

Meaning Making^{*}

/mee-ning may-king/ • verb

A human process of pointing people to what matters, explaining what it means, and telling them what to do about it.

We're in a major meaning making moment.

Real questions about our society are up in the air, and things we used to have social consensus about are now up for debate or (re)debate.



Why are we here again in a big way?

BIG FORCES AT PLAY

- Decaying systems
- Lack of trust
- Fast-moving tech
- Differences of opinions

BIG QUESTIONS BEING ASKED

- Who is an American?
- Is AI good or evil?
- Is higher education worth it or not?
- Is gender biological or a social construct?

This leaves us all feeling...



But it also opens up windows of opportunity.

Meaning makers look different today

We outsource our meaning making to people we trust:

- Content creators
- Thought leaders
- People we see as peers
- Cultural icons

How can we do proactive meaning making?

- Set your destination. What world view do you want to cultivate?
- Identify a big topic that is being contested (e.g., surveillance).
- Focus attention on the issue, deciding on the best angle (e.g., Flock cameras).
- Define it, add judgment and explain what people should do about it.
- Find your partners on the journey to reinforce the belief.

Meaning Making

What is the world-view that you want to cultivate?

**IF WE BELIEVE THAT
_____, THEN THIS
MAKES SENSE.**

So...

If we believe that the 1% should not hoard nearly 50% of the world's wealth then it makes sense to tax billionaires to fund public goods.

How can you TURN UP the volume to achieve that?

- Define and name the issue (e.g., doom scrolling)
- Connect the concept to identities they already hold
- Align the concept with something society agrees on



How can you TURN DOWN the volume?

- Redirect focus
- Disrupt people's thinking by popping collective illusions
- Identify a belief and replace it with another
- Focus on the people you have influence over

