

IF ARISTOTLE RAN GENERAL MOTORS

THE NEW SOUL OF BUSINESS

TOM MORRIS



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PREFACE

Reinventing Corporate Spirit

If Aristotle ran General Motors, what would he do? How would one of the greatest thinkers and wisest of people in all of human history, the student of Plato and the teacher of Alexander the Great, create lasting excellence and long-term success in the business world of today? What would he focus on? How would he shake things up? If you could magically connect with this great philosopher and seek some personal advice about your business, or about your life, what would he suggest that you pay attention to? What would he advise you to do?

Many of us seem to live stretches of our lives and do our work much of the time as if we think we have to make it all up from scratch as we go along. Or, at best, as if we can only borrow ideas and strategies of action from those people who happen to live and work around us in our own time. We appear to forget that extraordinarily wise people have gone before us, have grappled with many of the same basic issues that we face today, and have bequeathed to us great ideas that we can use.

The philosophers of the centuries, from Plato and Aristotle to the present day, have left us the equivalent of a huge bank account of wisdom that we can draw on for a wealth of insight applicable to both business and the rest of life. We can invest this intellectual capital in our own careers and experiences and reap tremendous returns of new wisdom as a result. If we let the great philosophers guide our thinking, and if we then begin to become philosophers ourselves, we put ourselves in the very best position to move toward genuine excellence, true prosperity, and deeply satisfying success in our businesses, our families, and our lives. Why should we settle for anything less?

It may be argued that peoples for whom philosophers legislate are always prosperous.

—ARISTOTLE

In this book I will present some very good news for everyone who cares about the attainment of long-term business excellence and the experience of personal happiness at work amid the turbulence and challenging times we face. This is not a book specifically about General Motors, as distinct from any other contemporary business concerned with basic issues of productivity, competitiveness, and success. I use the name of this famous, paradigmatic American organization in my title as emblematic of any group of people working together. And I won't draw on just the ideas of Aristotle for wisdom, although he will often be my leading light. His name is also to some extent symbolic, representative of all the great thinkers whose insights can shed light on the problems we now face, in business and life.

But my title also has another deep resonance that I should explain. Testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee in 1952, the year of my birth, Charles Erwin Wilson, former president of General Motors and later to be Dwight D. Eisenhower's secretary of defense, made one of the most notorious statements of the twentieth century when he proclaimed,

What is good for the country is good for General Motors, and what's good for General Motors is good for the country.

Critics at the time purported to be stunned by this pronouncement, and commentators ever since have characterized it as a shameless expression of the ultimate in corporate hubris. It seemed to indicate a perverse transvaluation of civic values and betray the radically bloated self-importance not merely of a single company but, more broadly, of industry, commerce, and economics. But when this statement is understood in the most fundamental way possible, I think that it's absolutely right. In this book I will show why.

I believe there are some basic truths, discernible by philosophical reflection, which undergird all sorts of human excellence or flourishing, whether in a company like General Motors or in the country at large. In our families, friendships, neighborhoods, communities, civic organizations, and business relationships, four profound but simple foundations—universally accessible, pervasively applicable, and incredibly effective—underlie the attainment and sustaining of the very best results. It is these four foundations, and the path of wisdom they make possible, that we will explore in this book. We'll see that, at bottom, what's good for the country is indeed good for General Motors, and that what's good for General Motors is very good for all the rest of us as well. Regardless of the context, however small or large, whenever people live or work together, the same basic principles must be used to take us to the highest possible level of excellence and keep us there.

I believe that a few simple but powerful ideas drawn from Aristotle as well as from many other great philosophers of the past can help us reenergize our ways of doing business, reinvigorate our workplaces, and reinvent corporate spirit for our time. Ultimately, greatness is rooted in simplicity, and we make consistent use of the most fundamental, simple concepts and truths about excellence as our foundations for everything we do.

Nothing is more simple than greatness; indeed, to be simple is to be great.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

By examining the four simple foundations for all sustainable business and personal excellence, we'll in the end come to see what I think the philosopher Aristotle would focus on if he ran General Motors, if he gave you advice, or even if he helped lead our nation into the future.

Inner Foundations for Excellence

I was recently at a golf resort in Florida with a group of insurance executives. On the first day there, four of us decided to get in an early round before the formal meetings began. Stepping up to the first

tee and making all his normal preparations, the first up of this group took his swing and completely missed the ball. His colleagues, who had played with him many times before, were quite surprised. Without any hesitation, he turned, looked at them with an expression of shock, and said, "Tough course."

The quick-witted golfer revealed with this remark one of the deepest human tendencies. Many of us seem to have an inborn inclination to blame our problems on external circumstances, on forces outside our control. We deflect attention away from ourselves and our own inner states, and focus on something else. Nowhere is this more evident than in modern business. So often we hear about global competition, technological change, the unpredictable economy, organizational restructuring, shareholder demands, or skyrocketing expectations. Tough course.

I suggest that the single most important factor for dealing with all the problems we now face in our business lives is our ability to look within and examine the inner foundations of our own business practices and business relationships. Together we will see how four foundations of human excellence should govern all that we do, both inside our organizations and with all our customers and suppliers.

The key to sustainable success in the world today, I've come to believe, is provided by some of our most ancient wisdom about the human spirit, in the context of our individual lives and our corporate endeavors. Throughout this book we'll focus on the life of business as our springboard for reflection, but we'll find ourselves most often drawing conclusions that apply more broadly to the whole business of life as well.

The wisdom of the wise is an uncommon degree of common sense.

—DEAN W. R. INGE

I won't be offering in these pages some shockingly new and exotic techniques I've patented for solving all our business and personal problems at the end of the century and into the next millennium. Instead, I'll be using some of the deepest insights of philosophy to articulate and organize a great deal of what you may have long suspected is the proper soil for growing long-lasting human excellence. I'll bring you a template of ideas that will explain quite simply and powerfully why so many business practices that have been found effective do in fact succeed, and why those that don't work fall flat. We're going to step back, philosophically speaking, and take in the big picture of what is needed for truly superior performance and sustainably satisfying outcomes in our time. The foundations for joy, satisfaction, great corporate spirit, long-term excellence, and lasting success that I'll lay out here will show you new ways to develop what you are already doing right, as well as fundamental ways to correct any problems that may be holding you back.

The Current Climate

For quite a while now American business leaders have been talking about rediscovering the vital importance of product and service quality for financial success in a highly competitive world. In just the past few years, it seems that nearly everyone has been talking about reengineering the corporation

redesigning the processes by which work is done to attain greater efficiencies and new forms of business excellence. Management strategies have multiplied. We're inundated in new techniques and nearly drowning in information. But behind the products, services, and processes of modern business behind all the strategies and techniques and data, are the people who do the work. And too often, as we have read frequently in the pages of magazines as well as in the panels of comic strips, the employees of modern businesses feel themselves more the victims than the beneficiaries of the new corporate strategies for success. As a result, corporate spirit has suffered immensely.

In fact, it's no exaggeration to say that we live at a time when corporate spirit needs to be reinvented. Pressures from many directions threaten to kill the spirit of productive and creative enterprise, smashing it into shards of cynical mistrust, narrow, destructive self-interest, and increasingly, even low levels of walking despair. Too many people feel insecure, threatened, and unappreciated in their jobs. As a result, their motivation for digging deep and stretching themselves to attain the best of which they're capable has withered. The long-term prognosis for their corporate endeavors cannot be good. In business, as well as in all the professions, and in fact throughout our entire culture, we face a spiritual crisis that is only recently beginning to be recognized as such.

I've come to believe that many companies right now are running on empty and don't realize it because of the inertia of their organizational processes. If you've drained the tank of human goodwill and motivation, you can continue to coast downhill for a while, even at a pretty rapid clip, but heaven help you if you encounter any big bumps in the road or the competition forces you into an uphill struggle.

The greatest asset of any nation is the spirit of its people, and the greatest danger that can menace any nation is the breakdown of that spirit.

—GEORGE B. COURTELYOU

People at work are the only true foundation for lasting excellence, and so I think the time has come to focus on the deeply human issues of happiness, satisfaction, meaning, and fulfillment in the workplace. Only by recognizing the vital role of these issues in life and work can we begin the crucial process of reinventing the spirit of our work and sustain excellence into the future. Without this recognition, none of the other strategies for improvement that we pursue—whether reengineering the corporation or refocusing on the needs of the client—will have lasting positive results.

In the large corporation, the small business, the law office, the school, or the medical practice—wherever people work together—we have an urgent need to attend to corporate spirit. As we can see from its Latin root, *corpus*, or “body,” the word *corporate* denotes first and foremost any body of people with shared interests or concerns, living together or working together in an organized way. By drawing on ancient wisdom and applying it as a philosopher to what I see happening around me, I've observed that the very same principles that promote human flourishing in personal, family, and friendship contexts apply just as directly to issues of business life and marketplace excellence. But these principles have been almost totally neglected in modern business literature and are insufficient

understood in recent management practice.

People are not motivated to be and do their best unless they feel some significant degree of satisfaction at work. They must sense that their work is a good thing, and doing it must bring them some measure of happiness.

Compensation experts have confirmed again and again that extrinsic rewards like pay raises, promotions, and bonuses can do only so much to motivate extra energy and creativity. This is just as true of negative motivators, like the fear of unemployment, and it holds at every level in the corporation. Without the intrinsic rewards of happiness, fulfillment, and a sense of goodness and meaningfulness at work, people will never be fully motivated to attain and sustain the heights of excellence of which they're capable.

The least of things with a meaning is worth more in life than the greatest of things without it.

—CARL GUSTAV JUNG

In this book, I will explain how a good dose of ancient wisdom mixed with some contemporary philosophizing about human motivation and human excellence is just what modern business, with its important bottom-line concerns, needs to meet the distinctive challenges that it faces. By using the simple but powerful ideas, we'll be able to put ourselves and our associates into an unparalleled position to move forward productively and establish those conditions that will allow all our corporate activities to flourish.

Bear in mind that reengineering the corporation, and implementing many of the other recent well-publicized fundamental, overall workplace innovations, typically can only be initiated from the top of an organization. By contrast, reinventing corporate spirit can be anybody's job.

Anyone at any level can take the initiative to reinvent corporate spirit within her own field of influence, and can make a difference that may be felt far beyond that domain. Ultimately, what is most important in any organization is also what is most accessible. In the chapters that follow, I will show how we all together can make a big difference for good by using simple principles that will revolutionize the way we think, not only about our businesses but about our families and communities as well. If Aristotle ran General Motors, I believe that this is what he would get straight first.

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INTRODUCTION

Business Excellence and the Human Quest

The newest problems we face can't be solved without the most ancient wisdom we have. It's time for a wake-up call to summon us all to the enterprise of a little collective philosophy. We've come to a juncture in history when we need to understand the human condition more deeply than ever before and apply that understanding to the way we live and do business every day; the people we live with and do business with will not be satisfied with anything less. Let me tell you a bit about how I have come to this conclusion. First, a little personal background.

Since I grew up in a business family, it was very natural for me to declare a major in business administration when I entered the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Fascinated by business relationships and institutions, I found myself contemplating the study of corporate law, with an eye on preparing for some sort of eventual leadership position in the world of business.

But as I did my coursework, I came to develop an increasing sense of the importance of things I wasn't hearing anyone talk about in my business-related courses. I began to suspect that deep wisdom about human nature would be important to business in the future, and that if I didn't understand some of the biggest issues that human beings had ever faced, I would never really be able to get my bearings for any of the things I hoped to accomplish. So I began to study philosophy and religion, examining all the ultimate questions, and every aspect of a big picture for human life and work.

Things have their seasons, and even certain kinds of eminence go in and out of style. But wisdom has an advantage: She is eternal.

—BALTASAR GRACIÁN

The search for wisdom brought me an undergraduate degree in religion and took me while I was still in college through the writing of my first philosophical book, a small text published a little over a year after my graduation. This same search then sent me to Yale University for graduate school in its renowned department of religious studies. Determined to leave no stone unturned in my quest for ultimate understanding, I ended up becoming only the second person ever to attempt and complete a joint Ph.D. from the two departments of religious studies and philosophy at Yale, a journey of six difficult but often exhilarating years.

While finishing my doctoral dissertation, I also wrote my second book, moved back to North Carolina, had my first child, taught part-time back at the University of North Carolina, and took

North Carolina real estate broker's license on the side, so that I could help my parents with the business should the need arise and keep in touch with the business side of my own interests. A great job in one of the best philosophy departments in the country, however, soon lured me to South Bend, Indiana, where I went on to spend fifteen wonderful years as assistant professor, then associate, then full professor of philosophy at Notre Dame, teaching in some years as much as an eighth of the entire student body and writing nine more academic books of philosophical analysis and reflection for publishers like Oxford, Cornell, and Notre Dame Press. I was in constant interaction with some of the best minds alive all over the world and enjoyed the rare privilege of testing my growing philosophical understanding against the highest standards of intellectual precision.

As I worked with the ideas of the great thinkers of the past, I began to discover powerfully how to be a philosopher in the present. Drawing on their insights, I began to have my own. And this prepared me for an unexpected and remarkable development, a turn of events that would ultimately catapult me over the walls of academia and launch me into an exciting new journey of pioneering exploration as a modern-day philosopher.

The New Wave of Needs and Expectations at Work

A few years ago, I had the most important conversation of my life. I was working hard discharging my professional duties at Notre Dame, striving to master world currents of philosophical reflection, writing up my own discoveries, and lecturing to all the budding sages on campus, when a very active and prominent woman in South Bend heard about my teaching and invited me to give a talk on ethics to a group of young business and civic leaders in town.

I was grateful for the invitation but told her that I had never before given a presentation outside a university context to a nonacademic audience. I was not a business professor or a management consultant. I wasn't sure that what I had to say would hook into the professional interests of the young up-and-comers in local businesses. I was afraid that these junior executives just might not know what to make of a philosopher.

In response to my worry, this young community leader smiled and said something that changed my life.

She replied, "Look, Tom, when I was eighteen and in college, we used to sit up late at night in the dorm and talk about all sorts of important things—life, death, love, meaning, God, happiness, the future, good and evil. Now I'm forty-five years old, and when I get together with friends all that the conversation is ever about is what the kids are doing, what's on sale at the mall, and who Notre Dame is playing this weekend. We never talk about anything important. We've lived long enough to have some real questions and maybe even some answers, but there's never any chance to talk about the big questions with other people. Would you please come into the community and give us an opportunity again to talk and think together about things that really matter? We all need a little philosophy in our lives."

What could I say? She was right. There was a need. And I felt that I should answer the call. B

how would people respond? In the ancient world, Socrates had often philosophized in public, giving people the chance to think and talk about important things—with clearly significant consequences since he ended up being poisoned by popular demand. I hoped for better results, but I never could have imagined what was to happen.

Danger and delight grow on one stalk.

—SCOTTISH PROVERB

During the years since that request, I have had an adventure very unusual, and in fact perhaps even unique, for a twentieth-century philosopher. I've flown all over the country, with side trips abroad, and I've talked to big, enthusiastic groups of real people outside any academic setting about such topics as success, ethics, happiness, personal satisfaction, corporate life, collaborative excellence, and the meaning of it all. I've enjoyed high-energy international wisdom sessions with leaders of the business world. I've visited all sorts of gatherings, from small civic organizations to huge national conventions. I've worked with local companies and multinational corporations. I've spent extensive time with schoolteachers, parents, doctors, lawyers, frontline workers, supervisors, middle managers, and government officials. I've perched on the sofa with Regis and Kathie Lee to pass on some philosophical advice to early-morning America. And I've been stunned by the reaction.

In the midst of all this travel and talk, I've witnessed a very exciting development. In just the last couple of years, everywhere I go across the United States, I've been seeing something I had never anticipated. In the pit of financial difficulties or in the wake of tremendous successes, in places you would never expect it, in good times and bad, people of all sorts are suddenly starting to do something that from my point of view as a philosopher is deeply right.

Having exhausted every other possibility, regular people everywhere suddenly are becoming philosophers. People of all sorts are launching into that engagement of attention and intellect that the woman in my community had so strongly wanted. In every part of the country, I've seen people starting to think in a new way about their work and their lives. They are beginning to philosophize, to reflect deeply on some of their most basic assumptions, and to question how they really want to live. They're tackling the big questions and asking how these issues apply to their lives right now.

The true medicine of the mind is philosophy.

—CICERO

Why are so many people beginning to think in this way? Is it to some extent a reaction to the perceived excesses of the eighties? Is this a spiritual backlash to our culture's long-term materialist fixations? Is it happening in response to the distinctive pressures of the nineties? Could it be that, as we near the close of the most dramatic thousand-year period in human history, it just seems like an appropriate time to take stock, rethink basic priorities and values, and ask questions like "Where are we?" and "Where are we going?"

With the international breakup of the “old world order” and the threat of a new world disorder growing daily, with increasing sensitivity to the pervasiveness of violent crime around the globe, with the ever-increasing pace of change thrown at us by forces seemingly beyond our control, and with our growing awareness of fundamental problems in all our basic social institutions, I think it’s safe to say that many people are beginning to feel a bit confused. We all want to get our bearings and make sense of our lives in a time when the meaning of it all is not obvious.

To make no mistakes is not in the power of man; but from their errors and mistakes the wise and good learn wisdom for the future.

—PLUTARCH

The Vanishing Dream

It wasn’t so many years ago that a large percentage of people believed that hard work would always pay off and bring some measure of basic human comfort and security. But we live in a time when those old assurances seem to be quickly disappearing. Men and women can now work their hardest and still find themselves out of a job, for geopolitical or financial reasons that no one seems fully understand. Increasingly, in job after job, people are being asked to do more and more with less and less, while seeing most of their customary incentives disappear, replaced by that most negative threat of being forced to join the ranks of the unemployed and marginalized. Overall job satisfaction and corporate morale in most places may be at an all-time low. People are disgruntled. They’re even despondent. And too many people feel as if they’ve completely lost their bearings.

So many modern formulas for happiness have failed. Prescriptions for success and promises of a golden age of social well-being have been found empty. There seem to be no easy, ready-made recipes for how to create a deeply satisfying, sustainable way of life, a life truly worth living. This obvious calls for some serious thought. Our time on this earth is not to be wasted.

Philosophy is good advice.

—SENECA

So into the fray steps the age-old pursuit, philosophy. Philosophy is, etymologically, “love of wisdom”: the word comes from two ancient Greek roots, *philo*, “love of,” and *sophia*, “wisdom.” Notice here a small point. It’s not *knowledge* of wisdom. It’s *love*. Think about this for a moment. If you have an object of love, you embrace it; if you lack it, you pursue it. Philosophy at its best is not just a matter of filling our heads with new questions and deep knowledge. It’s also an enterprise of the heart. It is the passionate pursuit and wholehearted embracing of wisdom, or genuine insight about living.

Wisdom is the conqueror of fortune.

—JUVENAL

As I've worked with people in businesses and other organizations all over this country who are currently rethinking their lives, I've formed some strong opinions about exactly what is wrong and what is right in the contemporary business climate. I've come to see what the ancient enterprise philosophy can contribute toward building sustainable excellence in all our endeavors. And I've also come to understand more deeply than ever before the overall importance of work in our lives, as well as the importance of bringing more of life to work. This has helped me discover a new strategy for workplace transformation that will result powerfully in bringing our work to life.

Business Values and Personal Commitments

People who are personally reassessing their lives in light of their deepest values will not find it easy to settle for less than a work environment that respects and encourages those values. They will certainly not be able to flourish, to be and do their best, in conditions that have not been wisely developed with sensitivity to what deeply moves people and what most fundamentally matters to us all. The corporate world is unnecessarily losing a great number of very talented people to midlife and midcareer crises. And those who stay are often not contributing all they're capable of. As the big wave of millennial philosophizing begins to crest throughout the population, all of us who aspire to effective leadership and world-class performance had better be ready to surf it. We'd better have our boards in the water and we'd better be paddling in the right direction, because this one's going to be a tsunami, and it will take us further than anything else possibly could.

The mark of wisdom is to read aright the present, and to march with the occasion.

—HOMER

And so that's what this book is about: catching the new wave of wisdom at work today and creating the right environment for ultimate motivation in the workplace. Laying the right foundation for long-term business excellence is a matter of bringing the deepest, most naturally renewable motivation into all our endeavors together. Many companies bring in motivational speakers on a regular basis to inspire the troops for an hour, or a day, or a week. But these seeds of inspiration must be dropped into fertile soil if they're to take root and produce results. And so we're going to see what the great thinkers might have to say about enriching the soil, enhancing the environment, laying down new conditions for superior work, and reaping the consequences in a surprisingly short period of time.

He is not wise to me who is wise in words only, but he who is wise in deeds.

—SAINT GREGORY

As the first-century Stoic thinker Seneca once said, "The best ideas are everyone's property." If we take possession of them and use them well, we'll see a tremendous difference for all our enterprises.

Aristotle and the Human Quest

The great philosopher Aristotle saw deeply into human nature. And that's no surprise. For twenty years he was a close student of and companion to Plato, one of the most creative and expansive minds in all of human history, and Plato himself had learned to think critically and imaginatively from the master Socrates, whom the Roman orator, philosopher, and statesman Cicero later described as the first man ever to bring philosophy into the marketplace.

Some wisdom must be learned from one who is wise.

—EURIPIDES

Socrates, who lived from about 470 to 399 B.C., gave us the first model of a man engaged in courageous questioning in search of true wisdom. His student Plato, sojourning on this earth from the years of 428 to 348 B.C., had such an extensive impact on Western thought with his writings that the Harvard philosopher and mathematician Alfred North Whitehead would in our century describe the whole history of philosophy as just a series of footnotes to Plato. And yet Aristotle, who lived from 384 to 322 B.C. and was the beneficiary of both Socrates and Plato, combined the pragmatic ethical interests of Socrates with the systematic mentality of Plato. He brought a talent for careful observation into the service of an incredible analytical ability to see beneath the surface of life. And whenever he thought about human nature, he had insights that are to this day unrivaled for profundity and power. So it's to a pivotal piece of his wisdom that we now turn to get our bearings.

When he looked around at the world, Aristotle saw, as all of us do, that human beings pursue different things. Some seek wealth. Others dream of fame. Some long for love. Others lust for power. The cautious aim for security, the bold look for adventure. But Aristotle had the insight that beneath all the surface differences in what we seem to chase, everyone in this life is really after the same thing: happiness. And what Aristotle discerned, many subsequent thinkers have confirmed.

All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.

—BLAISE PASCAL

The president of the company, the shipping clerk, the office manager, the salesman, the accountant, the current client, the potential customer, the supplier, and every other person you come in contact with during the day is seeking, in everything they do, to be happy. This is the universal human quest, underlying every other activity. If we can come to understand most deeply what that happiness is which we all seek, we can touch the innermost heart of human motivation and unlock the deepest secret of sustainable success in all our efforts together. Simple, but powerful.

What, then, is happiness? What is it exactly that we all pursue? If we can understand this, we can come to see more deeply what it is that people need to experience in their work as well as in their personal lives. Surprisingly, from all the great thinkers reflecting on the topic of happiness throughout the centuries and across all the major world cultures, I believe that we have inherited only three basic

views of happiness. One of them will give us the keys that we need for unlocking individual potential and creating the innermost foundations for long-term business excellence.

The first understanding of happiness comes to us from the distant past, but it is this view that has dominated the perspectives of so many people in the twentieth century. To give it expression, let me quote a man who, for many years before his death, was one of my favorite ancient thinkers, comedian George Burns. He once said, mirroring a famous eighteenth-century French philosopher but with his own distinctive twist, “Happiness is—a good meal, a good cigar, and a good woman. Or a bad woman depending on how much happiness you can stand.”

Happiness: a good bank account, a good cook, and a good digestion.

—JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

In his inimitable way, this classic American scalawag was attempting to articulate the hedonistic view of the ages: Happiness is just the same thing as pleasure. The advice of those who take this view is, if you want happiness, pursue pleasure and seek to avoid pain.

Happiness as Pleasure

It's this view of happiness that's behind the nearly frantic modern quest for money and things. Novelist Jane Austen is often quoted as having said over a hundred years ago, “A large income is the best recipe for happiness I ever heard of.” Of course, it seems that people chase money and hope for a large income primarily to get other things, the things they think will make them happy, or at least contribute significantly to their happiness. Concerning those most general things that people notoriously seek in their pursuit of happiness—money, fame, power, and status—the hedonistic view would be that they are sought because they bring pleasure either in themselves or in what they make possible, and that it is precisely the pleasure they provide that is the essence of happiness.

Money's easy to make if it's money you want. But with few exceptions people don't want money. They want luxury and they want love and they want admiration.

—JOHN STEINBECK

But is happiness the same thing as pleasure?

Aristotle once characterized this belief as a view fit for grazing cattle but not human beings. In our own century, Albert Einstein echoed Aristotle; commenting on any worldview that puts happiness viewed as pleasure, at the center, he wrote, “In this sense I have never looked upon ease and happiness as ends in themselves—such an ethical basis I call more proper for a herd of swine.” Strong words, but for a good point.

For all its importance in human life, pleasure is just one piece of a much larger puzzle. I can't imagine a happy life utterly devoid of enjoyment, but pleasure is not the same thing as happiness. The occasional self-destructive behavior of the rich and famous confirms this far too vividly.

Happiness is not identical to pleasure. And that's a good thing if we seek happiness at work because the workday is not usually just one long wave of pleasure washing over us. Nonetheless, there should be as many pleasures as possible connected with our work. People do their best when they enjoy what they are doing. And extrinsic rewards can indeed help provide for an enhanced ongoing enjoyment of the work experience. People should be well paid for what they do, and it's important to give associates the recognition they deserve for a job well done. Status can also be properly aspired to and attained in even a flattened organization. Promotion up a managerial hierarchy is not a necessary condition for the accruing of positive status. We can honor people in many ways, and increased power can and should be awarded to our colleagues who demonstrate their ability to use power well.

Certainly, the enjoyment of money, status, recognition, and power can be properly recognized as contributing to a happy life, or at least a happy workplace experience, if these things are received and used well. But the need for that little qualification alone, that little "if," is enough to indicate that the potential pleasures of money, fame, power, and status are not themselves the same thing as happiness. As we'll see shortly, what matters most is the overall process in which these enjoyments have a place. If we want the people around us to experience a measure of happiness in the business we do together and if we ourselves want to be happy in our work, we have to cast our net beyond the considerations of compensation, recognition, regard, and power alone. But then we are still left asking what exactly happiness is.

Let's examine a second view of happiness that comes to us from antiquity, one associated with Stoic philosophy in the West, and with many strands of philosophical thinking in the East. For reasons we'll discuss, this view has held great attraction for people in the late twentieth century, especially for those who see the limits of pleasure in human life. It is the view that happiness is ultimately personal peace.

A happy life consists in tranquillity of mind.

—CICERO

Happiness as Personal Peace

Tranquillity. Equanimity. Calm. Imagine the spirit of a happy person as mirrored by the surface of a still pond on a windless day. This is the goal of the meditative techniques practiced by people in every walk of life. I recently met a late-middle-aged conservative gentleman who couldn't get over what was going on in his own family. In describing what was to him a surprising development in the life of a family member, he shrugged and said, a bit sheepishly, "My son's taken up meditation. I guess it beats sittin' doin' nothin'." Well of course it *is* sitting doing nothing, but in the best possible way with the purpose of obtaining ultimate inner peace.

Clearly we could all use a little more calm in our lives. The *Los Angeles Times Magazine* not long

ago did a cover story called “The New Age of Anxiety: At the End of the American Century, the Country Is Stressed Out.” Anxiety in America has reached epidemic proportions. People are worried about their jobs, their marriages, their neighborhoods, their kids, their future. And it doesn’t only start when one has a family to support and a mortgage to pay. Elementary-school-age kids now regularly talk about being “stressed out,” and teachers increasingly share with preteens physical and mental strategies for handling the pressures of modern life.

This is every bit as serious as it is pervasive. On an airplane recently I read a newspaper article about anxiety being a significant health risk; a recent study on thousands of adults had indicated that highly nervous individuals are four times likelier than the rest of the population to be victims of sudden heart death. I thought to myself, “Reading *this* is not going to help the nervous people a whole lot.” But it’s true. Anxiety kills. It kills the spirit and the body. And we need to overcome it.

The ancient Stoic philosophers believed that nothing in the world is either as good or as bad as it seems. They realized that many people are nervous wrecks because they become too excited about the good things and too depressed about the bad. We need something like inner psychic shock absorbers as we hit the potholes and speed bumps of life, a measure of inner peace that will allow us to be flexible and steady amid all those unexpected things that life throws at us. We all need to calm down.

There is no joy but calm.

—ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

But the very pace of modern life militates against calmness. In the 1950s, social scientists predicted that by the end of the century we’d all be living lives of leisure. Technology would free us from dull, time-consuming tasks and allow us to work four-hour days, twenty-hour weeks, maybe less. Why do you think that so many of our colleges and universities during this period began setting up departments of recreation administration and leisure studies? It wasn’t because they needed special classes for their football teams. It was to help us figure out what to do with all the predicted spare time we would be experiencing.

Of course, that prophesied age of leisure has not materialized. On the contrary, life has gone in fast-forward. Cell phones, pagers, microwaves, instant grits.... I recently caught myself hovering over my fax machine in a state of high anxiety, gesturing wildly at the paper coming out of the slot, and saying *out loud* in a voice of frustration, “Faster! Faster!”

It’s gone too far. A reporter and essayist named Joel Achenbach has written about a current research project to design portable cellular phones as cochlear implants. The receiver would be medically implanted in your ear, and the transmitter would be a cap on your tooth. Can you imagine this? “Doctor, doctor, there’s a ringing in my ears!” “Well, answer it, you fool!”

What is the point of all this silliness? The external world will never move us toward nirvana. It might, on the contrary, drive us crazy. And we can’t live happily with our nerves all ajangle. We need some calm. We need inner peace. We need some measure of personal tranquillity or we’ll never be able to deal well with all that the future may throw at us.

The Stoic philosophers were right in believing that peacefulness is important. A happy life utterly devoid of personal peace is impossible. But is peace the same thing as happiness? As a wonderful and wise author named Mary Ann Evans, who wrote over one hundred years ago under the pen name George Eliot, once put it, “It is vain to say that human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it.”

A life at ease is a difficult pursuit.

—WILLIAM COWPER

In his great book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankl put it like this:

I consider it a dangerous misconception of mental hygiene to assume that what man needs in the first place is equilibrium or, as it is called in biology, “homeostasis,” i.e., a tensionless state. What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the struggling and striving for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task. What he needs is not the discharge of tension at any cost but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him.

Happiness is not a station that you arrive at, but a manner of travelling.

—MARGARET LEE RUNBECK

Too many people in the business world today seem to resent the challenges coming their way and hanker after equilibrium, a tranquillity in the work environment that would in effect render them, as human problem solvers, quite superfluous. But we humans don’t grow amid utter tranquillity. We need action. We need problems. We need a healthy amount of tension in our lives. Human happiness is not to be thought of as the emotional equivalent of one long nap. To help the people around us be happy at work, we may indeed need to help them calm their nerves a bit on occasion, but happiness at work does not require total workplace serenity. There is complete quietude only in death, and business is an activity of the living.

But men must know, that in the theater of man’s life it is reserved only for God and the angels to be lookers on.

—FRANCIS BACON

In their own ways, George Eliot and Victor Frankl were making a point articulated centuries before by Aristotle, when he concluded, “Happiness is a sort of action.” Let me dress it out a little bit and offer this definition in the spirit of Aristotle: Happiness is participation in something that brings fulfillment.

Happiness as Participation in Something Fulfilling

In his essay *De Finibus*, the Roman statesman and practical philosopher Cicero proclaimed, “The soul ever yearns to be doing something.” It is not having but doing that is most intimately related to the fullest experience of being. We are at our best and feel our best when we are engaged in a worthy task.

I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve (or save) the world and a desire to enjoy (or savor) the world. This makes it hard to plan the day.

—E. B. WHITE

Recently, when I was giving a number of talks over a short period of time in Disney World, my wife bought me the authorized biography of Walt Disney to give me some perspective on his legacy. Let me quote a snippet from one of his conversations that will be particularly illuminating here:

I've always been bored with just making money. I've wanted to do things, I wanted to build things. Get something going ... I'm not like some people who worship money as something you've got to have piled up in a big pile somewhere. I've only thought of money in one way, and that is to do something with it.... I don't think there is a thing that I own that I will ever get the benefit of, except through doing things with it.

I believe that Walt Disney was an Aristotelian about happiness. It was never a matter of just piling up money or stuff to be enjoyed. It was always a matter of the joy of doing, of creating, of participating in the building of new things to enrich the world.

It is only well with me when I have a chisel in my hand.

—MICHELANGELO

Happiness is not the same thing as pleasure, and it's not the same as personal peace. Both of these are relatively passive states, however active we may sometimes be in our pursuit of them. Happiness never exists in passivity. It is in fact a dynamic phenomenon of participation in something that brings fulfillment. At its best, it is accompanied by pleasure and a good measure of inner peace. In fact, it can be argued that one of the highest forms of peace is that which accompanies satisfying engagement in a job worth doing. And one of the greatest pleasures in life is active fulfillment from a job well done. So happiness is connected with peace as well as with pleasure. But ultimately it is to be found in the activity. It is in the work.

Taste the joy that springs from labor.

—HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

But this new definition of happiness immediately raises an obvious question. What exactly do we need to bring fulfillment to human beings? It's one thing to be told that happiness is participation in something that brings fulfillment, but we won't understand what that means, or exactly what happiness is, and what this implies for organizational or business motivation, until we get clear what it is that brings us fulfillment. Let's consider two answers.

The first is simple: different things for different people. Maybe you experience a sense of fulfillment working with a lot of other people in a large, open office. Maybe someone else is fulfilled in a more solitary routine. Perhaps you derive a measure of fulfillment in your personal time from playing music. Maybe I like sports. Different things for different people.

This answer is true, but it's also superficial. The greatest thinkers have seen that there is fundamental unity beneath the apparent diversity of forms of human fulfillment. My second answer to the question of what brings fulfillment to people takes this into account. I've come to believe that an activity or enterprise, a relationship or involvement, a form of work or a form of play, can contribute to bringing fulfillment to the people involved in it only if it respects and nurtures four fundamental dimensions of human experience.

We're going to explore in detail what these four dimensions are, but I should say right off that there are four basic ways that we all experience the world around us as we live every day. All our senses can be involved in each of these modes of apprehending life. And everything we do can reflect these four dimensions. This structure of our experience is universal, because it is rooted in human nature at the most basic level.

Nature has given the opportunity of happiness to all, knew they but how to use it.

—CLAUDIAN

This is the ultimate existential unity beneath the manifest diversity of human life. Whether you're single or married, employed or unemployed, a doctor, lawyer, factory line supervisor, or company president, a mother or an elected official, whether you're in sales and service or research and development, whatever your place in this world, you will not be fulfilled in whatever it is that you're doing unless these four basic dimensions of your experience are addressed. And the people around you won't experience a measure of fulfillment or happiness in that relationship or activity with you either unless these same dimensions of their experience are being nurtured as well.

The ancient philosophers wrote a lot about these dimensions, along with the foundations they provide for human fulfillment, and they were appreciated by medieval thinkers as well. Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), for instance, had his way of explicating what have come to be known to us as the great transcendentals, and William of Occam (c. 1285–1349) had his own distinct way too. What will present to you here owes a lot to the work of other thinkers, but it is primarily the product of my own thought and experience and so comes to you with no other imprimatur but the testimony I offer and the confirmation you see in your life and career. I am convinced that this powerful framework captures the best of what has been thought on the subject and in fact delineates the lineaments of ultimate reality as they impinge universally on issues of human happiness and workplace excellence. But in the end it is up to each of us to put these ideas to the test and prove them in our own experience.

Let me indicate briefly what these four crucial dimensions of human experience are. They will structure all the rest of what I have to say in this book. They are that important.

The Four Dimensions of Human Experience

There are four basic dimensions to all human experience, across all world cultures and throughout all of our history. They are as important now as they have ever been. They're the keys to individual happiness at work as well as sustainable corporate excellence. And yet they are only recently coming

to be understood and appreciated for their true significance in modern business. Each of the dimensions leads to a goal, a target that is itself a bedrock foundation for enduring human fulfillment. They are:

1. The Intellectual Dimension, which aims at Truth
2. The Aesthetic Dimension, which aims at Beauty
3. The Moral Dimension, which aims at Goodness
4. The Spiritual Dimension, which aims at Unity

The Intellectual, the Aesthetic, the Moral, and the Spiritual: Truth, Beauty, Goodness, and Unity. These are the elements that structure all of human life. And they offer us four timeless virtues, or strengths, for the soul of any productive endeavor with other people, and thus four foundations for sustainable human excellence. We neglect them in our business lives to our great peril.

Let me put it again in a simple chart:

THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE	THE FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN EXCELLENCE
The Intellectual	Truth
The Aesthetic	Beauty
The Moral	Goodness
The Spiritual	Unity

I've become convinced that these four dimensions of experience, and these four foundations of excellence, provide us with the key to both rediscovering personal satisfaction at work and reinventing corporate spirit in our time. They are the key to sustainable corporate excellence because they are the foundations of corporate fulfillment, and they have that status because they are the deepest touchstones for ultimate individual fulfillment and happiness.

People will not have a sense of positive corporate spirit in any endeavor unless that activity is connected with their personal quest for happiness, unless they are feeling some degree of fulfillment and some measure of happiness in that task. And it is only when this issue of individual fulfillment is understood in the deepest possible way that we will see how personal satisfaction is finally tied to interpersonal, organizational, and business flourishing.

As we look at the applications of truth, beauty, goodness, and unity in personal and corporate life, we're going to be examining the inner foundations for sustainable excellence in all our business endeavors. It is the people within any enterprise, and their interactions with each other, that ultimately produce excellence or mediocrity.

One of the most creative scientists alive, MacArthur Award winner Dr. John Holland of the University of Michigan, has said of any sufficiently complex system, "We can't add up the parts and understand the whole, for that does not give a good picture of what the system does. The interactions are just as important as the parts." In this same way what we're going to be exploring together here

the way in which the most fundamental parts of any business system, any organization or business relationship—the people who make it go—must operate and interact for that system to attain long-term excellence. Only by grasping this will we really understand business excellence and business success in the deepest possible way.

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