

# *Awakening Spirit in Organizations*

## **Applying 5 Core Principles to SED Projects & Enterprises**

Presented by Nancy Watters and Don Brown  
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Based on To Build Anew: Creating Baha'i-inspired Enterprises, by Don Brown

### **Core Enterprise Principles**

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|----------------------------|--|
| 1. <b>Purpose</b>          | Work for the betterment of the world       |
| 2. <b>Relationship</b>     | Set the common good above private interest |
| 3. <b>Conduct</b>          | Consciously practice human virtues         |
| 4. <b>Sustainability</b>   | Do what will profit you and others         |
| 5. <b>Decision Support</b> | Consult as the means of decision-making    |

### **Terminology**

**Principles** are “fundamental truths used as a basis for reasoning -- general laws that are guides to action” [Dictionary]

**Values** are “one’s principles or standards, one’s judgement of what is valuable or worthwhile in life” [Dictionary] Values reflect the particular beliefs and culture of the group and may or may not be aligned to principles.

**Spiritual Principles** are fundamental truths that govern our individual spiritual natures and our relationships to our Creator, to people and to ourselves.

**Virtues** are inner powers, capacities, human potentialities, qualities of the human spirit.

**Human Spirit** can be understood, in practical terms, as the source of qualities that transcend narrow self-interest. Such qualities include love, compassion, forbearance, trustworthiness, courage, humility, co-operation and willingness to sacrifice for the common good... (Bahá'í International Community, 1993, *Sustainable Development and the Human Spirit – TBA*, p. 61)

### **Applying the Principles**

It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action.... (Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings*, p. 250 - *TBA* p. 7, 85)

There is great difference between sounding a great general principle and finding its application to actual prevailing conditions. (Shoghi Effendi *Directives of the Guardian*, p. 21 - *TBA* p. 51)

High aims and pure motives, however laudable in themselves, will surely not suffice if unsupported by measures that are practicable and methods that are sound. Wealth of sentiment, abundance of good-will and effort, will prove of little avail if we should fail to exercise discrimination and restraint and neglect to direct their flow along the most profitable channels. (Shoghi Effendi: *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 87 - *TBA* p. 110)

## #5 The Decision Support Principle: Consult as the means of decision-making

“Consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way and is the bestower of understanding.” (Tablets of Baha’u’llah, p. 168)

“Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude . . . The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.” (Consultation: A Compilation, p. 1)

**Freedom of Expression:** Express your thoughts freely, without belittling the thoughts of others.

**Objectivity:** Carefully consider the views of others; do not willfully hold to your own opinion.

**Contribution:** Express your views as a contribution to the consensus of opinion; do not voice them as correct or right.

**Detachment:** A view once expressed belongs to the group; do not be offended if a conflicting view is expressed.

**Decision Support:** Support fully all decisions; do not criticize previous decisions.

## #1 The Purpose Principle: Work for the betterment of the world

With the utmost friendliness and in a spirit of perfect fellowship take ye counsel together, and dedicate the precious days of your lives to the betterment of the world and the promotion of the Cause of Him Who is the Ancient and Sovereign Lord of all. (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 184 – TBA p. 53)

Your criterion should be to pursue your commercial activities with such fairness and equity as to be a cause of guidance to others. The friends of God should, through the instrumentality of their business, lead the people to God's path, and make them so astonished as to exclaim: "How great is their truthfulness, how high their trustworthiness and how true is their good will!"

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Trustworthiness*, Page: 14 - TBA p. 109)

1. Baha’is are enjoined to dedicate the precious days of their lives to the \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
2. Through the \_\_\_\_\_, Baha’is can lead the people to God’s path.
3. Bahá’í businesses can be “instruments for leading people to God’s path through \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Two purposes of Bahá’í-inspired enterprises are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Which of the following are examples of enterprises that promote the betterment of the world? (Do this individually and then compare your answers with the rest of your group)

<input type="checkbox"/> Bar	<input type="checkbox"/> Auto repair shop
<input type="checkbox"/> Video rental store	<input type="checkbox"/> Fast food restaurant
<input type="checkbox"/> Cigarette manufacturer	<input type="checkbox"/> Medical supply company
<input type="checkbox"/> Financial investment firm	<input type="checkbox"/> Oil refinery
<input type="checkbox"/> Professional sports team	<input type="checkbox"/> Professional symphony orchestra
<input type="checkbox"/> Medical clinic	<input type="checkbox"/> Hair salon
<input type="checkbox"/> Laundromat	<input type="checkbox"/> Locally owned organic farm
<input type="checkbox"/> Credit union	<input type="checkbox"/> Big box stores

6. What are Bahá'í criteria for an enterprise that promotes the betterment of the world?
7. What has been your experience working for or dealing with a company that did or did not work for the betterment of the world? How did it affect you?

## #2 The Relationship Principle: Set the common good above private interest

The Bahá'í conception of social life is essentially based on the subordination of the individual will to that of society. It neither suppresses the individual nor does it exalt him to the point of making him an anti-social creature, a menace to society. As in everything, it follows the 'golden mean'. The only way that society can function is for the minority to follow the will of the majority. (Shoghi Effendi, *Directives of the Guardian*, p. 53 – TBA p. 61)

How noteworthy that in the Order of Bahá'u'lláh, while the individual will is subordinated to that of society, the individual is not lost in the mass but becomes the focus of primary development, so that he may find his own place in the flow of progress, and society as a whole may benefit from the accumulated talents and abilities of the individuals composing it. Such an individual finds fulfillment of his potential not merely in satisfying his own wants but in realizing his completeness in being at one with humanity and with the divinely ordained purpose of creation. (*Rights and Responsibilities*, p. 22 – TBA p. 64)

1. Describe a time when you witnessed someone put their own self-interest above the good of the group. What was the impact on you?
2. Describe a time when you witnessed someone put the good of the whole above their own self-interest. How did that affect you?
3. How can we support individual growth and development in the context of "setting the common good above private interest"?
4. This principle applies to which of the following areas of an enterprise?

<input type="checkbox"/> Leadership	<input type="checkbox"/> Customer relations
<input type="checkbox"/> Team project management	<input type="checkbox"/> Line workers
<input type="checkbox"/> Stockholder relations	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____

### # 3 The Conduct Principle: Consciously practice human virtues

You have written on the question of how the friends should proceed in their business dealings with one another. This is a question of the greatest importance and a matter that deserveth the liveliest concern. In relations of this kind, the friends of God should act with the utmost trustworthiness and integrity. To be remiss in this area would be to turn one's face away from the counsels of the Blessed Beauty and the holy precepts of God. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Trustworthiness*, p. 14 – *TBA*, p. 68)

1. In their business dealings with each other, the friends should act with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Which of the following are examples of the way the Baha'is should do business between themselves, as well as with others?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ A person is importing carpets and selling them from their home, using cash only transactions, so they don't have to charge or pay taxes.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ You go to a Bahá'í shop and they offer to not charge you taxes if you will pay in cash.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ You shop at a Baha'i-owned store, where they give a 10% discount to all Baha'is.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ A Bahá'í attorney gives a 40% discount on his services to a local Bahá'í SED project.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Two Bahá'ís quarrel over copyright issues. Instead of going to court, they work with the Auxiliary Board and the LSA to mediate the difficulty.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Two Baha'is decide to go into business together. They write up a formal partnership agreement.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ A Bahá'í sets up a new company and invites other believers to invest by supplying start-up funds. When asked to put the arrangements in writing, he says, "Don't you trust me? We are both Baha'is, after all."
  - \_\_\_\_\_ A Bahá'í realizes that a merchant has given them too much change when they made a purchase and immediately returns the excess.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ A Bahá'í negotiates a different price on his product with each customer.

These virtues do not appear from the reality of man except through the power of God and the divine teachings, for they need supernatural power for their manifestation. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 90-91 – *TBA* p. 16).

"Divorced from true religion, morals lose their effectiveness and cease to guide and control man's individual and social life. But when true religion is combined with true ethics, then moral progress becomes a possibility and not a mere ideal." (*Directives of the Guardian*, p. 84 – *TBA*, p.22)

"...and it is impossible for a human being to turn aside from his own selfish advantages and sacrifice his own good for the good of the community except through true religious faith. For

self-love is kneaded into the very clay of man, and it is not possible that, without any hope of a substantial reward, he should neglect his own present material good. That individual, however, who puts his faith in God and believes in the words of God – because he is promised and certain of a plentiful reward in the next life, and because worldly benefits as compared to the abiding joy and glory of future planes of existence are nothing to him – will for the sake of God abandon his own peace and profit and will freely consecrate his heart and soul to the common good...” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Secret of Divine Civilization*, pp. 96-97 – TBA, p. 61)

3. Can people change their character and develop their virtues? If so, how?
4. What motivates people to adhere to virtues, even when there are no foreseeable positive or negative consequences?
5. Will people consistently and reliably adhere to virtues without religion?

#### **#4 The Sustainability Principle: Do what will profit you and others**

“Lay fast hold on whatever will profit you, and profit the peoples of the world.” (Baha’u’llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 24. TBA, p. 75)

Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual’s own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 24 – TBA, p. 195)

... man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty. Having attained the stage of fulfilment and reached his maturity, man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth through crafts or professions is commendable and praiseworthy in the estimation of men of wisdom, and especially in the eyes of servants who dedicate themselves to the education of the world and to the edification of its peoples. (Bahá’u’lláh: *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, pages 34-35)

In this day it is incumbent upon everyone to serve the Cause of God, while He Who is the Eternal Truth – exalted be His glory – hath made the fulfillment of every undertaking on earth dependent on material means. (Bahá’u’lláh, *Huqúqu’lláh*, p. 13 – TBA, p. 76)

There are two principles which the House of Justice feels are fundamental to the generality of such projects of social and economic development, although, of course, there will be exceptions. The first is that they must be built on a substructure of existing, sufficiently strong local Bahá’í communities. The second is that the long-term conduct of the project should aim at self-sufficiency and not be dependent upon continuing financial support from outside.

...The second principle must take into account that any project started by the Cause should be designed to grow soundly and steadily, and not to collapse from attrition. In other words, external assistance and funds, Bahá’í and non-Bahá’í, may be used for capital acquisitions, to make surveys, to initiate activities, to bring in expertise, but the aim should be for each project to be able to continue and to develop on the strength of local Bahá’í labour, funds and enthusiasm even if all external aid should be cut off. (On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 552 – TBA, p. 82)

1. Wealth is praiseworthy if \_\_\_\_\_ and if \_\_\_\_\_.

2. Two principles which the Universal House of Justice feels are fundamental to the generality of SED projects are:
3. To be self-sufficient means \_\_\_\_\_
4. The goal is for each Bahá'í project to be able to \_\_\_\_\_
5. Why should Bahá'í enterprises and projects be self-sufficient?
6. What are some ways they can be self-sufficient?

Tragically, what Bahá'ís see in present-day society is unbridled exploitation of the masses of humanity by greed that excuses itself as the operation of “impersonal market forces.” What meets their eyes everywhere is the destruction of moral foundations vital to humanity’s future, through gross self-indulgence masquerading as “freedom of speech.” What they find themselves struggling against daily is the pressure of a dogmatic materialism, claiming to be the voice of “science,” that seeks systematically to exclude from intellectual life all impulses arising from the spiritual level of human consciousness.

And for a Bahá'í the ultimate issues are spiritual. The Cause is not a political party nor an ideology, much less an engine for political agitation against this or that social wrong. The process of transformation it has set in motion advances by inducing a fundamental change of consciousness, and the challenge it poses to everyone who would serve it is to free oneself from attachment to inherited assumptions and preferences that are irreconcilable with the Will of God for humanity’s coming of age.... (*Century of Light*, pp. 135-136 – TBA, pp. 26-27).

7. How can Bahá'í enterprises avoid “greed that excuses itself as the operation of ‘impersonal market forces’?”
  8. How can Bahá'í enterprises determine fair prices for things that are sold? Is it ethical to sell the same product/service to different people for different prices?
  9. How can one determine fair wages and equitable profit-sharing?
  10. The challenge for Baha'is is to free themselves from \_\_\_\_\_.
  11. Ultimately, the solutions to economic questions are \_\_\_\_\_.
  12. Advances are made by \_\_\_\_\_.
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## **Closing Reflections**

(5 minutes with a partner)

1. What was meaningful for me? (a “gift” I am taking with me)
2. One thing I will do as a result of this workshop today. (a commitment I am making)

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...The powers released by Bahá'u'lláh match the needs of the times. We may therefore be utterly confident that the new throb of energy now vibrating throughout the Cause will empower it to meet the oncoming challenges of assisting, as maturity and resources allow, the development of the social and economic life of peoples, of collaborating with the forces leading towards the establishment of order in the world, of influencing the exploitation and constructive uses of modern technology, and in all these ways enhancing the prestige and progress of the Faith and uplifting the conditions of the generality of mankind....

...Ultimately, the call to action is addressed to the individual friends, whether they be adult or youth, veteran or newly-enrolled. Let them step forth to take their places in the arena of service where their talents and skills, their specialized training, their material resources, their offers of time and energy and, above all, their dedication to Bahá'í principles, can be put to work in improving the lot of man. (Universal House of Justice, 1983 October 20, to the Bahá'ís of the world – *TBA*, p. 200).

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