

I hope you read the article in last Sunday's Times Standard Business section written by Bill Prescott; it described the principles for a local business, Sun Valley Floral Farm. A guiding principle says Prescott, is a creed your company and its employees follow in day-to-day operations. They can include some of the classics, such as variations on the golden rule, 'Treat neighbors like you want to be treated,' or they can oil the wheels of your business operation, such as 'Continuously improve and innovate.' Mr. Prescott came to Sun Valley a few months ago, and at first he thought that running an organization by daily principles was a bit over the top. With time he has come to see the principles as a kind of anchor that keeps the Sun Valley Floral ship from drifting.

Guiding principles or ideals are hard to come by nowadays. Why is that? I believe it is because we've succumbed to the Spirit of the Age, which is purely pragmatic: "Just try it and see if it works." If it works, we spend a lot of time trying to make it better. But few bother to ask the prior question: "Is this really what we *ought* to be doing in the first place?" Hitler could have subscribed to the maxim: "Continuously improve and innovate." In fact the Third Reich was remarkable at improving the efficiency of many things within Germany like the trains running on time and manufacture of weapons for the German Wehrmacht. But it seems *not* to have occurred to the Nazis to apply the all-important moral principle: 'Treat your neighbors like you want to be treated.' This is a dramatic way for me to point out that efficiency is not morality. In fact, an immoral efficiency <sup>would</sup> ~~might~~ pose terrible and lethal dangers to ~~the~~ human civilization—even to our very heart and soul.

I wish more of today's businesses would ask: 'Why?' Why should I do this? Is it true, is it fair? Is it right?

GK Chesterton, in his book What's Wrong With the World? Sounds remarkably contemporary even though he wrote a hundred years ago. He writes: "The only way to discuss the social evil is to get at once to the social ideal. We can all see the national madness; but what is national sanity? I have called this book 'What Is Wrong with the World?' And the upshot of the title can be easily and clearly stated. What is wrong is that we do not ask what is right." (p. 6f.)

What are the guiding principles of your business, family, or personal life? I for one am greatly heartened to see a local business that runs by the maxim: if we treat each other rightly, the bottom line will work out alright too.

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment