

THE DIAMOND CUTTER: USING BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES TO FIND SUCCESS IN BUSINESS

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Geshe Michael Roach is a Princeton graduate and a Buddhist monk. After university he spent seven years studying the wisdom of Tibetan Buddhism. At the suggestion of his teacher, he joined a fledgling diamond business in New York to test his ideals in real life. He stayed with the business as a member of the core management team for seventeen years. The company grew from a startup with two owners and two employees to US\$100 million in sales and five hundred employees in offices around the world. *The Diamond Cutter*¹ tells the story of how Geshe Michael Roach built the diamond division of this company, using principles culled from ancient Tibetan Buddhism as the driving force behind his decision-making.

The Diamond Cutter does not try to explain why some businesses succeed and others fail. It accepts that that we do not fully understand how wealth is created. If we did, everyone would be wealthy. What it does do is provide powerful insights into how we should be approaching our careers and businesses so as to maximize the opportunities that are presented to us, and to ensure that we can lead fulfilling and satisfying lives at whatever level of financial success we realize.

Some of the many insights in *The Diamond Cutter* are as follows:

A business should be successful; it should make money. There is no conflict between spirituality and success in business. Successful business people have the resources to do more good in the world than those people without the same resources. Also, the very people who are attracted to business are the same people who have the strength to grasp and carry out the deeper practices of the spirit.

Money should be made honestly, and with absolute integrity. How we make money matters more than anything. It determines our ability to keep making money, as nobody can indefinitely run a business built on dishonesty or deception. It also significantly affects our ability to enjoy the money we make.

Nothing is good or bad in and of itself; everything has a hidden potential. This is what the Buddhists call *emptiness*. What is bad news for you may be good news for someone else, and vice versa. We must not leap to conclusions about events, but must stop to consider what potential they really have for us. Even competitors can be seen as fairy godmothers challenging us to find the correct path to greater accomplishment. It is a matter of perception. With the right state of mind we can turn our problems into opportunities.

Whether we experience things as good or bad comes from ourselves, and depends upon mental imprints we have built up over the years based upon things we have done, said or thought in the past. Consider your mind as a continuous and sensitive piece of film that records

everything that you do, say or think. These records become impressions, which can be strong or weak depending upon the circumstances under which they were made, and which compound and grow over time like seeds grow to flowers, becoming bigger with the passage of time than they were when they were first planted. It is not what happens to us that affects what we experience, but what we do, say or think in response.

If we are to experience good things we must constantly monitor what we do, say or think to weed out the negative and respond with the positive. This becomes an absolute necessity if you accept that whether something is good or bad depends upon your perception, and that how we experience something depends on how we have behaved in the past. To have a better future we must behave better today, so that the imprints that come to mind when things happen in the future are more likely to be positive than negative. According to the teaching of *The Diamond Cutter*, you can essentially design your own future by keeping track of how you act and think today. After all, the cause come before the result, and the result is usually bigger than the cause.

Imprints to cultivate include: a generous state of mind; an ethical way of life; being honest and straightforward; being a patient grower of things; being sensitivity to how our words and actions impact those around us; taking joy in being constructive and helpful in our actions; taking joy in the success of the people around us; pursuing deep states of concentration and meditation on a regular basis; being compassionate; keeping our promises; maintaining an awareness for the larger questions in life; being aware and concerned for our physical surroundings and those of our employees; feeling gratitude to others; being dependable; respecting the property and space of others; listening to what others have to say; maintaining a sense of purpose; pursuing an understanding of how things work; maintaining a recognition of the order of things; having respect for integrity.

Imprints to avoid include: anger; jealousy; dishonesty or deception; pride; living for the recognition of others; actions or talk aimed at splitting people up; useless talk; malicious talk and gossip; holding ourselves out as someone we are not; dishonesty in the people we associate with; speaking harshly to others; taking pleasure in the misfortunes of others; wishing misfortune on others.

We should enjoy the money we make, by keeping our minds and bodies in good health while making money. In this regard, the key to a healthy mind is taking regular and structured breaks from the business and our other commitments to allow the true power and potential of our minds to work for us. Examples of such breaks include:

- ◆ Starting each day alone, fully awake, with a period of absolute silence and reflection, using fifteen to thirty minutes to reflect upon the most significant problem we are facing at that time, to envision how we would like the day to go, and to remind ourselves of what kind of person we are trying to be. Unlike some perceptions of meditation, *The Diamond Cutter* method requires you to travel inside your mind to focus on very specific things of real and practical application to your business and your life.
- ◆ Ending each day, as you fall asleep, reflecting on what did not go well in the day and why, what did go well in the day and why, and envisioning how you want to feel and act when you wake up in the morning.

- ◆ Taking regular and scheduled away days, which include a long period alone in silent reflection on the problems you are facing, what is working and what is not working, what you want your future to be like, and which can include all of the following items as well.
- ◆ Taking regular, light exercise as part of your periods of reflection.
- ◆ Spending a few minutes every week reading books on the higher meaning of life. Not “how to” books, but books on leading a purposeful life and the purpose of life itself.
- ◆ Taking time on a regular basis to learn something practical from a master in the trade, provided it is not something related to or of application in your work.
- ◆ Taking time on a regular basis to do things for the more needy people around you; not by sitting on boards of charities or other similar business related things but by physically going and doing.

We should work for the good of those around us as hard as we work for the good of ourselves. There are three steps to this process.

- ◆ First, we should educate ourselves about what others need and like and give it to them if we can. This forces us to come outside of ourselves to appreciate the needs of others, and will produce a tremendously positive response from them including an inclination to want to do the same for us.
- ◆ Secondly, we must learn to see ourselves through the eyes of others. The Buddhist call this *Switching Bodies*. By seeing ourselves through someone else’s eyes we can manage what we do, say and think to have the most positive impact on them. This can only help us advance our own causes as well, as we will learn to replace responses which produce negative results with responses which produce positive ones.
- ◆ Finally, we must see ourselves and the others around us as one person. This is called the *Rope Trick*, which makes sense when you consider that Tibetan Buddhists spend much of their time in and around the Himalayas. This approach breaks us out of our self-centred approach to business, and challenges us to work for the collective good instead of just our own. If everyone worked this way, everyone could find prosperity and happiness together. It is an ideal, but striving for it will provide great meaning in our lives while improving our chances for prosperity in business.

We should look ahead to the inevitable end of our days in business, and put ourselves in a position where we can honestly say our years in business had some meaning. The idea here is to anticipate our future, and move in a direction that will allow us to look back on our past with total joy and satisfaction. We must take steps today to ensure we will be able to say that we spent our business years and our lives in the best way possible. And since any day could be the last day of our life, we must spend every day doing, saying and thinking the things which give our life its most meaning.

*If what I have done is True,
Then may these things come to be.*

This is not only a wish for the future, but a statement of cause and effect.

The Diamond Cutter reminds us in a most powerful way that perception is reality, and that the path to happiness and prosperity requires an ethical way of living, a conscious awareness of what kind of imprints our behaviour plants in our subconscious, and a conscious awareness of how these imprints determine our future reality -- in business and in living.

¹ Roach, Geshe Michael, *The Diamond Cutter: The Buddha on Strategies for Managing Your Business and Your Life*, Doubleday, a division of Random House, New York, New York (2000).