



## **Monkey Business**

### **Better Business Practices Learned Through**

### **Monkeys**

Home Work

Jamie is getting fat. That is what others who have not seen him in a while would say. But that stings. At Frisky's we say, "He is over-nutritionalized." Jamie is a Bonnet Macaque Monkey, born on April 6, 1997. In 2006, his weight was 23 lbs., which is in the normal range for his breed. During his physical in 2008, he weighed in at 28.1 lbs. At the 2009 Primate Physicals in October, he had gained 2 more lbs., putting his weight at over 30 lbs. "Ok, it's broccoli and rice cakes for him now," Dr. Keith Gold told us. Poor Jamie. That is even deprivation for a monkey.

We all know that body types differ. Some can live on McDonald's food and not gain an ounce. Others need only to think about the Big Mac and it goes to the thighs. Monkeys born into captivity do not have to spend their days gathering food. The food is handed to them three times per day. In their natural habitat, much of their day would be spent foraging, burning calories while they hunt for food. Jamie, being born into the pet trade, has many toys and enrichments in his enclosure. But Jamie would just as soon lay in his hammock with a remote and watch television. He need not be concerned about hunting up his next meal. Something needs to fill the time that would have been spent gathering and foraging. This is the human story as well.



Jamie

In 1985, Wendell Berry (Philosopher, Farmer, Author, Advocate for Rural Life), wrote an essay entitled *What Are People For?* He talks about the governing doctrine in government, Universities, and Corporations since World War II, was "there are too many people on the farm." This caused millions of rural people to move to the cities, where they soon became labeled "the permanently unemployable" because they were unprepared for urban life or just not able to cope with it. The corporate economy certainly made out. They were able to replace farmers with machinery, petroleum, and chemicals. And, "As the farmers departed from the land, the land itself departed." Soil erosion soared.

Berry questioned, “Is the obsolescence of human beings now our social goal?”

In a country that puts an absolute premium on labor saving measures, short work days, and retirement, why should there be any surprise at permanence of unemployment and welfare dependency? These are only different names for our national ambitions.

And on this day in January 2010, the news has not changed much for farmers. When one thing is taken away, something else must replace it, for better or worse. Curious, I did a google search on Man replacing Machines. Sometimes things do reverse themselves. I was quite fascinated with a blog written by Brent Frei, co-founder of SmartSheet.com, in February 2009, entitled *Work Exchanges: When People Replace Machines*. “The next gusher in productivity and profit will come not from technology replacing humans, but rather technology enabling humans to do work that to date hasn’t been economically viable.”

There are millions of tasks out there that a computer is still not able to do and requires human intelligence. All it takes is having a computer to work on from home and the willingness to do these simple tasks for a minimal fee. For example, identifying objects in a photo or video (a computer can’t yet identify a blue car), transcribing audio recordings, choosing the best category for a product, etc.. Traditionally tasks like this have been accomplished by hiring a large temporary workforce, which is time consuming and expensive. Amazon has established the Amazon Mechanical Turk, which is a marketplace for work that requires human intelligence. Each task is called a HIT (Human Intelligence Task) and may take a minute or less to do. Businesses or developers needing tasks done can use the robust Mechanical Turk APIs to access thousands of high quality, low cost, global, on-demand workers. Mechanical Turk enables developers and businesses to achieve their goals more quickly and at a lower cost than was previously possible.

Frei describes the concept of a WorkExchange as “a global switchboard that connects real work and virtual teams on an ‘as needed’ basis in order to accomplish specific work. Those with work to offer would gain access to a broad reach of talent while those seeking work would be able to sell their talent to the highest bidder.”

Amazon’s Mechanical Turk is only the beginning of what is possible in the WorkExchange concept that Frei describes. Machine replaced man and now is needing man’s help. Many can now work from home because of machines. Jamie does not need to use his natural foraging instincts because his needs are being provided by humans. His right to freedom has been traded for three sure meals a day, a longer life span, and cartoon network. But rice cakes and broccoli? Is this the trade off for sitting at our computers, working from home and no longer living and working on the land? So, Dear reader, do you see hope, hopelessness, or possibility here?

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