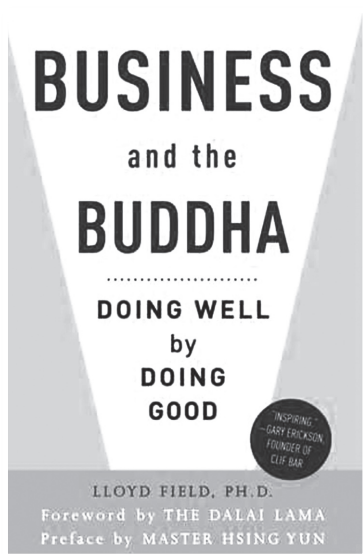


Business and the Buddha: Doing Well by Doing Good

By Lloyd Field

Sorayuth Vathanavisuth

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University



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Introduction

“Business and the Buddha” is one of handful books which directly addresses application of Buddhism to current business environment and management in particular. The book is written by Dr. Lloyd Field who is a Buddhist, an executive coaching and a management consultant. He provides coaching and counselling to senior executives solve business problems through Buddhist-influenced approach. His consulting practice has spanned for over 30 years after he left Johnson & Johnson International as Vice President of Human Resource.

Dr. Field actively participate in Buddhist activity at the International Buddhist Progress Society in Toronto (Canada) especially to share and debate on issue related to Buddhism. The International Buddhist Progress Society in Toronto (Canada) is a branch of Fo Guang Shan Buddha’s Light International Association which is the largest Taiwanese Buddhist monastery. Fo Guang Shan was founded in 1967 by Venerable Master Hsing Yun who also writes the preface for the book. Venerable Master Hsing Yun praises Dr. Field that he is one of a few who can apply Buddhist teaching to daily life including business operations.

He is also the former President of the Board of Nalanda College of Buddhist Studies in Toronto (Canada). Dr. Field is on the founding committee of Sarvodaya Canada, an organization commits to promoting community development. Sarvodaya Movement is a Sri Lankan community development organization which takes Buddhism and Mahatma Gandhi’s non-violent approach as its principles.

Besides this book and numbers of article, he also wrote Unions Are Not Inevitable! A Guide to Positive Employee Relations which is already published five times. Dr. Field hold a Lifetime designation with Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and also a Fellow of UK’s Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). Dr. Field received PhD. in Human Resource from Ryerson University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Structure of the book

In this 212-page and 12-chapter paperback book, which is forwarded by the Dalai Lama, the author clearly organizes into four sections which are Symptom, Diagnosis, Prognosis and Prescription.

The first section, Symptom, the author intends to convince the reader by paving the background of the problem (suffering) that can occur with individual and also business which is the focal point of this book. He then shares his view over business beyond profit for which he truly believe that teaching from Gotama Buddha can be applied. After allowing the reader to be aware of the issue, the author then moves to section two which is regarded as diagnosis of the current business condition. His discussion covers holistically on business and economics issues. Reference to the great thinkers and fathers of capitalism, Adam Smith and John Maynard Keynes, has been made. Two examples of how to balance human values and desire of making profit; the Slow Food Movement, founded in Italy, and the Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka; are raised to demonstrate his point.

Section three of the book discusses the middle way to healthy organization by addressing the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. The author also presents his approach how to practically apply to corporation which leads the reader to Section four where he presents and discuss his business model to be used by any organization

Overview of the book

The book is written by a leading management consultant who used to be at the top of global corporation. His academic background also suggests the reader to think that his work should be rational and logical which is true. Dr. Field writes this book from a Western who comes from non-Buddhist culture. Therefore, he has to understand Buddhism without any bias, of preference, at the first place. This book is a result of a Western scholar who truly believes and understands Buddhism right from the ground work.

He starts his message by hitting at the very heart of issue – suffering. The suffering is the main condition which separates Buddhism from another religion. By accepting that human being, and also corporation, is suffering, the author leads us into the cause of the suffering. He introduces the readers to realistic three poisons which are greed, hatred and delusion. These three poisons let human being keeps continuing on suffering path. Operating under the concept of free enterprise system, the corporation also tries to gain more and more with the belief of “more is good and even more is better”. Greed plays a crucial role in this regard since company wants to increase its revenue by consume more of natural resource without thinking much of consequence to society.

With reference to Pareto’s law, the author supports his argument that 20% of population consume over 80% of global resource. Therefore, he believes that our world is in stage of suffering which is governed by the very rich and many more in poverty. In this regard, Buddhism can be the right solution by considering the Four Noble Truth which are suffering occurs, the cause of suffering is clinging, liberation from suffering and the prescription or the Noble Eightfold Path. The author dedicates chapter 7 to describe the Noble Eightfold Path in great detail with grouping into ethical conduct (skillful speech, skillful action and skillful livelihood), compassion (skillful effort, skillful mindfulness and skillful concentration) and wisdom (skillful understanding and skillful thought).

There are numbers of good thing about this book. First, the author has done a great job to connect Buddhism and business in the simplest way for which any layman can understand. It is right to say that this book, *Business and the Buddha*, is one of a kind. Most of the book which is written on Buddhism and business mainly discusses on holistic view or economic system such as *Buddhist Economics* by Phra Brahmagunabhorn (P. A. Payutto) (2013) and *Small Is Beautiful* by E F Schumacher (1989) which is understandable since Dr. Field is a practitioner who used to run a major corporation before.

Second, the book is presented in the very logical way which allows reader to gradually digest the key message slowly. He walks us through rational building block, section, starts with acknowledge of the problem (Symptom), economics of spirituality (Diagnosis), middle way of health organization (Prognosis) and concludes

with walking the path (Prescription). Hence, the readers will truly follow and understand his explanation and argument of why they should consider Buddhism for business management and how to apply the Buddhist teaching to day-to-day operations.

Third, the book is quite inspirational since the author mentions in several places on “Cause No Harm” concept especially in-depth discussion on chapter 8. “Doing Well by Doing Good” mindset can encourage the reader to take his work as a role model to actual being used in the organization. Practical of “Cause No Harm” value is a good example in this respect. Besides, the “Creating a Better Society” concept, which can be considered as one of key messages of this book, also helps encouraging reader to do good thing for society as one can learn from two examples of Italian Slow Food Movement and Sri Lankan Sarvodaya.

Fourth, the author makes a wise move to discuss on applying Buddhism to business by addressing through cultures and values of company which is the heart of organization. The trust worthiness (page 142), 12-step guideline of adapting top executive behavior and values (page 156-160) and employee’s charter of rights (page 140) are three good examples in this regard.

However, there are some limitation or improvement which the author can also consider. First, since the book discusses mainly on broad concept of “suffering”, with the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path play active role as a practical tools, therefore the book may be considered too basic for anyone who wants to study Buddhism in great detail. It may be an intention of the author to write the book in this way in order to reach mass market of readers instead of handful of interest persons.

Second, although the author presents the two outstanding examples, Slow Food Movement and Sarvodaya, unfortunately they are not the main stream business in the free enterprise system or capitalism. If he describes example which is close to day-to-day experience and from sizable company, it will help strengthen his argument and allow reader to better understand what he tries to explain.

Third, the book seems to convey a message to decision maker which are Director of the Board, CEO or C-level executive not any business person. Although

discussion, in term of logic and rational, is extremely outstanding and perfect, but practical detail of implementation is missing from book. The author does provide, in several occasion, the example how to apply Buddhist concept to business management such as guiding principle of skillful speech (page 97) and guiding principle of skillful effort (page 101) but they are far from completion to cover general business management.

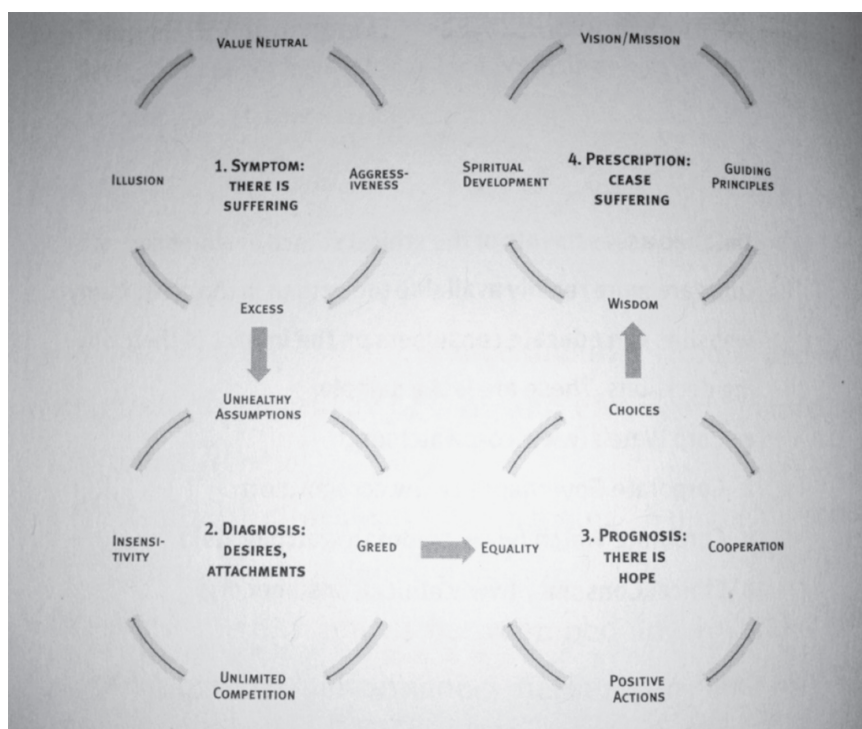
Fourth, business mainly relates to acquiring customer and generate revenue which is driven by three poisons as discussed early in the book. Therefore, at the heart of the business, management needs to make money. Although the author provides in-depth discussion on how to correct this thinking, of only earning money as normal business practice, but he stops short on how to handle normal business, earning money and compete successfully in marketplace, while practicing as a good corporate citizen.

Fifth, although Dr. Field heavily focuses on the Noble Eightfold Path, he rarely discusses important and necessity of meditation both concentration and insight. According to Buddhist teaching one can enlighten through three practices which are Pariyatti, studying of Buddhist teaching, Paṭipatti, practicing Buddhist teaching, and Paṭivedha, penetrating or realizing the truth. Therefore, it is right to say that the author has done a great job in term of Pariyatti, or providing the reader with logical discussion and supporting materials, and partially on Paṭipatti or practicing what we learn.

In order to perfectly practice Buddhist teaching, or Paṭipatti, it is advisable to meditate especially insight mediation which is the practice that Gotama Buddha discovered and let him enlightened. Although the book provides explanation on meditation in appendix III but it is too short and not enough information since it only covers breathing meditation. It may be possible that the author does not acknowledge important of meditation as practiced in Theravāda Buddhism as reflects in category of the Noble Eightfold Path for which he groups skillful effort, skillful mindfulness and skillful concentration together and labels as “compassion” not” meditation, or samādhi, as it should be called.

Sixth, in reference to below figure; this model (page 160) which the author says he adapts from the work of the founder of Sarvodaya, Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne; nicely demonstrates how to bring Buddhist teaching to business world.

He tells us that there is a symptom, the 1st stage, which is mainly caused by capitalism. Then, at the 2nd stage, people in capitalist business practice tend to cling with desires and numbers of attachment. In this regard, the author shows us that there is prognosis which can help ones, who suffer, to get out of suffering. The actions which is staged in stage 4 provide the reader with suggestion.



Although there is an explanation in the last chapter, the content is too short to allow reader clearly understand in detail. For example under Prescription, or Cease suffering, the reader may wonder how to learn to reduce attachment in order to develop spiritually, how to work constructively with impermanence in order to obtain proper wisdom, etc.

It may be the author's intention to write this book mainly for policy maker not for general administrator. Therefore, he only provides key messages supported by lengthy discussion and argument in previous chapters. It would be nice if the author write the second book to further explain this model especially "how to" do in each step.

Conclusion

The book is properly demonstrates step-by-step logical thinking towards application of Buddhist teaching basically on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path with issue of suffering is the main focal point. The author has done a great job in term of providing business model and examples to support his argument. Numbers of practical application in real life business set up have been raised. Although there are some areas the book can be further improved, this outstanding work by Dr. Lloyd Field should be highly recognized as one of the kind in the area of application of Buddhist teaching to business management.

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