

Openings: *"In the middle of the journey of our life I came to my senses in a dark forest, for I had lost the straight path. Oh, how hard it is to tell what a dense, wild, and tangled wood this was, the thought of which renews my fear."* (Inferno, Canto 1, lines 1-6)

These words from Dante's *The Divine Comedy* are hauntingly appropriate at this time.

Spotlight: We live in a society built on ownership. With rights and responsibilities codified through law, the influence of ownership is so prevalent that any concept that challenges the supremacy of ownership is often condemned as heresy. Stewardship is certainly such a concept.

Business is about the ownership of products, services, copyrights, trademarks, and other property so it is easy to dismiss stewardship as being irrelevant. The problem with taking this stance is that it ignores the evidence of daily business experience. Stewardship is the managing of another's property, finances, or other affairs. This definition sounds very much like the primary task of every CEO and most managers.

The concept of stewardship recognises that there is a motivation greater than profit. Business as a strictly mercenary pursuit is so much easier to conceptualise and control. The employee who voluntarily stays late and the customer who sends a thank you card are only two examples of the many ways that an enterprise's stakeholders complicate business theory. Why do these people act in this way? The enterprise holds an importance to them beyond their self-interest.

With no expectation of personal gain, your stakeholders take action and they act out of stewardship. Their reasoning is not important to know or understand. What is important is providing the opportunity for action and then acknowledging the action. Acknowledgment spawns further action and greater stakeholder loyalty. A heartfelt "thank you for caring" can be as extensive as that acknowledgement need be.

A few decades ago, a great enterprise was characterised as one where many people held a similar vision. Today's great enterprises are those that embrace divergent visions. Each stakeholder has a unique vision for the enterprise and allowing a person to exercise stewardship strengthens both their vision and your enterprise.

Musings: A good portion of every business day is devoted to the search for solutions. As one solution pours into your enterprise, attention shifts to the next priority in a seemingly endless list. Whether the process takes twenty minutes or twenty months, each of these ventures is an exercise in strengthening your enterprise. How do you acknowledge the contribution made by the stakeholders involved in these ventures?

Expressing thanks or gratitude is challenging. True acknowledgement must be genuine, free of motivational biases, and the appropriate magnitude. Acknowledgment is not a reward but rather a gift where the crucial element is the intention with which it is given. Members of your enterprise usually act appropriately because they believe it to be the right thing to do not because of any incentive. As they are acting "normally", it is easy to not notice that the ordinary is actually quite extraordinary.

When considering the gift of acknowledgment, remember that you are responding to an act most likely undertaken without expectation of acknowledgment. This is a great venue for creativity and innovation where the only wrong response is indifference.

Facts & Figures: Research into Canadian prescription drug usage between 1981 and 2000 has found that during that period, the total number of prescriptions for anti-depressants jumped to 14.5 million per year from 3.2 million. This 353 per cent increase occurred while the Canadian population increased only one per cent annually. The total amount spent on these drugs increased 1,630 per cent to \$543 million in 2000 from \$31.4 million in 1981.

Tools & Tips: Using your spelling checker assures that you have the letters in the right order, but do you have the right word? CleverKeys is a freeware program that allows you to quickly link to Dictionary.com from within any application to research your word choice. You need only highlight the word in question and press the keyboard keys. It even works from within your spelling checker! Download this handy utility from www.cleverkeys.com.

Just For Fun: More and more objects speak to you every day so why not your clothes? Australian scientists have produced an intelligent fabric that "groans" when the wearer moves in an unsafe manner. While intended for injury avoidance, clothing made of this fabric could certainly make aerobic classes sound more interesting.

Quotation: Author and business consultant Peter Block defines stewardship as being:

"The willingness to be accountable for the well-being of the larger organization by operating in service, rather than in control, of those around us. Stated simply, it is accountability without control or compliance."