FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Business & Economics

Z.B.A. (Zen of Business Administration): How Zen Practice Can Transform Your Work and Your Life

Marc Lesser
New World Library
978-1-57731-469-1
(January 21, 2005)

How are Zen and business alike? Anyone who wonders how right livelihood and practical wisdom can play a role in today's cutthroat business climate will find a resonant mentor and traveling companion in this author. He lived for a decade as a Zen monk working in various capacities at the San Francisco Zen Center. The disciplined daily work there provided principles for business success.

He recounts his journey back to the East coast, wife and infant in tow, to complete his undergraduate degree and to get his MBA from NYU. Lesser is now a Zen priest as well as a Bay area entrepreneur and the founder of fifteen-year-old Brush Dance, a recycled paper and greeting card business that has evolved into a company that offers "inspiration."

Building from the author's experiences, this humane business guide illustrates how to live the Zen practice of "being present" in the context of daily work life. Drawing lessons from both business and Zen philosophy, Lesser reiterates, "Everywhere you go is your temple … We are all Zen students, and we are all business people." Filled with the author's life anecdotes, classic Zen stories, famous Zen koans, and questions at the end of chapters for reflection, this book bridges the seeming paradoxes of acting in business and living a life while following spiritual practices.

Divided into five parts, the book advises, "Start where you are," then offers rich and practical observations on the difficulties and challenges of incorporating the elements of the Buddhist tradition's eight-fold path into daily life. Lesser explores the wisdom of following "ordinary mind" as the path, with concepts like generosity, energy, ethics, and letting go. He goes on to ponder listening to the clear quiet inner voice; Zen practice is especially conducive in this regard. Finally, the author encourages readers, "You can change the world."

He's unflinchingly honest as he shares painful situations at his company, such as being

unable to meet payroll, and having to lay off twelve people in one day. His practices of mindfulness, being present, and compassion all helped him connect with his own feelings and with his staff through the difficulties. He concludes with “nine practices for being more in connection with yourself while at work,” along with the Brush Dance story and the company’s manifesto.

Lesser presents a refreshing approach to business, written with emotional integrity and humanity, and filled with practical ways to bridge the apparent conundrums between the “real world” and Zen practice. Anyone who is willing to step into the possibilities of enriching and strengthening both workplace results and spiritual practices will not be disappointed. This book is highly recommended for both business and Buddhist philosophy sections.

Bobbye Middendorf