

On Enterprise

In April of 2006, for reasons that are too complicated to explain in a short period of time, I gave a seminar in Siberia. Not many people who do what I do give seminars in Siberia. And I thought it was going to be the worst day of my life and it turned out to be among the best. And the reason was, as I addressed this new crowd in a place that was not used to organizational thinking of the sort that many of us have gone through, I thought, you know, to be quite corny, “What the hell is it all about? What’s an organization about?”

And I wrote the following that I used on my first slide, and it kind of surprised me that I had written it. The language is sort of soaring and, as I do say at the beginning, it’s business at its best, not on average. But I put it this way.

I said, “Enterprise (at its best) is an emotional, vital, innovative, joyful, creative, entrepreneurial endeavor that elicits maximum concerted human potential in the whole-hearted service of others and pursuit of excellence.”

That is a mouthful. It’s over the top. I acknowledge that. But my question is: If not that, what? Organizations exist for one and only one reason, and that is to be of service, whether it's one-person organizations or accounting departments within an organization. And I’m not suggesting you’re going to get there—I’m not insane, for God’s sake—but what other aspiration would there be? A place where human beings engage in a growing way in doing things of value. You say it’s too much? I say I understand.

But I say, “If not that, what in the hell *are* you attempting to do in a given day?” Think about it. I’ve talked to many groups about it. We all acknowledge that it’s a near-impossibility. But we also acknowledge that, at the end of the day, the question is: If not this (or something like it) then what’s the point of getting out of bed?