

A Better Way to do Business

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There is a better way to do business that makes more money and gives a better life for everyone involved. Business is the creative and economic engine of the world. There is great virtue in small and large business; in goods and services, satisfaction in employment, personal relationships, in the quality of self expression, and an ever present opportunity to be of service to customers. Being in a business allows anyone to continuously challenge their own limitations and integrity. In this world of polarity and paradox, business works.

I've made a career out of promising people what they want and helping them get it. Various, executives have wanted to make \$18 million extra in six months, to save manufacturing plants from being closed and moved it to other countries, to combine four diverse companies into one coherent entity, and to avoid bankruptcy. Money, or some equivalent, is always the way it starts. Money is the interest of business, but, it doesn't stop there. What guides executives actions is always embedded in, personal values, problems in relationships, fears, the inability to connect, and the desire to hold onto power and position; to avoid losing. The sum of this appears in the culture, the way people say that's the way it "is" around here". I've observed is that whether a culture is effective and energizing, or limiting and suppressive, it keeps itself going. I think of culture as a machine, somehow designed to assure its own persistence. Like the Energizer Bunny, a culture keeps chugging along, whether it helps or hinders, gives life to a company's purposes, or drains life away.

I grew up in the experience of the family business from hell. My grandfather played his sons off against one another. My father worked himself to death. I don't think, in 20 years, I ever saw anyone smile or say a kind word. They all made a nice living, like squeezing blood out of stone. The business itself didn't grow, even during World War II. As a result, one of my life goals has been to find a way to do business that makes money, has people get along well, be creative, and feel like they are at home.

My purpose is to bring uncharacteristic values into the corporate world. No one argues these values don't make sense, nor that they are largely missing in the environment of large businesses. Decision makers always agree on their importance, but at the same time, find it difficult to act upon them. Given their

everyday realities, while they say they believe in these, they do not truly see them as possible, as a way of life in business. I sometimes meet ambitious leaders, men and women, themselves frustrated with corporate rules, who recognize that they need help to get what they want. They admit that they don't already know what to do, and since that makes two of us, a great partnership begins for a time. What typically happens is that they embrace the values as a condition of participation, make more money and a caring environment emerges as well. However, as the original business goal is achieved the attention given to these new values diminishes as well as their presence and impact. This is because they were only as attractive means to an end rather than embraced as fundamental and enduring values.

Over the years, there have been numbers of courageous leaders, who like King Arthur, allow Camelot for a while. And then it goes away. I call this the Camelot Phenomenon in business, a time of greatness rooted in an uncharacteristic code of values, destined to fall. Over the years, this experience of victory and loss reminded me of the Sisyphus fable-- every rock rolled up the mountain, rolled down when reaching the top. There were arbitrary and undermining effects from other bosses, headquarters, stock analysts or boards of directors who had not endorsed the values. Often, they would discount the legitimacy of unpredictable successes, and suppress further activity. Rarely, did a large enough group of leaders emerge to lead from values and change a corporate system as a whole. The ultimate power for fundamental and enduring change was always placed elsewhere. And many, in power,, and not in power(explain), become instantly aggressive if talk moves away from the hard lines of "what's on the agenda today?" They were embarrassed to talk about values such as respect, honor, trust etc. Getting people to buy in to what might be seen as "fluffy"" in a hard nosed business environment took patience and persistence, and often didn't succeed.

Despite the frustrations, I've seen dedication to values in corporations make an enormous difference. Consistently the critical values were;

Personal Responsibility for Breakthrough Results: People honor extraordinary performance. They promise and deliver breakthrough results, rather than good intentions and business as usual outcomes. Individuals take themselves as cause in the matter of going beyond normal limits.

Group Alignment: People are going in the same direction. There is shared enthusiasm for the goal. They have shared values and a similar image of the future. They are in the same boat.

Conflict Resolution: There is search for common ground and agreement on problems before seeking solution. People face up to problems and

negotiate differences. They attempt to discover and meet each other's underlying interests, insofar as possible.

Positive Relationship: People know what others care about. They practice openness, direct speaking, generous listening, co-invention and dialogue. They feel safe to express themselves.

Future Focus: People suspend assumptions, they speculate and inquire. They identify what is currently impossible and imagine ways to make it possible. Invention and novelty are valued. On balance, they take responsibility for shaping the future, rather than worrying about it. They embrace possibility.

Profound Respect: People honor each other and their environment. They treat each other as "human beings" rather than objects or "things." They hold each other accountable and are able to remain generous.

In dedicated practice of these values, there have been numbers of home runs.

- The Canadian Division of a global food manufacturer saved 28 million dollars in eight months, and saved several plants from closing, despite their high cost production in an underutilized manufacturing system.
- A global consumer goods plant in the north of England doubled machine efficiencies, thought to be impossible, and created a culture in which nearly everyone was enthusiastic.
- Cunard Ellerman Shipping Lines merged with savings of approximately 18 million dollars from combining sales forces and customer services, making use of one computer system, and combining ship management under one directorate.
- A Canadian national building products company integrated several faltering companies into one with a positive culture and profitable operations in less than three years.
- A top U.K. diesel engine maker, in a new United States Division, created a committed and bold business plan in three weeks. Typical time for such an accomplishment between the groups involved was eight months.
- A U.S.-U.K. car manufacturer improved its quality ratings dramatically on a very successful vehicle in a four week period while still meeting its schedule for introduction.

- An automotive engineering organization reported a 20% improvement in revenues and a dramatic improvement in efficiency of utilizing test beds. Its previous best was a 5% growth rate.
- In 13 months, a division of one the worlds largest informational technology providers reduced 1500 disparate products in five countries into one coherent product with great harmony in the face of a corporate culture that had been divisive and segmented.
- A major U.S. Air Force Base, in six months, reorganized a 20, 000 person human resource system with previously unheard- of grass roots support.

Most recently, during a six month program of training and coaching, a group of sales consultants in the wireless communications industry brought about an extra seventeen million dollars in sales, created an extraordinary team culture, and grew personally as professionals and as people. In the words of one participant,

“The program sessions had a prolific effect on me, both from a personal and professional point of view. It challenged the way I think, the way I approach problems, the way I plan and the way I interact.

My team was predominantly a team of twelve. Of the twelve involved in this training, I knew one of them reasonably well, but had no previous relationship with the other ten. Our business required us to generate 17 million of business in six months, a very unreasonable request, as the business was already selling 180 million a year, with a sales force of over 60, and there were only twelve of us.

While skeptical, the challenge was accepted, and the training got underway to arm us for what was ahead. The training taught us to stand for our colleagues, to do all we could to ensure our team mates were a success, and whether through their successes or our own, to ensure that the team won through.

Now, this may seem like a team building exercise carried out by countless others. It was not. This training in values, practice and application had such a profound effect on me and my team mates that our very language changed; we stood for each other every moment of every day. We ceased to be colleagues and became close friends, in an exceptionally short space of time. If help was needed, there was always, always, someone on hand to get past the problem. Whilst working in an office which was known to be an energy vampire, our little group was fast getting a reputation as a vibrant, fun place to be around. In a short space of time, other members of other teams were positioning themselves within the building to be nearer our team. It was inspiring.

The team then began to look across the business, to ascertain other areas in which it could have a positive effect. Intervention was a buzz word, and nothing was allowed to get by the team that they felt didn't

meet the expected standards. This in particular amazed me, as the employees within the business (myself included) had been somewhat apathetic about areas of the business that didn't appear to have a direct impact on their own roles.

By the end of the six months, we succeeded in our quest. The team had built a reputation of winning, a 'can do, will do' team. This was remarkable, especially since the initial mood was skepticism and doubt from the rest of the business. I witnessed individuals noticeably grow in stature and confidence. We had become far more purposeful, focused and effective, and along the way, achieved in revenue what the others said was impossible."

Einstein said that the problems we have created cannot be solved at the same level of thinking that created them. Context is decisive and people always end up in the context they start with. Corporations need a new context of values that has money and values be of equal importance. There is power that comes from integrating opposites. It's time for corporations to claim this power.

I am now putting the act of embracing values unequivocally up front as part of the full, necessary buy-in to get the results leaders want. Leaders are not evil. They just do not see the whole picture and most are controlled by their own decisive systems. Most corporate leaders either do not see this reality, or are so pressed by circumstances that they do not pay attention to the underlying levers and dials of their own success. As with any leadership approach, there are many ways to get to the same goal. Here, the objective is to assure that attention is paid, and action taken, whenever any of these six critical values are lacking, slowing progress and diminishing individual and group energy.

I am now explicit in telling leaders that they will get what they want by committing to an enduring, value based process that requires financial, relational and spiritual values. I honestly believe, and have evidence for the assertion, that there is more wealth and quality of life available for everyone when power and position are replaced by a value based, versus interest based strategy and orientation. It says in the Talmud that a person's life works if they continuously integrate physical, emotional, mental and spiritual energies. That's what this energy logic is based on. It's a paradigm shift that works on a macro level. Energy or vitality is the same as the power to act. I found that consistently, energy is power, energy comes from these values, and corporations with the most available energy succeed. Good ideas and the force of Will are not enough. This value driven "energetic" system is decisive, because it shapes and gives freedom to deal with material and political necessities. So, I'll now promise people the results they want if they promise to become leaders for both money and the cultural values we introduce.

The truth lives in peoples' experience. Attitude and behavior is naturally correlated with their own immediate experience. This experience is a value

driven, energetic reality. It consists of awareness of genuine or false relationships, being in the boat together, being focused on the future or stuck in the past, having a chance for conflicts and differences to get worked out, or living with the impossibility of resolution. And, it depends on whether transformation and new possibility is a serious aspiration. Peoples' experience is the decisive system.

I think that the underlying problem is that institutions treat people like things and systems make machines out of people. The theoretical breakthrough is to make humanity the context and have a physical and financial world that works. My approach is to create double binds, the resolution of which takes us to a new level of relationship, generosity, and quality of life for more people.

Our corporate leaders are not evil. Most are good hearted, creative men and women. Many are just deluded because they do not see the whole picture. I want to put them in a double bind in which they get what they want from a value based process. And, in the doing of it, their values can be transformed so as to see the possibility of a different world, and more equitable distribution is stimulated. The only option I see is a negative for most of humanity.