

# 5 Spiritual Principles I Try to Apply to My Business

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About seven years ago, I co-founded a community work, event, and educational space in downtown Seattle, Washington (USA) and began running the business with a team of amazing people. I became a Baha'i about two years into running this business, and one of the features that first attracted my contemplation and gratitude towards the Baha'i Faith was the practical nature of its principles, and how I could actively apply them to all dimensions of my daily life, and furthermore, how they evolve with meaning through experience.

Five years on, and I am continually astonished at how the Baha'i Teachings can be applied to not only my personal life, but also to all aspects of my business, and how they are deeply intertwined with the economic and ethical success of growing a company. I have been consistently applying five spiritual principles to my daily business activities and decisions, and as a result, they have made me a better leader, and have created concrete, positive returns in our business, affecting present-day standards like near-term profitability, talent, innovation and ideas. These principles have also had an impact on the more idealistic standards of my business, such as long-term revenue gains, a more diverse team, and opportunities for others to collaborate.

Here are the five spiritual principles I try to apply to my business, and I hope they can also help you too:

## **1. Unity**

As a newly minted female leader, I especially struggled with the concept of unity in the first years of our inception. I was young, unproven, and not yet aware of my skill-sets, surrounded by others who

subscribed to more traditional, masculine concepts of success. I felt pressure to prove myself through power and control, so I reverted to defensiveness and lone hero-mentality in order to maintain a sentiment of power and ego, and I built up silos within the team. After a particularly detrimental mistake almost bankrupted us, we brought the rest of the team into financial, high-level conversations for the first time, and began the rewarding work of dismantling divisive silos that had kept us from achieving key goals. The next few months were particularly instructive in the importance of leading with unity as the entire team was involved in making key decisions, supplying more brain power to the problems at hand and incorporating all of the data from our situation into their decision-making. Ultimately, it gave everyone more ownership over their roles.

## **2. Trustworthiness**

“We have enjoined upon all to become engaged in some trade or profession, and have accounted such occupation to be an act of worship. Before all else, however, thou shouldst receive, as a sign of God’s acceptance, the mantle of trustworthiness from the hands of divine favour; for trustworthiness is the chief means of attracting confirmation and prosperity.” – Baha’u’llah<sup>1</sup>

It is my understanding that trustworthiness is not solely a virtue to be followed because it is the right thing to do; indeed, in business, Baha’u’llah states that trustworthiness is the very foundation for any sort of material gain. North American consumers continually rank companies with business B-Corporation or environmental LEED certifications as top trusted brands within their households; the brand loyalty consumers associate with these companies is directly correlated to them building a foundation of trust, because they deliver products and services that consistently meet expectations and they make important contributions to society by dealing ethically with employees and customers, in their relationship to the environment, and by providing support for community needs. These actions not only build genuine trust among people, but they are also crucial components to any company’s long-term, material success as our world grows more connected.

## **3. Diversity**

The questions our society face are complex, and complex questions do not always have clear or timely answers. Companies that work to address these questions as part of their business model are in it for the long run, and so require a diverse portfolio that adheres to their overall mission and values while generating profits to maintain sustainability. Our mission is to build a civically engaged community in Seattle, a difficult product to monetize within constraints of current economic options. For us, diversity not only means ensuring that ethnic, cultural, and gender diversity are present within our team, but that diversity should be built into the business in every way. In order to continue working toward our mission, we diversified our revenue through two different methods: staying relevant to today’s market and our current customer needs, and by identifying trends in our industry one to two years away, in order to slowly start to introduce and stay competitive. This process of diversification never truly ends, because our society continues to progress. Not only are well-diversified portfolios better equipped to ride out rough business cycles, but prioritizing diversity in people, skill-sets, experience, feedback collection, supply chains, and customers reinforce our ability to identify new opportunities and trends, further diversifying our portfolio and maintaining lasting sustainability.

## **4. Reflection & Consultation**

All of the luck, money, and buzz in the world won’t make a company successful in the long-term if it is not thoughtful in its deliberations and decisions. I think that maintaining a practice of reflection and consultation throughout company culture is especially crucial for long-term success. Following long-established business standards can be a gray area, especially because our contemporary economy’s

perception of value is insufficient to address the diversity of the human experience. As our society continues to progress, maintaining a consistent practice of observation, reflection, and consultation is important to stay relevant in a rapidly shifting landscape. Instead of developing a five to ten year strategic plan, our business found it preferable to build a strong foundation in operations, processes, and values that allow us to adapt to a changing and complex future. Reflection and consultation are key to making adjustments based on the needs of our company and the realities of our society.

## 5. Equity

In my work, I consider the difference between equality and equity: equality is recognizing everyone as equal, while equity is recognizing everyone as uniquely different but valuing those differences equally. Abdu'l-Baha says:

“Considering this wonderful unity of the kingdoms of existence and their embodiment in the highest and noblest creature, why should man be at variance and in conflict with man? Is it fitting and justifiable that he should be at war, when harmony and interdependence characterize the kingdoms of phenomenal life below him? The elements and lower organisms are synchronized in the great plan of life. Shall man, infinitely above them in degree, be antagonistic and a destroyer of that perfection?”<sup>2</sup>

The Baha'i practice of using the logic of science informs my work because I can use nature as one example for equitable management and culture. If we look at human society through the lens of biology, we see that natural biological systems have many different types of attributes, but all are necessary for the ultimate survival of the environment or species. Natural ecosystems have evolved to survive, and so we can gather that our role as natural beings is to do the same – create capacity for others to thrive. Therefore, the idea of isolated power becomes evidence of an embryonic element of our society, and learning how to provide a foundation for our team to thrive with their own unique abilities becomes the most advantageous foundation for our business.

The Baha'i Faith has taught me the importance of keeping a long-term perspective and considering the equitable needs of a society that will take generations to settle. When we began considering our role as creating capacity for all stakeholders, our view naturally expanded from near-term gains to long-term forecasting; we saw the necessary interdependencies between all factions of our business in order to achieve long-term returns. We cannot institute diversity without reflection and consultation, and we cannot maintain trustworthiness without unified, distributive team ownership. By considering the inextricable connections between all ingredients contingent on building a successful business, we slowly built a foundation of equity that matches the principles and laws of nature and humanity: everything is connected, and nothing is ever done in a silo.

Ultimately, it is the means that justify the outcome in every way, and business is no different. I believe that building our business upon strong foundations such as these Baha'i principles ensure that our outcomes will be strong, too.

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1. From a Tablet—translated from the Persian and Arabic
  2. Abdu'l-Baha, [The Promulgation of Universal Peace](#)