the AGM said, there are "opportunities." The company might look at "retraining" or "corrective action." He said,

"That bottom zone is the zone we want to stay out of. We don't want to be in that bottom five percent . . . We want our team to be successful."

Every day, every employee's individual performance from the previous day will be posted in the stand-up meeting area, so that, "you'll get to see where you stand." The AGM characterized this program of daily rate postings as a benefit to employees because it provides "visibility to the expectations." Every building in the entire network will be adopting this program within the following few weeks. "Your performance versus the expectation," the AGM said, "will be shared with you, so you will understand where you stand within that process, and how the leader can help you to be successful."

So, a year after Matt's All hands announcement that SDF8 will be abolishing daily rate postings in favor of monthly evaluations, Blake announced that SDF8 will be posting daily rates for all Tier One employees, as a matter of company policy, and that this policy will be implemented network wide for all Amazon facilities and will benefit employees by making performance expectations more transparent.

The categories are more threatening than the AGM makes them out to be. An employee does not have to fall into the bottom five percent to lose his job. He only needs to fall under 100% of rate for two weeks out of the last six to receive documented coaching. After documented coaching, the employee will receive weekly escalations if he does not meet or exceed expectations. These escalations consist of a first write-up, then final write-up, then possible termination.

Following the announcement, I received documented coaching for my rate for the first time in my eighteen months picking. Documented coaching is the first step in getting fired. If I did not bring my rate up to 100%, the company would escalate disciplinary action. My manager was clear about this fact, and that I would be fired if I did not meet expectations.

Last week, the company fired a friend who had been with the company for more than a year after escalating to final write-up. He was a conscientious employee who showed up and did his best, but he wasn't fast enough. The consensus is that no one is safe from coaching and write-ups. Amazon uses these tactics to apply daily pressure, always leaving the employee on unsure footing.

One picker, who began working at SDF8 in 2012, the year the facility opened, received a first write-up last week. He is half way to being terminated. I work with this individual. He follows Amazon's rules to a T. I see him hustle every day. He has been a consistent performer for four years. In this scenario, either way, the company wins--it either brings the inveterate employee into conformity with artificially high rate expectations, or it replaces the inveterate employee, making a topped-out wage of \$14.40 per hour, with a new hire, at a starting wage of \$12.00 per hour, for a savings of \$2.40 per hour in base pay alone.

(Addendum: The above employee no longer works for Amazon SDF8. I don't know if he quit or got fired.)

Another, three year, employee was just written-up for the first time ever. She feels powerless and is afraid she is going to lose her job. She said, "They're doing it to people just coming up on two or three years." I told her, "You don't want to believe that, but it sure seems like it, doesn't it?"

It is hard to say if APEP is a direct strategy to eliminate a percentage of long-term employees to reduce labor costs. I hesitate to say that it is. However, elimination of a percentage of long-term employees is an undeniable byproduct of the new APEP performance system. It is important to understand that any metric I can conjecture from my observances as a Tier One employee, Amazon can study clearly and entirely in statistical/graphical form. No aspect of labor cost is left to chance by Amazon. The company is comfortable with these percentages as they weigh against production/cost objectives. It is a business, albeit a ruthless one.

Amazon should not be writing-up inveterate employees who are consistent performers and who have violated no company policies except failure to meet or exceed expectations. Employees are frustrated and angry over these write-ups. These kinds of write-ups, particularly for long-term, stalwart employees, are egregious in my opinion and should be a major issue to be settled during labor contract negotiations.

APEP rate postings confirms the employee-employer, performance-based relationship. Employees will want to hold the company to the same performance standards regarding pay, overtime, working conditions, and job security to which the company seeks to hold workers regarding rates. Employees will want to evaluate and critique company performance to compel the company to increase, improve, innovate in these areas personally important to the employee.

Wrap it up:

Amazon has created of itself an international proving ground for workforce manipulation and experimentation, testing the limits of human beings as a technical tool. Everyone who cares about what the US labor landscape is going to look like over the next 5-15 years should be paying attention to this and chiming in. This is important for private and public policymakers and the culture at large.

Using methods and strategies traditionally associated with authoritative control systems, not hourly wage employers, Amazon is challenging limits of culturally acceptable labor control methods in the United States. To what avail? Allegiance is low, morale is low, turnover is high, submission is high, passive resignation is high. The strategy fails and wins at the same time.

The company has introduced rhetorical strategies to superficially temper its inexorable drive for production efficiency, to normalize deceptive and manipulative labor practices--pushing the

boundaries of regressive labor policies using modern technology and information systems. I see this as a danger to the current workforce, but even more so for the next two generations if these policies are reified into acceptable practice.

Amazon acts upon its workforce with impunity, necessitating intervention by way of labor organization, public scrutiny at the state and federal levels, and cultural censure. Amazon, at least in the United States, might have created a proving ground for the resurgence of unions' ability to protect employee citizens between 2017 and 2020.