

If a business's success isn't just due to tangible monetary gains, then what is it that drives its true growth? The answer lies in its core philosophy, when it marks service to mankind as its primary focus.

## Beyond *Profits* and Money

My father was part of a dying breed of physicians who regularly made house calls. He willingly left the comfort of his home and family after demanding twelve-hour days of patient care to attend to those who had no means to pay for or to be admitted to a hospital. He did it because he cared deeply for humanity. My father was a big proponent of altruism.

As a young girl, I loved going with him on these nighttime trips into neighborhoods that were as foreign to me as faraway countries. On one occasion I followed timidly behind him as he knocked on the front door of a dilapidated house in an equally destitute neighborhood. When the door opened and the awaiting occupants saw my father standing there, the look of worry and despair on their faces was replaced with grateful smiles and a sense of hope. I could feel their relief. It was like a breath of fresh air. We were warmly greeted and welcomed into their home. I experienced on an instinctual level what my father meant when he said it was better to give than to receive, that the gifts he received from the hearts of his patients were so much warmer and more substantial than tangible rewards. I felt it in my bones as a little girl in dark hallways where the sick were taken care of by a man who was there for them. My father was a happy and fulfilled man. His life was marked by caring for and giving to others.

Altruism means being there for others, moving beyond self-preoccupation, extending a helping hand, listening and giving generously without expectation of anything in return. It's the CFO who quietly cuts his own salary, without being asked, when layoffs are impending. It's the employee who goes beyond his job description to help an overburdened coworker finish a project. It's the leader who truly cares about life and livelihoods.

**WHEN AIRLINE UNIONS AND MANAGEMENT WERE ENMESHED IN INFIGHTING, THE PILOTS OF SOUTHWEST TOOK PAY CUTS AND CONTINUED TO SERVE THE FLYING PUBLIC WITH COURTESY AND RESPECT.**

It's not always easy to not put yourself first. Most of us have dark sides to our nature; we are human. The fact is that altruism coexists with greed, dishonesty, and other examples of poor conduct. But in our humanness and as leaders, we always have the choice to either act on behalf of something or someone outside of ourselves or to protect our own self-interest. Altruism is always a choice. The decisions and actions of an altruistic leader arise from an awareness of what is in the best interest of the organization, its people, and its customers, despite the screaming ego that says, "Me, me, me!" When you capture the essence of altruism, you know that it is not just about you.

### A TOUGH ROW TO HOE

Putting the interests of others before your own can be difficult to do. It requires a degree of self-sacrifice. Yet at our core, most of us want to contribute to others and to our world in meaningful ways. We know that self-indulgence is ultimately not satisfying. How do leaders get beyond the powerful lure of self-interest? How can you strike a balance between a healthy self-regard and conscious service to others?

Our culture has fostered an entitled, "What's in it for me?" way of thinking and sanctions behaviors that run counter to selfless giving. We are inundated with marketing messages that tell us that having more things is the only way to feel good, look good, and be liked. We are taught that in order to have a good life we have to be successful, "success" defined as money, position, and wealth. What is not emphasized is the value of a life filled with love, caring, appreciation, and respect, along with the rewards of a life lived in service to others, a life that brings meaning to the world.

Money by itself has no meaning. It is a commodity, merely paper and coins that are defined and regulated by institutions to serve as a controlled and orderly means of exchange. Money's meaning lies in what it can provide: at a basic level, food and shelter. The problem with money is that we forget that its meaning has to do with *quality* of life as opposed to *quantity*. Money and profits are a necessary and important component of our businesses, but always keep them in perspective. As a

leader, remember to put profit into the larger context of the quality of life of those we lead and serve. When money and profits are the primary drivers at the expense of livelihoods, humanity suffers. Altruism reminds us to elevate the condition of our employees and make positive contributions to our communities—and make money at the same time. They are not mutually exclusive.

### THE BOOMERANG EFFECT

When people feel valued and acknowledged, they are more productive and committed, which can translate into low turnover, increased sales, better accountability, and higher profits. Truly caring about your employees and customers will have positive effects on your bottom line.

Over the past few decades, the aviation industry has had its fair share of economic challenges and setbacks, but two airlines have consistently weathered the economic storms better than most: Southwest and JetBlue. One of the primary distinctions of these two companies has been the remarkable character of their founders. Both Herb Kelleher and David Neeleman have been described as leaders with a genuine desire to serve others. During their tenures as CEOs, both were respected and appreciated by employees and customers alike.

The continuing success of Southwest has been a testament to Kelleher's generosity of spirit. When all the major airlines were failing, crippled by overhead and ballooning fuel prices, Southwest continued to increase profits. When airline unions and management were enmeshed in infighting, the pilots of Southwest took pay cuts and continued to serve the flying public with courtesy and respect. Kelleher had the interests of others at heart, and in return he received loyalty and cooperation, assets that can't be represented on balance sheets but can make the difference between success and failure.

### ***LiftOff Leadership: 10 Principles for Exceptional Leadership***

By Betty Shotton

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