

If Aristotle Ran General Motors

By Tom Morris

Review by Paul Cattermole

Tom Morris was a professor of philosophy at Notre Dame for fifteen years. He is best known for applying the wisdom of the philosophers to commercial organizations. This book includes the thoughts and quotes from ancient to contemporary thinkers and not solely those of Aristotle. However, Aristotle is more adaptable to commercial endeavors than most as indicated by having written long ago, "It may be argued that peoples for whom philosophers legislate are always prosperous."

Based on the seminal works of Aristotle and a few other philosophers, the basic dimensions of human experience can be classified into four categories. These dimensions and what each aim at are listed below along with an explanation of how these concepts relate to modern endeavors.

The Intellectual Dimension, which aims at Truth

Truth is the mapping of reality corresponding to the way things are. But also, when we do not create an environment in which truth is respected, we do not have a working environment in which people are respected. For example, the Enron management didn't respect their shareholders so they lied to them. Trust is based on truth. An organization based on trust has a free-flow of information amongst and between individuals who respect each other.

The Aesthetic Dimension, which aims at Beauty

Of course beauty can take many forms. It can be not only in nature or architecture, but also in an effective presentation or software program. For our work to be truly satisfying there has to be what can be described as aesthetic experience or surprise. And most significantly, this is something that we have to create ourselves. Naturally if we are creating new works then we are in a state of change. This type of change can be a source of satisfaction and also of uncertainty and apprehension. Notwithstanding, change is to be fostered and not discouraged.

The Moral Dimension, which aims at Goodness

Goodness is about ethical behavior that comes down to this: proper personal development and good dealings with others. This ethical behavior, sometimes called etiquette, is not just about avoiding negative activities, it's also about aggressively pursuing the proper behavior. Business runs on relationships and thus one can eventually be, "Doing well by doing good."

The Spiritual Dimension, which aims at Unity

In this context, spiritually-developed people are not necessarily religious but are capable of seeing depth of meaning and significance under the surface appearances of things

around them. If a company provides the three dimensions mentioned above then the cumulative effect is to provide a sense of common purpose or unity. Additionally, each employee needs to have meaningful work to perform in a respectful environment.

Bottom Line

I think that this book does a good job at taking the ancient wisdom and applying it to the business world. Throughout the book, great quotes of various thinkers are given. At times, Tom Morris tends to over focus on the individual as opposed to the organizational dynamics.