

# WHY ARE WE IN BUSINESS?

by Donald Samick

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“A man’s real work is what he is chosen to do.”

“It is one of nature’s compensations to withdraw prosperity from the business that does not serve.”

These quotations and others throughout this article are from *My Life and Work* by Henry Ford, published in 1925 by Doubleday, Page & Company. Whether you are an independent artist, a subcontractor installer, a one-person studio, or someone operating a 10-50 person studio, you are all in the economic realm of entrepreneurship — or in other words: *you are in business*. You can be counted as being in the minority of the working population, actually less than 10%.

We all know someone has to handle the many tasks of business, so why have you chosen this direction in life? Some might say, *I had no choice* or *My family expected it of me*. Others might say *I just fell into it*, and then there is, of course, the person who actually chose this profession. We all know not many did it for the money, for this profession is a work of love.

I write this article not to expound upon my ideas on business but to share with you the thoughts written by Henry Ford of his philosophy on which he founded the Ford Motor Company. These are ideas and ideals which can be applied to any size business enterprise and be embraced by those reading these words. Keep an open mind as you read, for preconceived thoughts will limit what you could potentially learn.

To be personal, I wanted to become an architect and found a job at 21 years old in my home town at J & R Lamb Studios as a draftsman, while continuing my education at nights. I worked closely with George deRis, a Cornell graduate in architecture. I drew floor plans and elevations of the interiors of churches. Shortly thereafter, I worked in the shop

learning the ropes of a stained glass studio.

In 1969, Karl Barre Lamb passed away, and the opportunity arose for me to purchase the studios, along with a co-worker. My one year of business study at the local University proved to be a help in the transition from employee to employer. The six years since joining the studio in 1964 had been my real education in sales, estimating, design, craftsmanship and people relations.

Was I in the right place at the right time? Was it an accident that I found a job at Lamb Studios, or was I meant to be in the small percentage of business owners? I never had any intention of owning a business, but when the occasion presented itself, it felt right, and I just moved ahead without hesitation, with no fear. As Henry Ford writes, “Fear is the offspring of a reliance placed on something outside ...” and “... fear is the portion of the man who acknowledges his career to be in the keeping of earthly circumstances. Fear is the result of the body assuming ascendancy over the soul. The habit of failure is purely mental and is the mother of fear. A man is still the superior being of the earth. Business may slacken tomorrow — he is still a man. There is no security outside of himself. There is no wealth outside of himself. The elimination of fear is the bringing in of security and supply.”

These words of Henry Ford are still true today as they were for him at the turn of the century, were true for me in 1970, and are true for all of you who took that bold, unknowing step to follow your heart. That was my secret: When all reasoning proved too difficult and confusing, it was my heart that led me to my life’s work. Think back to that moment when you had to put all reason aside and to commit to what you really wanted to do in life.

Now that we are business leaders, either beginners or seasoned, how do we conduct our daily affairs? How did we learn to conduct our daily affairs? Each of us does it differently based on our artistic and business experiences. As an example, two people in the same line of business experience failure. One files for bankruptcy and pays ten cents on a dollar. The other works out a payment plan to repay his creditors 100%. The decisions made by these two people were not based on courses learned at business school, but on their moral judgment.

This leads us to why we are in business. Is it just to make money? For money is an important aspect of staying in business. But if we go back to the reason we decided to be in business, most of us will remember, especially in the stained glass field, it was not for money but for the love of following our heart and our true destiny, for, if this were not the case, we would be long gone and be working for someone else. Working for money should not be the sole purpose of being in business. Again I would like to quote from the book, “Capital that is not constantly creating more and better jobs is more useless than sand. Capital that is not constantly making conditions of daily labor more just, is not fulfilling its highest function. The highest use of capital is not to make money but to make money do more service for the betterment of life. Unless we in our industries are helping to solve the social problem, we are not doing our principal work. We are not fully serving.

“Capital is a working surplus held in trust for the daily use for the benefit of all. The holder of such capital can scarcely regard it as a personal reward. No man can view such a surplus as his own, for he did not create it alone. It is the joint product of his whole organization. The owner’s idea may have released all the

energy and direction, but certainly it did not supply all the energy and direction.”

This is an important understanding of money — realizing its value as a social instrument.

Another important part of our daily work is leadership; everyone wants to be a leader, but not many know how to lead. A good leader knows the capabilities and limitations of the workers. The Peter Principle, attributed to Peter Drucker, means not advancing an employee just because they are excelling in their current position to a position beyond their capabilities. An example is an insurance company promoting their top field salesman to sales manager. He failed miserably at managing and training people. Again Henry Ford, “But the vast majority of men want to stay put. They want to be led. They want to have everything done for them and to have no responsibility. Therefore, in spite of the great mass of men, the difficulty is not to discover men to advance but men who are willing to be advanced.”

Which leads us to the topic of wages. Owners need to pay decent wages that create an economic comfort level for their families, so the workers can have peace of mind and be more productive. Again I quote from Mr. Ford, “A truly prosperous time is when the largest number of people are getting all they can legitimately eat and wear, and are in every sense of the word comfortable. It is the degree of the comfort of the people at large — not the size of the manufacturer’s bank balance — that evidences prosperity. The function of the manufacturer is to contribute to this comfort. He is an instrument of society and can serve society only as he manages his enterprise so as to turn over to the public an increasing better product at an ever-decreasing price, and at the same time to pay all those who have had a hand in his business an ever-increasing wage, based upon the work they do. In this way and in this way alone can a manufacturer or anyone

in business justify his existence.”

These are high ideals to aspire to from a man who proved himself successful in the industrial world. If we can carry some of these thoughts in our daily lives, maybe we can make a difference in people’s lives. The responsibility rests with us. From whom much is given, much is expected.

To continue with service, I quote, “All that the Ford industries have done — all that I have done — is to endeavor to evidence by works that service comes before profit and that the sort of business which makes the world better for its presence is a noble profession.

“Money is useful only as it serves to forward by practical example the principle that business is justified only as it serves, that it must always give more to the community than it takes away, and that, unless everybody benefits by the existence of a business, then that business should not exist.”

And one last word on wages, “If we only knew it, every depression is a challenge to every manufacturer to put more brains into his business — to overcome by management what other people try to overcome by wage reduction. Cutting wages is the easiest and most slovenly way to handle the situation, not to speak of its being an inhuman way. It is, in effect, throwing upon labor the incompetency of the managers of the business. To tamper with wages before all else is changed is to evade the real issue.” ... “it is part of proprietorship every now and again to lose money.”

To summarize Ford’s principles:

Do not fear the future, for fear limits one’s activity. Do not be disgraced by failure — disgrace is in fearing to fail. The past sheds light on the pathway to success.

Whatever you work at, try to be the best for the best price, and the word “competition” is eliminated.

Put service before profit. Success is measured by profit, which is necessary to

stay in business, but remember profit is a reward for good service.

Being in business is not buying low and selling high. It is buying materials at a fair price and transforming them through a reasonable cost into a consumable product that serves the customer in the highest way possible.

One of Henry Ford’s concerns was destructive competition. It lacks the qualities out of which progress comes, which emanates from a generous form of rivalry. Bad competition is personal, a sort of warfare, a desire to get even with someone. In the end, it is selfish to obtain money or market control. The motivation is not in producing a good product. “We must have production, but it is the spirit behind it that counts most. That kind of production which is a service inevitably follows a real desire to be of service. But we are too wrapped up in the things we are doing — we are not enough concerned with reasons why we do them. Our whole competitive system, our whole creative expression, all the play of our faculties seem to be centered around material production and its by products of success and wealth.”

Henry Ford and Thomas Edison were close friends. Ford recalls Edison’s thought about the impossible, “It is a description for that which we have not at the moment the knowledge to achieve.” He knew that, as we amass knowledge, we build the power to overcome the impossible.

I shall end the same way that Ford ends his book: “The spirit of true service will create for us. We have only each of us to do our parts sincerely. Everything is possible ... “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

