

Office Zen

*Simple, Life-changing Tools And Practices
For Busy, Intelligent People*



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Introduction

We are all Zen students -- really! We are all born and we will all die. We each find ourselves with a particular body and mind, thrust into this place and time. We each are faced with balancing taking care of the daily necessities of being alive—providing for ourselves and our families, performing tasks, serving our customers (or clients or students or patients) and at the same time we can each sense the miracle and sacredness of our breath, our bodies and our imaginations.

Though Zen is often perceived as enigmatic and complex, it is at its heart a system of simple practices that can be done anywhere -- even in the midst of our busy work lives. All Zen practices have the same aim -- to help us awaken, to be present and fully responsive, and to uncover our innate wisdom and authenticity.

The beauty, power and mystery of Zen practice is that it does not require learning anything or adding anything. It requires no special clothing and there is no cost to admittance. Instead, it requires our entire body and mind; our entire life; our vulnerable and open hearts. Zen practice asks that we make great effort, and that we give up our usual effort trying to achieve something special or to gain some particular knowledge. How can this be? This sounds impossible, paradoxical. Yes! Zen practice requires that we take a step, sometimes called a step backwards, to discover new places, new ways of being in the world, that were not previously known or available to us. Zen practice, in this way, is a journey, an adventure, not a destination. Courage is required for this journey.

Zen is a practice utilizing our breath and our bodies to unlearn habits and patterns that prevent us from being free, flexible and effective in whatever situation we might find ourselves. Though simple in theory and in practice, the results can be profound – it's a

bit like putting on new eye glasses, - with a small change ,the way we see the world can become vastly different.

Work and business are much like this -- small changes and adjustments in perceptions and actions can have a large affect. Since the environment, technologies and people are always changing, we are constantly challenged to “get out of our own way”, our habitual and concretized ways of viewing our businesses, and look at what we need to let go of, in order to be flexible, responsive and ultimately successful in our work.

“Without any hindrances, no fears exist” is a famous line in a Zen chant called the Heart Sutra, or literally called Wisdom Beyond Wisdom. By unlearning and transforming ideas, emotions, thinking and behaviors that block us, we unleash our natural and inconceivable wisdom. Instead of acting from our habits and conditioning, we find our freedom, happiness and authentic selves. Instead of acting and responding from fear, we begin to accept and acknowledge our innate fearlessness.

Practicing Zen in the office can have many benefits including increased creativity, inspiration, and openness. Integrating Zen practice with your work life can also improve listening and communication skills, build leadership and teambuilding skills and increase overall work and life satisfaction. With the growing influence and power of the business community, developing and transforming business leaders, business people and organizations can help lead to a gentler, more connected, more vital, and peaceful world.

We are all so much more than we think we are. We are amazing creatures. Our bodies and minds function in ways that are far beyond anything that we can conceive. Our imaginations, our lungs, our ability to connect with our own and other’s emotions function at levels that are outside of what words and thoughts can describe or understand. At the same time, we are also fragile and dependent creatures. We are also, I am sorry to say, vulnerable and fragile creatures, in need of real connection, understanding and support.

When things feel not quite right, when something is missing, when we feel pain, when we recognize that we are striving for something, that is Zen. When we feel satisfied, happy, and joyous, that is Zen. When we realize that everything is always changing, yes, Zen. Sometimes people think of Zen as a way in which one can become calmer by detaching from all emotion. To the contrary, Zen practice tends to make us more aware of our feelings and emotions. There is an expression, “Serenity is not freedom from the storm, but peace within the storm.” Getting closer to our own truth may lead us to feeling more joy and, at the same time may uncover places where we are holding or grieving; we may feel more at home at work or more estranged, depending on what the truth of our situation and experiences.

There is a Zen expression that says “Step from the top of a hundred foot pole.” From the perspective of Zen, (and business) we are all perched at the top of a pole, at each moment faced with choices from which there is no escape. At each moment, what do we think, feel, say or do? How can we live in this world and be true to ourselves and fully connected to those around us. There is no escaping these choices, no escaping doing something. Even doing nothing is doing something. In each moment of our lives we have no choice but to fulfill our deepest longing, our deepest wishes or to turn away from what is most meaningful, most important. In our work lives we are caught (perched on the pole) of personal and professional balance and sustainability, facing the dilemma of balancing where we are, with where we want to be with our underlying effort to create positive change and transformation.

Though we all want to be successful, and not fail, judgments, conditioning and labels can be a distraction from our real work. Good and bad, right and wrong, success and failure can lead us away from being right here, right now, making our best effort in each moment. The effort is to be ourselves, to be authentic, to be free of habits and patterns that we use for protection and to fully open our hearts and minds.

These practices do have risks – At a recent retreat for business-people that I was co-leading, we discovered that several people who had taken the workshop in the past had

returned – and most of these people had left their previous jobs! And, not doing these practices has risks – the risk of not being our full selves, with the excuse that we are just “at work.”

According to Suzuki Roshi, Zen practice is like walking in a gentle mist. The changes can be so subtle that we hardly notice we are getting wet at all. Just keep making the effort, without any gaining idea, moment after moment, day after day. Someday, when you least expect it, you may find you are soaked, to the bones.

Please, enjoy the journey, and find success, beyond success!

The Four Noble Truths, At Work

The four noble truths are the foundation of Buddhist practice. These “truths” are said to be the first teachings of the historical Buddha, more than 2,500 years ago. I have taken the teachings of Buddha, and applied them to the context of work lives.

- 1) Being alive, engaging with our work, and performing tasks, requires facing our uneasiness, what is uncomfortable. There is no avoiding the fact that we are in control and not in control of our lives; no avoiding the fact that our work is ordinary and at the same time, immense.
- 2) During work we participate in the creating of our uneasiness. Our dis-ease has its roots and its origins that we can discover and come to know intimately.
- 3) Happiness and freedom are always available, even during our work. Our work can be a place and a means of healing. Being complete and being completely ourselves are possible at work.

- 4) The path to happiness and freedom can be found by fully engaging in these eight practices:
- 1) Uncover and become intimate with your most basic attitudes.
 - 2) Understand and clarify your thinking.
 - 3) Practice mindfulness in your work and your daily life.
 - 4) Speak from your heart.
 - 5) Act with integrity.
 - 6) Do work that benefits others and does not harm others or the Environment.
 - 7) Stay on this path, embracing the roadblocks and difficulties.
 - 8) Develop a deep intimacy with yourself, others and the world.

Sitting Down: Getting up

Spiritual practice and work practice can be boiled down to two simple activities: sitting down, and getting up. When we sit down, we are quiet, observing, listening deeply. We let our thoughts, feelings, and ideas rise to the surface. We watch and listen for what comes through the cracks of our consciousness and our thinking. What wants to be seen or heard, that may be difficult to see or hear? What business problem needs to be addressed differently, in a way that may be subtle, or in a form from what we might not expect?

When we get up we utilize what we have learned from sitting down, and integrate these lessons and observations, this way of being, into our lives. We bring this sense of quiet and this practice of paying attention to our daily work activity. Without the practice and experience of sitting down we get easily become lost, and even frantic. We can be “successful” without ever knowing why, or what for. Sitting down may help us to redefine success. With too much attention to sitting down, important tasks and accomplishments may be neglected.

When we pay attention, the things we learn in our work – the challenges, disappointments, and satisfactions, can be turned and processed in our quiet “sitting down” activity. When sitting we have the opportunity to approach each breath, each thought, each emotion with a sense of curiosity and appreciation. What is my life? What is important? What is my business? Breathe...curiosity...appreciation. Breathe...curiosity...appreciation... Sitting down...getting up...sitting down...getting up...

- Make a commitment to yourself to have a regular meditation practice: time just for you, nothing to do, no demands to meet, no success and failure, right or wrong.
- Spend quiet time once or twice a week, (or every morning), before you begin your workday.
- Find a quiet place to sit. Sit on a cushion or in a chair. Keep you back straight, chin tucked in, eyes open and looking down, not focusing.
- Sit by yourself, with a friend, or with a group.
- Sit comfortably and with energy.
- Focus on your body. Focus on your breathing.
- Notice where your inhale ends, and where your exhale begins.
- Let your thoughts come, let your thoughts go.
- Count each exhalation, from one to ten, then begin at one.
- Be curious about your breath and body.
- Breathe fully. Keep coming back to your breath.
- Time yourself. Sit for from ten to thirty minutes.

The Practice of Appreciation

I was recently approached by a friend who is a senior manager of a medium sized publishing company. She recounted how undermined and unsupported she felt by the CEO of the company, who she knew was a close friend of mine. The woman who approached me felt that no matter how well she did her work, she never received the kind of recognition from the CEO that she needed to feel clear and satisfied. It was important to her to feel a sense of accomplishment and connection. In fact, she described ways that she felt unsupported and at times undermined by the CEO.

The following week I had lunch with the CEO of this company. When I asked the CEO how things at work were going, she told me how unappreciated and unseen *she* felt. Didn't her Board and her management team understand how hard she was working and how challenging her job was? I told her how important, as the leader of this company, that she trust herself, her vision, and her competency. I suggested that she take the initiative and make sure that her Board and her managers felt seen and appreciated by her, and that it was her job to create a culture of support, and not a culture of lack. She needed to embody and act in a way that set the tone for the organization. Supporting others, was the path towards her getting the support that she needed.

A primary and profound attitude that humans carry is a need to be recognized, seen and appreciated. Not recognizing, admitting and understanding this basic human need can create lots of trouble, especially for leaders and managers.

- Carefully notice your key motivations at work: accomplishment, satisfaction, money, survival, caring for your family, benefiting others, acquiring skills, and many others.
- Notice what work activities bring you satisfaction, joy, a sense of calm and openness.

- Notice what work activities bring you uneasiness, anxiety, and lead to your feeling closed and tight.
- Inquire, notice, pay attention to how you see yourself, your work and the world.
- Be curious. Study yourself, your feeling, emotions, and moods.
- Open you mind. Open your heart.

When you look at human life carefully, you will find out how important it is to become a trustworthy person.

Suzuki Roshi

Close to the Customer: The Practice of Listening

When I first read the classic business book, *In Search of Excellence*, I was struck by the first value listed as distinguishing successful companies from other companies. This value was called “Close to the Customer.” Tom Peters and Robert Waterman described the importance of a business culture that is customer focused, that is driven by the needs of the people the company serves. When I read this chapter and the stories of how companies manifested this value, it was clear to me that the key activity, the key action that comprised this value was that of listening.

Companies whose people value being close to the customer, by listening to their customers as an active embedded value, are not easily distracted by office politics or the countless details necessary to operate a business. The focus is clear – listening, listening; understanding the needs of the customer.

- If you want to know what your customers need, listen carefully to their needs.
- Talk less; listen more.
- Ask questions – how can I serve you?; what problems are you having that I can help with?; what keeps you up at night that my company can address?; how are we doing in serving you? Recognize that these needs are always changing. The need that a customer has today may be completely different from their need tomorrow.
- Realize that your “customers” might include your employees, those who report to you, and those who you report to. Your customers might include the mailman, the Federal Express Driver, and the person who delivers coffee and water to your office.
- Listen to the sounds in your office, the voices, the hum of computers, the sounds from outside – the birds, the trucks, people talking. Just stop and listen. Use listening as a tool to come back to yourself, to center, relax and open.
- Listen to your heart beating. Listen to the sound of your breath, flowing in and flowing out. Yes, we all breathe at work!
- When in conversation, just listen fully, completely. If your own ideas or responses start to form, watch them come and watch them go; then return your attention to the person speaking. When the person stops, wait; allow a space before responding. Acknowledge that you've heard and understood what was said.
- Listening fully is a powerful practice.

Act With Integrity

Ever since I was a teenager I was always drawn to the business section of the newspaper. It was much more interesting than other sections -- filled with drama, with people and

companies emerging, people and companies disappearing, merging, changing focus; sometimes overnight. There was the drama of success and failure, great acts of compassion, and great acts of corruption. It was all powerful, compelling and real, and at the same time a game or art.

What attracted me then and what attracts and intrigues me now, is to see that business is about relationships. There is much more drama in the business section than in the arts and drama section of the paper. Business is about people. It is about how people act when faced with difficult choices; choices that involve money, property, reputation, and most of all, other people. Business is about integrity.

Integrity is a beautiful word: the quality of being complete, unbroken; the quality and state of being unimpaired; upright.

Integrity is the fruit of being completely honest with yourself, accepting yourself, starting completely from where you are.

- Know that you are complete and whole, just as you are.
- Pay attention to what you do and to your motivation.
- Notice how your actions affect others.
- Practice compassion for others.
- Practice kindness.
- Practice generosity.
- Practice putting other's needs before your own.

- Pay attention to what may be difficult to accept and acknowledge
- Open your heart
- Act with integrity – in your work, your business, your relationships, your life.

The Practice of Concentration

We humans are amazing creatures. Our bodies are incredible organisms. I think of the complex act of driving a car – foot on the gas or break, hands on the steering wheel, eyes on the road, seeing other cars, scanning the near and far distance as well as rear view mirrors, listening to the radio, conversing with passenger, talking on a cell phone; sometimes, all at the same time.

Business can be even more complex than driving a car – creating a vision, setting goals, meeting the needs of customers, emptying the trash, managing cash, hiring people, paying bills...all while managing our lives, putting food on the table, getting the children to school...

In the midst of our many tasks, we can only be paying attention to one thing at a time. If we are reading emails, we are not fully listening to the person on the telephone. Perhaps, there is really no such thing as “multi-tasking.”

Concentration, from the framework of “Office Zen” is a reminder to live and work a life of practice. Stay focused. Keep coming back to your breath and body, and to trusting your clear, quiet voice. Open and trust your heart.

- Pay attention to your feelings, thoughts and emotions.
- Focus your attention on what is right in front of you.
- Widen your focus to include your surroundings.
- Notice that everything changes. Your time on this Earth is limited.
- Notice that everything exists in relation to everything else: paper comes from wood, which comes from trees, which depends on water, sunlight and clouds.
- What do you depend on?
- What and who depends on you?
- See clearly that there is no fixed objective truth.
- Pay attention to your breath.
- Pay attention to your body, speech and mind.

Right Speech

Business practice, history and teachings also filled with stories. Zen practice, history and teachings are filled with stories. A question that often arises in Zen stories, when two people meet is, “Where are you from?” These being Zen stories, these are not just innocent words, asking where you live, or where you just were. Perhaps there is a deeper meaning? If someone is fully present, fully alive, looks you in the eyes and asks, “Where are you from?”, what can you say? What is the truth? Who are you, and what are you, right now, right here? Where do you come from???

The same is true in our work lives. In our lives in business, people often ask – What do you do?; as though there is an easy, rational answer to this question, an answer that defines who you are. When someone asks you what you do, what would be a real answer, a truthful answer, something you and the person asking might remember?

In a famous Zen dialogue the emperor of China asks a renowned Zen teacher, “What is the highest meaning of the truth of Zen?” The teacher answers, “Empty, without holiness.” The emperor goes on to ask, “Who is facing me?” The teacher replies, “I don’t know.”

- Notice how you speak to others and how others speak to you. Just notice.
- Really notice.
- Try speaking directly and openly. Take risks with your words by speaking from your heart.
- Watch how your words touch people and affect people; how other’s words affect you.
- Experiment with beginning your sentences with the words, – “I want,” “I need,” and “I feel.” Make statements instead of asking questions.
- Speak the truth. Don’t tell lies. Don’t hide information. Don’t exaggerate. Don’t understate or overstate the truth. Speak the truth.
- Experiment with openly giving praise and support. Acknowledge what others do well.

See Everyone as Enlightened

Many years ago, my mother was chosen as a finalist in the New Jersey State Lottery, for a \$1 million prize. She and my father were invited to a baseball game at Shea Stadium in New York, along with the twenty other finalists, where the winning numbers were to be picked before the start of the game. They began by announcing the winners of \$5,000. My mother's number was not chosen. Then they announced the winners of \$10,000. My mother's number was picked. She was so thrilled she could not contain herself.

My father, on the other hand, turned to her and said, "We will always be losers." My mother knew, that no matter what, we are all complete, just as we are. This money was just extra, an unexpected gift. My father thought, mistakenly, that something was lacking. Even when he received a great gift, still, something was lacking.

- What do you think is lacking from your work, from your life? Look closely. Is anything really lacking?
- Experiment with seeing each person you meet as an enlightened, fully awakened person, with no judgments, no comparisons, nothing missing. Each person is perfect, just as they are:
- Image that an announcement has been made that a group of Tibetan monks are coming into your office to choose the next incarnation of the Dalai Lama – who could it be? Look at each person in your office and imagine that they were chosen.
- Then, imagine that you were the one chosen.
- Now, get back to work.

Compassion At Work

The full moon ceremony, performed each month at most Zen practice centers is one of the oldest spiritual rituals, dating back long before the time of the historical Buddha. Part of this ceremony is everyone, together, chanting the lines:

“All my ancient twisted karma,
from beginningless greed, hate and delusion
I now fully avow.”

Compassion is recognizing and accepting that we each have “ancient twisted karma.” This is true, since we were all raised by human beings, who themselves were raised by human beings. There are so many forms of difficulty, problems and suffering in our lifetimes, our parent’s lifetime’s and back and back – all, right here, right now, in us, affecting us, as well as strengthening and empowering, and connecting us.

We all bring our ancient twisted karma to work. We are all human beings with strengths and weaknesses. Our bodies and minds contain immeasurable suffering, as well as immeasurable possibilities.

- Look around your office and notice the fullness and complexity of each person’s life – everyone has stories and experiences to tell about parents, family, difficulties, pain and worries.
- Everyone in your office wants to be happy and to feel satisfied.

- Everyone in your office feels that something is missing, feels the same fear and anxiety that you feel: You and everyone at work have much in common.
- Imagine the people in your office as they might have been as children: playful, happy, innocent, as well as needy, frightened and vulnerable.
- Imagine the people in your office as growing very old and needing the help of others.
- Allow yourself to feel how deeply you are connected to everyone.

The Practice of Joy

Before starting my work day I used to drive my children to school. I remember a conversation from many years ago with my daughter, when she was 10 years old, that continues to stand out for me. We were coming home from school, riding in the car, when she announced that when she was older and had moved out of the house, she planned to live nearby so she could visit her mother and me on Sundays. I became a little teary hearing this as I imagined my baby moving out of the house. At the same time, I was filled with joy at the idea that she wanted to live nearby so she could visit.

A few minutes later, I asked her about her day. “Tell me something funny or unusual that happened during the day, something that made you laugh”, I said. She was silent. She thought for a while, and then she said to me, “Daddy, I laugh all day long!”

- When you answer the phone at work, endeavor to make the person on the other end smile. Say something light, even silly, just by being friendly, by being yourself. It's okay to have fun at work.
- Allow yourself at work to completely feel the joy of others. Smile when they smile; laugh when they laugh; celebrate others happiness and successes.
- At the beginning of a meeting, suggest that each person say their favorite Sunday afternoon activity, or name the person who was most inspirational or influential in their life, or speak about a time when they were truly happy and content.
- Put flowers on your desk. Smile.
- What is it that brings you happiness? Is it watching things grow or solving puzzles; is it connecting people or connecting ideas; is it hammering nails or drawing up plans. Whatever it is that makes you happy, do more of it.
- Aim for happiness; settle for satisfaction. Try moving towards doing more of what makes you happy.
- Imagine a world of everyone doing what makes them happy.

Office Altar (a sacred space, both ordinary and not ordinary)

Altars are everywhere in the natural world. Look at a tree or a rock. Look at the sky and clouds. Look carefully at a puddle.

Look at your hands.

Put your hand in front of your nose, and feel your breath... Altars, everywhere.

- Keep a stone on your desk that comes from a place that is special to you.
- Create a place in your workspace that is your altar – a small sacred space that helps remind you to be mindful, to be your full self.
- Keep a picture on or near your desk of a mountain, or river or lake; or a picture of someone you deeply admire.
- Keep a small Buddha, or special shell or beads on your desk or in a drawer.

Radical Honesty

Telling the truth at work is much more difficult than it might appear on the surface. How do you tell someone that works for you that you are dissatisfied with the work they handed in, in a way that is both constructive, inviting and real? How do we tell your boss that you feel hurt by the way he or she speaks with you or by the way he or she speaks with others? How do you tell your boss that you think the company is making some questionable decisions and taking a direction that you see as unhealthy? How do you tell your co-workers that it drives you crazy when they gossip or make personal phone calls?

There are no easy answers to these questions about truth. Tell it or not, the truth is always in us, so, sit, think, plan, and with compassion, skill and kindness, tell the truth. And, be prepared, and completely open to hear, other truths.

- Tell the truth, just as you see it. Tell your truth.
- Don't tell lies. What about withholding thoughts or feelings?

- Notice how often the truth is difficult.
- Be kind.
- It's ok to feel uncomfortable. Move towards what is difficult. Move towards vulnerability and openness.
- Tell the truth.

The Seven Factors of Awakening

- 1) Mindfulness: pay close attention, to your body, mind, feelings and emotions; to your work, and the people your work with.
- 2) Curiosity: Approach your work and the people around you with an open and fresh perspective. Inquire. Watch. Listen, without pre-judging.
- 3) Diligence: Stay with your emotions, your feelings and thoughts. Continue to practice, despite all the difficulties and disappointments. Complete tasks. Follow through.
- 4) Joy: When you are not worrying about the past or worrying about the future, notice how joy arises at work.
- 5) Ease: Relax into your work. One task after another; one conversation, one meeting. Be present, aware and relaxed.
- 6) Meditation: Sit quietly each morning before going to work. Just be with your body and breath.
- 7) Letting go: Drop all expectations. Be yourself. Be mindful, curious, diligent, joyful, and relaxed; LET GO!

These seven practices can be used as antidotes:

Mindfulness can be an antidote to carelessness.

Curiosity can be an antidote to being closed, certain or stuck.

Diligence can be an antidote to sluggishness or laziness.

Joy can be an antidote to being grumpy or depressed.

Ease can be an antidote to anxiety or stress.

Meditation can be an antidote to believing your stories.

Letting go can be an antidote to holding on, being tight, or being stuck.

Five Minutes of Mindfulness

Time yourself for five minutes – while sitting at your desk, or a quiet place, take a deep breath.

Feel your breath move completely through your body: chest, stomach, back, legs, feet, arms and hands.

Breathe in fully. Breathe out fully.

Sit up straight. Push your hips slightly forward and pull your shoulders slightly back. Don't lean against the back of your chair.

Feel the energy in your back and stomach.

Put your feet flat on the floor.

When five minutes is over, go back to work.

Take this experience of mindfulness into everything you do.

Office Walking Meditation

Walking meditation was an important and useful part of my day as CEO of Brush Dance. My connection with my work neighborhood and my connection with myself were altered by walking around the commercial neighborhood, where our offices and warehouse were located. Just a few minutes, in a new environment, paying attention with a different quality, altered my day and opened up new possibilities. Walking slowly, breathing, being aware of my body. This small change of pace and scenery allowed me to approach business issues and problems with a fresh perspective.

- Take a break and go outside by yourself.
- Walk slowly, with your back straight and head up. Stay relaxed and feel the energy in your spine. Relax your shoulders, arms and hand.
- Pay attention to your breathing. Notice your inhalation; notice your exhalation.
- Listen, look. Hear the sounds around you; really look at things as though seeing them for the first time.
- Smile.
- With each step, breathe in.
- With each step, breathe out.

Answering the Phone Meditation

Our habits and patterns are often in our bodies. To change our patterns, the first step is to notice them. Have you ever had the experience of while driving a rented a car, reaching down for the gear shift where it is in your regular car? Then, reaching down in the wrong place, again and again, even when you know it is not where it is in your own car.

Our feelings, emotions and habits are like this. We react, not so much to the situation, but to our own patterns and perceptions, that may not be appropriate or useful for the actual situation. Since our patterns are embedded in our bodies they can be difficult to change. Simple things, like breathing when you answer the phone, are ways to alter our routine behaviors.

- When your phone or intercom rings, take a breath before answering.
- Stop. Relax. Breathe.
- Anyone can wait for one breath.
- Imagine that the person calling you is also practicing phone-calling meditation, and is breathing with you.

Right now my life

Is one learning experience after another.

By the end of the week

I should be a genius.

Creativity and Innovation

Brush Dance began as a mail order catalog, selling wrapping paper and a few greeting cards made from recycled paper. In our first year of business we were pleased with the response we received from our first catalog mailing to individuals. By mid-December our catalog sales were complete and we still had significant amounts of recycled wrapping paper on hand. We began experimenting by selling our products at Christmas fairs throughout Marin County. We didn't really sell enough wrapping paper at these fairs to make this a worthwhile endeavor.

At a small, homey fair in Mill Valley we were assigned a booth just down the aisle from an artist making handmade greeting cards, combining watercolor images and Sumi brush calligraphy. We were delighted to meet artist Renee Locks. After the fair we went to Renee's home. Our eyes opened wide when we saw her living room and hallways filled with hundreds and hundreds of handmade cards. We began our collaboration with Renee, which was also a series of experiments. The cards, journals, calendars and magnets we developed with Renee put Brush Dance on the map.

- Experiment, muddle, play.
- Move forward, sideways and backwards – learn, listen, watch.
- Let your vision and passion pull you.
- Ask yourself: What's next, what's next...
- Learn from successes; learn from failures.
- Ask: What's needed; what's needed
- Move towards what is uncomfortable
- Stretch yourself, while staying centered and calm

Making Your Office Your "Meditation Hall"

In Zen practice centers there are altars outside of every bathroom. Before you enter the bathroom, you stop and bow to the altar. When leaving the bathroom, you stop and bow to the altar. Altars and bowing are nothing special, just a stone and some flowers; just putting your hands together and bending slightly forward.

Small reminders in our daily lives can be transforming. Going to the bathroom, after bowing to an altar, is no longer just going to the bathroom. It's not just something to get out of the way, something we do to get to the next thing. It is the next thing!

When you go to the bathroom at work, there probably won't be an altar at the bathroom entranceway. Use your imagination. Before walking in the door, stop, breath and notice that you are entering the bathroom.

In a Zen meditation hall, you generally don't enter the door through the middle – you walk on either the left or right side. When entering on the left side, you step over the threshold of the doorway with your left foot. When entering on the right side, you step over the threshold of the doorway with your right foot. This is both a practice in humility and a mindfulness practice.

- When you arrive at work, walk through the right side of the door, stepping over the threshold of the doorway with your right foot. As you do this, you make a statement that for this day your office will be a place for you to practice mindfulness.
- Make up other mindfulness practices – try taking a deep breath when your cell phone rings or when you check email.
- At the beginning of a meeting, stop, breathe and listen before the meeting begins.

- If you forget, not to worry. Next time...

Life is Short

Katagiri-Roshi was a Zen teacher who led a group for many years in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He was known for his energy, directness, wisdom and warm smile. Though a sizable and committed group had been growing around him for many years, financial security and fundraising never seemed to be one of the group's strengths.

The leaders of the group suggested that they organize a special fundraising day. The community invited a variety of potential donors to attend a special Sunday event. There was much excitement in preparing for this day – cleaning the grounds and cooking and baking a variety of foods and treats for guests.

On that Sunday morning Katagiri dressed in his special robes. He arrived to meet the guests and to give a short talk. He sat on his cushions and looked around the room at his students and invited guests. He began by saying, “You are all going to die.”

As you might imagine, this fundraising event was not particularly successful, despite the fact that Katagiri was merely making a statement of truth, and of fact. We are all going to die. This fact, this truth is not popular. It can, however, influence, inform, and motivate you in your business and your life. We are all going to die. Life is short.

- Life is short, is not just a cute, quaint saying.
- Acknowledge that you won't always be working at your company.
- Look around your office, and acknowledge that everyone you work with will die; some will grow old; others will not.

- Acknowledge that your company will not exist someday.
- Write down what you really want from this job – for the next month, for the next year.
- Write down what you really want to accomplish before leaving your job.
- Write down what you want to accomplish during this short lifetime.

You Are OK Just As You Are

For one day at work, (or one hour, one minute) don't judge yourself. For one day, realize that you are lacking nothing, that you have everything you need to be happy and complete. You are doing exactly the work, in this place, with these people that you were meant to do.

There is a wonderful poem by the 11th century Sufi poet and mystic, Hafiz, where he says:

For one moment each day

Stop torturing yourself

With thoughts of – I have great things to accomplish...

- Let yourself feel that you are okay just as you are.
- There is nothing lacking.
- You don't need more money.
- You don't need to be more intelligent or better looking, live in a different place or have a better job.

- Everything is ok.
- You are perfect, just as you are.
- No one has the answers. No one has your experience. So, relax. Breathe. Smile.
- You are ok, just as you are.
- For one moment, each day at work, try not torturing yourself with thoughts of what is lacking, what is wrong, or what needs to be accomplished.

Blessed are the flexible,
For we shall not be bent
Out of Shape

One Minute Meditation

Just stop, for one minute.

Notice how long one minute is. Just be here in this moment.

Take a deep breath in, a deep breath out.

Look around, as if for the first time.

Listen, as if with new ears.

See with new eyes.

Take another breath.

Pull your shoulders back gently.

Let your whole body relax, feeling how you are completely supported by your chair and by the floor.

Feel how the Earth completely, effortlessly supports you.

Consult Your “Board of Advisors”

I have had so many useful lunches during these past several months that I’ve been trying to figure out how to turn this activity into a business. Nearly everyone, from CEO’s to sales executives, lawyers and warehouse clerks, stop each day for lunch (well, maybe not lawyers...). Lunch meetings can provide a way to build your existing business, gain new perspectives, explore work in areas that you are unfamiliar with, or just for pure enjoyment. These lunches can also be a way to build your network, or establish an informal Board of Advisors.

Have lunch with a friend. Let your friend know what interests you and ask if he/she knows someone who works in an area you want to explore or connect. Then, offer to take that person to lunch. At the end of the lunch, if there was a good connection, ask that person if they can refer other people for you to speak with or meet. At these lunches, ask, listen, and learn. It is an inexpensive way to get a fabulous education, and a way to develop relationships.

Everyone at work needs a Board of Advisors – either real, imaginary or both.

These are people that you can get advice and feedback from about important issues at work. Consult your Board about how to effectively work with your boss, or how to work with those you supervise, to get help with marketing or operational issues, or about getting help with the direction of your company, or help with the direction of your life.

- Talk with someone you respect in the business world about your business.
- Build your network of associates, of contacts, of support.
- Move outside of your comfort zone.
- Take them to lunch. Put them on your “Board.”
- Talk with people that will challenge and question you about your work.
- Use your Board to gather data – these are not decision makers, they are advisors.
- Consult. Listen. Process. Act.

Read a Poem at Work

Poems are like yoga for our minds. The more we read poetry, the more flexible our minds can become. Some poems may be too difficult, too much of a “stretch” for our minds. Some may be too easy and do not challenge us enough. Experiment, play, be curious to find how words make you feel. See and experience yourself and the world, a little differently.

- What, poetry at work?!
- Yes, bring in one of your favorite poems.
- Try starting each Monday with a poem for the week that sets the tone for what you want the week to look like.
- Read, or suggest starting staff or department meets with a poem.

From Rumi:

“Don’t be satisfied with stories, with how
others have done things. Unfold
your own myth, simply and directly,
Let yourself open to your truth.

Start on the path. Your legs may get heavy and tired. Then comes a moment of feeling the wings you have grown, lifting you gently.”

When Hot Be Hot; When Cold Be Cold

A student asked a great Zen teacher, “Where is there a place where there is neither hot nor cold?” The teacher responded, “When hot, be thoroughly hot. When cold, be thoroughly cold.”

At work, be completely at work.

When at a meeting, be completely at a meeting.

When at the copy machine, be completely at the copy machine.

When feeling uncomfortable, feel completely uncomfortable

When happy, be completely happy.

Practicing mindfulness and achieving a sense of ease can be easy when there is little pressure and not a lot to accomplish. In the world of work, this is rarely the case. Being thoroughly hot or thoroughly cold does not mean working without intensity, passion and focus. It requires flexibility and presence, a sense of humor, being completely with what you are doing and simultaneously having a sense of perspective.

- While at work, be completely at work.
- When uncomfortable, be uncomfortable.
- When sad, be sad.
- When happy and satisfied, be happy and satisfied.
- When questioning and inquiring, question and inquire.
- When breathing, breathe.

Appreciate Your “Mistakes”

“Show me the person who never makes a mistake and I’ll show you the person who never makes anything.”

At work, we are often stretched to do things that are new and challenging – learning new computer programs, developing new sales programs, or training new employees. If we were afraid of falling, we would never have learned to ride a bicycle. Learning to play the piano, to dance, to sing, to hammer nails... means making mistake upon mistake. Learning anything new is such a great lesson in humility, in taking risks, and in trust. What is it we think we are doing in work? Are we learning, experimenting, growing and taking risks?

- Notice when you make a “mistake” – said the wrong thing, keyed in the wrong letter or number, or made a decision or choice that did not work out as planned.
- Notice, relax, breathe. What do you feel? What don’t you feel? What is there to learn?
- Notice that you are not the mistake.
- Mistake, mistake, mistake. Learn, learn, learn.
- The life of a Zen teacher is often described as “one mistake following another.”

Every Day is a Good Day

Every day is a good day is a famous Zen expression that doesn’t mean that every day is a good day. (Did I say Zen was simple?) It means that every day is beyond good and bad, every day is both ordinary and miraculous, even a good or bad day.

The beauty and power of our lives at work is the way our activities underscore and integrate the ordinary and the mystical; teaching, writing, programming computers, sweeping, gardening, cleaning—all are both ordinary and mystical. Rituals, birth and death are ordinary and mystical. What would a day of appreciation look like?

- Every day is an opportunity to learn about yourself, to do good work, to accomplish a lot, to accomplish nothing, to help others.
- Every day is an opportunity to practice mindfulness.
- Every day is a day filled with birth and death, beginnings and endings.
- Every day is a day of living on the edge.
- Every day is another chance to open your heart.
- Every day is an amazing miracle.
- And every day is as ordinary as the next phone call, the next meeting.

Discovering Your Real Work

“Your work is to discover your work, and then with all your heart to give yourself to it.”

- Buddha

So often, we want to be doing something other than what we are doing. This is true for everyone, not just you... If my work were just different... if only I had more... someday I will... If I just had.... If I could only accomplish...

What if you drop the “what ifs” and “if only” and completely accept just what you have and just be where you are. It takes tremendous trust, strength and fearlessness to realize that from this acceptance, what to do next will emerge...

- For just one moment each day, just let go of achieving anything special.
- Completely accept doing what you are doing.
- Completely accept yourself.
- Your work is to discover.
- Your work is to be yourself.
- Your work is to be present.
- Your work is to help others.
- Your work is to be happy.
- Your work is to be satisfied.
- Your work is to discover your work

We have come into this exquisite world

To experience ever and ever

More deeply

Our divine

Courage

Freedom

And light

Hafiz

Look Inward for What's Most True and Important.

My 16 year-old daughter recently returned from spending five weeks in Ghana, Africa where she was living with a native family and doing volunteer work in an orphanage. One of the first things she told me about her experience was that though people in Ghana lack the kind of material things we see in the United States— housing, cars, computers and other items, they have something that is rare in the U.S. – they have time, and they express a level of care for each other that has depth and power. There is no such thing as being late, since everyone understands the importance and length of time it takes to say “hello” and “goodbye.”

Though we may not have this kind of flexibility at work, the point is that at each moment we do have a choice about being relaxed or being tense, about struggling or about letting go.

- You can find your truth at your desk,
- What is your truth talking on the phone?
- What is your truth while checking email?
- What is your truth while at a meeting?
- What is your truth while negotiating?
- Is there any other place than where you are?
- Be with your breathing.
- Be with your body.
- Trust what your heart already knows.

Wash Your Bowls!

“Everyday mind is the way.”

- Zen teacher Nansen

A monk said to the teacher Joshu, “I have just entered this monastery. Please teach me.”

Joshu responded, “Have you eaten breakfast?”

The monk replied, “Yes, I have.”

Joshu said, “Wash your bowl.”

When we don’t see our work as a “practice place” as a learning environment, as a place to grow, change and transform, we are like the monk in the story, not noticing that the real teaching, is right there, right in front of our noses, imbedded in the simplest of our activities.

At work, though we don’t have bowls to wash, our daily activity is filled with the equivalent of bowl washing – straighten out your desk; take care of your relationships; clean up your email in-box, be prepared for meetings,...

As one of my accountant mentors used to say, “Take care of the dollars, and the ten thousands of dollars will take care of themselves.”

- Spiritual practice at work, is nothing other than our everyday mind.
- Our work is nothing special, nothing to achieve.
- Just being our full selves at work, moment after moment.
- Appreciate the effort. Appreciate the path.
- Our work is never perfect, never complete, never incomplete.
- There are no neat “packages” in the garden, nor in the workplace.
- Appreciate the changes, the process, the path.

It’s impossible

My good friend and Zen teacher Norman Fischer once began a lecture by saying, “I’ve been practicing Zen and sitting meditation for more than 25 years. I’m not sure it has made any difference in my life.”

Some people may find these words discouraging. I find them inspiring. What could be more challenging and more rewarding than attempting the impossible. It’s impossible, and I will do it anyhow! There is nothing to gain, nothing to achieve. Sign me up!

Our work lives, when we look closely are like this. There is no time ending point, no completion, no graduation. How can we find satisfaction and comfort and the realization that the comfort, satisfaction and success we are seeking is impossible to achieve.

- Opening your heart at work? Impossible!
- Our lives are messy, difficult and unpredictable.
- Give up the idea of growth, improvement, of getting somewhere different.
- Let go.
- Being calm, happy, centered; practicing Zen at work – all are impossible! So relax! Give up. Forget it. Throw your arms in the air and let out a huge sigh of relief. Perhaps even a huge laugh!
- Now, get back to work!

Have patience

With everything unresolved
In your heart.
And try to love
The questions
Themselves.

Rilke

Generosity

There is a famous Zen dialogue in which the student says, “I’m feeling discouraged. What should I do?” The teacher responds by saying, “Encourage others.”

When you are feeling discouraged in your work; help others. Our work provided countless opportunities to help others through our generosity.

- Practice being generous with your spirit.
- Be generous with your time.
- Be generous with your presence, the most precious gift you have to offer.
- Be happy. Give yourself over to helping others. Be alert and responsive.
- Be generous without expecting anything in return.
- Be generous anonymously (patting yourself on the back or having expectations is not being generous).

Equanimity At Work

“The basic difference between an ordinary person and a warrior is that the warrior takes everything as a challenge whereas the ordinary person takes everything as a blessing or a curse.” Carlos Castenada quoting Don Juan

When Brush Dance first started producing writing journals I would order the paper for the fronts, backs and inside pages from one vender and have these pieces sent to three different vendors for printing and processing. Then, each of these vendors would send their portions to a bindery. Once bound, the bindery would send the journals to an assembler to glue cards on the covers, before the finished product arrived in our warehouse. Sometimes I would put this all into motion with just a few phone calls and faxes.

I am aware of how many things can go wrong in business, that I’m sometimes amazed that anything happens the way it is intended. Occasionally journals would arrive with upside down covers or some missing pages. I often felt lucky that we never had any major issues. I often heard tales of companies that nearly went out of business when large batches of journals arrived with mistakes that would take lots of time and money to repair.

- Things will go wrong at work. Sometimes things will go right.
- Practice equanimity by seeing each event at work as a challenge.
- Celebrate and learn from your successes; mourn and learn from your failures
- Stay focused on meeting each person, each situation.
- Learn, grow, stretch with each meeting, each success and each failure.

The Practice of Patience

Our work and our businesses can be great teachers of patience. Have you noticed that everything takes much longer than you might think or hope? When I left Brush Dance I had the idea that I would officially launch a coaching and consulting practice within six to eight weeks. This seemed like plenty of time to write a business plan, have a logo designed, print some stationery and business cards, and build a web site. I was amazed how many things went wrong and took longer than I anticipated. The process of having letterhead printed, took nearly three weeks, due to a series of miscommunications, and I was in the printing world for 15 years.

- Accept that your life at work will be difficult, boring, challenging. What did you expect?
- When anger arises, breathe. When frustration or anxiety arise, breathe. Notice the thoughts and feelings and emotions. Let them come and let them go.
- Not having fun? Not feeling satisfied? Not feeling calm? Not even close? Be patient with yourself. Our lives are like a wave, one moment following the next.
- Moment, moment, moment.....
- “One moment of patience can prevent one hundred years of regret.”

Only those who risk
Going too far
Can possibly find out
How far one can go.

Your Life is Out of Balance – Excellent!

At work, everything is constantly changing. There is always a problem to fix, a process to improve, a customer relationship to mend. Everything often feels and looks out of balance. There is always a better way to meet the needs of our customers, a better way to take care of our boss or our employees. At the same time, everything is just as it should be. How could it be otherwise?

A basic assumption of Zen practice is that balance arises by acknowledging that everything is out of balance. Our bodies, and minds and hearts are completely beyond labels and concepts of being in balance, or being out of balance. A flash of lightning in the dark, night sky – balanced or not?

- Take care of your life. Appreciate your time at work.
- Take care of yourself. Appreciate your time alone.
- Take care of your family. Open your heart. Appreciate being with others.
- Find nourishment and satisfaction from your work.
- Give to others. Receive generously.
- Balance inner and outer.
- It is your time, your life.

Turn Your Life Upside Down

So often our work lives are turned upside down by unexpected and difficult events: companies merge, our bosses or key employees leave, we lose our job from downsizing or from being terminated for not meeting someone's expectations of us. Of course these events are painful, surprising and can be discouraging. At the same time, these changes provide important lessons, opportunities and openings.

Although Tom Hanks says in the movie, *A League of Their Own*, “There’s no crying in baseball”, no one has ever said there is no crying in business...

- See that you and the world and your work are not as you think (because they are not!)
- You are not separate from others.
- Forget your beliefs about time.
- Just for a second, forget about the trappings, the clothes, the environment, the time and day. Forget the titles, the deadlines, the things to be achieved. Feel your energy pulsing through you. Feel the miracle of being alive. You are more than your ideas.
- Lead a quiet, one-person revolution by seeing and experiencing the truth of your ordinary, immense life – beyond words, labels and ideas. Miraculous!
- Turn your world upside down.

Wide Pasture

In the book *Zen Mind Beginner’s Mind*, Suzuki Roshi suggests that the best way to control your sheep or cow is to give it a wide pasture. At work, the best way to control those we work with is to give them a wide pasture. The best way to control ourselves is to give ourselves a wide pasture. Of course, this requires that we be spacious and disciplined, that we be rigorous and generous, and that we hold ourselves and other accountable, with a deep, wide mind.

- Be gentle, and fierce.

- Be a beginner, and an expert.
- Be humble, and confident.
- Surrender, and gain control.
- Be flexible, and tenacious.
- Be yielding, and strong.
- Let go, and be fully present
- Get out of your own way, and there you are!

Cultivate Your Way Seeking Mind

When I was a young boy, growing up in central New Jersey, I used to collect cards that had humorous expressions. One of my favorite cards said, “I love work. I can sit and watch it for hours.”

I have a “love/hate” relationship with the practice of writing. (Yes, sometimes I think that since I am writing, perhaps I am a writer, and that this is my work!) I don’t write for pleasure. And I don’t write for financial gain. The activity of writing seems to access a different part of me than either thinking or speaking. I am surprised by what arises when engaged in writing. I am drawn, again and again, to this element of surprise, and the pull toward approaching unknown territories.

Our “way seeking mind” is like this. In Zen practice there is an expression, “it’s like reaching for your pillow in the middle of the night.” We are asleep; it is dark, and yet

we reach, and usually find, our pillow... We learn the most when we just reach, not knowing what we will find.

The world of work is like this. Why are we doing the work we are doing? What is the purpose of our life? Why are we here on this planet?

Remember when you first felt that something was missing in your life and from your work; something big and important. You may have felt or been feeling that something is not quite settled, quite right at work. Remember, and bring up the feeling of discomfort.

- Face and embrace these difficult thoughts and feelings.
- Ask yourself, where do these feelings come from? What is missing from my work? What do I really want? Really!
- Remember when you first felt the possibility of being complete, joyous, satisfied, nothing needed, nothing missing, nothing to add or do. Trust these feelings: open, explore.
- Hold both images in your mind, body and heart, at work and at home.

Envision Your Perfect Day; Then Let It Go...

When you awaken in the morning, with your first breath of the day, be open to curiosity, adventure, not knowing what the day will bring. When going to bed each night, note what went well, what didn't go well, what you learned from each.

At the beginning of each work day, begin with a sense of curiosity and adventure, not knowing what the day will bring. At the end of each work day, note what went well, what didn't go well, and what you learned from each.

Just imagine.

What would you really like to be doing today? What kind of work activity?

Where would you be? Who would you be with?

What skills would you be utilizing?

Just imagine, dream, ponder.

Who would you be serving?

What need would you be meeting?

Who would be serving you?

Let the thoughts and ideas come...

And let them go...

Breathe...

- Completely accept what you are doing.
- Let yourself dream about and envision what you are most deeply called to do.
- Whatever you is a sacred, spiritual practice.

Work is a Prayer

Work is Also a Stink

Therefore Stink is a Prayer

Aldous Huxley

The Practice of Enthusiastic Effort

Connecting with and helping others brings me lots of energy. For me this can take the form of helping someone carry boxes, being a mentor in business, leading a product development team, being a coach, or facilitating a meeting. I have always been drawn to connecting people and solving problems. When I can make a difference to someone I can feel my energy expand. The greatest gift we can give someone is our presence.

- Feel how much energy you have. Relax, just feel it.
- Put your energy to work, in your conversations, in your meetings, in your thinking and planning.
- Want others to have more enthusiasm? You go first!
- Notice how your enthusiasm affects others. Notice how it affects you.
- Notice what kinds of activities drain your energy, and what kinds of activities spark your energy.

Let Your Dragon Out

There is a wonderful story from Zen literature about a teacher in China who loved dragons. He spent his days creating beautiful clay dragons and decorating them with ornate colors. One day, the local dragon became quite curious about this person, his admirer, and decided to pay him a visit. When the dragon appeared, this “lover of dragons” was terrified and ran away.

Think of a conversation you need to have with someone at work, a conversation that reveals what you really think and feel, a conversation that will help someone and uncover your own truth. Imagine the outcome of this conversation. Carefully prepare what you want to say. Keep it short and direct. Then listen, be present, be yourself.

- Feel your dragon energy, the part of you that is bold, fearless and unstoppable.
- Be prepared to be surprised.
- Let your dragon energy and your gentle energy meet each other, dance, and guide you.
- Don't be afraid of the dragon. Be the dragon.

Right Livelihood

Do good. Avoid Harm. Help Others. What could be simpler?

All of our work is on three different levels:

Personal – How does what we do affect us? Are we taking care of our bodies and minds or are we harming ourselves?

Local/Community – How do we treat those we work with? Are we creating happiness and calm, or sadness and stress? How do we express our care, generosity and compassion?

The world – How does our work fit with the larger world community? What impact, subtle and not subtle does our work, our company have?

- In what way does your work help you, help others or help our environment?
- In what way does your work harm yourself, harm others or harm our environment?

- What concrete changes could you make to do more good and less harm?
- What small changes could you make, today?
- What larger, more long-term changes might be possible?

Your Deepest Intentions

We all need to take care of ourselves and our families. This is a primary motivation for our work. We need to put food on the table and a place to live. We may need lots of other things as well, like insurance and college tuition. We may feel we are struggling, just to take care of the basics.

Let yourself imagine living a larger life, a life of service, a life that touches others outside of your comfort zone, outside of your regular patterns. Then, experiment, volunteer, or write. Visit your local church, your local shelter or nursing home. Explore. Find fearlessness, in the midst of fear. Be a warrior, in the midst of paying the bills.

- Why are you here on the planet? What is your deepest purpose, your deepest intention?
- In what ways are you not really “showing up”, not being yourself, not being authentic.
- Try on making some commitments to yourself; simple things like showing up, being yourself and being authentic.
- Trust your instincts; trust your questions, trust your doubts.

Real Conversations

Read these three books, which are really about the lifelong work of uncovering and expressing our feelings, all filled with lessons that can be applied to our work lives: *Difficult Conversations*; *Non-violent Communication*; and, *Fierce Conversations*. Read them slowly, carefully. Try practicing with treating your feelings, and others feelings with curiosity, with care and with complete acceptance.

- While at work, ask yourself: What am I really feeling?
- Then ask again: What is behind that feeling?
- Then ask again: And what is behind that feeling?
- Go deep; let yourself feel, explore, uncover and unlock whatever is being held or protected.

Appreciate The Weeds In Your Mind

There is a famous Zen “koan” or story that says, “What is Buddha, or what is a fully awakened being?” The answer to the questions is, “Ordinary mind is Buddha.”

How could this be? How can “ordinary mind” be the same as Buddha, or the same as an awakened mind? What if this is it; this very mind, imperfections and all. Perfect!

A not famous koan, that I am creating now says, “What is being fully awake at work?”
The answer to this question is, “Appreciate each ordinary moment.”

- Doubts, anger, impatience, boredom, grasping – these are all weeds in your mind.
- These are part of our landscape; at home, at work, with others.
- Watch them; study them, appreciate them.
- Use these weeds as fertilizer for building trust, confidence, joy and understanding.
- Appreciate your imperfections. Appreciate others imperfections.
- Move towards what is uncomfortable.
- Trust and use whatever presents itself.

The Practice Of Wisdom

“Even though it is midnight, dawn is here; even though dawn comes, it is nighttime” is a famous expression by the Japanese 6th century Zen monk and scholar . Dogen spent many years studying and practicing in China, and is credited with bringing Zen to Japan.

Dogen is pointing out that we have become attached to words and concepts and often lose sight of our wondrous, magical, incomprehensible world and human existence. What happens when we put aside names and labels? What happens when we are fully present, fully ourselves at work?

- See and feel that your heart is not separate from the hearts of others, even at work.
- Your feeling of separateness from other people is true and it is an illusion.
Usually we only experience and believe our own individuality.

- Wisdom is knowing and experiencing both that we are separate and that we are not separate.
- You and your body, are not two and not one.
- You and your mind, are not two and not one.
- Trust your instincts.
- Wisdom is knowing what to do next.

Imagine That You Have Died ...

The fact that everything changes, that everything is in flux can be a great teacher. It is our human nature to resist change, to deny that our lives are short, and therefore precious. Not accepting the truth of change causes much suffering and allows us to take our lives for granted.

Imagine that you died some time ago. You are no longer alive. Your life is over. Picture your body, after you have died.

Suddenly, you are alive.

You are back.

Here you are at work.

You have no idea how long you will be here.

Now what?

What do you say?

What do you do?

What's important?

What's not important?

“Awake , awake. Don't waste time!”

Success Beyond Success

I have learned so much from “failure.” In high school when I tried out and didn't make the baseball team, I decided to take up wrestling. It changed my life. I was very disappointed when I didn't get accepted to Stanford's M.B.A. program. I then spent three fruitful years in New York City, as an M.B.A. student at NYU. At Brush Dance, we didn't have the capital needed for a mail order catalog, so, we grew slowly and steadily as a wholesale company.

I could write a book about my business failures. Several books...

- You are perfect, just as you are.
- Your life and your situation are just as they are meant to be
- Change is inevitable.
- Being true to yourself is success
- Failing is success.
- Learn and grow from what doesn't work out.
- Making your best effort is success.

- Helping others is success.
- Healing is success.
- Being yourself is SUCCESS
- One day's worth of failures could be turned into a book. Lesson after lesson.
- Success Beyond Success

Driving To Work Meditation

Driving to and from work provides a great opportunity to practice Zen. When you get into your car, be aware of your breathing and your body, just as you were about to begin meditation. (The fact is, you are entering a realm of life and death).

Try practicing kindness, while driving to or from work. Let others go first. Drive in such a way that makes it easier and more convenient for others. Make eye contact when motioning for someone else to go first. Notice how this feels, how it affects you when you arrive at work, or when you arrive home.

- While driving, be aware of your body and your thoughts. Let your thoughts come and go.
- Focus on your driving: breath, steering wheel, movement, road, sky, other cars.
- Be kind and generous to others.
- Practice patience. Let others go first; help others.
- Think of driving as though all the cars are on the same team.
- Everyone's job is to make it easier for everyone else to get to where they are going.

Skillful Means

A student asked a great Zen teacher, "What should I do if I have nothing with me?"

The teacher answered, "Throw it away."

The student responded, "If I have nothing with me, what can I throw away?"

The teacher responded, “In that case, keep holding it.?”

Every situation we face at work is unique. In each situation, bring your full self. Be present. Show up. Bring your strength and your wisdom, your gentleness and your fierceness; in just the right mix!

- Be strong in a situation that calls for strength.
- Be wise in the situation that calls for wisdom.
- Be gentle in a situation that calls for gentleness.
- Be fierce in a situation that calls for fierceness.

Intelligent Simplicity

When I first came to San Francisco, in the early 1970’s I had a teacher who once said to me, “You have an intelligence for simplicity.” Though this seemed like a great complement, I had only a vague idea what it meant. I have been pondering and exploring this statement for more than 30 years. I know it is useful and important, in my work and in my life, and I still have little idea what it means...

- Keep your work area simple.
- Keep your work space clean and neat.
- Treat your workspace and yourself with dignity.
- Keep your activities simple: one thing at a time, fully present, aware, relaxed.
- Ask yourself difficult, intelligent questions.
- In what ways do you have and express an intelligence for simplicity?

You Go First

How many times have you wanted someone you work with to be friendlier or more open or more straightforward? How many times have you craved for clearer communication, more accountability or more inclusion, either from your boss or those you work with? Try exhibiting what it is you want. See how your actions change the world.

- Need more kindness, friendliness and compassion in your work and life? You go first.
- Want more joy, humor, lightheartedness at work? You go first.
- Want to be more appreciated at work? You go first.
- Need more real speech, real connection and real intimacy at work? You go first
- Want to be more challenged, respected and seen at work? You go first
- Whatever it is you want more of: You go first!

Control; No Control

During my tenure as CEO of Brush Dance, I was vividly aware of the immensity and complications of this event we call a business, of which I was “in charge.” I often asked artists for particular types of designs and was regularly surprised with what was submitted. (Sometimes pleasantly surprised, and sometimes not so pleasantly). In opening the daily mail, occasionally extraordinary pieces of artwork or proposals would arrive, unsolicited. Our well-developed and well-tested new product ideas were sometimes miserable failures and sometimes were successful beyond our wildest dreams.

- You are completely in control of your work life.
- You are not at all in control of your work life.
- Neither of these statements is true.
- You do not control your breathing, your heartbeat and the variety of amazing systems of your body.
- You are responsible for what you say and what you do.
- Pay attention. Pay close attention.
- Let go of control.
- You control your boat. Feel the power of the river.

The Power of Vow

The word “bodhisattva” has not quite taken hold in mainstream American culture, but I think it is close to doing so. The term means someone who vows to help all beings become fully awakened, before become fully awakened themselves. Bodhi means awakening and sattva is a person or being; an awakening being.

How can we each be bodhisattvas at work? What if we set our intention, our vow to help others, to help others awaken? How would this change our work landscape? How would this change you?

- Take yourself seriously.
- Take your life seriously.
- Vow to be your wise, authentic self.
- Vow to “take the high road”
- Vow to help others.
- Vow to be true to yourself.
- Vow to do good and to avoid doing harm.
- Vow to understand yourself and to understand others.
- Vow to learn all the lessons you need to learn, while at work.

Abandon All Hope

Have you ever had the experience in sports that the more you stop trying so hard, the better your performance? Sometimes, if I don’t bowl or play golf for a long period of time, I don’t expect to do well at all. During these times, I find that I often play my best.

At work, I find it useful to come to the office early on a Sunday morning. I use this time to think, wonder, and look around. I can sometimes see myself and my work through fresh eyes.

- Think you can practice Zen at work; Forget It!
- Want to do better, improve, suffer less: Impossible!
- Forget about being happier, better, smarter, wealthier.
- Forget about improvement, awakening, helping others.
- Give up wishing and dreaming, plotting and planning.
- Abandon All Hope
- And be FREE

Don't Be So Predictable

Changing our patterns and our behaviors is much more difficult than you might think.

Though my head is nearly shaved these days, I still occasionally reach for my comb, or I sometimes look in the mirror to see if my hair is a mess! I wonder, in what ways my emotional life is like this, filled with patterns and habits.

Try experimenting with changing some of the routines in your life. Drive to work using a different route. Experiment with how you walk, how you speak and how you see yourself and the world.

- Throw your history out the window.
- Change the way you respond.
- Smile instead of getting annoyed.
- Stand up for yourself instead of ignoring your feelings.
- Be open instead of shutting down.
- Walk away instead of engaging in petty conversations.
- Really listen instead of trying to listen.
- Speak from you heart. Say something real, resolute, clear.
- Don't be so predictable.

Your Work Can Change the World

Aware or not, we each have a tremendous impact on the people around us. This is a big responsibility and opportunity. As technology transforms the way we work, we may find ourselves coming into contact with more and more people, outside of our communities, states and countries. What message are we sending? Are we spreading generosity, acceptance and peace?

I feel honored to be doing the work of coaching as well as working with groups of business leaders and boards of organizations. There is so much suffering and confusion in the business world. And there is so much richness, so much opportunity for real meeting and for real healing.

- Little things can make a big difference
- One smile, one kind word can influence someone's life
- One good idea can turn around your company.
- One good action can affect many.
- One real conversation can transform a relationship
- You are much more powerful than you can imagine.

Open Your Heart

I was recently leading a lunch meeting in which the topic was spirituality in business. A long and philosophical discussion was taking place about the meaning of spirituality and the role of spirituality in the workplace. I was feeling a bit frustrated and impatient, when it became clear to me that in its essence, most basic and simplest form, spirituality at work came down to one simple concept. It was not necessary to define the term spirituality. It all came down to one thing: keeping our hearts open, in the midst of work.

- Whatever choices, dilemmas and problems are facing you: Open your heart

- Whatever seems too difficult to face: Open your heart
- Whenever you want to avoid a difficulty or problem: Open your heart
- Whenever you are protecting yourself: Open your heart
- When you need something from someone else: Open your heart
- When someone needs something from you: Open your heart
- When you see a situation that is not fair, not just: Open your heart.

“But I’ll know”

The name Brush Dance (my previous company) comes from a story that one of my teachers sometimes told. The story is a dialogue between an uncle and a young boy. The boy is trying to understand the meaning of a healing ritual dance, called the Brush Dance. The uncle is repairing a small tear in his costume that he plans to wear for the ritual. The boy, watching him, says, “Why are you repairing the headdress. It’s barely torn, and besides, the dance is at night. No one will notice.” The uncle responds, “But I’ll know.”

On the back of every Brush Dance product are the words, The Brush Dance is a Yurok Indian heal ritual where being true to yourself means giving your best to help a person in need. Being true to yourself is the one and only Yurok Indian law. I wanted this story, and this name, to set the tone for every decision that I made, and for how everyone worked with each other and with our customers at Brush Dance – “But I’ll know.”

- Create a work environment of transparency, of trust, and of accountability.
- Be accountable for your actions at work. Let others know what you plan to do and when you will do it.
- See that others are accountable to you. Know what your co-workers plan to do and when they plan to do it.
- Address and celebrate achievement. Address and learn from what doesn’t get accomplished and what doesn’t meet your expectations.

Your Emotional Wake

In a telephone conversation with one of my sales representatives, I was surprised that I began to detect some distance and possibly some hostility in Steve's voice. I asked if something was bothering him. Steve went on to tell me that I had hurt his feelings a year ago at a trade show in New York City. He said as he was speaking with me at our booth, someone else came to talk to me, and that I turned away from him and began having a conversation with someone else. His feelings were hurt and he has been angry with me since that day.

I apologized, and told him that I had no idea that he was hurt and angry. I told him that my experience was of trying to be present for each person that appeared in our booth. I had no intention that he felt that I was making a statement about his lack of importance to me.

How often at work do you feel let down or hurt or anxious, when you make assumptions someone else's behavior, thinking that you know what someone else's intentions or motivations were? How often at work are you surprised by an assumption someone made about your intentions and motivations?

- When confused or hurt by someone's actions at work, ask for clarification. Be curious. Try not to form conclusions before you know someone else's intentions and motivations.
- Give your co-workers the benefit of the doubt. After all, you are all on the same team, even though it may not always feel that way.
- Trust yourself. Trust others.
- Express your feelings, doubts, and concerns openly and with care.

- Know, and take care of, your emotional wake

Returning Home: Work as Journey

My former business, Brush Dance literally started in my garage 20 years ago. My foyer was our shipping area. My living room was our first office. When I hired the third employee and had three computers in our living room, my wife informed me, it was time to move the business out of the house. An artist friend told me about a school nearby that was no longer operating as a school and was renting out spaces to businesses. I signed a lease for a 1,600 foot space, in what had been the cafeteria of the Martin Luther King Middle School. When I first opened the wooden sliding doors to this space, it seemed huge. I wondered how we would ever utilize such an enormous space. Within a year we added an office space that was as large as the original cafeteria. A year later our warehouse doubled in size.

Our lives, ultimately, are about returning home. Each of us is the hero in our own journey. We are all explorers, searching for real freedom, real satisfaction; searching for answers, questioning the questions. We struggle to survive, to take care of ourselves, to take care of our families. Our work is like a huge ocean that we each must enter, explore, sometimes battle and sometimes celebrate.

Now, I have literally returned to my home. I am developing a new business. My office is the room where my son lived, until he went to college. I wonder and imagine the stories, yet to be formed, yet to be told...

- Imagine yourself as the hero in your life journey.
- What role has your work played in this journey?
- What have been your greatest successes?

- What have been your greatest failures?
- What are the current obstacles?
- What does returning home mean for you?

Epilogue

I was interviewed this morning for KRON TV Sunday morning news. Henry Tenenbaum, the anchor newsman said to me, “when I get on an airplane, I immediately start working; every moment I’m busy, going from one thing to another. I look around and I see some people on the plane, just staring out the window. Are you saying I should be more like them?”

Great question, I thought. I responded, “Actually, what if you were neither crazy busy, nor just staring out the window? What if you put your attention on your breath and body, and for a few moments just appreciated being alive? Then, from there, you might ask yourself – what are my priorities; what’s needed; what might be the most effective way for me to use this time?”

Practicing Zen, in the office, or anywhere, is the practice of bringing our lives more alive – neither constantly distracting ourselves, nor minimizing nor avoiding our roles and responsibilities. If we think that our work is merely mundane, we will miss the magic and immensity that is always right at hand. If we think that our work is always magical and filled with meaning, we will miss the reality of the details and difficult work. When we see that our work is magical, meaningful, and mundane, this is the practice of Office Zen.

Marc Lesser – Bio

Marc Lesser is CEO of ZBA Associates LLC, a company providing executive coaching, seminar, and facilitation services. He is the founder and former CEO of Brush Dance, a publisher of greeting cards, calendars and gift items, with spiritual themes and artwork. Marc was a resident of the San Francisco Zen Center for 10 years, was director of Tassajara, and is a Zen priest. He is the author of *Less: Accomplishing More By Doing Less*, and *Z.B.A. Zen of Business Administration: How Zen Practice Can Transform Your Work and Your Life*. He has an MBA degree from New York University.

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