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White Paper Lessons

**Profitability of Imparting Dignity, Respect and Honor
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The Profitable Implications of Treating People with Dignity, Respect and Honor

Executive Summary

During more than thirty years as a leadership consultant, a virtual host of disgruntled employees and customers have given me an earful about how poorly they are being treated. Every time I hear the pain and disgust in their voices as they describe the disrespect and dishonor they are experiencing, it makes me even more determined to do something about this epidemic of disrespect in the workplace.

In case you may be thinking that this is just one man's perspective, I suggest that you read an article in *The Harvard Business Review*, titled "The Price of Incivility: Lack of Respect Hurts Morale and the Bottom Line" by Professor Christine Porath, Associate Professor of Management at Georgetown, and Professor Christine Pearson.¹

Porath and Pearson state emphatically that "Rudeness at work is rampant, and it's on the rise. Over the past 14 years we've polled thousands of workers about how they're treated on the job, and 98% have reported experiencing uncivil behavior."

The purpose of this white paper is to help leaders realize that this issue of disrespect in the workplace is not just an HR problem; it is, in the primary sense, a ubiquitous leadership problem that is destroying the trust currency and profitability of organizations all over the world.

In this white paper you will learn the root cause of the problem of incivility and discover a detailed system for creating a culture of dignity, respect, and honor that will enable you to reap a harvest of sustainable profitability, both socially and economically.

¹ Christine Porath and Christine Pearson, *Harvard Business Review*, "The Price of Incivility: Lack of Respect Hurts Morale and the Bottom Line," <http://hbr.org/2013/01/the-price-of-incivility/ar/1> Viewed 9/13/2014



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I have written numerous articles about the importance of shaping a workplace environment that encourages maximum engagement. There is not a business leader on the planet who does not wish for the kind of culture for which organizations like Google, Southwest Airlines, Zappos, and Chick-fil-A are famous—a culture that crackles with excitement, good cheer, and discretionary effort.

Leader, how would you describe the culture in your organization? Would you characterize yourself as a **preferred employer**—the kind of company that your employees would turn down a pay increase to work somewhere else because they so enjoy the culture at your company?

Let's consider the experience of someone I'll call Bob, who is looking for employment and has scheduled interviews at two different companies. Which of Bob's interviews might seem more like an interview at your organization?

I Think the Parakeet Would Die Quickly

Bob's first appointment is at a company called Perfunctory Performance. He approaches the receptionist and explains who he is and why he is there. The receptionist's lips tighten and she frowns down at her computer monitor. "*Who* did you say you want to see?" she demands.

Bob politely repeats the name of the Director of Human Resources. "We have an appointment set for 10:00 o'clock," he adds helpfully.

"Let me see if I can find her," the receptionist says brusquely. "Have a seat and I'll let you know." At no time does she make eye contact with Bob.

Bob sits on one of the two small chairs in the waiting area. He quickly discovers that the chair has a short

leg; every time Bob shifts his weight, the chair clicks and clacks back and forth on the hard tile floor. Trying to be as quiet as possible, he moves to the second chair and gingerly takes a seat. Click-clack, click-clack. Bob stifles a sigh and looks around uncomfortably. There are no magazines to read, so he pulls out his smartphone and checks his messages. Five minutes later, Bob hears a clicking sound from the receptionist's desk and he hears her voice, which is slightly muffled because her head is down behind the desk: "Fill this out and give it back to me." Bob notices a clipboard perched at the edge of her desk.

He approaches the desk. "I'm sorry," he says apologetically. "Were you speaking to me?"

The receptionist sighs impatiently. She does not look up from the monitor, but simply waves a hand in the general direction of the clipboard. "I said to fill out the job application and give it back to me." From Bob's vantage point, it looks like a game of Solitaire is keeping her eyes glued to the computer monitor. He gives the application a quick look and clears his throat nervously. "Miss, I'm happy to do whatever you say, but I've already filled out an application that looked just like this online. Are you sure you need me to do this?"

For the first time the receptionist looks directly at Bob. It is obvious that doing so gives her no pleasure. "*I* don't need you to do anything," she says, her voice thick with sarcasm. "But you need to fill that out if you want to work here."

If everyone here is like you, I'm not sure I want to work here, Bob thinks. But he maintains a courteous tone. "I see. Thank you."

When he is finished with the application—which is precisely the same document that he had completed on the Perfunctory Performance website—he approaches the desk again. "Here you go, miss."



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"Leave it there on the desk," she says tersely. By now, Bob would have been surprised if this unpleasant woman had made eye contact ... but she does not. Bob restrains an impulse to lean over the desk and look for a plug in the back of the woman's neck. *She's so mechanical, like a robot, he thinks. There must be a power source somewhere!* Biting his lip to keep from grinning, Bob returns to his chair ... *click-clack*.

Time ticks past the scheduled hour for Bob's appointment and Bob's sense of misgiving heightens. A number of people move through the receptionist's area, either to enter through a door marked "Employees Only" behind her desk or to exit to the parking lot. Bob can only assume that these are members of the workforce he is applying to join. Two of them speak curtly to the receptionist to inform her of their expected time of return. She makes no eye contact with her coworkers, nor do they with her. And not one of them so much as glances in Bob's direction, much less speaks to him.

The coal miners in the old days used to take a parakeet down into the mine with them to monitor the air quality, Bob muses. If the parakeet died, the miners knew that the air was going bad. If they hung a parakeet in this lobby, I think it would keel over in seconds. There's not enough psychological good air in this lobby to keep a parakeet alive, much less the human spirit!

A woman pokes her head out through the "Employees Only" door. "Bob Smith?" She calls out the name like it was a fast food order.

Bob leaps to his feet and smiles. "That's me," he says.

The woman glances at Bob and jerks her head toward the interior. "Come with me."

"Thank you," Bob says. He starts to walk toward her ... but the door has already swung shut. Puzzled, he glances at the receptionist, but she is absorbed by her Solitaire. Bob takes a deep breath, opens the "Employees Only" door, and peers cautiously around the other side.

The woman is standing in a narrow hallway, waiting. "Come on," she says and sets off down a long hall.

Bob hurries to catch up with her. "You're Mrs. Rachitt?" he asks, wanting to sound friendly and energetic. "Thank you for making time to see me."

"You're welcome." She does not look back over her shoulder.

Hmm, Bob thinks, I guess eye contact is not something they go in for here. As Bob follows her down the hall, he glances at the Perfunctory Performance employees working in small cubicles on either side of him. *My goodness, Bob thinks, they look just like zombies!* Very few people glance up from their work, but the few who do have dark circles under their eyes; they all look exhausted. One man looks at Bob and then turns away, shaking his head in what looks like bitter amusement. "You'll be sorryyy . . ." the gesture seems to say.



As they near the end of the hall, it dawns on Bob that there are no pictures in any of the cubicles. There are a number of charts and graphs affixed to the cubicle partitions, but there are no family pictures, nothing that discloses anything of the personality of the employee who sits in the cubicle. The cubicles all look the same and so do the people. No one talks, no one smiles, and there is no laughter. Bob is reminded of the cast of *The Night of the Living Dead*, and he shakes his head in amazement. *These folks are not happy, he thinks. There is no love, no peace, no joy, no happiness! What has happened to these people?! They should call this company Zombies, Inc.*

Mrs. Rachitt stops by an open door and gestures wordlessly for Bob to enter. Bob smiles at her and tries to make eye contact, but her eyes are fixed on the chair she intends for Bob to occupy. The windowless office is very small, and Bob has to squeeze between the desk and the designated chair. The woman closes the door behind them and Bob immediately begins to feel a little claustrophobic.

"Give me a moment," the woman says, and looks down at some papers on her desk.



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"Of course," Bob says, trying to sound cheerful. He glances around the room, almost as if looking for an avenue of escape. He sees the name Rachel Rachitt printed on a number of diplomas hung prominently behind her desk, along with certificates of membership in two professional associations. There are no pictures on the walls, nor any picture frames on her desk. *Do you suppose there's a rule here against having pictures of your family?* Bob wonders.

Rachel Rachitt looks up from the papers she has been shuffling. "So you're Bob Smith," she says flatly.

"Yes," Bob replies. "May I call you Rachel?"

"You're applying for our shift manager position," Rachel Rachitt intones. There is no warmth, no hint of encouragement in her voice.

"Yes, ma'am," Bob says. *Get a grip, Bob*, he thinks. *You sound like you just got called into the principal's office! Is it 'Mrs. Rachitt' or 'Rachel'? She didn't say I shouldn't call her Rachel ...* "I've been looking forward to meeting you, Rachel." Again Bob smiles and tries to make eye contact, but Rachel has resumed staring down at the papers on her desk. She does not acknowledge his compliment.

"You graduated from State with honors," she says. "But it took you four years to complete your MBA program?" She raises her eyes to Bob with an accusing look.

Bob shifts uncomfortably in his chair. "Yes, I was working full time at the engineering firm, and we have two young children. It was kind of a delicate balancing act." He tries a smile, but Rachel is looking at him like a prosecutor cross-examining a hostile witness.

"When do you plan to begin work on your doctorate?"

Bob was not expecting this question. "Well ... ah ... not any time soon." *You're shuffling your feet Bob! Sit still.* "Frankly, I still have some student loan debt I need to pay down."

Rachel looks up at Bob with a frown. She shakes her head and her lips purse with disapproval. "Many of our applicants already have a PhD. Some of them are younger than you." She looks back down at the paperwork and shakes her head again. "Well," she sighs, "perhaps I can find some redeeming qualities, but you may not be a good fit here."

"I'm sorry to hear that." Bob realizes that he doesn't *sound* particularly sorry, and he tries to add warmth to his voice. "Your want ad didn't mention a doctorate degree."

"Tell me about your work experience." It is as if Rachel had not heard him. "You worked for Zero Defects Engineering for eight years."

"Yes," Bob says, laboring to put energy into his voice. "I worked second shift while I was in college ..." He explains how he worked his way through college, earning high honors at the university and promotions at work. He speaks of his wife's tireless support and encouragement. He mentions the increases in output and decreases in spoilage on his shift during his MBA years.

Rachel Rachitt looks bored. "So what makes you think you'd be a good fit here at Perfunctory Performance?"

Before Bob had arrived for his interview, he had prepared and rehearsed an upbeat, positive answer to this very question. Suddenly, at the worst possible moment, a thought pushes its way to the center of his consciousness, demanding his attention. *Yeah, why would you be a good fit here, Bob? Do you really want to work with the people you've met here?*

Thanks, But No Thanks

That night, Bob lingers over dinner with his wife, Linda, and their daughters. Bouncing his two-year-old on his knee, Bob tries to describe the oppressive atmosphere at Perfunctory Performance. "Honestly, Linda, when their HR Director asked me why I'd be a good fit there, I didn't know what to say! I hadn't been there five minutes and I was starting to think it was a bad idea.

"The two people I met, the receptionist and this Rachel Rachitt, made no human connection whatsoever. The entire conversation with Rachel was about what I had *done*—my education and my work history. She didn't ask a single question about who I am as a person. All the people there look like robots, Linda, like I'd walked onto the set of *The Stepford Wives*. Nobody there looks you in the eye, nobody smiles, no social graces of any kind ... I've never seen anything like it! She made a big deal out of me not having my PhD; well, if having a doctorate is going to make me as stern and unsmiling as a prison warden, I think I'll pass!



"At the end of the interview she told me about their compensation plan. She called it their Employee Value Proposition. It looks like a pretty good pay plan, I have to admit, but the whole time she was talking, she sounded like a particularly uninterested flight attendant reading the instructions for putting on a seat belt. I kept thinking, 'This woman is so unpleasant!' I felt like she was telling me about the benefits of working in one of the Russian gulags!

"Linda, if they make me an offer, I think I'm going to say 'Thanks, but no thanks.' She never said one thing—not *one thing*—about the company's values, what they believe, anything to indicate that they care about people *at all*! And if the two people I met are any reflection of their leadership, they *don't* care about people at all! They place no *value* on people.

"I felt like I had to drink a gallon of negativity while I was there! I don't care *what* the money is; I don't want to work there. I wouldn't want that culture to rub off on me or you or our kids or anyone I know." Bob grins mischievously at his wife. "I'm afraid I'd become a zombie like everyone there! I wouldn't have to dress up on Halloween to go out with the kids; I could just go out and stagger around the neighborhood, groaning to myself."

He looks down at his daughter, rolls his eyes, and rocks his head back and forth, droning zombie noises. His little girl giggles delightedly and Bob grins at her affectionately. "Even if they offered to pay me more than we need, Linda, I'd probably spend the extra money on Prozac or some other drug to keep me cheerful! I'm telling you, I'd have to be *highly* medicated to work in a place like that!"

Linda strokes her husband's hand. "Well, you've got another interview tomorrow. Hopefully that will go better."

Bob shakes his head, still amazed at the dehumanizing environment he had experienced earlier that day. "I don't see how it could possibly be any worse." He chuckles and gives his daughter a kiss on the cheek. "If you made a movie out of my visit today, you'd call it *Close Encounters of the Impersonal Kind*."

We're Glad You're Here!

The next morning, Bob pulls into the parking lot of Engagement Inc. As he walks toward the front door,

he notices how well-kept the grounds are. There are islands with rich, green grass, colorful flowers, and neatly trimmed shrubbery. This bright, neat appearance is clearly not an accident; an older man is standing near the front door watering some plants. The man is whistling brightly, and he looks up as Bob approaches.

"Good morning, sir," the man says cheerfully. He gives Bob a big smile.

"And good morning to you, sir," Bob replies warmly. "Is this all your work here?" Bob gestures at the manicured hedges. "You sure keep this property looking nice!"

"Thank you so much for saying so!" The man sounds genuinely pleased and he beams at Bob. "I believe if I keep my area looking good, it makes the rest of our company look good."

Bob smiles back at the man. "I'd say you're succeeding, sir. Way to go!"

"Call me Richard," the man invites.

Without thinking, Bob extends his hand to shake. "I'm Bob. I'm very glad to meet you, Richard." Bob hesitates. "I'm hoping I may be coming to work here."

Richard's smile widens as he grips Bob's hand. "That's wonderful! We're always on the lookout for good people here. And it's a *great* place to work. Best of luck to you, Bob."

"Thank you!" Still smiling, Bob walks through the front door and stops suddenly. There is a large message board behind the receptionist's desk, adorned with large letters that spell **WELCOME, BOB SMITH. WE'RE GLAD YOU'RE HERE!** Bob stands staring at the sign, scarcely aware that the receptionist has spoken.

"Good morning, sir," she says with a bright smile. "Welcome to Engagement Inc."

Bob has been completely knocked off stride by the sign. *They must be expecting some major client who has the same name as me*, he reasons. He approaches the receptionist's desk slowly. "Ah ... my name is Bob Smith . . ." he begins cautiously.

The receptionist's eyes widen with genuine pleasure. "Oh, Mr. Smith! As the sign says, we're so glad you're here! My name is Molly. Please have a seat, Mr. Smith."



Molly gestures toward two comfortable looking couches.

"Thank you." Bob doesn't move. "Molly, I'm afraid you may have me confused with someone else. Are you expecting an important customer named Bob Smith today?"

"Oh no," Molly smiles again, "there's no mistake. That welcome message is for you! Any time we have the opportunity to meet a potential purpose partner, we want to let them know how much we value people here at Engagement Inc."

"I don't know what to say," Bob says frankly. "Thank you for the nice welcome." He looks at Molly curiously. "I don't know that phrase you used ... 'purpose partners'?"

Molly nods understandingly. "We don't speak of 'employees' or 'staff' here. Everyone in our company shares in a common vision and purpose: to live and work in celebration and to be the industry leader in every market we serve worldwide.¹ And since we're all partnering together to achieve that common purpose, we refer to our coworkers as 'purpose partners.'"

"Wow!" Bob is impressed. "I never thought of it that way before. And I liked what you said about 'living and working in celebration.' I met a man named Richard out in the parking lot who seems to have embraced that concept."

"Isn't Richard a wonderful person?" Molly's eyes are shining. "There are so many people here who are so great to work with, and he certainly is one of the best!" Molly glances at a clock on her desk. "Mr. Smith—"

"Please call me 'Bob.'"

"Thank you!" Molly says brightly. "Bob, you'll be meeting with Connie Congenial, the head of our People First department, in just a few minutes. She asked me to make sure to offer you anything you'd like to drink. Water? Coffee? Some juice? We have a cafeteria for all our purpose partners. I could get you some breakfast if you're hungry."

Bob can't help but chuckle in disbelief. "Breakfast?"

"Oh sure," Molly replies. "They serve bagel-and-egg sandwiches here that are to die for!"

Bob smiles, "I'll pass today, but I hope I'm going to get the chance to sample those sandwiches."

"You're sure you wouldn't like a bottle of water? A cup of coffee?"

"No, thank you, Molly, but you're very kind to offer."

"OK, Bob, Connie said you've already completed all your preliminary paperwork, so please feel free to have a seat." Molly gestures again toward the couches. "That black book that looks like a yearbook there, on top of the magazines, is a history of our company. You'll see pictures of our leadership team and there's an explanation of our People First philosophy."

People First? Bob wonders. He thanks Molly and takes a seat. He picks up the book, curious to learn what this "People First" phrase means. At that moment, a door behind Molly's desk that bears a sign reading "Welcome, Purpose Partners!" opens and a trim, fit-looking man comes through the door. His sparkling eyes immediately lock with Bob's and he smiles. "Good morning," he says cheerfully.

Bob is a little surprised. "Hi," he replies.

"Thanks for visiting with us." The smiling man walks over to Bob and extends a hand to shake. "My name is Chris. We're glad to have you here." He gives Bob's hand a firm, friendly shake.

"I'm Bob," Bob smiles back. "I'm glad to be here!"

Chris turns to include Molly in the conversation. "I'm sure Molly is making you feel welcome."

"Absolutely!"

"Well, Bob, I'm very glad to have met you." Chris turns to Molly. "Good morning, Molly. I've got several visits to make this morning and this afternoon, but I do expect to be back in the office before the close of business today."

"Good morning, Chris," Molly replies. "Thank you, I'll be sure you get all your messages."

Chris smiles again and looks back at Bob. "I hope you both have a great day," he says before he leaves.

¹ Readers who are familiar with MITek Industries, Inc., will recognize that I have borrowed elements from that remarkable organization's mission and vision (MITek is the industry leader in every market they serve worldwide) to use in the vision statement for my fictional "Engagement, Inc."



Bob takes his seat again. He looks up at Molly. "Is Chris one of your sales reps?"

"Actually, he's one of our senior executives." Molly smiles warmly. "Isn't he nice? Everyone on our senior leadership team is really nice."

They lapse into a companionable silence. Molly answers a few calls and Bob resumes his study of the history of Engagement, Inc. After a few moments, Molly speaks again. "Bob, Connie just called and asked me to apologize to you; she's in a meeting that's run a little long. She should be down in about ten minutes. Can I change your mind about something to eat or drink? Maybe a bottle of water?"

"Well ... water would be nice," Bob says.

"I have some right here," Molly says brightly. She must have a small refrigerator under her desk, because she quickly gets to her feet and brings Bob a bottle of cold water and a paper napkin.

"Thank you so much," Bob says sincerely.

"It's my pleasure to serve you," Molly says. "Please don't hesitate to tell me if I can do anything else to make you feel comfortable."

"Molly, I visited an organization yesterday that made me feel a *whole* lot less comfortable than I feel here!"

Molly nods sympathetically. "I'm sorry you had a bad experience. We place a great deal of emphasis on the dignity and worth of people here," she explains. "Did Connie get a chance to tell you about our values?"

"Your values?"

"Yes," Molly says, "Connie will tell you a lot more about it, but we have seven core values that provide the foundation for everything we do at Engagement Inc. —the way we interact with each other and with our customers. Those values are Integrity, Passion for Customers, Teamwork, Empowered Purpose Partners, Commitment to Excellence, Relationship-Driven, and Ownership Minded."

Molly has just repeated the values from memory effortlessly. There is no hesitation, no looking up at the ceiling to try and recall. Bob is fascinated. "Molly, you have your company's values committed to memory? You just rattled that off like you were giving me the street address of the company!"

"Thank you!" Molly smiles. "We talk about our values a lot, what they mean and how to live them out in our daily life and work. So, yeah, we all have them committed to memory." She looks at Bob candidly. "I really enjoy being a part of a values-driven company."

Bob looks at her curiously. "Molly, I hope you don't mind my asking, but do you really work in Sales or Human Resources and you're just filling in for the receptionist this morning?"

Molly beams another smile at Bob. "What a nice compliment! No, this is my job. I've been here for five years. They call me the Lobby Manager instead of 'the receptionist.' This is really a *great* place to work."

Bob is about to comment that Richard had told him exactly the same thing, but the door behind Molly's desk opens and a woman enters the room, smiling brightly at Bob. "Bob Smith?" she asks.

"Yes," Bob says, returning her smile. "Connie?"

"Yes, I'm Connie Congenial." She gives Bob a firm, professional handshake. "Please call me Connie. I'm so sorry for making you wait." She shakes her head with a wry grin. "I'm sure you know how these meetings can go."

"Sure," Bob says easily. "I've sat in a few of those myself."

"Well, I'm all yours now," Connie says. "Go ahead and grab your water and we'll go on back to my office. Did Molly offer you coffee? Or breakfast?"

Bob smiles at Molly. "Molly is amazing. I don't know that I've ever enjoyed waiting for an appointment as much as I have today."

Connie's smile is wide and warm. "Our CEO often reminds us that Molly has the most important position in our entire organization. You only have one chance to make a good first impression, and Molly is the first person many of our customers meet, either in person or on the phone. We are so pleased that she's chosen to work with us."

Molly's cheeks are pink with pleasure. "Thank you both!"

"So, Bob?" Connie asks. "Would you like to come back and visit for a bit?"

"It will be my pleasure," Bob says sincerely. "Molly



was telling me about your values, and I'm eager to hear more."

Connie holds the door for Bob. "At Engagement Inc., everything starts with people. We have a philosophy here that we call People First. I'll tell you more about it in just a bit." Connie pauses in a long hallway. "This is our customer service department. Our team here makes outbound calls to check on customer satisfaction, and of course they take inbound calls as well."

Bob looks around the brightly lit room. The contrast with the company he visited yesterday is all but palpable. The men and women in this spacious work area look relaxed and happy. There are flowers at a few desks and several green plants in pots on the floor. Bob notices a few large motivational posters, and there are family pictures at several of the work stations. Bob sees a large plaque and recognizes the core values that Molly had recited to him in the waiting area. Another attractive display bears the words **Living and working in celebration, our vision is to be the industry leader in every market we serve worldwide.** Another plaque reads **Outrageously engaged Purpose Partners serving incredibly delighted Customers.**²



Several of the employees—"Purpose Partners," Molly called them, Bob reminds himself—are speaking on the phone, but a number of people smile and wave to Connie, who returns their attention with a bright smile. Several people give a similar greeting to Bob. Bob can't help but smile back. He looks at Connie.

"Everybody looks so happy!" he comments.

Connie smiles. "We have a saying here that you can't impart what you don't possess. If we want our external customers to feel valued and important, then our purpose partners must feel that they are valued and important." Connie looks at Bob. "It logically follows, then, that if we don't treat our *internal* customers exceptionally well—with dignity, respect, and honor—how can we expect them to impart what they don't possess to our *external* customers? In other words, how can they genuinely communicate what they don't feel? So in all our departments, whether it's our facilities team, engineering, sales, customer service, manufacturing, or administration, we are intensely and intentionally personable, because we believe in putting people first."

They continue down the hall until Connie waves an inviting hand toward her office. A large picture window behind the desk reveals more of Richard's expert landscaping. There are several pictures on the wall; some look like Connie with her coworkers in various settings—bowling, company picnics, awards ceremonies—but centrally located is a large picture of Connie with what must be her family—an attractive middle-aged man and two college-age sons.

"Let's sit over here," Connie suggests, gesturing toward a small conference table by the window. "Are you still doing OK for water?"

"I'm fine, thank you. And Connie, I was just blown away by the welcome sign in the lobby."

Connie chuckles. Her bright blue eyes are locked on Bob's face. "That's never happened to you on a job interview before?"

Bob laughs aloud. "No! Granted, I haven't been to many job interviews, but that was definitely a first."

"Our CEO talks a lot about being the bright blue tile on the gray wall," Connie replies. "He wants us to stand out in every way: in our integrity, our personal passion, our professionalism, our quality control ... everything! So we look for every opportunity to make the first impression of our organization a memorable one,

² Once again, my sincere thanks go to the remarkable team at MiTek Industries for allowing me to borrow their wording.



whether it's for a potential purpose partner like you or a potential customer. That's why we have someone like Molly at our front desk. We don't just want a competent Lobby Manager; we want an exceptional Lobby Manager!"

Bob is quickly realizing that Connie is not in this position simply because of her friendly demeanor. Her eyes have taken on an intense, thoughtful gleam as she speaks; even her rate of speech is increasing. Clearly, she is warning to this subject, and she has no difficulty articulating it fluidly and well.

"I don't know if you saw the sign in the Customer Service area," Connie continues, "but our mission statement is 'Outrageously engaged Purpose Partners serving incredibly delighted Customers.' That engagement begins with letting each and every individual who works here know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that we value them tremendously and that who they are and what they do has meaning and significance."

Bob nods thoughtfully. "I met a man named Richard outside—"

Connie's eyes light with pleasure. "Our facilities manager! Isn't he wonderful? He does such a tremendous job keeping our grounds looking first class." Suddenly her eyes widen and she covers her mouth with her hand. "I'm very sorry, Bob. I interrupted you right in the middle of your thought."

"That's quite alright. I was just going to say that he seemed to find real purpose in his work."

Connie nods vigorously. "Yes, that's it *exactly*!" She taps the table with her forefinger. "Richard has a real *vision* for his work. He attaches meaning to it. A physicist named Dr. David Bohm once said, 'Only meaning arouses energy.' Richard has attached real meaning to making our facilities look like no other, inside and out, and so he works with great good cheer and energy."

"Connie, I know I'm here so you can ask me questions, but may I ask you another question?"

"Of course! I'm looking forward to getting to know you, Bob, but you're welcome to ask any question you'd like, any time."

"Connie, I have an MBA in business, but you're saying things that I *never* heard before in any of my classes. Is all this part of this People First that you and Molly have been telling me about?"

"Yes, it's the heart of our People First philosophy," Connie nods emphatically.

"Can you tell me a little more about it?"

People First in Order of Importance

"Sure," Connie smiles. "People First is at the epicenter of everything I do. I don't know if Molly told you that I am not called 'the director of human resources,' but the Director of the People First department. People First is a philosophy that rests on the foundation of belief in the exalted dignity, exalted worth, and exalted potential of all people. Everyone on our senior leadership team is committed to living out that belief in everything we do."

"Our CEO likes to say that every man, woman, and child you meet is a walking marvel, a masterpiece, and a miracle. He asks us all the time, 'What is your belief about people?' Because what you believe about people will communicate itself in the way you deal with those people. You will, of necessity, behave in accordance with your belief. So because we have such a high view of people, we strive to treat everyone—everyone in both our personal lives and professional lives—with dignity and respect. We make a conscious effort to clearly communicate respect to everyone with whom we interact."

"Bob, this may sound odd to you, but we value and esteem our purpose partners more highly than we do our products and services! Now, don't get me wrong; we maintain the highest standards for performance and quality control. We are *fanatical* about quality. But we know that the quality of our relationships will directly impact the quality of the work we do. So we make every effort to communicate to the people who deliver our products and services that they are first in importance with regard to what we value and appreciate in our organization."

Bob looks at Connie with a wide-eyed, almost childlike expression. "I've never heard anything like this! How does your staff—excuse me, how do your purpose partners respond?"



Connie's eyes light with approval at Bob's adoption of the phrase *purpose partners*. "You've met Richard and Molly. They're both exceptional people, but they are pretty typical of all the members of our team. Bob, this People First philosophy guarantees and ensures that our customers will receive the best service possible, because the customer is the beneficiary of the high levels of dignity, respect, and honor that we regard *all* people with."

Bob is shaking his head—not in disagreement but in wonder at what he is hearing. "Connie, no one ever taught this at the university ... I never heard it at any of my jobs ... And yet when you say these things I know that I've been *wishing* I would hear them for years, perhaps without even realizing it! Why? Why are you the only person talking about this?"

Connie chuckles and smiles at Bob. "You can be sure that I'm not the only person talking about these things at our company! As I've said, all our leaders work hard to be living examples of the philosophy. But you're right, Bob, there are so many organizations that don't get this concept at all. You don't need to ask them, because you can see how they treat their purpose partners ... except in those companies the people are referred to as 'employees.' In people last, profits first organizations, the 'employees' are painfully aware that they are not considered to be the competitive advantage in their organization."

Bob nods in thoughtful agreement. "I've seen executives give tours of a manufacturing plant. They go on and on, telling the visitors about the quality of the machinery, but they never breathe a word about the people!"

Connie makes an unhappy face. "Yes, I've seen that too. It's dehumanizing! And the way you make those people feel about themselves will *always* show up in the quality of their interactions with their internal and external customers. If our purpose partners believed in their heart of hearts that they were lowest in importance—and the bottom line, the external customers, and the quality of products and services were highest in importance—then in every interpersonal encounter they would showcase that same low estimation of themselves to the customer.

"And the customer doesn't need a PhD in psychology to recognize that the employees they are interacting with are not fully engaged. This issue of engagement is a *really* big deal, Bob, and this is something that I believe far too many organizations miss. I've seen articles which claim that the high cost of low engagement with reference to how employees feel about themselves in the workplace is estimated to cost American companies billions of dollars of lost revenue every year!"

Bob's eyebrows rise and he gives a low whistle. "You can document that?"

"Oh yes. The Gallup Organization released a report last year that estimated that the cost of disengaged purpose partners in American companies may run as high as \$550 billion dollars a year. When I said billions, I meant *billions*!"³

Bob is so astounded that he has practically forgotten he is sitting in a job interview. "My goodness, Connie! These things you've said about 'You can't impart what you don't possess' ... there's a real cost associated with that! I always thought that was true, but I never *knew* . . ."

Connie nods. "It's staggering, isn't it? Like our CEO says, it all starts with what an organization's leaders believe about people. Here at Engagement Inc., we believe the personal drives the professional. How we show up professionally is based on who we are personally. Therefore, we constantly attend to helping all of our purpose partners maintain a high level of personal engagement by letting them know how much we value and appreciate them—and not just what they do here, but who they are as human beings. We firmly believe that the greatest asset our company has is the team of people who work here; if we esteem them highly, we're sure they will passionately display that same attitude to our customers."

"I'd like to meet your CEO," Bob says sincerely. "He sounds like a unique person."

"He is," Connie agrees. "He'll come walking into a meeting with a big smile and say, 'I've been studying and learning more about what it means to be human, and I want to share some of it with you. I'm so excited about people and I want you to be also!'"

³ Gallup Inc., "State of the American Workplace," Gallup Inc., © 2013, page 5 <http://www.gallup.com/strategicconsulting/163007/state-american-workplace.aspx> Viewed 6/16/2014



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Connie chuckles. "Bob, have you ever had a professor in college or a CEO who called a meeting to talk about what it is to be human? And then went on to talk about what the implications are for all of us in our families, our business, our communities, and our nation?"

Bob shakes his head wordlessly.

"Neither had I!" Connie agrees. "He gave a talk at our last all-staff meeting about the profitable implications of treating people with dignity, respect, and honor. He talks about it all the time! He's taught us that all businesses are based on two fundamental concepts: relationships and results. And he says that the quality of the results is based solely on the quality of our relationships. So if our relationships are based on treating each other with dignity, respect, and honor, we've laid the best foundation for achieving the best possible results. We maintain great relationships inside and outside of work so that we can enjoy great results."

"My goodness!" Bob exclaims. "What a way to live and work!"

Connie nods and smiles at Bob. "It is! Our CEO likes to say that relationships are about serving others and results are about solving problems. So when we serve one another in excellence by treating each other with dignity, respect, and honor, this creates the kind of caring, collaborative community that is able to solve even the most challenging problems."

Connie's eyes are very bright. "And he's *right*, Bob. This philosophy is tried and proven and it *works*! This isn't just about being nice to each other, as important as that is. The People First philosophy, hands down, has had a tremendous impact on our bottom line, over and against every other organizational development initiative that we have pursued in all of our years of being in business. In fact, there's a phrase that we use around here: 'The Triple Bottom Line.' This People First philosophy has brought us a Triple Bottom Line of happy purpose partners, happy customers, and high profits!"

Bob smiles, nodding at Connie. "I'll have to take your word for the happy customers and high profits, but I sure can attest to the 'happy purpose partners' part. Connie, everyone I've seen here seems so happy to work here! I mentioned to Molly that I recently visited another organization that is the polar opposite of yours.

Everybody I met there seemed so cold and closed and unhappy! I told my wife that I felt like I drank a gallon of negativity while I was there. It was awful!"

Connie grins. "Well, I hope you'll leave here with a better taste in your mouth. There is something different about working here, Bob. We're not just coming to work to make a paycheck. We come here to learn how to make a life *and* how to make a living."

For the first time since they've entered the office, Connie glances down at the folder on her desk and opens it. "Bob, I'm looking forward to discussing the information on your resume, but I'd also like to get to know you as a person. I'd love to hear about your family, where you live, and I'd love to hear about what aspect of your life is most exciting for you right now."

Bob looks at Connie with undisguised amazement. "You want to hear—" Bob can't help himself. Laughter bubbles up in his throat and he laughs aloud. Mortified that he has just laughed in Connie's face, he struggles to contain himself quickly. "I'm sorry, Connie—" again, unbidden, he chuckles. "Please forgive me. I didn't mean to laugh at you ... it's just that no one ever asked me that before." Bob shakes his head and grins. "Not just in a job interview ... no one ever asked me that *ever*."

Connie gives Bob an understanding smile. "Don't worry. I don't know that anyone ever burst out laughing when I asked them that question, but I have seen some people's mouths drop open ... literally!" She gives Bob a frank, appraising look. "We believe laughter is a *good* thing in our workplace. It's a sign of happy culture."

"Connie, this is going to sound incredibly self-serving, but I have to tell you that right at this moment the thing I'm most excited about is this interview! You haven't told me anything about the job or the pay or benefits, and—I probably shouldn't be saying this, but I'm not sure I even care anymore! This just sounds like a *wonderful* place to work!"

"Thank you for the lovely compliment, Bob," Connie says sincerely. "We like to think that it is."

"To get back to your question, Connie, the big thing in my life is my family—my wife and my two girls."



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Bob speaks for a few minutes about Linda—what a wonderful wife and friend and mother she is—and how much he and Linda enjoy being parents.

Connie listens with careful attention, her eyes never leaving Bob's face. When Bob finishes talking, she beams her warm smile at Bob. "Thank you so much, Bob! As I said, the personal drives the professional, and you honor me by sharing your heart like that. Thank you!"

Bob is completely relaxed. He smiles back at Connie and says, "You're very welcome!"

"Bob, I'd like to talk to you about Engagement, Inc. But I don't want to start where most companies start, by talking about what we do and how we do it. I want to start with who we are and why we do what we do. I've already told you about the 'why.' We know that putting people first maximizes our Triple Bottom Line. To start with who we are, I have to tell you how we define ourselves, which is by our values, mission, and vision."

A Definition of Personhood

As Connie recites the seven core values that Molly had repeated so expertly earlier, Bob's mind is racing. *My goodness! Bob thinks. I've never been treated like this! Connie is not just treating me well; she's treating me exceptionally well. Her eye contact is consistent; her listening is laser listening! She treats everything I say as important—what I think, how I feel—all of it is very important to her. I'm thoroughly enjoying this experience!*

"There's a bedrock foundation for our People First philosophy—that is, our philosophy of the human spirit" Connie is saying. "And it's the same foundation we have for our values, mission, and vision. That foundation is our belief about people and the way we define personhood."

Bob looks at Connie curiously. "You have a definition of personhood?"

"Well, it's not really *our* definition; it's the definition that was held by our nation's founders. We believe that all men and women are created equal—each

one possessing exalted dignity, exalted worth, and exalted potential."

Connie slides a sheet of paper across the desk to Bob. "We give this to every one of our prospective purpose partners; we call it the Human Value Declaration.⁴ We believe the reason we've achieved the Triple Bottom Line at Engagement Inc., is because of our belief about people. We have found that when we treat our purpose partners according to the most ennobling belief about humanity, they're happy. When our purpose partners are happy, they reflect that to our customers, and our customers are happy. When our customers are happy, high profit margins are a necessary outcome.

"So whenever I sit here with prospective purpose partners, I can look them in the eye and say with complete certainty that you may find a better pay plan at another company—and I'm quite proud of our compensation package—but I can promise you, Bob, that no one will treat you better or train you better than Engagement Inc. And that's because we know what it means to be human."

Connie is looking directly at Bob with her bright blue eyes and the focused attention that is so much a part of her nature. "I know who you are, Bob."

For the first time that morning, Bob stirs uncomfortably. "You know who I am? You mean, you've already called my references?"

Connie's face lights with a bright smile. "As a matter of fact, I have, and you have excellent references, just as you said you would. But that's not what I meant. I meant that I know that you're a human being. I *know* that you have exalted dignity, exalted worth, and exalted potential. We celebrate the human spirit at this company because we believe the human spirit is infinitely upgradable."

Bob bursts into a huge grin. "The human spirit is infinitely upgradable," he echoes. "*Man*, I like the sound of that!"

"I'm glad," Connie says brightly. "The first thing we do here is to talk to everyone about who they are as a

⁴ If you'd like to read the Human Value Declaration in its entirety, you can visit: <http://www.lannomworldwide.com/blog/turning-ordinary-people-into-extraordinary-performers/>



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human being, before we start talking about the human doings. This Human Value Declaration I've given you, with its ten human value propositions regarding what it means to be human, governs our attitudes and actions toward one another. We maintain a happy culture here by believing this document and behaving in harmony with the tenets of this document. We work to keep our beliefs and behaviors in harmony with the Human Value Declaration."

Bob is shaking his head. "I've never had a job interview like this, Connie. I don't know that I've ever had a conversation quite like this! Connie, I said before that I had visited another organization recently. Actually, it was just yesterday. That company is Perfunctory Performance. My experience there could not have been more different from this!"

Connie nods, shaking her head unhappily. "Yes, Perfunctory Performance has been a great feeder of personnel for us. I'm afraid that many business leaders have forgotten what it means to be human. Most people who come here to interview really resonate with our approach. People enjoy being recognized as people!"

"Now, I'll admit to you, Bob, that there is a good, healthy dose of self-interest in this approach as well. We place a great deal of importance on culture here, so we want to know what's important to you, so that we can determine if you'll be a good fit with us. We want to know if your philosophy lines up with our philosophy. In other words, do you share the same beliefs about people? Do you treat your family, your friends, and your purpose partners as if you were living out the tenets of the Human Value Declaration?"

"I want to," Bob says wholeheartedly.

Connie nods and smiles. "I believe you do. We're taught in our company to be great at reading people. We want to know if people are engaged or disengaged, so that we can be sure we're not causing any disengagement. When we interview prospective purpose partners, we look to see if this philosophy engages you. If you're not engaged, your body language will communicate that. I usually see it in the eyes. You've heard the old saying, 'The eyes are the windows to the soul.' That's where we're trained to look.

"We put a lot of energy into our interpersonal encounters, even into the initial greeting, as you saw when you arrived here today. From the moment we meet a potential purpose partner, we're assessing if you are a good fit or not. We are all keepers of our culture, and my role is to be the main guardian of the culture. With regard to the hiring process, my role is to be sure that the men and women I meet will be a great fit for our culture.

"When I first met you, Bob, I very intentionally gave you a high-energy, high engagement greeting. I was watching for how you would respond; would it resonate with you or would you be repelled? I could see from the beginning you were engaged. Everything I gave to you, you gave back to me with the same energy—the same bright eyes, the same firm handshake, the same warm tone. When we stopped in customer service, you were curious and engaged; you asked questions. People smiled at you and you smiled back. I can see by your body language that you are engaged right now! I think you're going to be an excellent fit with us. Not everyone responds positively to our philosophy; the People First philosophy attracts a great many people, but it also repels some."

Bob shakes his head, honestly puzzled. "Connie, I hope this doesn't sound naïve, but why in the world would *anyone* not want to be part of a culture like this?"

Connie looks at Bob candidly. "Because we have very high expectations for success. I said to you before that People First isn't just about 'being nice.' Our CEO likes to say that we live by this philosophy because it's the right way to live, it's the right way to lead, it's the way people want to be led, and it's the right legacy to leave. So just as we have high expectations for interpersonal excellence here at Engagement Inc., we also have high expectations for professional excellence and ongoing growth."

Bob nods and smiles. "That's as it should be. If we're not growing, we're dying!"

"You're exactly right, Bob! And part of that growth is communicating to everyone in our organization the knowledge of what is most important, what's less important, and what is not important at all! We refer to this as *the discipline of maintaining our focus on the*



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vital few. And, we call the vital few our KBIs—our Key Business Imperatives.

“Once we aligned the entire organization around our KBI's, we began to experience an unprecedented level of high engagement and high execution because everyone took personal ownership of the overall success of the business. There is not one purpose partner in our organization who does not know what our corporate KBIs are and how their role and responsibilities within their specific sector of our business contribute to the achievement of those KBIs.

“That intentional shift in our organizational focus keeps us from being relentlessly driven by ‘the tyranny of the urgent.’ Instead, we’re inspired and enriched by being part of a passionate pursuit of achieving what is most important—our KBIs! Our purpose partners constantly experience shared engagement and shared responsibility, which ultimately has led to sharing and celebrating very positive results!

“And there is nothing like profitable, shared results that engages the human spirit of every purpose partner in an organization, especially when they are given weekly feedback on how their individual contributions directly impact those profitable results, coupled with genuine, enthusiastic celebration for their efforts.

“Laying this emphasis on our vital few sets us free to focus on what is most important, and that extricates us from being a cold corporation and allows us to become a caring community. We’re no longer an impersonal firm; we’ve become a personal family. We are no longer powerless, purposeless performance puppets, but powerful purpose partners who are fully engaged and committed to making a difference in our organization. And we *know* we’re making a difference because we can measure our performance by our KBIs.”

Bob has been listening carefully and nodding his head while Connie has been speaking. “Connie, all that sounds tremendous! I *want* to be challenged! But I need to have a clear understanding of how well I’ve met that challenge, and it sounds like your KBIs provide those metrics. And I want to be appreciated for what I’m doing well that helps the organization do well. So I get what you’re saying; I *like it*! So I still don’t understand why you say some people are repelled by this kind of culture?”



Connie nods and smiles. “The fact that you don’t understand is one of the most important

indicators that you’ll be a good fit here at Engagement Inc. You *want* to work in a culture of high expectation, high engagement, and high appreciation. There are those people—and I’m sure you’ve met them—who just want to show up, move through the day, go home, and pick up a paycheck.

“That’s not what we’re offering. We’re looking for men and women who want to make a commitment to personal and professional excellence. And in return, we offer a culture that is intentionally designed to encourage and polish and celebrate that excellence ... every day of every week of every year. Would you like to be a part of that culture, Bob?”

That’s the Way I Want to Live and Work!

“Oh my gosh, would I!” Bob says to Linda over dinner that night. “It’s a night-and-day difference between the two cultures at Perfunctory Performance and Engagement Inc. You know, when you think about it, Linda, it’s a matter of choice. Engagement Inc. has chosen to live and work the way they do. A culture like that doesn’t just happen; you have to work at maintaining an environment like that. She kept saying things like, ‘Our CEO says this,’ and ‘Our leaders are committed to living this philosophy.’

“And it wasn’t just the three people I talked to there. I could see it in the eyes of the purpose partners in the customer service area, and then later, when Connie took me on a tour of the plant. People are happy to work there! They smile, they engage, and they’re energetic. Connie told me that everyone is responsible to treat people in harmony with who they really are, and that they are taught to act that way everywhere they go—banks, restaurants, even at the grocery store or buying a cup of coffee. She said sometimes people will say to them, ‘You must work



at Engagement Inc.' They're famous for their great culture, like a Southwest Airlines."

Linda smiles. "So ... did they make you an offer?"

"Connie still has three more interviews. She promised to let me know by Friday. Linda, if their offer came in at \$10,000 a year less than Perfunctory Performance, I'd *still* choose Engagement Inc. I wouldn't just be driving my car to work; I'd be signing up for a way of life ... and *that's* the way I want to live and work!"

So, How Is It at Your Company?

I wanted to paint you a picture of what the People First philosophy looks like when it's lived out wholeheartedly. While there is no "Engagement Inc."—at least not yet—we have several clients who are working very intentionally to sustain such a culture within their organizations. I think immediately of MiTek Industries, Inc. Their CEO, my good friend Tom Manenti, was the inspiration for the CEO in this article, just as MiTek's Vice President of Human Resources, Bonnie Daniels, was the model for Connie Congenial.

So you've looked at the picture. Is it a familiar one? Does your company resemble Engagement Inc.? Or would you have to admit, in your heart of hearts, that the description of Perfunctory Performance was uncomfortably familiar?

People First companies like MiTek (a billion-dollar Berkshire-Hathaway company with thousands of purpose partners on six continents) have an exalted view of the dignity, worth, and potential of people and they treat their purpose partners in accordance with their belief. And the fruit of that belief is a culture of high engagement, high empowerment, and high profitability. MiTek is growing steadily, and unlike the fictional Engagement Inc., it is not MiTek's *vision* to be "the industry leader in every market they serve worldwide" ... they already are. As Connie Congenial said to Bob during his interview, this People First philosophy *works*!

There are specific implications for the way we define the human spirit. There are one-to-one implications, and you and I see them lived out in our interactions every day. Stand in line for a few moments at your local grocery store or pharmacy or coffee shop ... and you'll see men and women put their belief about people on display for all the world to see.

In the course of my consulting work, I walk into all kinds of organizations all over the country and I see the fruit of their belief about people. People First organizations like MiTek and City Furniture in Sunrise, Florida, are enjoying the Triple Bottom Line of happy purpose partners, happy customers, and high profits. I visit other companies which practice the outmoded high command/high control leadership model, and I can sense the difference almost from the moment I enter the lobby, just as Bob did when he walked into Perfunctory Performance. Their cultures are closed, cautious, and defensive, and they are usually struggling just to maintain market share, much less to expand it.

Our Foundation for Sustainable Success

I believe there is a direct societal and economic link to how we define what it means to be human, as well. Please bear with me for just a moment as I broaden our focus from the personal and the professional arenas to the national scene. Despite our recent struggles, the United States has been a bright, shining light of freedom and prosperity for almost 250 years. We are far from perfect, but there is a perfectly good reason why millions of people have risked their lives to emigrate here; it is the reason why, for years, our society was the most free and most prosperous nation on earth.

Was that prosperity an accident? A stroke of good fortune? Don't you believe it! There are other countries that have been just as abundantly blessed with natural resources as the United States but have failed to achieve even a fraction of our success. Why? I am convinced the foundation for sustainable success as a nation is the very same foundation for interpersonal excellence: that nation's definition of what it means to be human.

Our founders richly and clearly expressed that definition in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights . . ." Our founders had an exalted view of humanity, and that proved to be the springboard to levels of prosperity here in America that were the envy of the world.

The practice of everything—in a home, a workplace, a community, and in a nation—is the practice of



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some philosophy. Whether one is cognizant of that philosophy or not, it does not alter the inevitable, inexorable consequences of that philosophy. If the philosophy is evil, it will bear evil fruit; a good philosophy will bear good fruit, just as it did here in the United States for two centuries. I believe that the reason America is struggling today, both socially and economically, is because we have, as a nation, forgotten what it means to be human. What I am contending for in this paper is the practice of the philosophy that accords with the truth about what it means to be human so that we can once again reap the good and profitable fruit of that philosophy.

The consequences of a dehumanizing philosophy are *always* devastating to a society. History attests to the irrefutable fact that the dehumanizing of a select group within a society always starts with defining them in a manner other than who they are—that they are *not* “created equal.” It follows, then, that genocides—that is, the deliberate and systematic extermination of a national, racial, political, or cultural group—cannot exist without stripping people of their God-given humanity! In other words, when a group is defined as less than human, i.e., not human, they are treated as not human, and they are rounded up and sent to the concentration camps and the gulags.

There is a direct relationship between your epistemology (your theory of knowledge) and your anthropology (your theory of the nature of mankind), and that relationship has a direct bearing on your theory of economics. I'll say it more simply: there is a direct correlation between a society's definition of what it means to be human and its economic prosperity. We have seen nations around the world that have not adopted the view of man that America's founders started with (“All men are created equal”), and those nations fail to provide a sustainable foundation for liberty and prosperity because they hold such a low, dehumanizing view of man.

You'll never hear this question asked in one of our presidential debates, but we might do well to ask each candidate, “What is your belief about people? How

would you define what it means to be human?” When you look at the despots of the last century, you see their view of what it means to be human displayed in stark, horrific terms. George Orwell's chilling parable of Soviet Communism, *Animal Farm*, concluded with the ruling party's declaration that “All animals are created equal, but some are more equal than others.” Joseph Stalin, who was the embodiment of the *Animal Farm* credo, was directly responsible for the deaths of tens of millions of his own people. Mao Tse-tung wholeheartedly embraced Stalin's Marxism and ordered the extermination of as many of 70 million of his own countrymen. Adolph Hitler and the infamous Joseph Goebbels used powerful propaganda to convince Germany that the Jews were a subhuman species, and the Holocaust was the result.

The belief that men and women are *not* created equal will always lead to tyranny and anguish at the national level. Lord Acton, the British historian, rightly observed that “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” But I would say that there is an even deeper root cause for that corruption: a diminished view of the exalted dignity, exalted worth, and exalted potential of mankind.

There are millions of men and women all around the world who are being dehumanized at this very moment because their leaders reject the idea that all men are created equal. This belief about what it means to be human is not just “nice” to know, as one among many bits of historical trivia. It was no mistake that our Declaration of Independence opened with the assertion that all men are created equal; the framers of America's freedom knew that unless they laid this belief about all human beings at the foundational, epistemological level on which every civil and religious liberty would be built, then their posterity would be vulnerable to the kind of despotism that would subject them to every unimaginable form of the inhumanity that man has committed against his fellow man. While we have not yet descended to that point here in the United States, recent public opinion polls show that the vast majority of Americans believe that we are on the wrong track as a nation.⁵ I agree; we have lost our way.

⁵ Rasmussen Reports, “Right Direction or Wrong Track; 26% Say U.S. Heading in Right Direction,” June 18, 2014 http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/mood_of_america/right_direction_or_wrong_track Viewed 6/25/2014



If today's leaders would help us to become more mindful of this definition of what it means to be human, it would transform every area of human endeavor in our nation. Our governments, educational institutions, businesses, and houses of worship would *all* behave differently if they truly believed and practiced this idea that all men are created with equal dignity, equal worth, and equal sanctity of soul. It would lend a much-needed helping hand toward regaining our moral compass, so that we would return to a more righteous and dignified path as a nation.

We must get back to the basics of what made us great as a nation, and you can't get any more basic than "All men are created equal." If America's fifty-four founding leaders thought so much of this ennobling definition of human beings that they intentionally and deliberately placed it at the forefront of their world-renowned achievement—one of the greatest documents ever conceived for establishing civil and religious liberty for all and affording everyone an opportunity for happiness and prosperity in every manner imaginable—should we do less than them when it comes to us, as corporate leaders who are seeking to build profitable businesses?

Transforming Your Organization

What was the fundamental difference that caused Bob to have such starkly contrasting interview experiences at the two companies he visited? At Perfunctory Performance, Bob tasted the bitter fruit that is the logical outworking of a very bad philosophy, one that did not treat him with dignity, respect, and honor. In his second interview, he tasted the sweet harvest of an uplifting philosophy, one that regarded him as a human being who is created with exalted dignity, exalted worth, and exalted potential.

The way that business leaders define the human spirit is directly related to how they will treat the men and women they employ. A philosophy cannot rise any higher than the veracity of the epistemological foundation on which it stands. If our leaders' definition does not rest upon a true, accurate epistemological foundation, leaders will believe that they are superior and try to dominate and control people. I have often said that fear is one of the most over-utilized and ineffective tools in a leader's toolbox. If you don't start with the true

epistemological definition of who people are, you will never treat them with dignity, honor, and respect.

Here is the bottom line: wise business leaders who establish their organizations on the greatest, most truthful, and noblest foundation—that is, the truth about what it means to be human—will have provided every person in their organization with the very best platform from which to unleash their individual potential. This philosophical foundation will provide the gateway for their companies' sustainable, profitable, competitive advantage. In addition, these visionary leaders will, by their example, contribute to protecting, and securing the sanctity, dignity, value, and freedom of every human being within their nation.

Leader, when you embrace this concept as one of the key drivers of your business success model, your organization will be forever transformed. You and your purpose partners will become evangelists for showing people that there is a more excellent way to humbly live our lives and joyfully engage in our vocation, all by recognizing and honoring the dignity, diversity, and immense value of our fellow man.

We reject the impersonal moniker "employee" and embrace the concept of "purpose partners." These partners are taught how to "make a life" driven by a cause bigger than themselves, and they will consistently outperform competitors who are merely being taught how to "make a living." Those "employees" are driven by a car that takes them to a J.O.B. ... and many of them believe this acronym stands for **J**oyless **O**rganized **B**elittling!

I'd like to give you some practical steps on how to create a People First culture that celebrates the dignity and worth of the people with whom you live and work. Since the personal drives the professional, you'll see that these action steps start with the steps that you can take on the personal level, and then broaden out to creating this culture in your organization.



Creating a Culture of Dignity, Respect and Honor

Personal Level

1. How much of your behavior is worth modeling?
2. Where do you need to improve?
3. Ask others to help you to see your blind spots.
4. Start at home with your improvement.
5. Apologize for any shortcomings.

Organizational Level

1. Educate everyone in why treating people with dignity, respect, and honor is profitable for them and for your organization.
2. Discover, from an individual perspective, what it means to be treated with dignity, respect and honor.
3. List specific behaviors that exemplify dignity, respect, and honor. Explain that you expect to see these behaviors from every individual, team, and department in your organization.

4. Reinforce exemplary, dignified, respectful, and honoring behaviors by habitually recognizing, celebrating, and rewarding them.
5. Challenge and encourage everyone in your organization to outdo each other in showing honor to each other, so that you will ultimately “out-honor” your competition!
6. Institute a zero-tolerance policy for undignified, disrespectful, and dishonoring behavior. Explain the consequences for incivility.

I am calling on business leaders to embrace this People First philosophy and return to the ideology of our nation's founders: the self-evident truth that all men are created equal. I exhort you to teach everyone in your organization how to treat people in harmony with what it means to be human—with dignity, respect, and honor—and begin to reap the prosperous harvest of an outrageously profitable business, both socially and economically. The implications for sustainable success are staggering ... personally, organizationally, and societally! 🏆

Become a People First Certified Company

At Lannom Worldwide, we're nothing short of DRIVEN to bring about total transformation in the workplace. We're passionate about building a better world ... one person, one family, one organization at a time.

And we want you to be next!

Our diagnostic tools, coupled with our leadership training and certification, provides you with everything you need to enrich the spirit and increase the effectiveness of everyone in your organization.

There are no shortcuts here ... just real, solid progress and true transformation.

As you embrace the People First philosophy, you'll watch as your entire culture is revolutionized, becoming a wildly successful breeding ground for inspiration, innovation, and enthusiasm! Suddenly, your competitors begin to seem irrelevant—not even on the same playing field!



“My message to my Senior Team is that this has the potential to have the most transformational impact on our lives and our company that we will ever encounter, and will create a culture gap between MiTek and our nearest competitor that is so wide, it will be inconceivable to imagine them ever coming near to us culturally.”

Thomas J. Manenti

Chairman and CEO

*MiTek, Inc. – A Berkshire Hathaway Company
A People First Certified Company*

When you've completed your People First Certification, every person you and your Purpose Partners encounter will notice the difference and appreciate the change in attitude, in service, and in professionalism. People will want to know your secret. Tell them the secret is putting People First! The BEST time to get People First Certified is NOW, BEFORE your competition does.



We Invite You to Join The Ranks of Our People First Certified Companies!



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