

Michael Scott and the NPC Life We Can All Fall Into

Continuing the trend of social media purging, [Twitter has banned](#) “hundreds of right-wing accounts for posing as soulless, ‘nonplayable’ liberal activists”—otherwise known as NPC accounts. Twitter claimed these accounts violated their rules of “intentionally misleading election-related content.”

The term non-player character (NPC) comes from the world of video games. An NPC is a character not controlled by any of the players; the program controls the NPC to advance the plot. Since the character is controlled by the game, the range of actions the character can take is limited and predictable.

Why the Left Is Being Compared to NPCs

“Liberals,” who in knee-jerk fashion support politically correct positions, have been called NPCs. Like NPCs in a video game, their responses seem to be limited and predictable. Their views seem not to be driven by thought and reflection; instead they “parrot left-wing orthodoxy, in the manner of a scripted character.”

Memes have been created using bland cartoon avatars called [NPC Wojak](#). To show the vacuous nature of “left-wing orthodoxy” the avatars are crudely drawn with soulless, emotionless faces. NPC characters dispense bromides such as “diversity is our strength.”

The humor is biting, and [progressives are alarmed](#) by the dehumanizing nature of the memes.

However, you don’t have to be liberal or anti-Trump to behave like an NPC. Trump supporters behave like NPCs when they

reflexively mouth their own bromides, such as “Trump is a master negotiator, trust him,” in response to arguments that Trump is wrecking global trade.

You don't have to be interested in politics to behave like an NPC. There is a learning opportunity for us all that shouldn't be passed up. How often is our own behavior NPC-like, at work or at home? Before you answer, ask your family and friends for feedback. You may not like the responses you get.

It's far easier to notice NPC behavior in others than in ourselves. In his book [Thinking, Fast and Slow](#), Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman writes, “The premise of this book is that it is easier to recognize other people's mistakes than our own.” Kahneman observes “our almost unlimited ability to ignore our ignorance.”

NPC Michael Scott

Consider for a moment, everyone's favorite regional sales manager, Michael Scott, brilliantly played by Steve Carell in *The Office*.

Michael interprets each situation and every person through his lens of the little he already knows. Besides knowing little, what he knows is often wrong. Consequently, his actions are almost always inappropriate. Michael is the proverbial bull in the china shop, demanding the world conform to his beliefs. When things go wrong, Michael blames everyone and everything else for his failures.

Driven by his programmed thinking, we could say that Michael lives with a perpetual disclaimer: “I am not responsible for the world I am experiencing.”

Michael is about to attempt a stupid stunt by jumping off the roof into a children's bouncy castle, in the episode “[Safety Training](#),” in season three. The warehouse manager Darryl tries

to stop him:

Darryl: Mike, you're a very brave man. I mean it takes courage just to be you. To get out of bed every single day, knowing full well you got to be you.

Michael: Do you really mean that?

Darryl: I couldn't do it. I ain't that strong and I ain't that brave.

Michael buys into every thought that pops into his head. Darryl is saying: *Whew, I could not live being bounced around all day by my thinking. I'm not that brave to play your part in the play.*

Michael doesn't know he is an NPC. Darryl is correct; it takes courage to walk in the world each day like a mindless video game character, pretending to have no power to make different choices.

How to Take Responsibility

Every episode of *The Office* provides a master class in how an NPC behaves. Michael ignores the warning signs that he is an NPC, but we don't have to. We can choose to notice when we blame others and take no responsibility for our experience of life.

Becoming more aware of NPC logic is the beginning of the way out. We can't change what we haven't noticed. If we believe how we feel results from the way others have treated us, we maintain the world is responsible for our experience. Like Michael, we will then try to control the world; and as with Michael, our attempts will inevitably backfire. Michael is a major pain to everyone, and so are we when our inner-NPC has the upper hand.

There is no end to who and what can be blamed for our feelings: my parents, my partner, my teacher, my manager, my commute, my bank account, the president, the economy—there is a grab bag to choose from.

Think of the last time you felt like a victim of the world. Notice how you replayed the event in your mind. You may also notice how you were hyper-tuned into your transitory emotions.

The more mental bandwidth we put into replaying events and feelings the less bandwidth is left for taking responsible action.

We interpret our emotional reactions as evidence that we have identified the cause of our feelings. Our inner-NPC has a special effects department designed to get us to buy into our mindless blaming thoughts. The next time you feel angry, notice tension building in your body or your heart racing. You are responding to your inner-NPC's self-produced propaganda. Your inner-NPC reasons, *I am feeling agitated, so my interpretations must be accurate*. The truth is, you are always feeling the effects of your thinking. Emotions are not self-validating.

Stop Giving in to Your Inner-NPC

Notice the next time you say about a colleague, *They make me so mad; how could they?* Really, does your colleague access your mind and place thoughts in your head?

“Between stimulus and response there is space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” This [anthem to personal responsibility](#) is widely attributed to Viktor Frankl, when instead it was written by an unknown author and popularized by Stephen Covey. In his foreword to [Prisoners of Our Thoughts](#) by Alex Pattakos, Covey adds,

The space between what happens to us and our response, our freedom to choose that response and the impact it can have upon our lives, beautifully illustrate that we can become a product of our decisions, not our conditions.

When our inner-NPC is in charge, it may not seem we can choose to be a product of our decisions. Yet, Covey instructs us, “We have the power to choose our response to our circumstances.” Covey warns us that when we ignore “this freedom, this responsibility, the essence of our life and legacy could be frustrated.”

Eschewing this responsibility, Michael Scott lives in a perpetual state of exasperation. NPCs—of all political persuasions—may be exasperated, yet we don’t have to follow suit. We become players again when we take responsibility for our inner experience of life. The life we experience can be the product of our decisions.

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