

Excellence: Organizations as Cathedrals

The Australian Institute of Management, oddly enough, became the first group to really celebrate at a major conference the life and work of the late Peter Drucker. And I was flattered out of my wits to be asked to be the keynote speaker. It seemed a heavy burden, if a nice one.

And so, I thought an awful lot about it. And I thought about some of the deeper writings that Drucker had had, that, frankly—to some extent—I was looking at for the first time. So, I ended up—and the keyboard wrote this, not me—I ended up doing this little riff. And in the middle of the riff, I said, “Organizations should be no less than cathedrals in which the full and awesome power of the imagination and spirit and native entrepreneurial flair of diverse individuals is unleashed in passionate pursuit of excellence.”

Now, I’m not a terribly religious guy, so don’t capitalize the *c* on *cathedrals*, but the point is that—a friend of mine wrote a fabulous book that was called *Putting the Customer Second*, and he actually sold his company for billions of dollars because the customers loved him and they stormed in the door. But his point was—if you really want to put the customer first, you have to put the person who serves the customer even *more* first.

Therefore, if you follow that kind of logic, the ultimate purpose of the organization is to develop fabulous people who, in turn, can therefore do a fabulous job of serving their customers.

And so, again, cathedral with a lowercase *c*, but the organization is devoted to the fullscale, wholesale development of human beings who work there. That comes first.

Think about it. I don’t expect you’ll buy it in one bit, but think about it. I think it’s right. And I think it’s important.