

Commitment to the Community

We may have been working hard building the business and walking a lonely path. Eventually, we realize that we cannot stand alone. We have to come up for air and then may realize our own need for community. We need a community. We live in a community. Our business operates in a community of customers, suppliers, and employees. Now, because of our need for community, we start to take responsibility for the well-being of the community.

We can take inspiration from others. There are many good examples of American business people who changed their lives to working for the good of all. There are those who leave highly successful companies and spend their lives in service to others. Many more transformed their business conscious of the impact on the community. Even without leaving the business, we start to see that there are specific actions that we can take to improve our own communities. We, as business people can work for the good of others while still making a profit.

Communities are built on justice – not just the justice provided by the legal system and by what is legal. There are many forms of justice and all contribute to the well-being of the community. As we start to comprehend how vital the many forms of justice are to the community, we strive for justice even when we do not directly profit from those efforts.

As business people, we want to have a voice in the community and we want to

use that voice for good. However, we may have events from our pasts that keep our voice from being heard. This might be called “ethical debt”. This “ethical debt” never showed up on any balance sheet, but it still cost us. It cost us in community relations, in employee retention, and in dealing with suppliers.

Ethical debt can be incurred in many ways. Sometimes, we incur ethical debt when our values are not clear.

Sometimes, we did not live up to our promises to customers. Sometimes, we did not properly handle an employee-customer interaction. We may not have properly designed a system and its failures or sabotage caused worse problems. All of these left us with debts on our values.

Justice Builds Community

Creating a new type of balance sheet that includes our “ethical debt” starts us on a new journey towards a deeper justice. We work to clear up even this debt. We clear up our values. We change how we handle situations. We change how we deal with employees, customers, and the general public. As we identify our “debts” and resolve to make the world a better place, this new “balance sheet” shows a gain.

We work for justice within our businesses, with our customers and suppliers, and towards the greater community. It may not be possible to completely correct a situation but we can always improve it. We can mitigate harms done by taking actions in multiple ways. As we ensure that our moral voice is clear, we gain a moral authority that gives our voice far more power. Improving the community is always a gain for the business.

Trust the computer?

Have you ever wondered about those AI based recommendations? YouTube keeps suggesting videos you don’t want to watch. Instagram offers clips of subjects you don’t like. There are so many places suggesting things but the suggestions need to be carefully reviewed. AI systems work best as assistants, not as managers.

Science fiction is full of machines that can do so many things. TV shows had robots that looked and acted human. One show had a “holographic” doctor. Yet the science behind such AI is not as rosy as the shows made it out to be.

Computer scientists have a lot of distrust of the AI solutions. The research shows that while the AI often has good ideas, there are so many times when it has a bad idea. The IBM Watson system that beat Jeopardy gave nonsense results at times.

The science of AI shows that the current structure will produce moments of “brilliance”, many average solutions, and moments of ridiculous stupidity. AI is only as smart as the training it was given. Many an AI system has biases built in. Thus, a system to suggest criminal sentences has been shown to have racial biases. Facial recognition systems have flagged congress people as “criminals”. While some people might agree, it shows just how difficult it is to get reliable AI systems.

The combination of trained people reviewing AI recommendations has produced the best solutions. Often, AI can point out solutions that the trained person might have overlooked but can improve on. By using AI to offer suggestions to trained people, we get the best of both worlds.

Don’t take the computer as authority. It is best used as an assistant.

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Risky World

A Janet Jackson song, “Rhythm Nation”, has crashed laptops. One laptop playing the song could crash other laptops nearby. Turns out that the song matched the resonant frequency of the hard drives which caused them to over-vibrate and crash the system.

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