



The Telos of Business. You may not be able to measure it, but it's shaping your destiny.

ARISTOTLE BELIEVED that everything has a telos, that all organisms move from an imperfect state to an innate, perfect one. For example, an acorn's telos is an oak tree. He also believed that human life has a telos, and that aim is happiness.

I'm not so sure about human life, but I'm convinced that the telos of our modern marketplace is happiness—happiness that comes from novelty, entertainment, and social interaction; happiness realized by being more productive, safer, and healthier; and happiness that flows from contribution, self-worth and identity.

Happiness must be a business's intent. Not products. Not services. Not content. Not money. Happiness. Happiness should be an organization's context; the frame through which its people view their purpose, activities, and results. Theodore Levitt's "what business are you in?" if you will.

To be clear, I am not saying that the genesis of all successful ideas is the burning desire to make other people happy. It is certainly not. Many, if not most, innovations are born of curious and creative minds intent on solving their own problems and making themselves happy.

What I am saying is that the long-term success of those ideas in the marketplace is absolutely dependent on the happiness and well-being of others. Because given an abundance of choice, people pick and choose their personal definition of what they believe will improve their lives and make them happy. Happiness is their ultimate currency.

My friend Paul has profited greatly from this seemingly hippy-dippy concept. His initial idea for website testing software was launched in a University dorm room with a secondhand computer and a few

hundred bucks back in 2005. He developed the product primarily to solve his own problems as a designer, impelled by the marketplace's lack of an affordable and functionally intact solution.

Fast forward six years and Paul, along with two partners, now operates a growing, multimillion dollar software business. But it wasn't the original idea that rocketed him to success. Rather, he listened intently to his customers' wishes and responded with a new, market-shaking idea; an idea that's feeding their hungers and fueling his growth.

Let me be clear about something else. Although Paul is a very kind soul, he is no altruist. He's a shrewd and sensible capitalist. He's simply aware that it's all connected; his success and happiness is bound up with the success and happiness of his customers. The future well-being of his business lays not with its beginning, but rather with its telos, its aim. And so does yours.

We are in the midst of a massive marketplace upheaval. Like my friend Paul, we must all rapidly change our perspectives, our myopic focus on our short-term desires, and embrace a new, customer-driven ethos. It's time to expand our concerns from measured performance and efficiencies, and obsessively ask, What's going on in people's lives? What role do we play in that drama? What role could we play to improve their lives, to make them happier?

The telos of the marketplace is happiness. Does that mean it has to be yours? Of course not. This isn't a short-term, hard and fast rule; there are far too many exceptions for it to be. But, I assure you, your marketplace competitiveness and organizational well-being over time will inevitably come down to your telos. The difference between you and an acorn is that you get to choose yours.