

# A View

From the Prairie

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## Honesty to Self

Recently, a founder of a Silicon Valley startup was convicted for fraud. She made fantastic claims for her startup, collected a lot of money, but had nothing to deliver. In some places, it is almost common that leaders make fantastic claims and hope to be believed. For many of us, we have tried to live up to the image of the strong business leader: confident and constantly giving assurances that we are all on the right path, but it has cost us a lot. When events happen, often employees, investors, and followers are left disillusioned.

When we lie or omit truths to our advisory board, to our employees, or to our customers, we impede our progress and may often waste time, effort,

and resources on the wrong actions. We can get trapped in a web of lies unable to admit even to ourselves. Worse, when people find out that we lied or omitted the truth, we lose trust - the most valuable part of the relationship. That loss of trust costs us a lot. We can never hope to keep the fact of our lying hidden. Lies will always come out in some way.

While we may need to act assured when talking to potential investors and to some employees, it can be deadly to try to believe our own assurances. We need to be honest in order to handle reality. Far too many business leaders have descended into drug and alcohol use and more trying to cope with the pressures and doubts. Our efforts to hide from our own truth can put us and others in very dangerous situations.

Our lives may depend on our being honest with ourselves.

Many drug and alcohol treatment programs start with trying to break down the walls of denial and demand honesty as the first step to recovery. Unless we are willing to face our hard reality and learn from the situation, we will not be able to change the real problems in our lives. When we face the truths about our businesses and learn from the problems our business has, we gain ability to make better decisions for business prosperity.

There are things we may not consider to be lies.

We may have built quite a life based on certain concepts that we never questioned. We may have past positions, past publications, prior votes, existing policies, and

associations that may not accurately reflect today's reality. While nobody can fully walk away from their past and many can't even question teachings they grew up with, our willingness to question as many things as we can will help us find what are past lies and what we need to change today.

Honesty to self can give us the flexibility to respond positively when an employee badly "drops the ball". We can handle disappointments, natural events, and market actions without fear of others finding out how we are not in control of the situation. Instead, we can change our plans, find new markets, or help the employees learn and recover from bad mistakes.

Our goal has to be honesty to self so that we can live.

## Get Real with Yourself

## Do You Still Believe?

One investor said that the one factor that kills a startup the most is when one of the founders stops believing in the venture. The same is true in nearly every other business. When employees stop believing that the business is doing good, they disengage or quit. A disengaged employee is the worst to have as they don't do right by the customer.

You can find books on the speed of trust and many books, articles, and consultants promoting company culture. Trust and company culture are based on employees believing that the business is worthwhile. A bad company culture destroys that belief.

Ronald Reagan pushed for "trust but verify". Today, new employees are asking us to verify that we are operating in ways that they can trust. People want to believe us, but we have to demonstrate that what we say, we actually believe.

We have all seen companies where the boss only believes in profits and not in providing outstanding services or products. The business slowly or quickly fades away and once the community views that business with distrust, almost never can that trust be recovered. The beliefs of the boss can kill a business.

Fake beliefs won't cut it. Someone who promises greatness for others but focuses on getting everything for himself will fool some people for a while but over time, more and more people will see that his actions don't match what he says. It is far better to act with integrity on beliefs in silence than to trumpet beliefs and not act on them.

Our beliefs make a difference.

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## Risky World

In Cambridge England, a robot vacuum cleaner made a dash for freedom and went out the front door of a hotel. The staff posted lost notices on social media which generated a bunch of interest and comments. It was found the next day hiding under a hedge. Nature doesn't always abhor a vacuum.

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