

CONSCIOUS BUSINESS

BASED ON THE TEACHINGS OF YOGI BHAJAN

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Introduction	3
What Do We Mean by “Conscious”?.....	4
Yogi Bhanjan’s Businesses.....	5
The Author's Eyewitness.....	6
The Six Characteristics of a Conscious Businessperson	11
1. Mental Clarity	12
2. Self-Awareness.....	17
3. Teamwork	23
Choosing Team Members and the Trap of Too Easily Dismissing Valuable Input	24
Checks and Balances	28
Inter-Personal Dynamics to be Avoided: Cliques, Self-Justification and Stereotyping	30
Job Satisfaction and Righteous Action.....	34
Teamwork Summary	36
4. Able to Put Aside Your Ego	39
When to Decide and When to Discuss	44
5. Respecting the Human Dignity of Other People	47
Performance Management	50
6. Flexibility.....	59
Flexible Decision-Making	59
Flexible Styles	60
Summary	68

INTRODUCTION

This book describes a different approach to business. Any person and any business can practice what they do either consciously or unconsciously. If you practice business consciously, you will make better decisions because you will have a fuller understanding of all the facts, undistorted by personal agendas. Also, the clarity that comes with conscious business practices leads directly to greater personal satisfaction from your work.

The business world is too complex and too fast paced these days to go about it unconsciously. In fact, the pace of change is so fast—and it will only get faster—that anyone at any level of business needs to have tools to sort out the facts from wishful thinking, reality from misperceptions. This book gives you those tools.

Consciousness is always the way to find the righteous action, what is uniquely appropriate, in every situation. In the world today there are less and less absolute rights or wrongs. Different things are appropriate at different times, and it is only consciousness that can tell you what is uniquely right for each situation, what is righteous for that moment in time. That is why conscious business can never be reduced to a collection of rules or guidelines. Instead of telling you how to act in business, this book gives you a different way of thinking about your business so that you can find the uniquely right action in every circumstance. When you can exhibit the characteristics described in this book, you will have the consciousness to be able to act righteously at work.

These teachings of Yogi Bhan do not replace traditional business training. You still need to know marketing, strategy, and finance. Yogi Bhan's teachings on conscious business provide a way to make sure that you are optimally applying those basic business skills.

This book discusses six key characteristics that a conscious businessperson will have, and gives practical advice on how you can increase the level of consciousness you bring to your own work right away.

When you practice these tools, and increase the level of consciousness in your own decision making, you will find that you will be more clear in your understanding of the issues, more balanced in your perceptions, more neutral in your assessments, more focused on the best interests of the company, and able to make better decisions in the midst of pressure, stress, uncertainty and rapid change.

It doesn't matter if you are a CEO, a salesman, or a secretary. Everyone at all levels of business today faces pressure and stress and needs to make at least

some level of decisions as part of their job. This book will help you make those decisions better.

Additionally, practicing business in a conscious way can give you more satisfaction from your job. It will help reduce your stress and help you handle information overload. There is also something innately satisfying about acting consciously. A conscious business decision transcends right and wrong to become a righteous decision. Right and wrong are bound by rules and absolutes. Righteousness means that it is uniquely appropriate to that specific situation, at that specific time and place. This book gives you tools that will enable you to act in that righteous way at work. There is a joy that comes from being so much in the moment that you can act that way. With these tools and approaches to business you can find joy in your job, whatever it is, and increase your performance.

In this book we describe what it looks like to practice business consciously. And we discuss practical ways you can increase the level of consciousness in your own work.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “CONSCIOUS”?

Some people have made the analogy between a corporation and a living organism. Some people extend this analogy to talk about the organization as a collective whole showing emergent properties, which can be called consciousness, unique from its component elements. This is *not* the kind of conscious business we are discussing.

To us, conscious business happens when the participants in it are conscious. Conscious business transacts when the people in the business are making decisions in a conscious way. So this book is really more about people than about business. It is about the characteristics and the behaviors of conscious businesspeople.

You may be wondering, “Aren’t we all conscious? I am conscious when I am awake, and unconscious when I’m asleep, so are you just talking about making sure you are doing business while you are awake?” Equating conscious with the state of being awake is a common convention, but we use the term “conscious” slightly differently. We use it to describe the state of being more “awake” than the normal, meaning more aware and more self-directed than usual.

You can probably recall a time when you were distracted and instead of driving to the store like you wanted to, you “unconsciously” followed your daily routine and took the road to your office instead. This is more in line with how we use the term “conscious.” When you are in your car, you are awake, but a subconscious pattern asserted itself, and hence you were not fully conscious while driving.

If you think about why you drove to your office instead of the store, chances are you had something else on your mind. For most people in the business world today, distractions are a growing problem for them every day. With information overload and constant stress and pressure to always be multi-tasking, we almost always have something else on our mind when we are making business decisions. Conscious business is the antidote for information overload. You can't stop the flood of information coming to you, and you can't work on only one thing at a time. But with the tips in this book you can increase your chances of making it to the store as planned.

In our driving example, our unconscious mistake eventually becomes obvious. You find yourself pulling into the office parking lot; you're surprised a bit to see no other cars. In wondering why no other cars are there, in a flash it hits you – it's Saturday and you were meaning to go to the grocery store!

When you make unconscious decisions in business, it may be tougher to notice, but the exact same thing happens, and it happens all the time. We make decisions and take actions based on unconscious patterns and habits that impact the business. We react instead of act, every day. We end up taking the business in an unproductive direction, towards an unwanted destination. We thought we were trying to make the business successful, but sometimes a subconscious pattern diverts us from that road.

A conscious businessperson is more aware than most people about their own subconscious patterns, and they are doing their best to make every action and every decision a conscious one. A conscious businessperson will make less mistaken decisions because they are able to stay fully focused on the ultimate destination, success for the business.

When people are making conscious decisions they are acting with a clear goal, to serve the best interests of the company. They have a mental clarity that can see through their own ego needs, their emotions, the emotions of their colleagues, the stress of information overload. Even in the toughest situations they aren't reacting; they aren't acting on emotions; they aren't blindly following someone else's ideas of right and wrong; they aren't putting their own self-interest above the business's.

The below sections discuss a number of attributes that a conscious businessperson would have. Within each section there are quotes from Yogi Bhanjan to further explain them. Many examples are given to show how these concepts play out in real life situations, and practical suggestions are given for how you can immediately begin implementing these concepts.

YOGI BHANJAN'S BUSINESSES

The source material for this book comes entirely from Yogi Bhanjan. Over the course of his 33 years in the United States, he has inspired his students to start

numerous and diverse businesses. Over time some of these businesses merged together and put themselves under a common management structure. Under his guidance, this family of companies continues to thrive and grow.

For example, Akal Security started with \$500, five men and a pickup truck doing security for some of the roughest bars in Santa Fe, New Mexico. They soon gained a reputation for integrity, honesty, and hard work, and the company grew quickly. In 2002, Akal Security was awarded the honor of being the 7th largest company in New Mexico, employed more than 6,000 people, and managed security services for over 70% of all Federal Courthouses in the United States. In 2003, Akal Security was awarded contracts to provide security at several Army bases in the United States, and was employing over 10,000 employees.

It is not surprising that Yogi Bhajan would practice and teach conscious business. His entire life has been devoted to teaching and uplifting his students, teaching them to raise their own consciousness and to be teachers in their own right, rather than remain his students. Everything he has taught, from yoga to meditation to diet to business, has been to help people become more conscious and more aware. This book is simply highlighting a small sliver of what he has taught—conscious business.

Through more than 30 years and a lot of business growth, Yogi Bhajan has been a trusted advisor and consultant; meeting regularly with corporate management teams to guide, teach, and inspire. He's also acted as the "conscience" and the "consciousness" of the businesses. He consistently insists that the businesses run in accordance with both core values and solid business principles. He constantly pushes his students towards being the kind of conscious businesspeople this book describes.

Yogi Bhajan is a master of Kundalini Yoga, the yoga of awareness. So it is no surprise that he teaches running a business with awareness. Before coming to the United States in 1969, Yogi Bhajan was an army intelligence officer and an Indian customs officer. It is the combination of those two seeming opposites, the spiritual teacher and yogi intertwined with the hard-nosed, extremely practical businessman, that make Yogi Bhajan such a dynamic and unique business leader.

All of the material here comes from his teachings. Some comes directly from his words, taken from the notes of hundreds of meetings between Yogi Bhajan and the management teams of the businesses he inspired. The rest comes from observations of how the businesses he has inspired and continues to advise run. We hope that this material can guide and inspire you to approach your work in a more conscious way, in a way that is not a compromise between

the spiritual and the practical but a unique place that simultaneously honors them both.

THE AUTHOR'S EYEWITNESS

I went to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as an undergraduate in 1987 expecting to be a theoretical physicist. I loved the way physics could explain so much diversity of experience and observation with simple laws and equations.

After talking with a few professors, I decided that I didn't have it in me to make a career out of physics. I couldn't see myself being a professor and doing nothing but scribbling on blackboards all day long, which was how I was envisioning life as a theoretical physicist. So after my freshman year I switched majors to Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineering.

I began looking for a job in the Aeronautical Engineering field as I was finishing my Master's degree. I didn't get any job offers. And the few places at which I interviewed didn't seem very interesting anyway. So partly by choice and partly out of necessity, I went back to MIT to work on a doctorate.

About three years into my research on the aerodynamics inside aircraft engines I realized that that kind of research was also not very interesting. I love learning new things, but to spend three years trying to expand the general body of knowledge about a particular subject was a bit boring. I would have loved taking a class on the aerodynamics inside aircraft engines. But for me, spending several years on that one topic was too much.

So during my final year, while finishing my thesis, I was looking for something else to do. I considered getting into technical project management. Maybe I'd enjoy managing the process of designing an aircraft engine, instead of being one of the technical guys contributing to a small piece of one small component inside the engine? I also got together with two friends of mine and we started a company to make web sites (this was in 1995 when this was still a fairly new idea).

Our web business didn't last long. We had one client, and then we closed the doors. We were all committed to finishing our degrees, and we realized that there was no way to both run our own business and go to school at the same time.

I had recently gotten married, and my wife worked for Golden Temple Natural Products (they manufacture cereals, granolas, the Yogi Tea® brand of herbal teas, and other products), a company that was founded and run by students of Yogi Bajan, so I explored the possibility of working for them.

When I graduated with my PhD in early 1996, I did go to work for Golden Temple Natural Products as their Information Technology Manager. They were

small enough at that time that I didn't have anyone to manage – I was doing network, desktop, and application support.

One of the first surprises I had when I first began work with Golden Temple was the big difference between theory and practice. All I was used to was theory, coming up with a solution. And it took me a long time to learn that actually implementing a solution in a real business situation is often much more difficult than coming up with the solution itself.

For example, one of the very first projects I worked on was a forecasting and MRP (Manufacturing Resource Planning) spreadsheet. Once I learned some of the basics of what was going on, I immediately jumped to the conclusion that we were going about it all wrong. If only the sales people would do their forecasting differently and the production people would do their planning differently, then we could have a really efficient system. I was actually a little shocked and disappointed when no one else thought my solution was very good.

At that time I had no idea just how challenging it can be working with people to change systems. The kinds of things that are elementary to anyone who's in the business world were still mysteries to me then. I didn't understand that when someone is already working 10 to 12 hours a day just trying to stay on top of their work, they're not going to be very receptive to the extra work of designing a new system. And even though it seemed clear to me that the salespeople *should* be able to forecast differently, I didn't know enough to even find out from them what issues they were facing that were preventing them from doing it differently.

I quickly learned that just having a good idea is often not very useful in business! There was an entirely new area for me to learn about – how to deal with people!

I eventually moved to New Mexico, where Golden Temple's corporate headquarters are located. My work gradually began to expand beyond just IT into general management and operations. After about 4 years I joined the management team that oversaw 8 different businesses (Golden Temple being one of them).

I worked with this management team for over four years and I loved my job. I do sometimes miss the simplicity and neatness of differential equations, but business, particularly the conscious business that we are trying to practice here, is always interesting to me, always challenging me to grow and expand my skills. There is always more and more to learn about the businesses, about people, and about myself.

It was as part of that team that I began to directly learn and understand the material that is in this book. Our team had regular meetings with Yogi Bajan at which he would both give advice on specific business issues and talk about his philosophy and approach to business in general. The conscious business style that we try to practice is a perfect answer to my questions about how to effectively deal with people. It's not a replacement for good communication skills, project management, basic supervision skills, or any specific kind of training. What Yogi Bajan teaches is a meta-skill. The concepts of Conscious Business give you a framework in which to practice all the other skills that are still necessary for success in business.

As part of the management team of this family of companies I saw us having great success in the marketplace, which told me that we were doing something right. And I saw that the way we ran our businesses and the way we interacted with each other was (and is) very different than other businesses. I assumed that there was a link there; between the way we run our businesses and our success.

But maybe even more important than the success of our businesses was my own personal experience of my job. As I said, I love my job. I get a lot of satisfaction and fulfillment from it. But when I stop to consider why I like my job so much, it's not really *what* I'm doing, but *how* I'm doing it. It is the regular practicing of the principles in this book that gives me so much enjoyment from going to work every day.

I wouldn't say that I am expert in practicing conscious business. I still do a lot of things unconsciously, and I still sometimes forget to practice the tools in this book. But I find that the more conscious I am in my own job, the more satisfaction I get. And I'm less stressed. When I look back on a bad week, a week where it felt like I was struggling at work, not getting anywhere, not happy with where things were going, etc. (i.e., a stressful week), I inevitably find that there were at least a couple of things from this book that I was not doing.

From my own personal experience then, practicing conscious business helps you achieve two things that we all want: success in business and personal satisfaction from your work.

As I said, I am no expert in the practice of conscious business. But as a scientist, I have been able to distill the fundamental laws of conscious business. Mostly by watching and observing, but with some tantalizing hints directly from Yogi Bajan, I kept learning more and more about his approach to business. And my scientific mind kept trying to boil all of the diversity of that down into a few principle concepts, the simple "equations" that would answer my questions of, "Why?"

I often get asked if I ever use what I learned getting my PhD in Aeronautical Engineering, and if I think that my years of graduate school have been wasted. And while I don't use what once was my extensive knowledge of the Navier-Stokes equations, I do regularly use what I learned about problem solving and how to distill a large body of complex information down into some simple ideas. It was those very skills that allowed me to formulate the concepts in this book.

The principles of conscious business in this book are the laws that when applied to diverse circumstances will give rise to diverse observable actions. But the results of those diverse actions will always be in the direction of business success and, more importantly, personal satisfaction.

THE SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF A CONSCIOUS BUSINESSPERSON

Just as a conscious driver won't mistakenly head to their office when they want to go to the store, a conscious businessperson won't make decisions based on anything but what is best for the company. This may sound simple, but it is extremely complex because it deals with the subconscious mind. The driver accidentally heading to work doesn't mean to go there; that wasn't their intention. But they end up there just the same. Just so in business. You can have every intention to be doing your best, and still your subconscious mind may divert you.

It is not a hopeless situation. A good intention alone is not enough, but there are practical, simple things that you can do to prevent yourself from driving off the path you've chosen.

Your mind will always process some information automatically. We are all hardwired to make some judgments subconsciously. In some cases, your automatic decisions are appropriate and necessary. But at other times, they will be erroneous and based on false information. Since you can't stop the automatic processing of your mind you have to have a habit to counteract that. You have to have a habit to consciously stop, step back from your subconscious decision or judgment, consciously process it, and only then act.

This section breaks the practice of conscious business into six key characteristics. When a conscious businessperson demonstrates these characteristics, they will be protecting themselves from unconscious mistakes. They will be ensuring that all of their business training and experience is being directed towards the right goal; not sidetracked down a path (like the road to the office) that is not consciously chosen.

There are two results from doing business consciously. The first is a more successful business because you are making better decisions. Secondly you will be happier and gain more satisfaction from your job.

Within each chapter we also discuss why that attribute is necessary, give examples of how it looks in practice, and discuss ways that you can increase that attribute or improve that area for yourself.

1. MENTAL CLARITY

The first thing you must have to practice business consciously is mental clarity. When you are not acting consciously, you are in some way not seeing the reality of what's in front of you. You are unable to clearly see all of the implications of an action you are contemplating. You cannot accurately predict the consequences or sequence of events that will follow. A lack of mental clarity can also indicate a poor understanding of your own motives and subconscious desires; you aren't clear about what goal you are really going after.

The driver who ends up at their office by mistake had a lack of clarity about his destination. His conscious mind wanted to go to the store, but his unconscious mind wanted to go to the office. When he came to the fork in the road, where one direction led to the office and the other to the store, he didn't have clarity about the future implications of his decision. He didn't consciously make the decision at that fork. He didn't have clarity about the future implications of one decision versus the other.

So we can say that when you make a conscious business decision, you are making it with as much clarity as possible. You are clear on all the facts, you are clear of the goal you're trying to accomplish, you are clear on all the possible courses of action, and you are able to see as clearly as possible see the ramifications of those actions.

Seeing clearly is different from simply making sure you've fully researched an issue. Mental clarity is not just collecting more information. It's more subtle than that. Fully researching an issue really just addresses the first word of the phrase, "seeing clearly." Understanding the "clearly" part of that phrase requires some knowledge of the subconscious mind and its role in filtering the information that reaches our conscious awareness.

On a physical level, we know that only a small fraction of the available sensory input, the signals coming in to our brains from each of our six senses (smell, taste, touch, sound, sight, and proprioception – the sense of our body's location and orientation in space), makes it to our conscious awareness. For example, background noises can be filtered out by our subconscious, allowing us to focus in on a conversation even in the midst of a crowded, noisy room. This kind of filtering is essential and is hardwired into us.

Conscious business recognizes that this exact same function, this filtering by the subconscious mind, also affects our higher-level cognitive processes like thoughts and emotions. Just as you are not consciously aware of everything in your visual field of view, perhaps only noticing something when it moves, you

are not aware of all the thoughts and emotions that are going on inside your head. Every day we all make decisions based on or biased by these subconscious thoughts or emotions, leading to poor results.

Subconscious filtering therefore is a fundamental obstacle to practicing conscious business. Mental clarity is the absence of subconscious filtering. If you don't recognize and account for your inevitable subconscious filtering, you'll never achieve the clarity you need no matter how much data you collect. Mental clarity also requires the ability to neutrally assess the information you collect. That is the "clearly" part of "seeing clearly."

We all know someone who we would characterize as generally optimistic. And when that person predicts the results of a decision, we'd expect them to see a rosier future than most people. That's basically the definition of an optimist. Using our language of mental clarity, the optimist has a subconscious filter that distorts their view of reality. He isn't able to see future implications clearly; he has a lack of mental clarity. He is seeing brighter prospects for the future than are warranted. Because of his distorted view of reality, the optimist will occasionally make a wrong decision because it was based on an incorrect view of the future. Unless he has a habit of correcting himself, he won't be practicing conscious business because of his subconscious filter.

Another excellent example of subconscious filtering is captured in the old axiom, "When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." Without our even knowing it, our subconscious filters information before it reaches our conscious awareness. We end up seeing a distorted view of reality. We end up seeing a nail when in reality there isn't one. Inappropriate hammer usage is exactly the kind of poor decision that we make all the time in business when we aren't mentally clear!

When the driver headed down the road towards his office instead of the store, his subconscious mind was automatically filtering the decision of which turn to take. His subconscious mind made the decision and kept it from reaching his conscious mind. In the same way, as we solve complex problems in the office, our brains are filtering our thoughts and feelings based on our temperament, personality, culture, and upbringing. This automatic processing of information can lead to a distorted view of reality and therefore poor decisions.

The following story exemplifies this principle. A very talented, experienced businesswoman had been entrusted to negotiate a major deal with a foreign business partner. The talks had been going very smoothly, but on one of the final deal points, she and her boss disagreed. She went back to finalize the negotiations as per her boss's instructions, but she was not 100% behind that approach. All of a sudden she found the talks bogged down and at risk of collapsing. Because of the disagreement with her boss, she was subconsciously

looking for problems, rather than looking for solutions. She was subtly, unconsciously, sabotaging the negotiations.

She was not saying to herself, “That darn boss of mine! He doesn’t know what he’s doing. I’ll show him!” That would be conscious sabotage! With just a small shift in her subconscious attitude, all of a sudden she stopped being as effective a problem solver. The talk dragged on several months longer than everyone had hoped, costing money and fraying the business relationships. Luckily a deal was eventually reached, but the mental fog caused by a small disagreement with her boss really got in the way. Unconsciously her mind was trying to take her down the road to failure instead of success.

It is impossible to eliminate your subconscious filters. They are a fundamental part of how our brains work. Therefore a conscious businessperson must have strategies to counteract the negative implications of this normal human process. You must do two things: minimize your filtering, and check if you are acting on a clear picture of reality before making a decision.

Because we’re dealing with subconscious patterns, there is a fundamental paradox in trying to correct them; you often don’t know when you are suffering from a lack of mental clarity. Therefore the only really effective way to deal with increasing your mental clarity is to set up habits that will support conscious decision making. If you put some corrective tools in your back pocket and wait until you think you need them, it’s guaranteed that you will under-use them. You must make a habit of using these corrective tools so that you can be sure you’re getting their benefits when you need them.

When facing an important or pivotal decision, many people practice something to clear their head and think more clearly such as taking a long bike ride or a lone walk. They take these actions to increase their mental clarity because when it’s critical, they want to make sure they aren’t acting impulsively.

But we face decisions all day and every day, so it’s important to create a habit that supports your mental clarity. If a brisk walk helps you think more clearly, then don’t just save it up for when you have a big decision, get in the habit of walking every day. As Yogi Bhaajan says,

“First man creates habits, then habits create the man.”

What habits can you set to increase and maintain your mental clarity? The best thing is some personal discipline or practice such as meditation. Yoga and meditation, of any form, is the most direct way you can increase your mental clarity. Some *sadhana*, or spiritual discipline that you practice every day, whether you are stressed out or things are going smoothly, whether you feel like you are mentally clear or you know you aren’t, will help you be as

conscious as possible. While some people run or ride a bike to clear their head and to be able to think straight, yoga and mediation is the ultimate practice to “clear your head” for good business decision-making.

Make meditation or long bike rides or brisk walks a habit that will support you in your attempt to make conscious decisions every day. Even with a meditative practice, the best you can do is minimize the existence of subconscious filters, so the next sections discuss strategies to minimize their negative influence on our perception and hence our decision-making.

Because I am a scientist by training, I did an experiment with meditation and work. I do yoga and meditation every day, but I wanted to really see how much that practice contributes to my work. So I set out to *not* do any yoga or meditation for a week, to see if I would notice any difference.

I quickly noticed myself being much more emotional than usual. I was getting annoyed and frustrated at people and at situations that normally wouldn't bother me. These strong emotions did nothing to help me at work; they only stressed me out.

Three days into this experiment, I was in a meeting. Early on, I put forward an idea, “Don't you think we should...?” Normally, I have worded it differently, more like, “What do you think about...?” My choice of words was telling, as was the faint whiff of withering scorn my tone of voice carried.

The other people in the meeting weren't very receptive to my idea (partly caused by my tone of voice and phrasing?), and the discussion continued down a different path. I was silent for the rest of the meeting. My eyes followed the conversation around the table, but I wasn't listening. My head was full of self-justifying chatter, reassuring myself of my right to feel so judgmental.

What an awful meeting! I was completely ineffectual because even if my idea had merit, I was an ineffectual advocate. My emotional state, feeling judgmental, unheard, and a little angry, was very unpleasant; and had ripple effects that made the rest of my day stressful and frustrating. I knew that my mental clarity was off. I knew that I was making myself miserable. Still I couldn't stop my subconscious patterns from drawing my thoughts into cul-de-sacs of negativity.

The next morning I restarted my daily practice. By the second day I had regained my emotional balance. Yoga and meditation give me more mental clarity, allowing me to stop those negative patterns. What a simple way to help me enjoy my work and be more productive!

Since then I've tried this experiment a few more times, always with the same result. When the work is not too stressful, I can make it the whole week

without meditating. But I always notice the same reduction in my mental clarity, the same increase in my emotional reactivity, and the same increase in my stress level.

After seeing the difference between my normal level of consciousness in business (with meditation and yoga) and a lower level of consciousness (without yoga and meditation), it was very clear that mental clarity is critical to my performance at work and to my enjoyment of my work (because who enjoys being emotionally reactive, stressed, frustrated and annoyed?). For me, yoga and meditation are extremely effective tools for increasing my mental clarity. Now, if I miss just one day of my practice, I notice those same symptoms creeping into my work, which gives me plenty of inspiration to pick it up again!

The first characteristic of a conscious businessperson is mental clarity. This is the ability to neutrally and unemotionally see the reality of a situation, both the current facts and the future possibilities, with as little subconsciously-imposed distortion as possible. Conscious businesspeople have some daily habit that helps keep their mind clear and minimizes these inevitable subconscious filters.

2. SELF-AWARENESS

Once you have some level of mental clarity, the next most important attribute for a conscious businessperson is self-awareness. Self-awareness means having mental clarity in your view of yourself, and an understanding of your own internal workings and processes. Self-awareness is being able to clearly see the truth about yourself. Just as mental clarity allows you to see the facts around you clearly, self-awareness allows you to see the facts about yourself clearly as well.

The conscious businessperson knows that perfect mental clarity is impossible. All of our observations, thoughts, and feelings are to some extent distorted and colored by our subconscious. It is self-awareness that lets us know when our subconscious filters are most strongly distorting our vision. Therefore it is only with self-awareness will we be able to practice the compensatory strategies discussed later in this book. You have to know where the distortions in your vision are to enable yourself to correct them.

We can make an analogy between seeing with your eyes and “seeing” a business reality. Mental clarity in business is equivalent to seeing things in focus, undistorted and clearly. For each of us, some parts of our field of view are clear and in focus, while others are fuzzy and distorted. Each of us will have different areas of our field of view that are out of focus based on our personality, our culture, and our background. The conscious businessperson tries, through the practice of mental clarity, to get things into sharper focus and decrease the number and size of the distorted areas.

When you are not practicing conscious business, you will act as if you are seeing everything clearly and perfectly. But since this ideal can never be fully achieved, you are acting on a false premise. You can't view everything with perfectly neutrality and without bias. Hence you will inevitably make some poor decisions, because they will be based on inaccurate information. This is where self-awareness comes in. Self-awareness tells you what areas are fuzzy in your field of view. If you can't see with perfect 20/20 vision, you at least need to know what your prescription is so you can try to correct it.

We all have hidden agendas, secret motivations, things that act on our subconscious and influence our decisions. Our subconscious filters all the information coming in to us, and greatly effects our reactions to that information. But acting based on subconscious agendas, or on information that is distorted by unconscious filters, is the antithesis of conscious business. With self-awareness to we can act to counter these.

Using the example of the optimist again, if they have enough self-awareness, they will know that they have a tendency to see a future that is too rosy to be true. When faced with a critical decision, perhaps they would ask the advice of someone more negative than them. That's one way someone with enough self-awareness can compensation for their own tendencies. This is like using that pessimist as the corrective lens to clearly see what once was distorted. Only with self-awareness does the optimist know they need the pair of glasses provided by the pessimist's viewpoint.

Even if you are aware that you have a bias, say to be overly optimistic, often this awareness is "theoretical," or "generic." Meaning that even though you realize you tend towards optimism, the natural tendency is to resist the suggestion that some specific viewpoint of yours is biased. We all too lightly dismiss opinions different from our own.

A necessary ingredient of conscious business is the ability to see clearly. For the optimist in our example, their vision isn't quite 20/20. It's distorted by their tendency to not see potential problems or to underestimate challenges. Getting the advice of someone more pessimistic is like a corrective lens. Self-awareness is the critical knowledge that such a correction (in what areas and in what ways) is even needed.

Self-awareness allows a businessperson to take actions that balance out their lapses in mental clarity. This is different than acting to increase mental clarity (through meditation for example). This is acting to compensate for the remaining mental distortions. Without such compensation, you will inevitably make some bad decisions. The optimist may be fine in 9 decisions out of 10. But eventually they will make a bad decision because their personality led them to see a distorted reality. Their innate personality, the part of them that is overly optimistic, got in the way of their mental clarity. Yogi Bhanan calls this kind of problem a conflict of personality, where the personality is preventing the best interests of the business from being served.

"We have to forget these conflicts that our personality gives us towards work."

Another kind of conflict of personality occurs when you have a subconscious agenda. For example, imagine a person who has a strong personal dislike for one of their coworkers. They may subconsciously act in ways that make the other person look bad. Another example is someone who, due to financial stresses at home, subconsciously self-promotes and makes decisions that to help their career (at least in the short term) more than the business. These subconscious agendas are another example where there is no mental clarity.

You aren't seeing your own motivations clearly. Therefore there is no consciousness in the business.

Just like the driver unconsciously heading down the road to the office instead of the grocery store, a person under personal financial pressures may unconsciously make a business decision that is in their best financial interests, not the company's. Of course we aren't talking about outright fraud or stealing, when the person is *consciously* choosing to promote their own financial gain at the expense of their employer. We're talking about a much more common and subtle problem where an employee's subconscious agendas hurt the business without them consciously wanting that outcome.

Conscious businesspeople use self-awareness to catch themselves before they act on their sub-conscious agendas. Self-awareness gives them the understanding of where they are biased so that they can use the later tools in this book to correct themselves.

"People who want to do their own subconscious agenda, we don't want them."

In this quote you can see just how important it is to keep subconscious agendas out of business. No matter how promising an employee seems, if they are not self-aware (meaning that they are too controlled by their subconscious), they will eventually inadvertently hurt the business.

This is a pretty radical statement. A critical measure of an employee's future performance is their level of self-awareness. Take this concept to its logical extreme, and you can imagine incorporating "self-awareness" into performance reviews and hiring criteria!

Given the importance of self-awareness and mental clarity to conscious business, Yogi Bhanan has given the following advice regarding how to hire employees:

"Hire consciousness. Train skills."

It is a lot harder to learn to practice consciousness in business than it is to learn a specific function needed to do a job! This tenet of conscious business is exemplified in the businesses that Yogi Bhanan advises by the way they deal with new hires. Often these businesses hire people who show potential, especially young people, and then spend years training them.

How can you develop self-awareness? Again, a regular practice of meditation is a great tool for this. Another easy but powerful way is to learn from our mistakes. Unfortunately we often don't take full advantage of our failures to increase our self-awareness.

Yogi Bhanjan puts it quite bluntly:

"People in business who don't analyze themselves are stupid. Analyze whether you are going in the right direction."

"My way of educating is to face the facts, 1) where we have failed, 2) why we have failed, 3) what has made us to fail."

"Set time aside each week to analyze your own mistakes. Investigate and understand your failures. Find out why things collapsed, no matter who is embarrassed. Look at consequences of your failures and adjust yourself."

"Analyze past failures—we should know all failures, what's going wrong."

Another way to practice self-awareness is to ask yourself a simple question before you act.

"My head is clear because before action I always think twice. Am I acting from my ego or from my fear? Or am I doing it for the interest of the company?"

Here Yogi Bhanjan is saying that you can't be working for yourself (acting from your ego) and the best interests of the company at the same time. It's either one or the other. And of course, a conscious businessperson must be choosing the interests of the company over their own ego or their own fear. If you can cultivate the habit to ask yourself this question before acting, you will be practicing self-awareness.

Here is an example the lengths to which a conscious businessperson should go to gain self-awareness from the analysis of past mistakes. In one of the businesses that Yogi Bhanjan advises there once was a new executive. One of his responsibilities was to facilitate the approval process between the board and the business units. After about a year in his new position, Yogi Bhanjan learned of a few decisions that had not gone through the proper approval process. In several sessions over four months, he sat this young executive down, and forced these mistakes to be analyzed so that self-awareness could be gained.

Yogi Bhanjan's approach to helping this executive increase his self-awareness was very simple, but very powerful. He just kept asking, "Why?" "Why did this happen?" he'd ask. And the first responses from this executive were the "surface" reasons. "It was an emergency and a decision was needed right away," or, "This other person told me it was ok." But those answers didn't

really get to the core of what had happened. Yogi Bajan knew that there was some unconscious issue at play with this executive.

So Yogi Bajan continued to probe. He continued to ask, “Why?” “So what if it was an emergency, why did you bypass the system?” Under the pressure of this questioning, the executive was forced to examine his own motives, to try to bring to his awareness why he had gone around the approval system. From this self-examination, the next layer of rationalizations came out. Things like, “I felt so pressured by the people requesting approval, and I didn’t want to let them down.” Or, “I thought that the existing system was too slow. I didn’t agree with it, so I just on my own decided to do something different, something I thought was better and faster.”

Even there, Yogi Bajan did not relent. He didn’t stop asking, “Why?,” and probing deeper and deeper for the core reason for this executive’s bypassing of the system. Until he was self-aware of the root cause of the mistake, it could happen again. That blind spot would continue to cause problems in the future unless it was perfectly clear to him what had gone wrong.

And so the questioning continued. “Why did you think you could just change the system on your own? Why did you cave under the pressure from the people asking for approval? Didn’t you think that if it was OK for you to change the system, then it would signal to everyone else that they don’t have to follow your systems? You were undercutting your own authority as an executive!” The young executive was forced to dig deeper within himself to really analyze his mistake and bring to the surface his subconscious agendas that made him act as he did. As the analysis of the mistake continued, a deeper lever of understanding emerged. He saw that there was a part of him that was insecure. His self-esteem would be boosted each time he made people happy. His subconscious agenda was to gain “strokes” from the people asking for approvals (which they’d give when they got a fast response from him). And this subconscious agenda pulled his actions more strongly than the conscious desire to uphold his responsibility, which was to enforce the proper procedures and systems.

And still the questioning continued! There was still more self-awareness to be gained from further analysis of this mistake. This poor executive was remaining in some form of denial. He still hadn’t gotten to know the true, core reason behind the mistake. Finally, after four months of this exercise in self-awareness, in exhaustion, the executive’s mind a big blank from so much introspection, he answered the “Why?” question with a very softly-spoken, “I guess I was ignorant about the ramifications of my actions, and I was arrogant enough to think I knew better than the people who had set up the system.” And as the executive said that sentence, you could tell from the sound of it that

it was the truth. All the excuses had been stripped away, all the rationalizations had been abandoned, and the real motivation behind the mistake was revealed. He was finally aware of all of the sub-conscious agendas that had led to the mistake. Mental clarity had been achieved.

This example really shows how important self-awareness is to a conscious business. Yogi Bhanan was willing to go to such great lengths just to help one of the executives he advises gain a small measure of self-awareness. Any other company would have fired someone who had usurped authority and ignored the chain of command. But a conscious business would much rather have someone learn from their mistake than fire them. And not just learn from a mistake as in, “Oh, I learned that I shouldn’t bypass the system.” The conscious way of learning from a mistake means to gain true self-awareness. Only when the underlying psychological issue that caused the mistake is out in the open can the mistake truly be avoided in the future.

Self-awareness is the first step towards correcting your mental “vision” or clarity. To practice conscious business you want to be seeing things as clearly as possible. But you must also recognize that it is impossible to see everything perfectly clearly. We all have strengths and weaknesses, personality traits, and subconscious habits, all of which filter our thoughts and cause distortions in our perceptions.

Even as we act to increase the clarity with which we see things, we must also develop our self-awareness so we can deal with those areas where we still have “blind spots;” so we can know where we still need to compensate.

Conscious businesspeople know that everyone’s input is biased – even their own! Their own thoughts and opinions are undoubtedly colored by their personality, their mood that day, their background, their work style, etc. No person can neutrally assess every situation and always be unbiased. They also recognize that with the pace of the world today, no business can afford to be making decisions that aren’t neutrally assessed. Actions based on biased opinions can only lead to trouble sooner or later. Self-awareness is the critical tool of conscious business because it lets you know where you tend to lose your neutrality so you can compensate, which the rest of this book will tell you how to do.

3. TEAMWORK

The most effective tool you can use to practice business consciously is to work in teams. Conscious teamwork is different than how most people think of teams in a business environment. We're not talking about cross-functional teams or self-directed teams that have seen their days as management fads come and go. We're talking about using other people to cover your blind spots. A cross-functional team would have different departments represented so that a breadth of skills and experiences could be brought to bear on a problem. The idea is that more breadth will mean a more balanced, and therefore more effective, approach. Conscious teamwork extends this concept to the realms of bias and distorted vision that we've been discussing. Conscious teamwork brings together people with different biases and blind spots so that their aggregate vision is neutral and unbiased. Just as breadth of skills will help achieve better results, breadth of styles and unconscious filters also improves performance.

For example, a young manager was very creative and an excellent initiator. But he was not skilled at maintenance type work. This wasn't the kind of skill that he could easily be trained in. Instead, it was caused by a personality trait that led him to view his work in a biased way. He almost couldn't help himself in prioritizing the creative, new projects on his plate above the more regular, on-going (but of course still critical) work. In his own mind, his subconscious filters made the new things seem more important to him. His strengths in those areas, and the more innate enjoyment he got from being creative, made him subtly favor those parts of his work.

Like almost every personality trait, this manager's predilection towards initiating versus sustaining was simultaneously a strength and a weakness. In some instances, it served him well, and in others it was a liability. The important point in this example is that the subconscious bias this manager had is more subtle than a skill. Perhaps with focus and training and a lot of follow-up attention this manager could get better at prioritizing his mundane, but still critical, tasks. But the bias itself will be with him his entire life. It is rooted so deeply in his personality that it can't really be changed.

It is these kinds of traits that conscious teamwork allows to be covered. By working with people who could better balance new projects and maintenance work, this manager covered his blind spot. His department's performance noticeably improved when he began to solicit advice to help him plan and set his priorities.

The conscious businessperson recognizes that they have subconscious filters that distort their view of reality, they apply self-awareness to understand what their filters are, and then they use teamwork to correct their distorted vision.

Conscious teamwork requires each member to be open to being balanced by the others. An optimist will never be trained to see the world more negatively. But the pessimist can help the optimist by giving their viewpoint. If the optimist is open to hear it, and understands that to be neutral they need to be pulled in that direction anyway, then the optimist can achieve a balanced perspective. Or in the example of the manager with a predilection towards new and creative projects, conscious teamwork will only succeed if he is open to being pulled into the more mundane work. If he continues to insist that his priorities are correct, even when his team suggests he increase the priority of certain maintenance tasks, then conscious teamwork didn't help.

A manager who tends to get too detailed can lose sight of the bigger priorities and strategies. They can use teamwork to balance that out. Some people are more visionary. They can see clearly where they want to be, but aren't detailed enough to see what steps to take right now to get there. A group can help them plan the details. Other people are very good with facts and figures, but are weak in their people skills. All of these traits are the kinds of things that conscious teamwork works with. Each of these traits will be a strength in some cases and a weakness in others. Each indicates a subconscious bias that needs to be balanced out to avoid occasional poor decisions.

It is important in conscious business to not judge these subconscious biases as bad. All of us have them, and we can't avoid them. Conscious teamwork is the way to work with them. One of a conscious business's biggest challenges is fitting employees to the best role (more on this in Chapter 5). There certainly are times when someone's personality really doesn't fit their job. Sometimes a bias can be too extreme, or affect an area critical to their job, and in those cases the person needs to be moved to a different job. Perhaps if our creative manager is in a position that requires mostly routine, on-going kinds of work there isn't a good fit. But a conscious business recognizes that no one is perfect. We all have these types of weaknesses and blind spots. Teamwork allows them to be covered.

CHOOSING TEAM MEMBERS AND THE TRAP OF TOO EASILY DISMISSING VALUABLE INPUT

There is a critical corollary to the imperative for a conscious teamwork. Everyone's personality, work styles, strengths and weaknesses need to be understood so that the right people can be brought in at the right time. You need to really understand the people with whom you work. Because the goal isn't simply to collect several opinions, conscious teamwork is about collecting

opinions from specific people; people with diverse styles, personalities, temperaments, and experiences.

If possible, you'd like to consciously choose your team members, so you can get the right mix of optimists and pessimists for example. But whether you've chosen your co-workers or not, you have to deeply understand their psychology. You can't cover your own blind spots with other people's strengths unless you know what those strengths are!

In Yogi Bhajan's words:

"Never forget the basic reality of the other person."

"You have to know their personality profile before you deal with anybody."

You don't need to be a psychologist to practice conscious business, but you must have a clear view of your co-workers' biases and styles. When you know your colleagues this well you must be careful of not falling into the trap of prejudging them or their input. We will discuss this pitfall in the following section on stereotyping.

A big challenge to practicing conscious teamwork is the natural tendency to dismiss or rationalize away diverse viewpoints. Sometimes we're glad to get assistance in areas we're weak in. But other times, we are so attached to our "right" idea that we don't take opportunities to balance ourselves. Even if an optimist has the discipline to ask a pessimist for their opinion, sometimes they will ignore good advice. This is almost a Catch-22. You need diverse input because you aren't neutral. But you have to be neutral to be able to use that input! The dynamics of a conscious team help each member navigate this tricky psychological territory.

When you get opinions different than your own, you are never beholden to change your mind. You need to evaluate that input, weigh the biases, strengths and weaknesses of the person giving it against your own shortcomings and decide what to do about it. You aren't trying to find a consensus, so you don't have to convince everyone else that your decision is the right one. You can solicit diverse opinions and still end up doing what you originally wanted to do.

"When a lot of people talk into a situation, the situation can be easily corrected. But we don't want to talk to everyone. Cooperation is cooperation."

This quote is very interesting and has a few components to it. It starts by talking about how useful it is to have a number of different people's inputs into

a situation. Yogi Bhanjan then acknowledges how difficult it can be to get that diverse input. We usually don't want to hear diverse viewpoints. And this is where a conscious businessperson's self-awareness can come in. It takes a lot of self-awareness to catch your natural tendency to dismiss contradictory information and force yourself to neutrally listen to it. You don't need to force yourself to act on it. But you do need to really "hear" the diverse input. You won't balance out your own biases if you are so biased that you immediately dismiss the input you receive!

Because you aren't obligated to act on every piece of diverse input you gather, there is the opportunity for dismissing good advice, but it also means there is no downside to practicing conscious teamwork. As long as you maintain your openness to having your viewpoint improved, you at least have the potential to reach a better decision without risking making it any worse. From a risk-benefit analysis, it's an easy decision to use other people to balance out your blind spots. And in groups with more than two members, you can reduce the risk of not being neutral enough to hear input that would help you be more neutral.

A conscious business is not flat or consensus-based. It has a strong chain of command, with clear levels of responsibility and a status that goes along with the responsibility of a job title. But within this hierarchical structure, the people act with consciousness. They balance their blind spots by hearing all sides. They can remove their ego from the situation (which we'll discuss in detail in the next Chapter) enough so that the wisdom of the group can emerge. Once they've heard all the opinions, they have an attitude of cooperation that allows them to incorporate those diverse views into their final plan or decision. This attitude of cooperation helps overcome the instinct to immediately dismiss contrary viewpoints.

"One should never make a decision when one is in power. One should always take collective opinion."

This quote from Yogi Bhanjan shows the importance of teamwork to a decision maker in a conscious business. It emphasizes the importance of hearing all of the views around an issue. He is not saying that you should never make a decision, or that every decision must be by consensus. He is saying that a conscious businessperson must avoid making decisions just because he or she has the authority to make them. First cover your blind spots by taking the collective opinion, putting aside your ego to allow the collective wisdom to emerge. Then you can decide. Only then should you can exercise your authority. Without balancing out your own blind spots and biases, you will, sooner or later, make a bad decision. How can you avoid poor judgment if it's based on an incomplete view of the facts because you have a subconscious filter that you didn't balance out?

Conscious teamwork is much more flexible than organizational charts. Pick your teams based on the specific needs of each situation, not based on hierarchies or formal work relationships. Sometimes you need to work with your supervisor, sometimes your peers, sometimes your subordinates, and sometimes people complete outside your normal sphere. In fact, conscious teamwork can occur in just about every interaction you have with your coworkers.

A recent department restructuring is a good example of this. An Information Technologies department was growing from five to seven people. The manager needed to determine what jobs the new people would fill, and what, if any, shuffling of the existing employees' job duties would be best. The manager first formulated his own ideas. Then he collaborated with his supervisor, getting a broader sense of the department's long term priorities and future demands. Next the manager talked with his employees to get their ideas. They not only offered input on their potential changes, but were able to give valuable advice about the new positions as well. Everyone in this process, the manager, his boss, and his employees all brought their unique perspectives. The manager went back and forth several times between his supervisor and his subordinates, refining the restructuring plan. None of them could have come up with the best solution alone, but as a team they got to the best plan.

The restructuring implementation went smoothly because everyone had been involved up front. The plan was a good one because many perspectives were included. These are important benefits. But the thing that allowed the plan to really be optimal was the balancing out of some of the IT manager's subtle subconscious biases. For example, one of his employees had a very different personality than he did. Because of this, the manager had a tendency to be a bit unfair in his judgments of this employees work. This one employee's role in the manager's initial plan reflected this subconscious bias against him. Luckily for both the employee and the department, the wisdom of the group was able to balance out the manager's bias to arrive at a better solution.

Another way in which conscious teamwork played out in this example was helping the manager account for his tendency to be a perfectionist. His initial plan had a lot of resources dedicated to a lot of mundane, less than mission critical details. His supervisor was biased a little the other way, tending to gloss over details and focus mostly on new, large projects. Between the two of them, they balanced each other out and ended up agreeing on a plan with a good distribution of resources.

Here are some more quotes about how conscious business helps prevent you from dismissing valuable input.

"I want you to disagree on everything. Give sincere opinion and assessment. Don't change your opinion due to anything. We want to know opinions and know everything."

"I'm not asking you to agree at all. Totally disagree, but give your opinion and the CEO will decide."

"'Company' means people together. You can't do what comes to your mind. Everything needs to be thrashed out, leveled. The very word, 'company' means, 'People together.'"

"Nobody should avoid anybody. Everyone's opinion is important."

If you are honest in pursuing diverse viewpoints, you will actually look for disagreement amongst your team. In fact, if everyone is agreeing, perhaps you'd even suspect that they aren't digging deeply enough and you are still at risk of acting on a distorted view of reality. You may be a bit worried in the absence of disagreement, because you'd be lacking the essential balancing force of diversity, and perhaps a "group-think" mentality has set in. In the first quote above, Yogi Bhanjan is asking his management team to disagree with each other, and to be comfortable with that. The only hope of "knowing everything," is to know all the opinions, especially those that are at odds with each other.

There was recently an echo of this concept in an article in Time Magazine. The piece was about how the White House administration ignored warnings from one of its key members because they disliked his style and they disagreed with his conclusions. Time wrote that, "Administration officials had become numb to...the kind of grating dissent powerful organizations most need to hear."¹ If the White House was a conscious organization, they would have been more aware of the dangers of avoiding divergent views.

CHECK AND BALANCE

A very important result of conscious teamwork is check and balance. You're probably familiar with the financial type of check and balance, where for example the person signing checks is different than the person entering invoices. Having two independent people involved can prevent one person from abusing their position. Conscious teamwork extends this concept to allow

¹ "How Credible is Clarke?" Time Magazine. Vol. 163, No. 14. April 5, 2004. Page 30.

the more subtle areas of approach and style and innate blind spots to be checked. If conscious systems are set up, an optimist won't be able to charge ahead in a possibly risky direction. At least without more pessimistic viewpoints having a chance to balance out their innate style.

"Check and balance is the key to survival."

"If somehow by a prestige or ego we cross the check and balance, that is the day we dig our own grave. It's not who controls who. Do we coordinate, cooperate and then operate?"

A conscious system of check and balance is an administrative system that passes critical decisions through multiple people, each with a unique viewpoint. It is not about who is higher in the chain of command. Every person in a conscious business must operate in this way. Even the CEO must vet their opinions and thoughts through a group of diverse people. That's why Yogi Bhanjan says, "It's not who controls who," because conscious teamwork operates across organizational hierarchies. The CEO still retains the status and right to make the final decision. But if she does not consciously use a team to help her, she will occasionally make a wrong turn because no one is without some blind spots or weak areas.

We cannot emphasize enough how important it is to run a business with a conscious check and balance. Conscious management teams always use other people's viewpoints to bring light to their blind spots. It can be very challenging to work this way, but conscious teams will bring out diverse views and "thrash out" issues collectively. The "thrashing out" is what prevents a contrary viewpoint from being dismissed too soon, a lone dissenting voice from being drowned out, or a disagreement from being swept under the carpet. It is what forces the cooperation that is necessary to really practice business consciously.

Yogi Bhanjan used to regularly ask two different people to investigate the same situation and give him their plans. Most of the time, he wouldn't tell either of them that someone else was also assigned the same project. He'd always choose two very different people. Often times one would be an "insider," someone within the organization, intimately familiar with the situation, circumstances and people involved. The other would be a complete outsider, someone with no direct experience with the situation to be investigated. This would sometimes lead to wounded egos. When he found out about it, the insider would often feel untrusted, or even undermined, by the outsider's independent work. But when they would both report back with their findings and their recommendations, Yogi Bhanjan would have a diverse set of opinions on which to base his decision. If they both came back with very similar

information, he would have confidence that that was the truth. If they came back with very different viewpoints, he'd know to dig deeper to find out what was really going on.

Not only can a team of people working together help each other make better decisions via a check and balance process, they can also help each other practice conscious business. This means that not only can your team members provide you with valuable input about a given problem, they can also reflect back to you information about your own subconscious patterns. They can greatly help you increase your self-awareness. This leads to a virtuous cycle, where you are helping each other make better decisions *and* helping each other get more and more conscious. You are all individually getting better and better at practicing the principles of conscious business, and consequently the team functions better and better. And the better the team functions, the more effective it will be in helping each member. The team members will be continually challenge each other to be excellent.

INTER-PERSONAL DYNAMICS TO BE AVOIDED: CLIQUES, SELF-JUSTIFICATION AND STEREOTYPING

The other side of that virtuous cycle is a dynamic that you must be very cautious about when working in a group. Just as it is very difficult for an individual to overcome their biases, a group has its own dynamics that can cloud its collective vision. A vicious cycle can develop in team dynamics that must be avoided – cliques.

As Yogi Bhanjan points out:

"I'm very anti-clique. Clique is based on personality, not on work."

By definition a clique is a group of people with a common viewpoint. And what happens in a business is that they will act as a mutually supportive body. This is antithetical to the conscious business tenet of independent viewpoints balancing each other. And as we discussed earlier, when your personality is the dominant factor in your decision making, you will be biased and eventually, inevitably, make decisions that are not in the best interests of the business. As Yogi Bhanjan's quote says, a group that has formed cliques is acting from personality and not from neutral consciousness. The motivation driving the people in a clique is personal. They may want the other members to like them. Or they gain some deeper sense of security by creating an "us" in an "us and them" dynamic. There may be many other reasons for cliques, but they are all personal. Members of a clique will support each other just because of who they are, not because of the value of their particular idea in that particular instance.

Cliques actively squash dissent, rather than support open-mindedness. Instead of each discussion being a fresh, free exchange of ideas, a clique has a group-think mentality, where the end result is almost a fore-gone conclusion. The members aren't looking for the best solution; they are looking for a solution in which they can support each other. And when personality comes first, the quality of the work will have to come second.

When you have a clique, instead of having multiple viewpoints balance each other, you have something that's worse than a single person being stuck in their personal biases. You have several people being stuck in an unconscious, biased, view of things. With the collective weight of several people, this view will have more influence in the business than any single person. The destructive power of cliques can be countered by working with cooperation (that an earlier quote talked about) and without personality.

To make an effective, conscious group, each member has to practice the next two characteristics of conscious business (Chapters 4 and 5). Otherwise people will naturally tend to relate to, and work better with, people who agree with them. Unchecked, this will lead to a group with cliques or some members sidelined. These are the typical politics that most teams suffer from, and which conscious teams must avoid.

Another warning signal that you are reacting based on personality rather than the work itself is when you find yourself justifying your position to yourself. When you hear yourself telling yourself things like, "They just don't understand. They never... They always think that way...," you aren't hearing the content of what they are saying. You are reacting to them, or your past history with them, or to their style of presenting their information.

Here is an example that demonstrates how common, and corrosive, self-justification is. Five members of a manufacturing management team were meeting to discuss a new product introduction. Of course there were the typical differences in opinion between operations, finance, sales, and marketing. The salesman presented his viewpoint, based on feedback he'd gotten from his customers and his observations of the competition. The marketing manager had a different perspective on the marketplace and the competition, and the group's conversation began revolving around his ideas rather than the salesperson's.

What's important in this example is what happens next, inside the head of the salesman. He can either react consciously or unconsciously to his input not being agreed to. In this example, the salesman reacts unconsciously. He feels frustrated that his idea was ignored. He feels that he has the right direction, and the group didn't hear him. And because he's worked for many years with the marketing manager, he starts to say to himself things like, "He just doesn't

understand what I'm saying. He's always against my ideas. He doesn't have the experience I do. All he does is sit in his office reading reports, while I'm out there with my ear to the ground hearing what's really going on."

Notice that nowhere in that self-conversation does the salesperson step back from his emotional attachment to his idea and neutrally assess if there's anything to what the marketing manager is saying! The reaction is emotional, biased, and self-justifying. He's actually subconsciously defending himself and his idea rather than being open to his teammate's viewpoint.

The salesperson may very well be right in this case, but with such an unconscious reaction, he can't be effective in advocating his idea. In a typical, unconscious business, the salesperson could take several strategies to have his idea prevail. He could get louder in the meeting, as sometimes a forceful presentation can be mistaken for rightness. Or he could individually, outside the meeting, appeal to the decision maker. If he sucks-up enough, perhaps he can convince the boss to side with him rather than the marketing manager. Perhaps he'd even voice to a few key people his distrust of the marketing manager's judgment and let those negative stories percolate through the company grapevine for a while. The worse the marketing manager looks, the more receptive people will be to his ideas, right?

Those kinds of politics may sound distressingly familiar, but in a conscious business those strategies don't work. All of those stratagems are based on personality, and a conscious business will always put the work ahead of personality. The type of unconscious reaction that the salesman had still does happen in a conscious business. But the boss and the rest of the group don't allow it to work. They would be sensitive to the fact that conscious teamwork is being undermined, and they would look for ways to challenge the salesperson's biases. They would try to elevate the level of the conversation above the personal so that a neutral play of ideas can result.

A more conscious reaction by the salesman in the meeting would have been to catch himself feeling defensive. Not that he wouldn't initially react the same way, it's normal and unstoppable to feel attached to our own ideas and to react defensively when someone challenges them. Conscious business does not expect you to become a saint! But with self-awareness, the salesperson could have noticed his own reaction and realized that it was counter-productive. Then he could have taken a deep breath, mentally stepped back from his immediate dismissal of the marketing manager's ideas, and neutrally evaluated them. He could still end up disagreeing with those ideas, but in an unbiased way instead of an emotional, reactive way.

Or perhaps the salesman finds it impossible to step back and be neutral about the marketing person. Maybe he is too emotionally attached to his own ideas

and he can't be neutral. In that case he can leverage another aspect of conscious teamwork; he can rely on the rest of the group.

The key is catching himself being defensive. That signals that he has a bias and some subconscious filter playing out. He can try to self-correct. If that doesn't work, conscious teamwork can still save the day. If three or four other people all are agreeing with the marketing manager's analysis, hopefully the salesperson can say to himself, "Well, I spoke my piece twice. I can't say that they didn't hear me. If they are all not agreeing with me, *and* I know that I'm not fully neutral in this situation, then perhaps I'm wrong and should go with the group's direction."

Notice that the knowledge that he's not neutral is critical. Because if the salesman was very self-aware and was sure that he wasn't reacting based on a subconscious bias, he could very well choose to continue arguing his point. His awareness that he is biased is what allows a conscious businessperson to accept another direction, even when he himself still disagrees with it. And all of this started with a simple defensive, self-justifying reaction in a meeting!

The natural tendency to immediately justify ourselves (even if only in the privacy of our own minds) is exacerbated by another natural phenomenon of stereotyping. Stereotyping is just another type of subconscious filtering, where our brains, in an attempt to be helpful, limit and simplify the information reaching our conscious awareness. Again, practicing the tools described in the following two chapters will allow you to minimize the negative impact of stereotyping on your group's dynamics.

The emotional dismissal of diverse input that was just described in the example of the group meeting is typical of the unconscious ways that teams can. But conscious team members use mental clarity and self-awareness to avoid falling into that kind of typical group dynamic.

"Teamwork is not a small thing. Teamwork is a personal consciousness."

Yogi Bhanjan's view of a team is not simply a group of people who are working together. As he is saying in the above quote, teamwork requires a high level of personal consciousness from its members. Each person on a team practices all of the tenets of conscious business so that true teamwork, deep listening, and fundamental respect can lead to exceptional results.

Stereotyping is a phenomenon closely related to self-justification. The two dynamics feed off one another, and the both gang up in your subconscious mind, making it often too easy to dismiss input from other people. We all have a tendency to characterize other people. We naturally try to simplify our world by stereotyping people and categorizing them. Especially if you've worked with

someone for some time, you can feel that you know them so well that you think you know how they will react in a given situation. The conscious attitude towards other people allows us counteract this tendency because we can go beyond either a shallow initial impression or a long history to really hear the essence of what the other person is saying.

Stereotypes are subtle prejudgments that will act like filters to your conscious awareness. Once you have pegged someone as “the type that always...,” your subconscious will seek out ways to confirm that attitude for you. And then you will judge a person’s input based on judgments about them as a person, rather than on the merits of the information. That blocks us from hearing potentially valuable input.

The way to counteract the negative impact of stereotyping starts with self-awareness. You can’t prevent yourself from having stereotypes and prejudging people. But you can train yourself to listen in on your internal, mental, conversations. When you hear yourself dismissing someone’s input based on personal judgments rather than strictly on the merits of their comments, that is a major danger signal that you aren’t neutral and you’re probably not hearing something that you need to. If you aren’t sure if you are too lightly dismissing some advice, use someone else as a sounding board. Unless they happen to have the exact same stereotypes as you, that third person can help you practice conscious business.

JOB SATISFACTION AND RIGHTEOUS ACTION

Beyond better business decisions, there is another excellent result from consciously working with other people as we’ve described here. When the business, and your team, is actively assisting you to cover your blind spots, you suddenly find yourself able to be honest about your weaknesses. You don’t need to feel defensive all the time, worried that any sign of weakness could spell the end of your career. In fact, in a conscious business, the more honest you are about your weak areas, the better the team will be able to support you in those areas. This makes honesty about yourself a valued attribute in a conscious business, rather than a liability as in most politically charged work environments.

This team dynamic doesn’t remove responsibility from you. You are still responsible for fulfilling your role and status. In those areas under your authority, you are still the one signing your name on the decisions. If a mistake is made, its weight is still on your shoulders. You can’t hide behind the group, saying, “Well, they all looked at this decision and signed off on it.”

"In business, group has no authority. When the authorized executive signs off, that is authority. Collective management and discussions is not a decision. Every officer with individual status must make decisions."

"When you sign, you put your honor at stake. A million people can advise you, but your signature is your honor."

Even though you are still ultimately responsible, as these quotes indicate, conscious teamwork is a big stress reliever. A team can help you filter through your information overload to see what is truly important. You can be honest about your imperfections. Additionally, you feel a deep satisfaction when you have a great idea, and are able to refine it and improve it by taking in input from other people.

When you are not acting consciously, you will be stuck between the polarities of right and wrong. Right and wrong are static judgments which sometimes are appropriate, and sometimes not. With consciousness, you have the ability to weigh the experiences of the past without being locked into them. The pace of change in the world today demands this kind of flexibility, and conscious business gives you the tools to act in ways that are unique and appropriate for any particular situation. We call acting in the uniquely appropriate way for that instant in time righteous action.

Acting righteously in business is almost a meditation in itself. It means you are acting completely in the moment, with the past as a guide, not a straightjacket. All of your talents are focused on the singular goal of finding the best solution to the particular situation you are facing. Within that you find a paradoxical feeling of freedom. Simply put, the personal impact of practicing conscious business is a deep sense of satisfaction. Using a team to increase your clarity allows you relax into that sense of job satisfaction. Acting righteously feels very joyous and free, and this comes as a direct result of practicing conscious business.

The concept of a conscious team may seem foreign to most Westerns, where we place so much value on individualism. Conscious teamwork is not the same as the stereotype of the Japanese company, where the individual is subsumed by the group. With consciousness, groups can work in a way that takes the best from both Western individualism and Eastern group-think. Conscious business melds them into a third way that gives you greater individual freedom than the go-it-alone West while at the same time serving the greater good (the good of the company over the good of the individual) more effectively than the East.

TEAMWORK SUMMARY

Wired magazine recently had an article that discusses the challenges modern businesses face and argues that groups are better at overcoming these challenges than individuals. "...at so many firms the flow of information is shaped by political infighting, sycophancy, and a confusion of status with knowledge. Hierarchies have certain virtues – efficiency and speed – as a way of executing decisions. But they're outmoded as a way of making decisions, and they are ill-suited to the complex strategic landscapes that most companies now inhabit. Firms need to aggregate the collective wisdom instead."²

Conscious business is the answer to how to "aggregate the collective wisdom," while at the same time maintaining the benefits of a hierarchy. Conscious teamwork is the critical ingredient to change how information flows in your organization and how to leverage an entire group's knowledge to make complex decisions.

A conscious businessperson will try to use their interactions with other people as opportunities to test their own ideas for gaps. A conscious CEO talking to a line worker can use that interaction as a way to learn something new, to challenge her assumptions, to poke her own thinking process for blind spots. That of course takes humility, the openness to learn something new from that line worker. The less conscious approach would be to have a conversation with that same line worker but prejudge that nothing that person can say will have much value; they don't know enough about what really goes on to make much of a contribution, etc. The conscious CEO is having a true dialogue; they are deeply listening and fully respecting the other person. In fact, they are treating them the way we'd all like to be treated. In doing so they are helping themselves be more conscious by leveraging teamwork to cover their own blind spots (even unknown blind spots!). In this way, you can choose to practice conscious teamwork in every interaction, be it even with only one other person.

We will discuss in the next section being able to put aside your ego. Without this attribute, the proper group dynamic cannot occur. Without this humility, the CEO won't be deeply listening to the line worker. And teams in which egos prevail will have cliques, and you be focused on getting the other people to agree with your opinion. When energies are focused on lobbying, they are not focused on creatively solving the business problem! When you work in a

² "Smarter than the CEO: Why the Rank and File knows more than the boss and what to do about it." Wired, Vol 12, No 6. June 2004. Pages 87-88.

conscious team, your goal is to really hear the other members, and to always be looking out for how their viewpoints can enhance and augment your thinking. Conscious teams thrive on diversity – diversity of styles, diversity of personalities, and diversity of viewpoints. The members of other types of teams will try to shut down diversity so as to gain agreement with their own perspectives.

Besides trying to use every interaction as an opportunity to learn something new, you should also set up a more systematic group dynamic in which to gain the benefits of conscious teamwork. You should set up both formal and informal working groups through which you can process information and decisions. Make these groups as diverse as possible. Use the viewpoints of people at different levels of your organization, and with different personalities and styles. Add informal discussions with diverse people in your organization a regular part of your routine.

Set up formal review teams and systems to provide a check and balance, without taking away any of the individual status of each person's role and position or undermining the chain of command. Remain vigilant against your teams segmenting into cliques. Occasionally bring in new people for fresh perspectives. And continually practice self-awareness with questions like, "Am I collecting input only from people I view as already my advocates? Am I disagreeing with this person for personal reasons? Am I reacting to justify myself so fast that I'm not hearing all sides of this issue? Are there any areas involved with this decision that I know I have trouble being neutral in?"

Where you aren't neutral, see if you can find a safe way within your current organization's political structure to get help covering that area. See if that simple act of reaching out for some assistance doesn't help you enjoy your job more than the old go-it-alone style.

Because it is impossible to have perfect mental clarity, and it is impossible to have perfect self-awareness, a critical aspect to the practice of conscious business is the establishment of a group dynamic that doesn't undermine a chain of command, but never the less forces decisions to be processed through multiple people, through multiple subconscious filters, so that collectively a more accurate picture of reality can be seen and understood. Conscious business accounts for the natural human tendency to too lightly dismiss ideas we disagree with (which of course completely undermines the entire point of gathering the other ideas) by having management teams that cooperate and "thrash out" their differing opinions. By following this advice, you have the best chance of gaining a neutral perspective on a situation, and are then ready to make a conscious, unbiased decision about it.

Using a team to balance out your blind spots is a practical application of conscious business that you can start practicing right now. Even if it is only informally, collect diverse points of view before you make your next big decision. See if you can step back just a little from your personal involvement in the decision, from your own sense of what you think is the right thing to do. See where a little “thrashing out” of diverse opinions gets you. Also don’t be locked into a static definition of your team. Conscious teamwork doesn’t match organizational charts. You need to work with different groups in different situations. You could easily find yourself working with several different teams at the same time, each on different projects.

The single most important thing you can do to practice conscious business is to work in the kind teams we’ve described. You have to recognize the fundamental fact that you can’t possibly be conscious all the time in every situation. The best hope for consistently making conscious business decisions is to have a group of people that balance each other out and can act as a check and balance for each other. This practice is very challenging, and requires several characteristics that are discussed next.

4. ABLE TO PUT ASIDE YOUR EGO

The topic of the previous chapter, balancing out your own blind spots, sounds easy and straightforward. But in practice it is very challenging. We all have egos that don't like disagreement, even when we know we need it! We all can bristle at people who contradict us, or seem to be standing in the way of us going in the "right" direction. The most challenging times are when you are feeling most attached to your idea, when you have the most emotional investment in a certain action or decision. Because it is at those times that:

- a) You are less neutral than usual, and
- b) You are least open to other points of view.

Just when you need it most, when your own vision is most clouded by strong emotions or attachments, that is when you are least likely to use the tool of using other points of view to balance out your own! That is why being able to put aside your ego is an important characteristic of conscious business.

Being able to put aside your ego allows you to act on what you learn through self-awareness. It is ego that stands in the way of acting to correct your distorted vision. Once you are aware of what your own personal biases are, a conscious businessperson needs to be able to act to correct them. Previously we used an example of the optimist who uses the opinion of the pessimist to balance out his personality tendency. If he is not able to put aside his ego, his natural attachment to his own viewpoint, he won't be able to benefit from the pessimist's input. He'll have put his personality first, not the neutral, best interests of the company.

"If ego has to come first, then the purpose of the business goes down."

This quote makes it pretty clear why the conscious businessperson needs to be able to put aside their ego. It's either one or the other. You are either working for yourself (for your ego and your personal interests), or you are working for the business. Will you be making decisions in your personal best interest, or in the company's best interest? We all love to be right, but the conscious businessperson needs to be able to make that desire secondary to the desire to serve the company.

It's not about *not having* an ego, which is impossible. It's being able to put your ego aside when needed. You need to be able to hear, among all the inputs you are receiving, "Oh, this is what my ego wants," and letting that be one voice among all the other opinions and thoughts you have instead of having your ego drive your decisions and actions. It's not that you don't have ego needs, but you aren't forced to act to fulfill them.

Doing this allows you to fully embrace serving the company as your only goal, rather than doing things that may serve yourself (your own career, your own monetary gains, etc.) at the company's expense. You can take a lot of input from many diverse people without feeling that you will "look bad" or that your performance will somehow be judged worse because it didn't all come from you. Being able to put your ego aside for the betterment of the company also means that there is no need for territorialism. Instead there is guardianship, ownership and delivery.

Just as in the previous sections, the core of being able to put aside your ego is more subtle than it first appears. Conscious businesspeople still want to make money, get raises and promotions, and succeed at their jobs. And it's not just that they don't pursue those goals at the expense of the company. They are also self-aware of the more subtle ways in which we self-aggrandize, or create protective strategies to shield ourselves from painful realities. It is these subtler ego influences that most stand in the way of using other people's input as much as we should. We limit how well we correct our own distorted vision by resisting, for many reasons but all stemming ultimately from ego, corrective input.

Yogi Bhan traces the root cause of most business problems to this exact problem of ego getting in the way of clear vision.

"The problem is not you. Problem is your fear, which makes the ego protect."

We get afraid. Afraid of failing, afraid to try something new, afraid of admitting we were wrong. This fear triggers our ego to kick in, and then we're stuck in a false reality that will prevent us from seeing clearly, and prevent us from acting righteously.

Here is an example where someone's ego got in their way, and how a conscious business process was able to correct the situation. There was a marketing team working on new packaging for a line of consumer products. The head of this team had some very strong opinions about what the packaging should look like, and he was not very open to hearing alternative suggestions from his team members. The CEO heard about this group dynamic, and realized that this marketing team leader was too attached to the work to be fully conscious. He was not fully open to finding the best solution because his ego was making him subtly resist suggestions different from his.

This situation exemplifies the subtle but very negative effects of ego coming first. The marketing manager was not consciously trying to hurt his company. He was not even consciously putting his own needs ahead of the company's. He thought he was making the best possible package design. But because his ego was too attached to his own creations, his ego was protecting his

emotional investment in his work, and he was unable to be clear and neutral in making the best business decisions.

From the marketing team leader's perspective, he was acting in the best interests of the company. He was not consciously aware that he was acting from his ego rather than neutrally. To him, all of his decisions were the "right" ones. From his perspective, he was listening to the input of others. He just wasn't acting on their input because they were wrong. It didn't seem to him that he was being biased against them, even though that was what was really going on.

To correct the situation, the CEO stepped in and changed the team dynamics so that other inputs could be truly heard. The CEO also had a straight talk with the team leader about the dangers of having his ego too attached to the work.

This is a great example of why all of these attributes of conscious business are so challenging to practice. You don't know when you aren't doing it! When your ego or your subconscious mind is influencing your decisions, when they are distorting your view of things, you probably have a perfectly reasonable rationalization. You often don't realize you aren't seeing things neutrally or clearly.

Luckily, the reality of what's going on is often very easy for other people to see. As in our example of the marketing team, the CEO was immediately able to see that the team leader was off base. It's not that the CEO would always have stepped into a team in which the team leader was going in a direction with which others on the team disagreed. Remember that a conscious business is not run by consensus. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with a manager making decisions that others disagree with. It's possible that the CEO could have looked at the team dynamics, not seen any ego problem, and hence not stepped in to correct the process.

Mental clarity is what allows you to judge when to use which approach. The CEO had no emotional attachment and hence had more mental clarity than did the marketing team leader. Hence the CEO was able to neutrally judge if the design process had degraded into an unconscious one or not.

The ability for people outside of a given situation to more clearly see the dynamics is one of the big reasons why conscious businesspeople work in teams and use others to balance their blind spots. One of our biggest blind spots is the ability to see when we are acting from a "blind spot," so we often need to use an outsider's perspective to tell us when we're not seeing things clearly. To be able to hear someone tell you, "I think you're acting without full clarity here," when you think you going along just fine, thank you very much, really requires the ability to put aside your ego!

One of the common pitfalls to practicing this conscious business tenet is trying to suppress your ego instead of putting it aside. This won't work. The conscious businessperson has a strong ego. They just don't let it get in the way of serving the business. The first quote in this section doesn't say, "If there is ego, then the purpose of the business goes down." Yogi Bhanjan isn't saying to not have ego. He's saying that you get in trouble when your ego takes priority over the business's needs.

This is a very important point, and as with all the sections in this book, points the subtlety and depth of Yogi Bhanjan's conscious business ideas. Putting aside your ego doesn't mean just avoid stealing or committing fraud because those actions benefit you to the company's detriment. A conscious businessperson has a strong sense of herself. And she isn't willing to compromise what she knows is right just to "go along to get along." But at the same time, she isn't so attached to her own ideas that she can't hear valid input from others.

I see the struggle between these two (putting ego aside versus trying to suppress it) all the time in myself. In every meeting I'm in, I have to try to find the balance between my ideas and the other participant's. Consciously putting aside my ego without losing "myself," my identity, my ideas, my sense of what's needed is the approach that strikes that balance. When that balance is correct, the best decisions will be made, and I will feel the best about my participation in the solution.

In some meetings, I find myself erring on the side of giving up my power, my individual responsibility, to the group. There are all sorts of justifications for this. "The meeting is going on too long and it would take too long to get into my objections. If I'm the only one objecting, maybe I'd better not open my mouth. Maybe I'll look stupid. They must know this better than I do. They're in a bad mood, so I'd better not provoke them by bring my objection up." All of these are excuses that I unfortunately find myself using sometimes to justify my allowing the group to decide something with which I'm not totally comfortable.

Remember that conscious teamwork is very different than letting the group decide everything. Conscious business works when each person is acting strongly from their individual status and position, like a traditional hierarchy; but they are each using teamwork to balance themselves out. As we saw in an earlier quote,

"In business, a group has no authority."

When I give the group too much authority, I am suppressing my ego. In other meetings I don't suppress my ego, I let it get in the way. I let my ego get too attached to my ideas, and therefore I shut down my ability to really hear what

the other people in the meeting are saying. Again, it's subtle. I don't pound my fist on the table saying, "I'm right and you're wrong! Do it my way!" But when I stop listening to the other people, because I'm so sure I'm right, or because I'm so sure they're wrong, I'm not practicing conscious business.

Putting your ego aside, without losing it, is the middle ground between those two scenarios I struggle with. It is what allows you to find the correct balance between hierarchy and consensus.

For bigger decisions, you can learn to stop yourself and ask the following question to help catch when your ego needs to be put aside.

"What is the projection with its pros and cons? Is it for the company or is it for you?"

You need to ask if the decision is in the best interest of the company or is the decision in some way self-serving. "Self-serving" decisions can be either subtle or obvious. A kick-back would be an obvious example of a self-serving decision that is not in the company's best interest. But Yogi Bhanan is talking more about the subtle self-serving decisions, as in the example of the marketing team leader. The decisions the marketing team leader was making were self-serving in that they propped up his ego. They made him feel good about himself. Not following the direction he had already decided on would have made him feel badly. He would have taken it personally because he was emotionally attached to his work. So in a subtle way he was acting for himself, for the comfort of his own ego, rather than for the business. When that happens, you are not acting consciously, and the business will suffer.

Yogi Bhanan says something similar in this next quote, in which he uses the word "personality" to mean the same thing as what we've been defining "ego."

"When you bring personality into work, work comes second, personality comes first. And nothing you do will be right."

You can see this same concept echoed in the following quote, with some additional references back to the concepts we discussed in the previous Teamwork chapter. The key thing in this next quote is the relationship a conscious businessperson must have between their personality, their ego, their team, and their decision-making authority. Those things are very unique in a conscious business, and set the groundwork for the success of this conscious approach.

"Anyone who comes to you is a person, so all information is personal. To get to the reality of things, you see it impersonally and get the opinion. When

you get the opinion, put your ego off. Then get the collective opinion. Then make a decision."

WHEN TO DECIDE AND WHEN TO DISCUSS

When you are practicing conscious business, and you are taking input from diverse people, you will often be faced with situations where two people disagree. Often the suggestions you are getting about how to proceed are mutually exclusive. The conscious businessperson has two fundamentally different ways to deal with this difference in opinion. The first way is the hierarchical, chain of command method. This means that both opinions go up the chain of command to the person who is the authority over both individuals. This person hears both sides, assesses them neutrally and with awareness, and then they make the decision.

The other way a conscious businessperson deals with disagreement is by sitting together and "thrashing it out," as Yogi Bajan called it above. In this approach you take the time to talk through the disagreement, making sure all the underlying issues are heard, and solutions that take the best of all the suggestions are sought.

Without being able to put aside your ego, you can't consciously choose when to use each of these two approaches. If one of your subordinates disagrees with a decision you are about to make, what boss wants to spend the time to discuss it further with them? What boss is able to put aside their ego to such an extent that they will hold off on a decision that they've already made just because a subordinate disagrees? In our example of the marketing team leader, he was too attached with his ego, and therefore he chose the chain of command method. He told his team, "I am the boss, and I want the packaging to look this way. End of discussion." Unfortunately, he should have chosen to thrash it out more with his team, which is what his CEO eventually forced him to do.

The conscious businessperson actually has two challenges here. Before they can even face the challenge of putting aside their ego, of "unmaking up their mind" enough to reopen an issue, they must be able to know when that is the right approach. Sometimes the boss should make a decision after hearing all sides. If his ego hadn't been clouding his vision, the marketing team leader could have directed his team as needed. But sometimes the decision is not yet "ripe." Someone is rushing to a decision because they don't want to go through the discomfort of putting their ego aside. In those cases, more "thrashing out" is needed.

When you are in the situation, it is very difficult to tell which approach is the right one. We saw this with the marketing team leader. He did not know that

his ego was too involved, and therefore he didn't see anything wrong with just making the decisions. It is difficult to know when a balance has been gained from hearing all sides, versus when reality still is not yet being seen clearly. It is impossible to have your ego in the way and still exercise good judgment about whether or not a considered decision has been reached, and reached properly. You will always feel that once you've made up your mind, further discussion is not needed. But a conscious businessperson can recognize that this is their ego speaking. They can put that aside when necessary and take the difficult step (difficult if your ego is still involved that is) of moving back from a decision and re-opening it for more input, even from their subordinates if needed.

Additionally, a conscious business sets up its systems to account for the difficulty any one person will have in recognizing when their own ego is getting in the way. The conscious business in which the marketing team leader worked had systems that allowed the CEO to hear about the team dynamics that were going on. Once that information got to her, she could investigate, determine if that team leader was off base or not, and then act to ensure that balance was brought back into the decision-making process. The CEO was not overriding the marketing team leader's decision because she thought she knew how to make the packaging better herself. The CEO knew that the decision-making process had gotten off course. It had become to some extent unconscious. The CEO knew that when decisions are unconscious, they won't be the best decisions for the business. So she did not step in and tweak the packaging design. She stepped in and tweaked the process that was creating the packaging design so it could be more conscious.

Here is another example of a conscious system catching a problem where someone was not clear whether to just make the decision or thrash it out more. There was a top executive, the VP of Sales, who was recruiting for a manager under him. In a normal business, they probably would have been allowed to hire whomever they chose. But this conscious business leveraged teamwork as we discussed in the previous chapter, so there was a group of other top executives involved in the selection process. Once several interviews had been done, the VP of Sales had his choice for the open position. Several of the other executives involved disagreed. The CEO was brought in and she had to decide if should she let the VP of Sales hire whom he wanted, or did this situation warrant further discussion? Was the VP of Sales acting consciously, or was he brushing aside the concerns of the others because his ego was in the way?

Even though she couldn't be sure, by listening to both sides of the discussion, she suspected that the latter was the case. And weighing the importance of the position being filled, the CEO was unwilling to risk an unconscious decision. She therefore decided that this decision needed some more thrashing out. She

personally chaired a meeting with the VP of Sales and the rest of the group that was involved with the interviews. You can imagine how the VP of Sales had to put aside his ego for that meeting! He was having re-opened a decision that by rights should be within his authority to make. And he had to be open to hearing opinions he disagreed with, from people who were not his boss.

The outcome of that meeting was that the VP of Sales was able to put his ego aside enough to really hear *why* the others wanted to hire someone different than he wanted. The group ended up agreeing on a different person to hire, different than the VP of Sales originally wanted. Once this person was on the job for a while, everyone, the VP of Sales included, was in total agreement that the right decision had been made. The best candidate had been hired. Everyone was glad to have spent that extra time thrashing this issue out, and everyone was glad that the VP of Sales was conscious enough to put aside his ego so a better solution could be reached.

Being able to put aside your ego is very hard to do. And it is even harder to know when you need to do it! That's why in both of the examples in this section it required an outside person to raise a red flag that there was a problem happening. A conscious business is set up to catch those kinds of issues.

Conscious businesspeople are open to being told that they need to put aside their ego, and they are able to play the role of the neutral outsider for their co-workers. As you attempt to practice conscious business yourself, keep an eye out for those times when you brush aside opinions that are different than yours. Ask yourself if it is your ego that is avoiding taking that input seriously. Asking yourself this simple question will help you practice conscious business.

5. RESPECTING THE HUMAN DIGNITY OF OTHER PEOPLE

Respecting the people with whom you work is essential to using their input to balance yourself. This characteristic is a partner to putting aside your ego. The latter has to do with your relationship with yourself. The former is your relationship with others. Just as the way a conscious businessperson puts aside their ego is different than the traditional definition of “humility,” the relationship a conscious businessperson has with their coworkers is slightly different than just “respect.”

“Humble” can imply diffidence or meekness. As we discussed in the previous section, a conscious business does not want you to be passive or obsequious. It needs you to be very strong in yourself, confident, while still being open to others. Respecting the human dignity of others is what allows you to do that. You don’t have to put yourself down; you have to elevate your view of the other person. You aren’t respecting them because of some shallow attribute, because of some experience, skill or unique knowledge they have. You are respecting them simply because they are human just as you are. This attitude is how an executive can remain open to hearing input from any person in any situation.

Taking a cue from the spiritual traditions, a conscious businessperson will view the people with whom they work as unique souls. Every interaction you have with someone can recognize this fact or not. Whether a person is right or wrong, good or bad, they still deserve basic human respect. This is subtler than respecting someone for their intelligence or their experience.

This attitude is essential for conscious teamwork to happen correctly. Without this fundamental level of respect for each other, a team will splinter into cliques or other negative dynamics that will prevent the corrective thrashing out process to occur. Only with this deep level of respect can you practice what Yogi BhaJan meant in his “Corporation is cooperation,” quote.

Yogi BhaJan constantly reminds executives to be diplomatic:

“You must be diplomatic. Dip Low on the Mat. Only one who does that is a diplomat.”

The highest-level executive should approach their interactions with even the entry-level employee as a diplomat, with humility that does not demean yourself and respect that has no contingencies or conditions.

I’ve previously mentioned how I have trouble finding this right balance in almost every meeting I’m in. Sometimes I don’t put my ego aside correctly, I

don't practice conscious humility. In some subtle way I put myself down, discount my own opinions or allow them to be discounted, or I give up my status and personal authority to the group. Other times I err on the other side; I don't practice the kind of respect we're discussing now. I too lightly dismiss the opinions of the other people in a meeting or I am too attached to my ideas to give enough value and respect to their's. When I forget to view my coworkers as my equals, my judgments of them and of their input become disrespectful. Conscious respect does not mean viewing everyone as my equals in terms of experience, skills, temperament, authority, or any "surface" characteristic like those. It simply means viewing everyone as a human being just like I am.

Earlier an example was given of a manufacturing team meeting where the salesperson's reaction to an opposing viewpoint was, "Oh, that marketing guy! he just doesn't understand what I'm saying. He's always against my ideas. They don't have the experience I do in that area; they don't know what they're talking about." This is a very common unconscious reaction when the attribute of respecting the human dignity of others is not present. We discussed this negative dynamic of self-justification in the Teamwork chapter. Often, this self-justification also contains a measure of putting the other person down, as we see in the comments of the salesman. We exaggerate their weaknesses to justify ourselves and make ourselves feel "more right" in our position. We end up subtly and personally denigrating our coworkers. They aren't as experienced as I; they are always against me, etc. This is the opposite of what a conscious businessperson must do.

Approaching each person with respect is essential for conscious teamwork because it counteracts the natural tendencies towards stereotyping, personal attacks on others to justify ourselves, and not wanting to listen to opposing viewpoints. If you view a coworker as a person just like you, then you will listen to their viewpoint, you will hear their side of things. When you are humble, you can hear their opinion even if it is very different than yours. Of course you can then decide what to do with that input. Whether to change your mind based on it or not. But the first step for a conscious team is to make sure that each person is fully heard, and that their input isn't prejudged. This requires conscious respect.

Another way to look at how a conscious businessperson interacts with other people is that they apply the principles of clear vision and an undistorted view of reality to their interpersonal relationships. If we prejudge people, or more subtly prejudge their opinions, we are seeing a distorted picture, and of course this will lead us to poor decisions. A conscious businessperson is committed to viewing the true reality of the people around them, and treating them in ways that acknowledge that reality. Prejudices and stereotypes also cause you to

miss opportunities to find answers in unexpected places. This limits the creative flow of the group, and will have negative business consequences.

It is so easy to get locked into negative cycles of judgments. Once that prejudice comes into our subconscious minds, we will be unconsciously trying to make that judgment a self-fulfilling prophecy. Once you start to prop up your own ego by putting down others, you've initiated a vicious cycle. You will be especially acute in looking for confirmation of that, and you will be less likely to notice or acknowledge contrary information about that person.

When you are stuck in those cycles of negativity, your job satisfaction will be lower. You can't go home feeling good at the end of a day spent disrespecting those around you. When you practice this conscious business attribute, your relationships with others, even when you disagree with a colleague or you are disciplining a subordinate, will be kinder, gentler, and more fulfilling to your soul. When you've spent a day connecting in this respectful way with other people, you definitely can go home feeling good!

As a yogi and a spiritual teacher, Yogi Bhajan understandably takes the view that every interaction with people is an opportunity to uplift and serve them. The conscious business extends this philosophy into the business arena. In every interaction, a conscious businessperson is asking herself, "How can I accomplish the goals of the company while still uplifting and serving the people with whom I am dealing?"

Even when you are disciplining an employee, or having to fire someone, the conscious businessperson keeps those interactions respectful and uplifting rather than rude or in any way personally attacking. This may sound "wishy-washy," but we'll explore some very practical applications of this attitude below.

The challenge for a conscious businessperson in employee relations is to find ways that both protect the business interests and at the same time treat each person with respect and dignity, even as they are pushing them for results and performance. When employees are dealt with consciously, you will find ways that serve the business, and simultaneously give the employee the best chance to succeed. You will find ways to be both truthful (about performance problems) and kind at the same time; which is how we'd all like to be treated.

Performance management is a huge area that every business must face, and these concepts of conscious business give a unique angle on this topic. How can you support your employees while at the same time getting the best work from them? How do you fire anyone if you are respecting them as a human being as valuable as you yourself are? Consciousness is always the answer to

balancing out seeming opposites like this, and we explore some specifics below.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Anyone who has to supervise people can attest to how hard that job is. Communication challenges, different work styles, and different motivations all contribute to the difficulties of managing other people. As with the other sections in this book, learning how a conscious business deals with its employees is not a substitute for learning communication skills or other management techniques. Yogi BhaJan's teachings on how to consciously relate to your employees will augment and enhance those other types of skills. This section describes an approach, almost a philosophy, on how to be a conscious manager.

The foundation for consciously supervising other people is always viewing them as human beings. They are not cogs in a machine, there for the business to exploit. But a conscious business also does not cater to them to the detriment of the business. A conscious manager will still push for performance from their employees and hold them accountable for delivering results. But the way in which they push, the manner in which they hold people accountable, reflects the consciousness of viewing the employees as human beings.

When employees are treated that way, they are usually inspired to deliver their best for you. And when you yourself are treated this way, you feel better about your job, more motivated, and happier with your work. We talked above about how you feel better when you treat others with the respect this chapter discusses. The flip side of that is how much more pleasant it is when you yourself are treated this way by your boss and colleagues. This is another area in which conscious business leads to more job satisfaction.

A key ingredient of conscious performance management is the lengths to which a conscious business will go to give their employees job security.

"We do not like to fire anybody; we like to put a fire under their butts."

"First try to see they don't lose their job and understand. If they still play their game and their own ego, then they can go."

As these quotes show, a conscious business hates for anyone to have to get fired. Instead they strive for the right kind of pressure to be applied to people, a pressure that gives them the opportunity to grow, learn, expand, and measure up to what's required. If that pressure is applied in the right way,

most people will either measure up, or they will quit to get out from under that pressure. If everything has been done that can be and the business is still not getting the results it needs from an employee, then as a last resort they can be let go.

This may sound odd in today's labor market, where everyone is a free agent and no one has any job security any more, but this is the conscious approach. When you are treating people as human beings, you don't take terminations lightly. A conscious business has a very high level of commitment to its employees.

"We don't give people chances. Either we give people everything, or nothing. We're fair. If they're not up to the mark, we tell them to their face."

"We don't believe in lies or playing games - only straight as an arrow. This is our fundamental policy. Here we'll be with you through thick or through thin."

This commitment to its employees is based on the long-term perspective that the most valuable thing a company can give an employee is job security. The commitment to the employee does not necessarily mean offering employees the best compensation or benefits package around. It means that the company will run conservatively, minimizing the chances that layoffs will be necessary, and will reach out to help its employees succeed.

Yogi Bhanan says that there are really only two reasons to be in business; to make profit and to serve people. And one of the most important ways that a business serves people is to give its employees the security of a solid, steady job.

"We do business for profit and we serve people by giving them security. Don't cut corners. Be steady. You think business is personal, impersonal, big and little. Business is only for security and profit."

To a conscious business then, one of the best ways it can be of service to its employees is by giving them job security. A conscious business will not cater to its employees (serving them only in the short run) and then fire them at the first sign of trouble. Doing so would put the short-term interests of the employee over the long-term survival of the company. To a conscious business, it is more important to keep the company secure, to ensure that the company will be around to provide jobs for everyone, than to satisfy the short-term pressure to please a particular employee.

A conscious business will always want to help its employees; even if helping them means pushing them for their own growth. You don't cater to

employees or stand for substandard performance, but you are never exploiting. You view employees as human beings, not means to your ends. You simply cannot mistreat or exploit someone if you are viewing them as a human being. Yogi Bhanjan puts it this way:

"I exploit people for themselves. The first law of administration is that you take information and intelligence and exploit it. You have to exploit. My difference is I exploit them for themselves."

A conscious business will always look for the win-win situation with employees. It will find the ways to achieve what the business needs and at the same time give the employees opportunities to grow, expand, and mature. Because of this approach, a conscious business is fairly tolerant of mistakes, as long as the employee is learning from those mistakes. Just as we saw in the example of the young executive who made a mistake and was painfully pushed to expand his self-awareness, a conscious business doesn't jump to fire someone when they make a mistake. The mistake is already made, so firing them now doesn't help the business anyway. If that employee can be educated, can expand their own self-awareness as to why the error happened, then you've achieved a win-win. The employee won't make that same mistake again, which helps the business. And the employee was treated honorably and their job security was maintained.

So how does a conscious business manage the performance of its employees? What does a conscious manager do to get high performance from their employees, while still honoring the desire to provide job security, being tolerant of mistakes, and looking for ways to help the employees learn and grow? Does all this mean that a conscious business will never fire anyone; no matter how poorly they perform? No, not at all. In fact, the imperative for the company to survive over the long run, so that it can provide job security for its employees, necessitates strong performance management. A conscious business must strive to get the best out of all of its employees, just like any other business. But a conscious business will reach out more to its employees to help them perform, to help them measure up, to help them grow to their potential before it resorts to having to fire someone.

If an employee doesn't perform, Yogi Bhanjan has given a sequence to be followed where the business makes an effort, probably much more of an effort than most companies today are making, to grow and maintain their employees and to correct the situation.

"When a person is not profitable, business is suffering, then:

1st — start communicating with them

2nd – start educating them to improve

3rd – if they don't follow the lead, start confronting them with the facts and figures of the loss. Then disciplinary action can be taken.

It doesn't reach that point. People know when their days are numbered."

As you can see from this sequence, the disciplinary actions possibly leading to termination are a last resort. A conscious business has a responsibility to its employees to reach out to them, to help them, to try to make the employee-employer relationship work out. In fact, if an employee is not performing, and their supervisor has not gone through all these stages, the poor performance is the fault of the supervisor, not the employee! You can't be in a conscious business if you aren't treating people as human beings, which means treating them with respect and reaching out to help them grow.

Conscious managers will understand the personality profile of their employees, and will be able to neutrally assess when the blind spots in that personality profile need to be covered, and when the mismatch between the job needs and the personality profile is so large as to necessitate moving the person out of that position. As long as the decision is to leave the person in their position, it is their supervisor's responsibility to help them cover their weak points. A good manager therefore will be the first member of your conscious team.

Here is a real-life example of how a conscious business dealt with a very serious performance problem. Several years ago a salesperson didn't hit their numbers. At the end of the year, there was a major shortfall that dramatically, negatively, impacted the company's profitability. In a business that did not practice conscious performance management, this person surely would have been fired. But instead of doing that, the CEO followed the steps given above. First they discussed the problem with the salesperson. These were straight and honest discussions. The shortfall was not glossed over or ignored. The poor performance was not tolerated. The salesperson was grilled until everyone understood why the sales targets hadn't been met.

Then the CEO went to the second step; educating the employee. With the CEO's guidance and direct involvement, a new system was designed to correct the problems. The salesperson was a part of the team designing the new system, but the final decisions about how it would run remained with the CEO. Once the system was designed, the salesperson was educated on how it would work, as well as informed about what would happen if the same shortfall in sales happened again the next year.

By the end of this conscious process with the salesperson, he was willing to commit to not only hitting his numbers for the coming year, but he also pledged to go beyond that and make up the difference from the previous year!

And he did it. The salesman exceeded his numbers the following year, and he made up the difference from the year before. And every year since then he has exceeded his numbers! That's a win-win. That's conscious performance management. Instead of losing a great salesperson that made a mistake, he was educated and included in a system to correct the problem. Because he was treated with consciousness, his commitment and loyalty to the company and its success was redoubled, to the point that all of the loses were made up, and over-achievement has been the result ever since.

As you can see in this example, the interests of the company were upheld, while at the same time the employee was uplifted, educated, inspired, and not fired for his mistake. The business could very well have fired the sales manager, but instead it found a win-win solution where the employee's job security was protected, he was educated so the mistake wouldn't happen again, and the business got its performance back on track.

In this example you can see the high level of commitment a conscious business has towards its employees. You can see how a conscious business is with its employees "through thick and through thin."

Here's another example of how a conscious business dealt with a performance problem, but where the employee never came along. A project manager for a large contract terminated one of his employees without following the proper HR procedures. The company immediately began the steps outlined in Yogi Bhajan's quote above. They communicated with him that what he did was not correct, and explained to him again what the proper procedure was. The project manager's supervisor went further than that, into the second step, to try to educate him as to why the policy was as it was, and why he needed to do things differently in the future. The project manager never was able to admit their mistake. They continued to argue that what they did was fine.

A few months later, when the business began to have legal trouble from the terminated employee, the third step of the conscious performance management sequence was started. The project manager was confronted with the legal costs caused by his failure to follow the HR policies.

The company would have been glad to have this project manager learn from his mistake. But even when confronted with the facts of the cost of that mistake, the project manager refused to accept he'd made a mistake. His ego wouldn't let him gain self-awareness. Without that learning, the company couldn't risk continuing with this project manager, despite his many other good

qualities, and the otherwise excellent job he did running the contract. The project manager did know that his days were numbered, and so he resigned rather than learn from his mistake.

Part of showing people the respect that everyone deserves is to be perfectly straight with them about their performance. Letting an employee “get away with” sub-standard performance is actually not serving them. That would be catering to them. A conscious business can find the line between catering to an employee and treating them with respect.

"You have to be straightforward with everybody for their own progress."

Being straight with someone when they are underperforming is more respectful, when done in the right way, than letting them get away with the poor performance. The last part of this quote, “for their own progress,” indicates where the conscious business really implements the characteristic of respecting employees.

This next bit of management advice from Yogi Bhanan also emphasizes how a conscious manager must build up their employees; never tear them down.

"As an executive you cannot fight. Only consolidate the strength of the other person."

I once had a department manager under my supervision. His department was growing very fast. When he had started, it had only two employees. Now it was up to 6 and would probably continue to grow. This manager was in his first position where he had to supervise and manage others, and he was struggling a little bit.

I sat down and had a direct talk with him about my concerns with his management skills. I had to tell him that if the growth in his department continued, and if his skills and management style didn't improve, I might have to bring in someone over him. I was very specific with where he needed to improve, and I was very honest that I hoped he could step up a level so that I wouldn't have to hire a more experienced manager.

I could have fired or demoted him right there, but I was following the conscious performance management steps. He was a bit shocked and a little offended by my being so straightforward with him. But he was also inspired to make the changes and improve his skills and performance. After my initial straightforward communication with him, I moved on to the education step. I began spending more time with him than I had been. I educated him about why his performance needed to improve, what areas needed improvement, what it would look like in his department and in his day to day work if he was

functioning differently, and what steps I thought he could go through to make the improvements.

After two months of my more intensive involvement with him, I began to slowly pull back my involvement to its previous level. To my pleasant surprise, this manager was picking up his performance and was making changes to his work style. The temporary additional investment in time I had to make to help this manager was small in comparison to the time it would have taken to recruit and train a new person. By being straightforward with him for his own progress, I was able to achieve a win-win situation.

Of course, the employee may not take advantage of the chances to succeed. It's not the business's responsibility, or a supervisor's responsibility, to carry an employee that isn't working out. It is their responsibility to consciously give them every opportunity to succeed. As Yogi Bhanjan says in this next quote, a supervisor needs to reach out to help an employee, to give them opportunities to succeed.

"If you have no intention of harming someone, people are very cooperative. Reach a person who you want to help before they make a second mistake."

You can see this quote put into practice in the example of the sales manager who didn't hit his numbers. Management reached out to him and prevented him from making another mistake. Now if that salesperson hadn't come through in the following year, if the following year was a bad year again, then the conscious business would have moved him to another position or let him go. But he was given the opportunity to succeed and he took it, creating the win-win situation. This is a common result of treating employees with conscious respect.

Another important advantage that comes from treating employees as human beings, with trust and mutual respect, is that this approach often brings out the best in them. When you are truthful and kind at the same time, you will often get the best response from people. People can sense how you are viewing them. They can sense if you are viewing them as an object, a cog in your machine whose only function is to get a task done for you, or if you are honestly viewing them as a human being. When your attitude towards others is to uplift them, they will sense that and most people will respond positively. They will, as Yogi Bhanjan says, be "very cooperative." And that's definitely a win-win. The business benefits and the employee benefits.

In this next quote, Yogi Bhanjan talks about how he applies this attitude of not harming employees, while at the same time ensuring that the business is protected.

"We're not here to damage people. That's not what we are. If people are wrong and can't amend themselves, they will fall into a pit themselves. We're not going to push them. War accomplishes nothing. Love and peace does."

It can be quite a challenge to deal with employees in this way. Because it's not about being "soft" or "hard" on someone. It's about having compassion and kindness while you are being straight and truthful with them. It's about always viewing them as human beings, even as spiritual beings, so every interaction is respectful and uplifting.

The conscious businessperson has the flexibility to be tough and hard-nosed, kind and understanding, or anything in-between as the situation warrants. But underneath whatever style they are using, they have an honest caring and compassion for the other person.

Another practically manifestation of conscious respect is that conscious businesses never punish employees. This is what Yogi Bajan was saying in the above quote that "war accomplishes nothing." A conscious manager will be direct and straightforward with their employees, they will push them to succeed and help them to succeed. But they will also never forget to act with kindness.

If efforts to help an employee fail, even if an employee has to be fired, the actions are taken with the best interests of both the business and employee at heart. Punishment has no place in a conscious business. If a person is not succeeding in their job, your first priority is to try to help them succeed. If they still aren't working out, then they are in the wrong position, and it will still be a win-win solution to let them go to another job, either within your organization or somewhere else. What good does a punishment do? At best it could teach them a lesson. But there are other ways to educate an employee who's made a mistake (which we've talked about above) that don't cross the line of disrespect. Even when disciplining an employee, you must still respect them enough to want to be kind. Conscious disciplinary actions are not punishments meant to chastise an employee or "teach them a lesson" about a mistake they made.

Conscious business is a balance between the entitlement mentality of "employment for life" and the current freelance culture where there is no such thing as job security. Employees of conscious businesses have a lot of job security, much more than at other companies. And the company will go out of its way to work with an employee that is not performing. No one will be fired capriciously or carelessly. But within that job security, each employee must still perform and measure up. Everyone is treated with kindness and respect for their human dignity.

The way a conscious businessperson relates to other people, both colleagues and subordinates, is respectful and uplifting. This allows them to be open to hearing their input, even when it is very different than their own; and creates an employee/employer relationship that rewards job performance with job security, pushes for job performance while at the same time maintaining a graceful and respectful relationship that is geared for mutual benefit. This is a key attribute of a conscious business.

6. FLEXIBILITY

To take action based on the conscious approaches we've already described, you need to be flexible. When a person is self-aware enough to avoid the pitfalls of blindly acting on their own hidden agendas, and when they can put their ego aside enough to hear options from others; they will inevitably find times when they will need to act in novel ways.

FLEXIBLE DECISION-MAKING

There are actually two levels of flexibility that the conscious businessperson has to have, flexibility in actions and flexibility in styles. The first is being able to be flexible in your business decisions. This means that even if you haven't tried something before, if it's the right thing to do, you'll do it. Often people associate trying something new with taking risks. But these days, the pace of change is so great that business people have to stop blindly relying on solutions that worked in the past to solve today's challenges. In today's business environment it can often be riskier to stick with the comfortable than to find a new approach.

In the eyes of a conscious businessperson, an irrational attachment to what has worked in the past is just another distortion of reality that our subconscious minds are causing. For whatever reason, we are hard-wired to view a new action as riskier than one we've done before. We consciously and intellectually know that with the pace of change today and the complexity of the problems we're facing that just because something worked in the past is no guarantee that it will work again now. Even in the face of this intellectual knowledge, our subconscious will still steer us towards familiar ground and away from new territory. The grocery store is the new territory and the office is the familiar ground; we'll naturally tend to unconsciously favor the habitual over the novel. A conscious businessperson avoids this tendency using their self-awareness and their mental clarity. They neutrally assess all the options, new and old, and choose what's best for the business.

A consciously run business will actually be more risk-adverse than most companies. They are not in business for a quick profit. A conscious business's responsibility to provide long term job security to its employees leads to a view of business as a legacy for the future, an institution lasting generations and providing financial security for everyone involved. So the need to be flexible in a conscious business definitely does not imply a high degree of risk taking. The conscious business will carefully weigh options and neutrally review projections (possible future results that could occur). And if a new idea is the best choice for the business, a conscious businessperson won't hesitate to do it. As Yogi Bhan says,

"Change is necessary; do it gladly."

So a conscious business is both flexible and conservative. Its goal is long-term success, and sometimes the best way to accomplish that is to do something completely novel. It takes conscious decision making skills to be able to judge if a new direction is too risky or not.

Yogi Bhajan is famous within the businesses he advises for his regular advice to try something radically different, which after careful thought makes perfect sense. For example, there was a discussion about how to increase the sales of a small division. The management team worked on this and had a few concrete suggestions, which they took to Yogi Bhajan for his advice. About mid-way through the discussion he suggested that we sell off the division.

These businesses had never sold off a division before, so this was a radical suggestion. The management team went off to digest that advice, and at first there was a lot of resistance to it for many reasons. But the group continued to look at it. They knew the benefits of being flexible, and they gradually came to see the wisdom in selling off this division. They realized that each of their initial objections was based on unexamined assumptions. And because everyone shared similar subconscious assumptions, there was a bias towards the status quo. The management team was flexible enough to come around to a good suggestion when it was in front of them, but not quite flexible enough to come up with the radical suggestion on their own. So the first area application of flexibility is being able to go in new directions, to make decisions you've never made before.

FLEXIBLE STYLES

The second area in which a conscious businessperson is flexible is more difficult and more personal. A conscious businessperson must be flexible in their own work-style or communication style to meet the needs of a particular situation. A conscious business person needs to be sensitive enough to know what style would be most effective in a given situation, and they must care so much about doing what's best for the business that they will take the difficult step of *not* acting according to their normal habits, style, or pattern.

We talked before about the old adage of everything looking like a nail if the only tool you have a hammer. We are talking here about applying this saying to work styles. We are all biased towards our own style, our "tool." We all have this unconscious tendency to justify our preferred approach to ourselves. But to truly serve the best interests of the company, a conscious businessperson has to be flexible in their style to match the needs of the situation. It takes a tremendous amount of self-awareness to see past the

natural proclivity for your normal approach and neutrally assess what the situation needs.

For example, a person who is very analytical and fact-oriented will tend to view that approach as superior to others. When faced with a challenging situation, they will naturally favor this style. In fact, the more stress they are under, the more subconsciously they will lean on the style they are most comfortable with. But many business situations require a more people-oriented approach, and the heavily analytical person may not have the best style for that instance. The conscious businessperson has enough self-awareness and clarity of foresight to accurately see which approach is best for a given situation. And they can show the flexibility to act on that foresight.

To have flexibility in their work style a conscious businessperson must do two things. First they have to neutrally judge whether or not their natural style is the best approach in a given situation. Secondly, they must change their style when a situation calls for it. Both of these have their own challenges!

Good managers learn what motivates their employees and give them that. If one employee really gets excited when faced with a large challenge that they have to tackle alone, a good manager will give them large challenges and give them the space to accomplish them. Perhaps another employee is overwhelmed if given something too large, but with regular encouragement and positive feedback they can accomplish just as much as the other employee. A good manager, a conscious one, will display enough flexibility to give each of these two types of employees what they need to succeed.

There are many types of trainings and books about how to be the kind of manager who can motivate diverse employees. As we've said before, conscious business does not replace those trainings and approaches. What we are emphasizing here is an aspect that those other places do not cover. Even if you have all of the knowledge and information in the world about how to motivate your employees, without self-awareness and conscious flexibility, you won't be able to apply those techniques. Consciousness is not a replacement for knowledge, but it is a prerequisite for turning book knowledge into your own experience and hence wisdom.

This chapter is not trying to teach you how to know what your employees need. You will need to turn to other tools for that. Conscious flexibility is the skill necessary to put that into practice.

Every manager will have one style that they prefer, that will be their natural tendency if they don't act consciously. For example, imagine a manager that works best with very little interference from a supervisor. It will be easy for them to manage an employee who likes the same approach. But this manager

may negatively view an employee who needs more interaction. Because of the natural bias towards our own style, this manager may be thinking, “If they were a good worker they wouldn’t need as much encouragement.” Through the distorting lens of his subconscious, his style equates to “good,” and another style must mean “bad.”

This unconscious reaction may not be accurate. Perhaps for the job at hand, independence is a critical attribute. Or possibly if the manager can change their style and give the second employee the encouragement and interaction they need, perhaps their performance, and hence the benefit to the business, would be even greater than that of the more independent employee. A conscious businessperson has enough self-awareness and mental clarity to see beyond their own personal preferences and work style to see the truth.

Take another example of a manager who has a caring and soft style. Just like any other style, this will have some instances when it will be appropriate and work well; and others when it isn’t the right approach. Most of this manager’s employees respond very positively to her style. They have a lot of department lunches together, and the manager brings in bagels for breakfast for her people on Fridays. The manager is good at listening to her employees when they have personal issues going on. Because she has built a strong personal bond with her employees, most of them feel a lot of loyalty to her, and usually the department runs smoothly and congenially. But there is one employee who doesn’t seem to fit in well with the rest of the department. Their performance is not up to standards, and the manager needs to deal with this low performance.

This manager will most likely deal with a performance problem using their natural style. She’ll talk nicely to them, try to see if there is anything the matter that could be causing the problem, maybe even go so far as to restructure their job to help things. The manager would probably mention at the end of the talk that she hopes the employee’s performance will improve.

Some employees may respond well to this kind of caring, soft approach to performance management. Maybe they did have a one-time personal issue, outside of work, that will soon be resolved, and the manager’s approach makes them feel valued and cared about. Because of this maybe the employee would feel even more loyalty to the company (or at least to their manager) and work even harder once their situation was resolved.

But other employees may not respond well to the soft, caring approach. They may not be as self-motivated as the others in the department, and need a bit more pushing to perform. Or they may need a stiff challenge laid out for them so they can stay engaged and striving. The manager “default approach” with

one of these types of employees will probably not increase their performance. In fact it may even backfire.

If this manager is practicing conscious business, she will apply the quote we used earlier about always knowing the profile of the people you work with. With that knowledge she'll have at least an idea as to what style may work best with this employee. If she still has trouble seeing past her own natural approach, she would practice conscious teamwork by soliciting input from someone else to help cover her blind spot. Once she knew what approach to use she'd be flexible enough to be able to use it. And she'd be motivated to go through all of this just to help this one employee improve (rather than simply writing them up or firing them for their poor performance) because she understands the philosophy of conscious performance management.

As we've discussed in other sections, conscious business is not a replacement for specific skills, such as knowing different categories of work style and how to work with them. By all means you should study and learn these kinds of things. There are many books specifically devoted to this topic of diversity of work styles. There are many tests, such as the Myers-Briggs, that will categorize you into one of several personality types. And there are many consultants and trainers who help businesses apply the results of these tests to their business.

Those kinds of things can be very helpful. But they aren't required for conscious business. Some people respond very well to those kinds of detailed categorizations, and if they study the categories and how to work better with each style, they could gain a lot. But many people don't operate that systematically in their personal interactions. They don't stop to think before they have a meeting with their boss, "I know that they are an extroverted, sensing, feeling, perceptive type. Therefore I should broach this subject with them in this particular way..."

If that approach works for you, use it to be flexible in your style. But don't worry if that approach to styles doesn't work for you. All you really need to practice conscious business is the desire to be flexible as we've discussed. If you truly practice the attribute of respecting the human dignity of other people, you will find ways to work with them. You will be open and receptive to trying different approaches to effectively interact with them.

Conscious business is the framework in which skills like these can be best applied. For example, there are experts who can easily read other people's styles. Misused, this skill could be nothing more than manipulative. If they are using their flexibility to get what they want, rather than to best serve the business and their co-workers, they aren't applying the other principles of conscious business. If studying personality types works for you, learn how

personality profiles such as the Myers-Briggs can help you at work. But put it in the broader context of doing everything consciously.

Here is an example of how one conscious business applied flexible work styles to support an employee. One manager had a very people oriented approach. This style had worked well for years, allowing her to effectively network and connect with people in her service-industry business.

The CEO, this people-centered manager's boss, had a very different style. His style was to plan, set goals, and then aggressively go after achieving those goals. He wouldn't go out of his way to "connect" with the people he was working with. While the manager's division was doing well, this CEO was content to let her work her way and not interfere.

Then her division hit some hard times. The CEO began to get more involved. He fell into the unconscious trap of thinking that his approach was always the best one. He began to think that the main reason for the division's troubles was the manager's "soft" style. He began to push the manager the way he thought she should be pushing her people; setting goals, making plans, reprimanding her when performance didn't meet the goals, etc. Not too surprisingly, this approach didn't work very well. That style was so foreign to this manager that she just couldn't relate to it. The relationship between the CEO and this manager quickly degraded to a point where something obviously had to shift.

In an unconscious business, the manager probably would have been fired. Homogenization of styles is a normal result of unconscious business. This CEO was conscious enough to call on a team for some advice on how to handle the situation. With the help of a team, the CEO was able to come up with win-win solution.

The team members, with their "outsiders" perspective, were able to more objectively see the situation. They could see that the CEO was partly right. The manager's style was partly to blame for the division's current struggles. But they were also able to see both the positive aspects of her approach, which needed to be sustained, and the futility of trying to get her to change as abruptly and radically as the CEO wanted.

The CEO's advisors reminded him of the need to support employees by being flexible in your style. And they helped him step back and go through the performance management steps we discussed earlier. They facilitated discussions with the manager so that she could understand the problem (the CEO thought he'd had those kinds of conversations with her, but of course she took these as reprimands, not as constructive criticism, and hence she was not at all receptive to hearing it directly from the CEO).

With the CEO's blessing, they then set up a situation in which she could be educated to work differently. They set up a team to work with her, a team with a balance of work styles, so that the division could get the hard driving kind of focus that it needed, and maintain the softer, people oriented approach that they'd used so successfully in the past.

Via the team the CEO could accomplish what he wanted to, while still leveraging the manager's strengths as a people person. Because she was such a "people person", the group dynamics helped her to better relate to the direction the CEO was giving. And by working in this conscious team, the manager was educated about the more goal-oriented approach.

This was a more conscious solution to the problem of a struggling division than simply firing the manager. The business was served and protected, and the employee was educated. It was a win-win situation that the CEO was able to come up with only because he was willing to be flexible in his work style.

At least it had the potential to be a win-win solution. Unfortunately, the manager never could fully understand the weaknesses of her approach or the need for her to learn something from different styles. She was not able to be flexible in her style. So after some time with the team approach, when it became clear that her performance (and hence her division's) still wasn't where it needed to be, she had to be demoted to a different position in which her style was more appropriate.

This example showcases a many of the conscious business attributes. The CEO worked with a team to help him practice conscious performance management. The group's input helped him see more clearly the role of the manager's style in relationship to her job's requirements. The CEO put his ego aside enough to overcome his own initial reaction and ended up agreeing with the group's recommendation to continue working with her. And then he showed the flexibility necessary to put that input into practice, even though it wasn't his normal style.

This kind of flexibility is essential for conscious performance management. In an unconscious business, a manager could easily fire an employee if that employee's work style didn't match the manager's. A conscious business would never sanction that. Remember that conscious business has nothing to do with your personality. So it doesn't matter whether or not you like this style or that style. The only thing that is important is what style best serves the business.

This kind of flexibility and support of your subordinates is what a conscious manager must be expected to display. It is a critical part of reaching out to serve and uplift an employee. Firing someone just because their style is

different is not displaying the conscious characteristic of respecting the human dignity of other people.

Of course, there are times when an employee's style really does not fit the business needs. In those cases, the conscious manager must try to help that employee change and grow, or find them a spot in which their style could be a better fit. The challenge for a conscious businessperson is having enough neutrality that they can objectively judge when it's appropriate for them to change their style, and when it's appropriate to ask the employee to change. The normal tendency will always be to choose the latter; to make the other person change rather than change ourselves. A conscious businessperson uses their mental clarity to see past this tendency to the truth. The CEO in our example at first made this mistake. He assumed that it was the manager who needed to change her style to better fit his, rather than the other way around. But eventually he came around to seeing, with the help of some outside advisers, that he also needed to show some flexibility.

I find this aspect of conscious business particularly difficult to practice. Time and time again I make the mistake of unconsciously assuming that the other person thinks as I do, processes information like I do, is motivated by the same things I am, thinks the same things are important as I do, etc. When I do this, it always creates unnecessary confusion, tension and friction that could have been avoided if I had thought beforehand to be flexible in my approach.

Because I know I make this mistake frequently, I use my team to help me. I ask other people their advice on how to proceed, how to interact, and what style to use. When needed, I have people I can ask whether to be heavy and direct or lighter and inquiring for a given situation. This kind of teamwork works well for me except when I forget to use it! Forget is not quite the right word. It's more like in some situations it never even occurs to me to ask for advice. There is some kind of unconscious decision to go ahead my way. This is just like the driver who out of habit heads to his office instead of where he really wants to go, to the grocery store.

In the beginning of this book I talked about my first frustrating experience working at Golden Temple Natural Foods. I was trying to improve their forecasting and Manufacturing Resource Planning system, but the way I arrived at my solution and the way I tried to implement it were not very good. The actual solution itself may have been perfectly fine, but I wasn't successful in that project because I didn't know the conscious business principles of teamwork and flexibility. If I had that same project today I would have used the help of other people. I would have had them help me evaluate and refine my proposed solution. I also would have had them help me find the best approach to implementation, because my normal style may not work best in that

situation. And I would have been more flexible than I was then, so that I could have successfully completed the implementation.

A conscious businessperson is flexible enough to make decisions that have never been tried before, once they've neutrally assessed that it is the best decision for the business. They are able to see past the normal subconscious blinders that make us favor the status-quo over change, and they are flexible enough to match their style or approach to what best fits a given situation. They don't let their personality, their unconscious assumption that their approach is best, cloud their judgment of other's (especially their subordinates') work.

To begin improving your own conscious practice of flexibility, watch out for decisions that support the status quo. Be willing to take a second look at them to make sure that you aren't unconsciously biased against the new direction. You should also take the time to understand the different work styles that your employees and coworkers have. With that knowledge, make sure that what may look like a performance problem isn't really an issue to do with style differences that could easily be resolved with a little flexibility.

SUMMARY

Yogi Bhajan is a yogi, a man who through the conscious control of his mind, body, and breath has cleared the subconscious filters from his vision. He sees the world clearly, undistorted by how he wants things to be or how he wishes things will turn out. When he is practicing business, he applies this same clarity and consciousness.

In the above sections we have used direct quotes from him to describe what it looks like to practice business consciously. You don't have to be a yogi to practice conscious business, but you do need to develop and apply the attributes we described above: mental clarity, self-awareness, teamwork, ability to put aside your ego, respecting the human dignity of other people, and flexibility.

Perhaps the descriptions above of how a conscious business looks and how a conscious businessperson acts sound very idealistic and extremely challenging to actually practice in your workplace. They are not idealistic. The businesses that Yogi Bhajan has inspired are operating this way. And many other excellent companies and executives out there incorporate these principles, even if they may use different language to describe them. But it is difficult to live business consciously, and there are three reasons why it is challenging.

Most significantly, it's difficult because you're dealing with the fine line between your conscious and unconscious mind. You are trying to expand your self-awareness and understanding. You're trying to clearly see what's best for the business, through the normal human fog of self-interest, work-style habits, and hidden agendas. You are trying to be flexible when the normal human tendency is to stick with the tried and true. Increasing your consciousness in these areas often feels like you're swimming upstream against the strong currents of human nature and some fundamental structures built into the human experience.

When dealing with these kinds of issues, it's very, very easy to not realize when you're being unconscious, or to let yourself justify to yourself an unconscious reaction. Even with the best of intentions, there are normal human tendencies to subtly self-aggrandize, to avoid looking at our own shortcomings, to let personality judgments block us from hearing valid input, etc. These natural tendencies make practicing consciousness in business challenging.

For example, a group of people in one conscious business were formulating a new strategic direction. Amongst the top management team a consensus was forming. One person, a subordinate who was peripherally involved, had a problem with the direction that was emerging. This person spoke of their

concerns to two members of the management team, and both times her concerns were brushed aside. The management team members had a number of rationalizations for not really hearing this person. Because he were a subordinate, he didn't have the big picture perspective, he was known to "always" be difficult to deal with, and everyone is just so busy, it really wasn't worth the time to try to explain to him and convince him.

But now look at these rationalizations from the conscious perspective we've been discussing. A clique was forming where the management team was in a mutually supportive pattern. No one wanted to spend the time talking to this person, who was pre-judged to be "difficult," so no one really heard his concerns. And if they did feel a twinge of uneasiness from his input, they masked that twinge with the rationalization that the rest of the group didn't agree so there must not really be anything to those concerns. The clique mentality helped justify the prejudgment of this person's input, which prevented it from really being heard by the decision makers.

The prejudgment of this person's input was also justified by the extremely busy schedules of all the key players. Deciding on this one strategic direction was just one of the many issues that they were dealing with. Therefore no one looked kindly on slowing down the process to deal with this subordinate's input. Unconsciously, their desire to not slow down, to not add more work to themselves, biased them against the contrary input.

So the management team proceeded to finalize their decision, against the warnings of this one person. When they brought this decision to Yogi Bhajan for his advice, they of course didn't mention this lone dissenting opinion. But he had heard of that one person's concerns through another channel (because he himself was practicing conscious teamwork, he had collected input from diverse sources), and he immediately advised against the management team's suggestion.

He wasn't even that concerned with who was right or wrong in this case. He wasn't saying that the person disagreeing was right and everyone else was wrong. What he heard was enough to tell him that the consciousness of the decision was off. He could tell by the way the news had come to him that his system of a team acting as a check and balance for each other had broken down. And because people were not fully hearing the dissenting opinion, they individually were not being fully conscious in their approach. With these two major breakdowns in his system, he advised the management team to stop the implementation of their decision, and go back and really hear the input of that one person who had concerns.

The team, though not happy about the delay and the possibility of having to change their minds, did listen to Yogi Bhajan's advice. They went back and

began a process they should have done much earlier. They sat down with this person, put aside, at least temporarily, their idea of what the “right” solution was, and their predetermined opinions about this person’s input; and really began to hash out the issue from a fresh perspective. In the end, which didn’t take very much time to reach (remember that being in a rush was one of the excuses or self-justifications the team had used to avoid this process in the first place), they reached a different strategic direction.

This new direction was different from both the original decision the management team was about to make and the direction the lone objector was advocating. It was not a compromise between the other two, but an amalgamation that took the best parts of both.

The result was a great success, acknowledged by everyone involved, and everyone was glad of Yogi Bhanjan’s advice. A better decision was reached by being conscious. Diverse input was clearly heard. Self-awareness prevented a “group-think” mentality to shortcut the system. Everyone was able to put aside their egos so that this subordinate could be heard. And the team was flexible enough to act in a new way.

When you are deep within a situation, as the busy executives in this example were, it is easy to justify shortcutting the practices that lead to conscious decisions. It is difficult to see when you are being unconscious in your own approach. This is the first challenge to practicing conscious business.

The second reason why practicing conscious business is so tough is that all of the attributes we’ve described are inter-related. They depend on each other for successful execution. You can see echoes of all of the attributes within each example that was given throughout this book. These attributes aren’t like other skills where you can pick one and work on it in isolation from the others. For example, you need some level of self-awareness to be able to use other people to cover your blind spots. Without flexibility, you won’t be able to always act in the best interests of the company. And without being able to work in a conscious team, you’ll always be at risk of kidding yourself as to the true level of your self-consciousness. You can’t work on just one of these attributes at a time. You have to work on all of them at the same time.

All of the attributes of a conscious businessperson build on and support each other. That supplies the key to how to increase the level of conscious in your own work. You need to gradually and patiently advance all of these attributes together. You need to take small steps forward with each of them, and expect slow progress, punctuated with backsliding and challenges.

If this process were just about doing your job better, not many people would be motivated to go through it. But the personal satisfaction you gain by

working this way makes it very rewarding and worthwhile. Even right from the beginning of your practice of these principles you will begin to feel that deep joy of conscious, righteous, action. The hints of those feelings will keep you motivated and keep you striving to fully practice these tenets of conscious business.

The third challenge to practicing the tools in this book is that the more stressed you become, the more you will revert back to your old habits and patterns. Just when you need it most, when you have the biggest decisions to make, or the least time in which to make them, those are the times when you will be least likely to want to or be able to practice conscious business.

There are only two ways to counteract this tendency of constricting under stress rather than expanding even more into the new zone of conscious decision making. First, you can have some less stressed people (at least about the particular situation you're dealing with) on your team who can help you stay balanced and help you practice these tools.

Second, you just have to be patient with yourself. Practice these techniques in less stressful situations first. Ingrain conscious practices into your daily routines. Make them habits. Gradually this conscious approach to business will become second nature to you, and conscious decisions will become your habit. As this conscious method becomes your default mode of practicing business, you will come to rely on these tools even during stressful times.

You can immediately set up a team that will be mutually supportive in being conscious. Choose members not because you like them, or they think as you do, but because they don't think like you do, because they can balance out your blind spots. And you should begin, if you don't already, some kind of regular practice of yoga and meditation to keep your own thinking as clear, conscious, and neutral as possible. Starting today, take a few minutes each week to analyze your own mistakes and learn from them. Bring an attitude of deep listening and humility to your next interactions with your co-workers, even in the midst of a hectic pace and your own prejudices.

Practicing these concrete actions regularly, coupled with frequent, regular attempts to maintain the conscious mindset (self-awareness, neutral mental clarity, viewing other people with respect and dignity, etc.); will allow you to increase your application of consciousness in whatever business, at whatever level, you are engaged.

When you work consciously, you will be better able to handle stress and information overload. Work won't seem so much like a battle, but more like it's own meditation. It will become a realm in which you can learn about yourself and interact with your colleagues in respectful and uplifting ways. You

will experience the freedom of being unshackled from subconscious patterns that don't serve you or the business. Your actions will be uniquely in the moment, and you will feel the deep satisfaction of this kind of righteous action. This satisfaction goes beyond job satisfaction into life satisfaction.

Business will always have challenges. Practicing these attributes of conscious business will allow you to maximize your chances of success and will give you joy and satisfaction in your work. To end with a Yogi Bhajan quote about success in overcoming the challenges of business:

"There is not life without challenge. Challenge is the way of life. Life without challenge is called a dead life. Meeting the challenge and winning, there's not joy like it."