

## TAKIN CARE OF BUSINESS

Get up every morning from your alarm clock's warning,  
 take the 8:15 into the city  
 There's a whistle up above and people pushin, people shovin  
 And the girls who try to look pretty  
 And if your train's on time you can get to work by nine  
 And start your slavin job to get your pay  
 If you ever get annoyed, look at me, I'm self-employed  
 Love to work at nothin all day  
 and I'll be Takin care of business,  
 Takin care of business,  
 Takin care of business every day  
 Bachman-Turner Overdrive, 1973

This song is about a city dweller who works a nine-to-five job that he or she must hate since he calls it slavin—the rat-race, the daily grind. Bachman-Turner Overdrive, a Canadian rock group, created that song in 1973—they were *not* living that way themselves, since they spent most of their time making music, but they knew the habits and feelings of the urban working class. They knew people who were stuck in that rut, needing a paycheck, dreaming of being self-employed, “working at nothing all day.” As they created *Takin Care of Business*, their music was becoming BIG business and millions of fans were playing, singing and living their songs. Takin care of business every day is the story of modern life. Sometimes it's some *family business*, professional, commercial, or charitable, founded by a previous generation and providing “business” for descendants of the founders. OR we may be takin care of personal business, anything from tending the garden to writing a book, posting on Facebook or shopping for household bread and potatoes. *What we do all day* may not be rightly called WORK, but very seldom do we find ourselves “working at nothing all day.”

Being self-employed is a greater load of responsibility much more often than a chance to do nothing. You've seen the shocking figures about income disparity—most men still earning more than most women, whites more than blacks, English-speaking more than speakers of other languages, the beautiful, shapely, young and strong with better earning power than those who are older, obese, or disabled. Men and women disadvantaged by any personal trait are often unemployed—skating on the edge of poverty, especially if they stem from the Afro-American culture, they may turn to self employment as drug dealers. Takin care of *that* business is crime, maybe rewarding for a while, but eventually disastrous.

Everywhere in these United States, not just the South, but also east, west, and north, the economy is dependent on Afro-Americans and immigrants who are takin care of business just to survive. Minority group men seldom wear white collars at work, more often it's jeans or overalls, and they seldom sit behind desks, more often can be found standing by some vehicle with the hood up and grease on their hands. Minority group women are often found in restaurants standing next to a computer punching in

orders, or table-hopping with a coffeepot in hand, or out in the kitchen flipping burgers. In short, they earn their pay, which may or may not be enough to live on. In Wisconsin the minimum wage is \$7.00/hour, and labor unions are a thing of the past.

When I was a kid growing up in Louisville, Kentucky, I walked a lot around my neighborhood, which was 100% white, like my school, church, and shopping area. The population of the city was at least a third Black, but they might as well have been in Canada or South America--their world and mine connected only on sidewalks, in a few public parks, and on buses, where everybody dropped coins in the same slot. Sometimes I walked past the gas station, where white and black men worked side by side, but only the white men looked at me and sometimes whistled.

Now I want to be sure you know this was twenty years before Bachman-Turner Overdrive composed *Takin Care of Business*. *School* was MY business back then – Henry Clay grade school, followed by Shawnee High School, and after graduation I got an office job, typing (of course this was before computers). People here and now, if you know me at all, you may be waiting for me to get around to how and why I came to believe that my real business is social justice, which I've been trying to take care of most of my life. Even back then, when I graduated from Shawnee High and earned my very first paycheck by dancing on the typewriter keys, even then as I contemplated racial segregation and felt a slow burn inside, I knew that social justice was the business I needed to take care of. After decades of civil rights struggles, now I've finally accepted the fact that that I cannot be Black, all I can be is an ally, and we who think of ourselves as white are all stuck with the racist habits all white people harbor. We don't see that, don't know it, may hate to hear any preacher black or white say it, and truthfully it's not our fault. But it's contradictory to say **Black Lives Matter** even when we know it's true and we really mean it, because every day nonverbally we modify the message by adding "**but not as much as White lives.**"

In case you want to deny that, here are a few relevant questions. If you were given a medical referral by your family doctor to some specialist, would you expect to be told if that new physician happens to be Black? Would his/her racial identity have any bearing on the situation? No? Yet, if nobody told you that in advance, wouldn't you be surprised to see an Afro-American face above the white coat? That's because of the hidden assumption that any well-paid professional is going to be White. If you gave a description at home, what characteristic of the new doctor would you mention first? If you say anything before race I'm not going to believe you.

In a multi-cultural crowd such as a regional or national UU assembly, do you guard your language, mentally considering each word before letting it out, fearful that you might say something offensive or naive? Now you may say "of course! I don't want to offend anyone—what's wrong with that?" But that is a confirmation of hidden or passive racism, and do I, as a UU committed to social justice, have a right to question your language—is that any of MY business? When the activists of **Black Lives Matter** say the majority culture in America is ALL racist—they don't mean ala Paula Dean and the n-word, they mean we have a sense of privilege. White dominance, institutionalized racism is the paradigm of this nation. This is how it's always been, and working to change it cannot become our

business unless we face the truth. This seems like a good place to stop and remind ourselves what IS our business in this UU Fellowship. Here it is loud and clear:

**We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:**  
**The inherent worth and dignity of every person,**  
**Justice, equity and compassion in human relations,**  
**Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations,**  
**A free and responsible search for truth and meaning,**  
**The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large,**  
**The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all,**  
**Respect for the interdependent web of all existence, of which we are a part.**

This IS the business I'm takin care of. Called to affirm and promote the *inherent* worth and dignity of *every* person, yes. How can I get rid of that little voice in the back of the mind that asks "even Black persons?" Even the men who love other men and women who love other women? Even the men who used to BE women and the women who were once men? Yes, yes, and yes, but if you do affirm and promote *their* worth and dignity, all and every single one, that's above and beyond ordinary business, and you deserve special admiration and praise. You cannot expect all of us to be so broad-minded. **That is the voice that speaks in our minds for the philosophy of racism**, planted there in elementary school lunch rooms and high school locker rooms, on basketball courts, softball fields and poolrooms, places where people who think they are white learned who to accept and who to reject. As we grew up we recognized and rejected that philosophy, but the world we live in keeps white privilege firmly in place, and we seldom challenge that because it feels normal. After repeatedly running into it at every turn, we start to wonder if it IS normal.

In this list of seven principles, we're promising to care of ever bigger kinds of business including peace, liberty, justice, democracy, world community, and finally respect for the interdependent web of all existence. Al Gore made planet Earth *his* business, forcing the issue that he called an inconvenient truth on all humanity when most people were looking the other way and stubbornly denying climate change. Many are still doing that despite the specter of rising oceans and melting glaciers, sinkholes swallowing vehicles and buildings and lead poisoning our water supply. Later in the song **Takin Care of Business**, the Bachmans sang **Workin over time, workin over time every day**.

That phrase is open to interpretation, as some of us are workin overtime not just every day, but every year and well into retirement years. This fall I will be eighty-two—this fellowship is top-heavy with senior citizens, many of us workin overtime to save this planet and all its creatures. Of course we'd like to have help from the young-- families, moms and dads at the peak of life, takin care of family business, but also productive in the community, tending to public affairs, building and teaching. We need children who will fill our refurbished SE building with noise, laughter, singing and playing, *takin care of their business*. We need people who look around themselves in this life, looking for a purpose bigger than themselves to commit to—what should become **their** business. *The word is STEWARD, buried in a bigger word often used in fund-raising*. Stewardship IS takin care of the business of LIFE. Anyone at any

age can become a steward when something or someone around us strikes us as inherently important and worthwhile, needing support, calling for commitment, and raising in our spirit a slow burn urging us to get up and take care of business. Once you become a steward, that internal alarm clock cannot be quieted by writing a check, dropping coins in the red kettle, or helping disabled people get where they want to go. In fact it starts to seem that some business urgently needing to be taken care of is finding You.

Spending hard-earned dollars to support citizen action groups, writing letters to editors or blogs on the Internet, setting up a table in the garage to make protest signs, you wonder if you're making any difference. The mailbox starts to overflow with appeals from worthy causes, your computer is jammed up with petitions to politicians with the power to protect, preserve, and defend animals, trees, minority groups, children, and those big words from the UU principles—liberty, freedom, the interdependent web... I'm a good news person, but I'm sorry to say the future of our planet is at stake. Earth and all its inhabitants is up against the wall facing a firing squad. Takin care of business is rapidly becoming a fight for survival. We're in this fix together, counting on each other, working overtime. If we want to sleep at night we must find ways to put it aside at bedtime, knowing tomorrow is another day, certain to bring work that is *our business*. *Let the church say Amen.*