

Introduction

Welcome to kind business.

We are all familiar with the positive feelings that are generated when we exhibit kindness, and yet this quality is rarely associated with business, which for many of us is where we spend most of our waking day. Kind' as a description of business scarcely exists, in fact the words 'kind' and 'business' rarely appear in the same sentence.

The purpose of this book is to provide an overview of how business could be conducted, if we are to respect people and planet while acknowledging the responsibility of business to produce returns for those who have invested in the company.

The book contains multiple references to authors, journalists, public speakers, researchers and advocates from a range of countries. In this sense it acts as a resource that helps to build the case for 'business done differently', including reports from CEOs who have experienced the transformative power of good business practice, and its effect of underpinning long-term sustainable returns for shareholders.

The book is designed to put forward thought-provoking concepts while inviting the reader to dive more deeply into any field that particularly takes their interest via the works and wisdom of the experts quoted. It is hoped that the book will not only further the reader's own knowledge but also contribute to the transformation of the business world.

We begin with a short history lesson of how company structures came into being, the essential motivation of business and the way business evolved to focus on the short term.

We will see that this environment, characterised by ever-increasing demand for quarterly profits and shareholder returns, often drove poor and unethical decision-making. Short-termism is the curse of the capitalist system.

Nigel Lake, co-founder of global corporate advisory firm Pottinger, provides us with an alternative paradigm in his book, *The Long Term Starts Tomorrow*, when he states, 'long-term thinking + action = lasting impact.'

Today, the impact of companies extends well beyond the simple model of a seller and a buyer engaged in a financial transaction. The responsibilities of companies start with the treatment of the people who work there and extends to their greater societal and environmental impacts. This presents challenges for boards and senior executives in balancing short-term shareholder interests, with environmental and human rights responsibilities affecting the lives of future generations.

The community is looking for large corporations to demonstrate that they are doing business in a way that is honest and transparent, and that this is embedded from the board down. The public are sick of scandals involving deceptive business practices, poor executive behaviour and corporate corruption.

While quoting case studies of poor business practice *Kind Business* highlights the positives as regards constructive leadership behaviour, and corporate cultures that enrich the lives of those who work within them and builds a case for 'business done differently' becoming 'the new normal' with superior outcomes for all stakeholders.

Revolutions tend to polarise and create ‘us and them’ environments. Hence this book is not about inciting a revolution; rather it advocates for logical, pragmatic reform. A process which may take longer, but if executed well, is guaranteed of greater lasting success, as we are likely to take more people on the journey.

This book is not a compilation of financial numbers, however, at times numbers do have a role to play. Quantitative and qualitative data are both important in building a case for change as different audiences respond more positively to the methodology that they are most aligned with.

For example, measuring turnover rates in a company will tell you *how many* people are leaving, but we need the stories of those people in order for us to understand *why* they are leaving. When measuring what’s important we also need to respect the subjective, and often personal, nature of people’s stories, as not everything of value can be measured, and not everything that can be measured is of value.

To help make this book as accessible as possible to those with different learning styles, much of the content comprises stories. This is deliberate as analysis of people’s learning styles tells us that:

... roughly 40 percent will be predominantly visual learners, who learn best from videos, diagrams, or illustrations. Another 40 percent will be auditory, learning best through lectures and discussions. The remaining 20 percent are kinaesthetic learners, who learn best by doing, experiencing, or feeling. Storytelling has aspects that work for all three types.

This book is a compilation of many people’s ideas, and every effort has been made to attribute all quotes and ideas to the original authors. These are all people who are seeking a better world. There are also many more people doing extraordinary work than it has been possible to include.

Placing good values at the heart of all cultures is not a radical idea, but nevertheless a powerful one. The corporate sector has enormous resources, brilliant people and vast reserves of capital. If even a small percentage are channelled into caring more deeply for our people and our planet, and into tackling some of society’s most intractable problems, the world will be a better place for all of us.

I hope I have captured philosophies, perspectives and stories that will inspire the reader to adopt a different approach as to how they manage people and how they conduct business; or embolden them to keep up their existing efforts.

It all starts with embracing the philosophy of being kind and finding the courage within ourselves to put this philosophy into action. To quote Nelson Mandela:

What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we had.

Books Referenced

- Ferrucci, Piero, *The Power of Kindness: The Unexpected Benefits of Leading a Compassionate Life* (2006)
- Lake, Nigel, *The Long Term Starts Tomorrow* (2014)