

1. Burning Man is not a festival

We begin story time with one of my favorites this year. Please don't ever call TTIND a 'Festival'. Here's why.

The BMOrg has noticed a measurable change in the following four things over the last 6 years.

1. A decrease in civility.
2. A decrease in volunteers.
3. An increase in vandalism.
4. An increase in people unable to take care of themselves.

I think that the idea of even tracking these aspects of the event demonstrates its fundamental difference from the experience of a festival. I'm going to use them as the basis for storytime this week.

4. While the playa may provide, you cannot *expect* it to. Radical self-reliance dictates that you plan to care for yourself. All the NERT, Emergency Wilderness Training, and First Aid courses I've ever taken say you must first care for yourself before you can hope to help others. Even the airlines tell you that when the oxygen masks drop, put yours on first before helping others. If you are tired, hungry, thirsty, sunburned, or in need of a bandage and a hug, you do not have the capacity necessary to help others effectively, and might be in danger of becoming a liability yourself.

Be prepared to provide for your own needs, and to check in on your own state of being frequently. You cannot help others when you need help yourself. And please, if you need help, ask. We won't always be able to see that you're in trouble, but we do always want to help.

3. There can be no trust without respect, and no community without trust. Radical self expression should always include respect for others, for their work, and for their safety and security. We've seen vandalism range from burning and tagging art, to stealing street signs, to stealing chairs or other property mistakenly seen as 'communal', to accidentally breaking the ship by climbing on it inappropriately. I think vandalism is often a result of believing, without empathy, "It's Burning Man! There are no rules here. Radical self expression, man!"

If you see anything that looks like vandalism in progress, please speak up. The vandals may simply not know that ships are easily broken, chairs are not community property, and street signs are required by emergency services to find those in need of help.

2. Burning man is a participatory community. The easiest way to participate (and maybe the only way, really), is to volunteer. We have all volunteered to be a part of this camp. We will all volunteer to contribute to its functionality in some way. Some of us also volunteer for the Borg, for Earth Guardians, for Lamplighters, as Greeters, or as burn perimeters. This is a call to participate through volunteering. Volunteer your skills. Volunteer your compassion. Volunteer your jokes and hugs and open heart. Volunteer to help others build, to help the desert survive, to help someone understand, or to help someone let go. Volunteer your silence, or your song. Volunteer to stay late and clean up, to get up early and prepare, or to come and applaud. Volunteer your joy. Volunteer your fresh eyes, or your old stories.

People talk about Burning Man as a 'gifting culture'. Volunteering is a gift. It's not about the objects; it's all about the story.

1. This is the most interesting item on the list. Who tracks civility? Cities do. Communities do.

Civility should be the baseline. It doesn't mandate empathy, or compassion, or generosity. It's simply politeness, and courtesy. It's the recognition of the other as a person who breathes the same air, and walks the same earth as you. We all carry our own burdens. The least we can do is be polite to one another, and maybe see where it goes from there.

I think we can try to do better. Be compassionate. Be generous. Smother that asshole with kindness. Protect yourself, and protect your family, and when you're safe, go out into the world and play.

Burning man is not a festival. It is a participatory event. If you don't participate, if you come in only as a spectator, you won't get anything unexpected out of it. It will be simply a festival for you. And, if you don't participate, the best you will be is just another body to us. At worst, you'll be a burden.