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The Ethical Entrepreneur - Vision & Values

My observation of business values and practices over a career spanning 53 years is that there has been a gradual shift away from the such core values of honesty, loyalty and service, in favour of intense efforts directed at obtaining short term financial results. This might involve reducing the cost to produce, but also reducing the quality of a product in ways not easily discernable by clients, e.g. a major car manufacturer; taking steps calculated to increase senior management's bonuses e.g. firing staff and outsourcing a function which reduces costs, but also limits the organisation's ability to respond, as was the case with a major oil company; offering products of potential danger to personal health e.g. some pharmaceutical products; allowing bribery of foreign officials in order to gain business. As standards slip more people begin to think that the focus on short term gain, at any cost, is the normal and accepted way things are done in business. Accepting this error in judgement as the norm is the next step down a slippery slope.

There has also been observed increasing public frustration with business leaders which has resulted in a dramatic loss in public trust. Opinion polls regarding trust in various occupations rate business people near the very bottom of the scale. The verdict is that business people cannot be trusted. That same lack of trust is present within many companies, making working for such companies an unattractive proposition, especially for many young people. They 'do not want to go there'. The economic uncertainty is also why there is a growing interest by young people to start their own enterprise - to become entrepreneurs.

Management Functions Guided by Fine Values

We are going to look at the subject of the key management functions in running an enterprise and how these functions can be performed more

effectively when guided by natural human values. When values such as honesty, patience and courage are followed i.e. lived, they lead to the achievement of necessary business qualities, such as credibility, efficiency, innovation which ultimately results in the development of a sustainable, responsible business. We will in essence look at how we think, how we relate to others and how we act in business. We will cover the values guiding 'how we think' in this issue and the others in a subsequent issue.

How We Think - Establish a stable and balanced state of mind when making decisions.

In business and in life we continually need to make decisions. What enables us to make a good and right decision is when the mind is stable and balanced and thus able to view with clarity all the factors involved.

The values that help bring about that state of mind are: Stillness/Silence, Mindful Awareness and Calmness.

For those of you familiar with Mindfulness and Meditation, they are being used increasingly in schools as well as in businesses to relieve stress and to help bring about a quieter, still state of mind. While we have all experienced such moments of stillness, the direction given is to go there more often, especially when making difficult decisions. Keep calm and carry on is also a very good prescription.

How We Think - Be clear about the vision, values and our long term sustainable objectives

The long-term perspective of the enterprise is as important as meeting its short-term goals. Here the values of Service, Duty/Responsibility and Fearlessness are important. We are encouraged to give our full attention to our responsibility as a

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business to serve a real need. When we can find the market need which our capabilities are best suited to, that is when we can make the best use of our talents as well as providing a fine service. The entrepreneur needs to be clear about the vision for the enterprise and how this will be sustained in the long run. We all know that fear about what might happen in the future can cause confusion and agitation such that good, clear decisions are very difficult. Fearlessness enables us to remain balanced and poised.

How We Think – Be free from excessive desires, habitual reactions and claims for success or failure

Another important aspect is how we meet the inevitable problems

created by excessive desires, habits e.g. 'We have always done it that way!' and the claims for the result. Greater self-control is needed to give proper measure to our desires for wealth, recognition and power. In today's highly competitive world, losing has come to mean that you are less of a person. We then become subject to the pressures from peers, the opinions of others, and self-criticism, all of which crowd the mental realm. The important values here are Temperance/Moderation, Self-Control and Detachment.

A free values app, The Ethical Entrepreneur, will soon be released which will offer detailed guidance on the practical application of these values.

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