

Zen and Creative Management, by Albert Low, is the best book that I have read and is the most interesting to me in bringing a system of spirituality into the business world. Interestingly enough, Buddhism is not mentioned in detail other than the very beginning and then sprinkled throughout the book and the last three chapters. Interesting that the author waited to cover Zen in more detail til the end. One doesn't have to be an expert at Zen to understand the concepts.

It really feels that this book should be laid out into a manual where exercises are drawn out from the concepts. I am working on a .ppt. It is a lot like Steve Hagen's book Buddhism Plain and Simple. Much of understanding the message does come from reading the author's writing style. I have written an overview of Buddhism Plain and Simple so I guess I can with this. Recording my thoughts might be the start. It really flowed and I had an urge to come back to the book. I was able to finish it where many books lately have been hard. I have been looking for a system. One of the initial points is "Dilemma" and Zen is helpful in that arena to deal with dilemmas.

In the very first page after the table of contents,

"Modern capitalism is absolutely irreligious without internal union, without much public spirit, often, though not always, a mere congeries of possessors and pursuers. ~ Maynard Keynes

"Are we confronted with a tragic, insolvable dilemma? Must we produce a sick people in order to have a healthy economy, or can we use our material resources, our inventions, our computers to serve the ends of man? Must individuals be passive and dependent in order to have strong and well-functioning organizations? ~Erich Fromm

From the Foreward:

"I look at Zen not as a religion but as a way of thinking, and at scientific breakthrough-the joy of creating something-as a form of enlightenment."

"Conflict is the very source of creation; thus, what is most to be feared by the company that wants it's management to remain creative, is loss of a sense of conflict through the resolution of conflict by an old man's methods."

So, the dilemma is often times businesses wanting to decrease the tension that exist within it. Businesses like family and other entities have tension. It reminds me of contrast-desire is created by the contrast of the universe. We have to get comfortable with tension in business. Businesses try to relieve the tension by coming up with systems, among other things, without taking into account the whole that businesses are a part of. Throughout the book, he talks about different aspects of a business. He breaks down work and different types of work – The work is not about the "right" solution. There are no right solutions.

More from the Foreward:

"Dilemmas arise out of the whole; problems come with the luxury of being able to reduce the whole to component parts. With dilemmas, unlike problems, there are no right solutions; one can only choose the most suitable decision. This has always been the case but nowadays managers do not simply have to wrestle with dilemmas that arise within their own companies, but also with those that arise from the interaction of their companies with society as a whole."

Karl Marx said that every system carries within it the seeds of its own destruction. ... Pollution is fast becoming the number-one threat to the future- (Note: it is the number one issue here in 2015).

"Outpacing other threats such as overpopulation, depleted resources, and nuclear disaster. Pollution,

however, is but one horn of the societal dilemma. The need for full employment is another. The present specters of depression, unemployment, poverty, and disillusionment are the other side of the story. The pendulum will swing again, jobs will once more become plentiful, but how much more litter, discarded chemicals, waste material, and waste gasses can our planet survive.” This was written back in the 70's.

“A full dilemma, moreover, as this book will show, has four horns, not just two. The societal dilemma also includes the need to control inflation, which still threatens the financial structure, and also free access to credit, which has become a principle feature of that structure. Each of these four is dependent on the others and none can be resolved in isolation. Each is a dimension of the whole”

I remember back in the 70's how inflation was so impactful. I was 12 and the gas crisis hit. Since then, there has been this fear of inflation coming back to hit us. Alan Greenspan was always trying to limit inflation. He tried to limit the economy when things were heating up with regulations and not raising the interest rate. Then in the 90's the banks became so big and so did the investment banks and they allowed to be in the others industry. Was it Glass Spiel Act and derivatives? I think this is what we try to do. We fix something here but we don't take the whole into account. This is the beauty of Albert Low's book. He comes up with systems that I wouldn't have come up with or thought of. He links certain actions with certain departments. For example, he as a really good diagram in the appendix.

He uses the term Life Force in the last paragraph of the Foreward, which is why I like this book and how it is unique for business:

“The life force that organizes species, organs, and organisms also molds organizations,. Human beings cannot conquer nature-they are nature in action. The creative leaps made by man and the creative leaps made by nature are of the same kind. Nature makes use of what may be called “un reculer pour mieux sauter,” a recoiling, in order to leap that much better. When nature's evolutionary drive has reached a cul-de-sac, it withdraws and breaks out from a new point in a new direction. I am suggesting that Zazen is a discipline that uses un reculer pour mieux sauter; this approach provides greater facility in dealing with those organizational cul-de-sacs that are both frustrations and opportunities. Zazen seems to be as old as mankind; what is new today is its availability to the West, and specifically, its availability for dealing with the complex, multifaceted problems encountered in organizations. Sometimes you see this with businesses where you or they want to implement a quick fix when there are problems or they want to jump on an opportunity when it arises. With Zazen, you absorb or make whole when tension comes about. This term from Steve Hagen in Buddhism is not what you Think. That is where the Creative Management comes into play. When you absorb, heal and make whole the tension, you are more at ease and you do from a place of being. The result is a higher level of creativity. You are not trying to fix things. You are creating with a real sense of the whole. This is not easy. We are such a doing society.

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Example of a decision table. Subject of Decision is new and Existing Products. The President has only one decision and that is Decide priority price and extent of service to be given to new products. Unbelievable. R/D has 11 decisions ranging from deciding whether there are any servicing difficulties that would preclude the company from taking the new product to deciding method of discovering problems being experienced in the field and of resolving those problems. Sales and Service have 12 decisions- deciding lead time required to prepare for release of new products to deciding who will receive and relay customer information. Finance has 2 – deciding economic guidelines to be used for pricing new products for sale and rental or lease to deciding amortization period for products being leased or rented. Marketing has 9 decisions – deciding methods of keeping in contact with new product

developments to deciding minimum and maximum product inventory levels. It's the marketing department that is investigating new products. You would think the President would be doing this but it is the marketing. There has always been a conflict between Sales and Marketing. I will include this Appendix in the .ppt overview. This might be a challenge to come up with a tree like this for other decisions but could be very helpful.

Back to the table of contents, the first two chapters are #1 Shareholder, Employee, Customer: The Basic Triad and #2 The Basic Triad as a Field.. In the latter, he describes companies as fields. How decision making is influenced by the confusion between shareholder and management and that it is biased in favor of the shareholders return and other factors. He talks about the company as a field and if you think of a field of energy with dimensions, it is quite complex and that is why it is so difficult to consider decisions affecting the whole the way they do. Choosing what products to take on. Looking at it from a company point of view.

Then he gets into Structure/Process, which is probably the biggest issue that is covered in the book. It permeates through the rest of the book. This is up my ally, especially the process side. Next chapter Work and Organization, then Not Two, Not One. He uses the word "Holon" and how Zazen is a Holon. He talks about "I am I", but also others see "me". He compares humans to animals since animals have this two. Animals know they themselves exist but also know when they are being observed by another object. That is the dilemma that humans and animals face. This is the dilemma and tension is created because of it. It is referred to as central and periphery. You can be aware of only one at a time and yet both central and periphery exist. You can't ignore the other. That is why he brings in Zen Buddhism because non-duality is the central theme. It is not two – there is the whole but there is also consciousness. Chapter 8 is Conflict and Growth. Conflict arises because of the tension but you can't have growth without conflict or tension. He talks about the difference between growth and expansion. Growth comes from creativity and how employees are challenged in their work with new responsibilities. They are learning. Expansion is just more work. I saw this when talking with the gardener. He wanted more money and I wanted him to do a few more things. He agreed. He is overwork, not just in what he is doing with us but with his other clients. I know he is. I sense he is. He nodded but he didn't do it. The extra work would be an example of expansion but not growth. He is not being challenged. The Dilemma is talked about throughout the book but it has its own chapter. The dilemma is a mental problem, not a physical one. Physical work is easier than mental work. We put off the mental challenge. The dilemma has to be solved.

That is why this book is beautiful. It can be used with a 1-person business or a large corporation. Chapter 11 is Types of Work. He mentions different types of work, one of which directly relates to product work. Another is entrepreneurial work. There is flux work which is often problem solving work so you can keep the product work going. For example, in a commercial kitchen, you have to clean up or deal with a piece of equipment that goes down.

Chapter 9 is Staff and Line – The Battle Lines of Business. This is where you get overlap between shareholders and management and employees. You don't give responsibilities to the employees. Page 68 The Staff/Line theory says that some members of a company make decisions while others give advice. This staff/line approach was adopted from the military organization, and it is widespread throughout industry. "Although most every business of any consequence at all in the United States today is a corporation with the line-and-staff pattern of organization."

The logic of the staff and line is simple. The proponents of the approach say, or imply, the following: Someone must make a decision. Conflict is endemic to an organization. It goes on to say what is

discussed earlier about how conflict or tension needs to be reduced. Words like threat and panic are used. It is not surprising since this is used by military and war is dangerous with drama and crisis and danger. As with other chapters, this subject is discussed in far more details and I will determine how to cover this detail in a .ppt presentation. Top of page 72 In this statement, we see the real value of the staff/line theory is the at it drives conflict underground, and so conflict ceases to be a recognizable problem for a manager. Again for a business, this is not healthy.

Thus Staff and Line are no longer appropriate. He talks about how the manager should have lots of employees reporting to him. I remember talking to a guy who works at Apple. They do this so that the employees are as close to management as possible rather than lots of managers who have less employees while these managers aren't as connected to upper management. Another concept is survival versus expansive mode of the organization's activity. This involves the organization-as-structure. The second concerns the organization-as-process.

Chapter 16 is Idea and the Four Criteria. The latter consist of, you guessed it, four criteria: simplicity and completeness which are in opposition of each other. The other two criteria are pragmatism and communicability, which are also in opposition of each other. A reminder that an idea that forms and has demand is a product. Developing a product is not easy. I look at my brother's food business and he has this. He may not have all the sales he wants. Can you get volume? I wonder with my own service business, it is slow going. Any idea takes form in a way. Is there demand? How do you package it? These last two items are where I have a challenge. Maybe with this book, things will change.

Chapter 17 Commitment, Capacity and Ability. This is an important part of the book. It is quite detailed. Each one of these topics is broken into several sections.

Reading this book validates a lot of the concepts. It is much like Steve Hagen's writing, per Robert Pirisg, who said just reading Hagen's work shows the way.

Many of the concepts mentioned in the book will open some business owners' eyes. He talks about how money comes into play. It is so bizarre how he talks about money and the difference between accounting and finance. Accounting is for balancing the books, how you have done up to this point. Finance is for the future – for future products product development. It is tied in with marketing. Money is an expression of who we are as human beings. It reminded me of Law of Attraction. There is such a problem with today's society since wealth is so concentrated in so few people's hands. People with large sums of money use this money for self-expression. There is no creativity in it. There is a law of less returns. At some point, your return on investment falls dramatically. Gluttony is probably the best way to describe it. When you have so much money, you can only express yourself so much, unless you give it away. Ad nausea. This could wake people up. People who want to make a lot of money or who already have made it. It will also tell people who have enough how they can express themselves. If you go into Apple, or Google or Microsoft and show them these concepts, they might see they don't need all this money. Maybe I am getting sick or loved ones and choking on this wealth. Maybe other employees could use the money. And not just employees but countless others outside the company, who don't have enough. This could give them the motivation they need to get off on giving their wealth away.

This was mentioned earlier in the summary when covering the Foreword: This has always been the case but nowadays managers do not simply have to wrestle with dilemmas that arise within their own companies, but also with those that arise from the interaction of their companies with society as a whole.” He talks about boundaries and their importance. There are boundaries that aren't clear within a company, including shareholders and management along with employees and customers. Who is

most important? He also talks about territory and compares it with male female in a couple and also with animals. That women aren't attracted to men per se. He uses female bucks and how they aren't into the alpha buck. It is the alpha buck's territory. This territory is psychological, at least partly. Self and other includes boundaries.

I have never seen anything like this. How he describes the business. I believe a manual can be created from this concept. Maybe audio is the best way to do it. The two appendixes are very helpful. Plus there are many graphs which can be included in the presentation. In the 2nd appendix, it involves "Dilemmas Involved in Setting up a Salary Administration System". For example, in the total system, "The system must be economic in terms of costs and administration" and "The system must be complete and cover the full range of work and all necessary roles." These two are conflicting with each other. The next two are conflicting as well. "The system must be pragmatic in that it ensures WCP in equilibrium as far as possible." and "The System must be capable of being understood and accepted by the employees and those using it." Item #2 and #3 are compatible. Item #1 and #4 are compatible as well.

This is where Zazen comes into play. It helps you deal with tension and to come up a good enough solution. He compares process to structure. Page 46 figures 8-10. Three of these six functions have an emphasis on structure and three on process. Out of the first three comes the field, out of the second set comes the product. This should not be construed that the field is first established and then the product produced. Rather, all six create the field and all six produce the product. ...The field is centered by an idea and this centering is producing the product. A useful analogy is that of a crystal growing out of a gel. The seed of the crystal is the idea, the gel is the organization; but the seed and the gel are made of the same ingredients.

It feels like I could go in and give a presentation on this and how we could follow a system that comes from the book. It reminds me of Phil Jackson who was looking for a system. He found an offense. The funny thing is how everyone talks about the Triangle Offense but the defense was what was good. The same goes for the new NBA Champions Golden State Warriors. It was their defense that was good, even though they had a great offense.

Here is a system that can be put in place. It seems to make so much sense. The author Albert Low now offers week long Seshins in Montreal Canada. He has another book. Zen and Creative Management was ahead of it's time. The question is whether it still is.