

True to Yourself: Do You Have a Monk Inside You?

I'd like to start off today with a quotation from *True to Yourself: Leading a Values-Based Business*. This quotation embodies the key message, the soul, if you will, of the book. The quote comes from the remarkable and humble co-founder of Bioneers®, Kenny Ausubel, whom many of you know as a filmmaker:

"Each of us has a spark of life inside us, and our highest endeavor ought to be to set off that spark in one another."

Nothing more needs to be said. Kenny has said it all. I'm done! Thank you very much for having me here today and enjoy the book...

Seriously, we could stop here and discuss Kenny's quote for the rest of the hour. It reminds me of Rabbi Hillel's reply over 2000 years ago to a non-Jew wanting to learn the entire Torah: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary. Go and learn it."

In the spirit of the Golden Rule, let me spend the next hour on a commentary of Kenny's wisdom. I will explain the question in the title of my speech and how *True to Yourself* was written as a practical guidebook, which if followed, leads to values-based leadership, what I call more specifically, "people-centered leadership."

To begin, let me re-emphasize that I'm not here to sell you a book—it isn't even out until July and my tribe, Social Venture Network, receives the lion's share of the royalties! I'll let sales take care of themselves and trust that friends in the media will help out! Sales will allow me to continue to do the work I love. But unless *True to Yourself* leads to a more peaceful, socially just world, who cares how many copies are sold?

Like you, my M.O. is to use my energy, passion and the time God has given me to get across the key humanistic messages of my writings. My hope is that this book will serve as a guide for small company founders and large company managers to become effective leaders. My hope is that they will be able to bring their dreams to scale. My hope is that they will put Kenny's quotation into action.

What then is the key message, the purpose? you may ask.

My primary purpose is to *shift consciousness*.

To do so, *True to Yourself* promotes **people-centered leadership**—leadership that uplifts the human spirit and alleviates some of the poverty and suffering we have on our planet.

What is people-centered leadership? Here are three examples from the book:

1. *Give away competitive advantages* to increase generic demand for humane treatment of animals. (People-centered leaders care about animals, too!)

A restaurant owner develops a cruelty-free menu, financially supporting the respectful treatment by local producers of the animals whose meat is sold on the menu. She then takes what becomes a strong competitive advantage in her market and trains other restaurants on how to develop a similar menu, thus losing her advantage but increasing demand for the animals from these cruelty-free producers. (NB: The publicity she got didn't exactly hurt sales!)

2. *Slow down company growth* and foster growth in employees' abilities so that the company does not outstrip people's abilities to be successful at work.

A cookie manufacturer diverts the company's attention from sales to making the world's largest cookie—an intense nine-month effort, slowing down sales by 30%. The effort brings the company closer to its local community through outreach programs funded by the cookie's success and in the meantime, employees are trained for the next level of company size. The company then returns to a healthy, sustainable growth rate commensurate with employees' abilities while community outreach programs take hold.

3. Increases in profitability are used to *line the pockets of employees*.

"I really hope we can have a good financial year so that we can give significant bonuses to our exceptional people. I want to make sure everyone can afford to put braces on their kids' teeth and send them to a good college." Time and again, these leaders speak of and use financial gain as an opportunity to pay people better, to offer more employee benefits, and the like. One leader's company net profit was 3.5% instead of 13.5% as monies were used for benefits like full maternity and paternity leaves for all employees, including the 225 blue-collar factory workers. Loyalty and productivity? Went through the roof!

In summary, *True to Yourself* maintains that profit-centered leadership is not the focus of values-based leaders. These leaders focus instead on their *impact on people and the planet*. And when they do it well—building a company or division that reflects these values—it results in more meaningful lives and financial health.

The book's outline is simple: It draws a carefully designed picture of what business looks like when its leader is people-centered. That picture is framed by an update of former General Electric CEO Jack Welch's three levers of leadership success—reputation, productivity and regulation. The new trinity I call "transparency, sustainability and responsibility." The book fills in that picture with three key characteristics of successful values-based leaders and five best practices to help them do the hard work of developing the soft skills necessary to becoming more people-centered.

What do I mean, then, asking leaders to become more like a monk?

To excel at people-centered leadership, leaders must work to become *whole* people—a term I got from Reverend John Nelson of the Dover Church this week. That is, true to the essence of the Hebrew word "shalom," when we become whole within ourselves, we are *mindful* of our impact on others and act more compassionately. We are tuned into what people and our surrounding environment need to move us forward on a path of personal and professional success.

This is most likely to happen when leaders recognize that life is a *shared journey* where we gain by helping others gain, where we become whole by making others whole, and where we become holy by recognizing and treating others as holy. Where we realize that we reach our dreams by helping others reach their dreams and that ultimately, by serving each other, we serve that Higher Spirit in us and among us—we serve God who is greater than any one of us.

Sounds as if these practices are intended to help bring out more of the monk in you, doesn't it?

The Monk

Kenny Moore was a monk for 15 years before joining a large natural gas utility, KeySpan, where he has served as the eyes and ears of CEO Robert Catell for the past decade. They have an unusual, successful partnership, which is documented in their book, *The CEO and the Monk: One Company's Journey to Profit and Purpose*. When I say, "act more like a monk," I am saying in essence to act more like Kenny.

Mr. Catell is a traditional-style leader who knew that a more people-centered approach was needed as the company was poised to go through gut-wrenching changes brought on by deregulation and mergers in the industry. He recognized that as he neared retirement, he couldn't change in time. He was able to make the necessary leadership changes, however, through a partnership with Kenny who has served to make the office of CEO at KeySpan more mindful, more whole, and dare I say, more holy. What do I mean?

The leader as monk needs to be more of an *illuminary* than *visionary*—showing the way through example and deep listening. A monk invites you to become spiritually engaged in work, communicating carefully—and personally—how you can incorporate spirit into work and life. He knows how important it is that he models the values he wants to impart. He recognizes that his job is not to tell you what to do, but to help you find your way and take personal responsibility. He wants you to become the best you.

These leaders recognize that their primary role is to translate the mission and values of the organization into practice, creating a values-based context for all decision-making.

Accordingly, *everything you say and do—and don't say or don't do*—sends signals throughout the company to what values are important. You must be mindful of the powerful effect you have on the people of your organization. No matter what the formal company documents say, *you* make values visible. That's leadership competence. That's Kenny's impact on Catell.

For example, if respect for others is an important company value, what do you do when you, the CEO, walk into an office where two co-workers are engaged in a business conversation? Do you interrupt them because you, your agenda, are more important, or do you wait your turn—leaving for a few moments if necessary—until they are finished?

What kind of regular practice might support this attempt to incorporate spirit into work? At an investment bank, for example, when monthly financial statements are sent to investor clients, each client's company representative takes a moment to personally initial each page of the statement—a moment of being mindful of a client's situation and of communicating that fact simply, personally. That one practice has received more positive response from investors than anything else the firm has done in 60 years!

How did I translate "being more like a monk" into language acceptable to mainstream businesspeople?

Now here's something that may surprise you. Other than the examples I've used, none of what I've talked about this past half hour is explicitly in the book. If I wrote as I have spoken to you, I believe that the broad audience outside the world of socially responsible business would never read this book—or more importantly, never put into practice its contents. What could I do to overcome this dilemma?

The first draft was a mess. No, it didn't need just a heavy dose of editing—which people from stodgy *Fortune* Magazine to spiritual Sounds True audio programs did wonderfully—but I had to rid it of the New Age feel. That's when the big idea came, just in time:

Make this book look like a practical guidebook of leadership practices, where one might ask, "where's the value-based part?" And make it look like a self-help book for aspiring leaders, where one might ask, "where's the social action?"

In truth, if readers put these practices into place—even just the essence of these practices—they will become spiritually guided, people-centered, values-based leaders. There's no other way you can do it.

That was my Trojan Horse: a practical guidebook written in business language.

I've spent much of my working life in mainstream business. I know what language works and what doesn't work. I had to present a practical front with traditional business language. There's no grand overarching vision in *True to Yourself* that will jump right out

at you, just a "devil-is-in-the-details," fine print of daily leadership. You know that it's in those countless small acts and daily decisions humanistic values take center stage in running a business.

And what would that vision be if it weren't so hidden? It would answer the question, "What would the business world look like if leaders were "people-centered," not "profit-centered?"

Admittedly, I have been seditious. Dishonest? I hope not. I believe my intent is good and just. As Dumani Mandela said to me of his grandfather, Nelson, "When people know that you act without personal motive, that you are doing what you feel is in their best interests, how can they criticize you?"

Do I have a personal motive? Sure I do: a better world for my children and yours, for one.

I wrote this book to spread the gospel of the 75 Social Venture Network leaders I interviewed, who though imperfect in action were clear in intent. It is what my tribe, SVN, is ready to offer the world as a model of business. It's a model from people who don't ask what the market needs and how their skills can fit what's needed. They ask instead what are the big social challenges we face and how can I build a business that will help us meet those challenges.

It's the challenge each and every one of us faces in our work: How do we harness the gifts we've been given to play our part in creating a world of economic and social justice? How can we hook our personal dream to that big dream for a more just world for all?

True to Yourself is my small blueprint, my contribution, toward meeting that challenge as a leader in daily life. May it help you find your success in your way and see the world you hope to see in your life—a world that is true to itself.