

Business Driven by the Eternal



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Paper prepared for Hawaii Politics, Summer 1993

At the turn of the millennium there arose a new world order not imposed by any one country, but by the collective action of indigenous peoples around the world. The European Community crumbled after a series of natural disasters, political scandals, and economic shake-ups.

The United States and Japan, already suffering a continuing depression, were severely affected by the collapse of the EC. For almost a year a civil war where borders were drawn according to race, religion, and sexual orientation was fought in the United States. Seizing the opportunity to respond to calls of a new social structure, the states of California, Alaska and Hawaii seceded from the Union.

California became a US commonwealth, Alaska and Hawaii became independent nations. Joining the United Pacific Nations Organization (UPNO), the nations of Hawaii and Alaska aligned themselves with the new independent indigenous peoples nations of Australia, Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Guam, along with other Oceania nations within Polynesia, Melanesia, Micronesia, and the Marianas. The UPNO was the new, Indigenous Peoples United Nations, wielding tremendous political power in a world turned upside down.

Many Hawaiian residents, mostly mainland US and Japanese national transplants, fled the islands fearing a war of ethnic retaliation by the native Hawaiians. The mass exodus of people from the islands, as well as a barren tourist trade, caused the island economy to collapse. Hawaii was engaged in a siege warfare of the economy because it was no longer a center of tourism and now the new object of American animosity because of the secession. The leaders of the new Nation of Hawaii deliberated on the structure of business and its role in a Hawaiian society yearning for past traditions, but knowing the ancient ways could never be completely brought back.

The decision of the High Council of Chiefs shocked local small business owners, corporate executives, and laborers alike. Commerce and economics in the new Hawaii would be driven by traditional Hawaiian mythology. A society thirsting for direction from the new leaders quickly embraced the vision and acted upon it.

With the rapidness of flowing water, business changed forever. Businesses were broken into groups of no larger than one-hundred employees. Economies of scale, competitive advantage, and productivity/efficiency were traded for economic values emphasizing quality of life and fullness of employment. Businesses in the mountains grew kalo, the new mainstay, rice, or manufactured raw and finished goods. Businesses near the ocean either aqua-farmed, transported goods across the waters, or provided other services. The economy became self-sufficient. Goods and services were designed to meet the needs of each ahupua'a (the new division of lands). If the needs could not be met within the ahupua'a, there was free trade between ahupua'a or even moku (islands). A self-sufficient Hawaii became a reality.

This brings us to today, the year 2043. Only a few decades have passed since those days of confusion, turmoil and social chaos. Business in Hawaii today is a far cry from what it was fifty years ago. Commerce is no longer driven by financial profit, but by what is now termed social profit, the ability to contribute meaningfully to society on more than just an economic level.

As a collection of human beings, businesses represent a level of society. The behaviors and actions of the people associated with the business have a direct impact upon the organization, much like an undisciplined child reflects poorly upon the 'ohana (family) who was raised it. A business is perceived as a living body, rich with culture and symbolism, feeding off the cumulative powers of the people within, not as an artificial structure imposed upon living beings.

The business system in Hawaii begins with a central image to all Hawaiians and all Hawaiian institutions -- that of the kalo, or taro. Kalo's primary need is to be planted firmly in the rich and dark soil of the earth, the most basic of our human existence. (Knipe, 38) Businesses realize that in order to succeed, they must be rooted in the earth from which we all come. A certain degree of earthiness must exist within the organization for it to prosper. The daily duties of feeding the children, washing the laundry, or cleaning the toilet must not be subordinated to the work of the organization. A worker with a home life in order will be a productive and happy worker. Today, work schedules are designed around tasks, rather than time. Like the ancient Hawaiians, if the task or tasks of the day are done, the work day is done. Of course, some people still hold jobs centered around time; retail salespeople, and public safety technicians, for example. The majority, however, benefit from the new working day which has resulted in better physiological and psychological lives, as well as stronger intra-family relationships.

The second aspect of the kalo metaphor is that in order for growth it needs nourishment from the waters of life. The quest for water is also a metaphorical journey in search of the inner and intimate self (Knipe, 14). It is also a quest for ultimate truth, if there is one (Ibid.). Before we are born we are surrounded by life giving waters in our mothers' wombs. Workers must be nourished with this same sense of water. Labor and management work side by side sharing a commitment to their jobs. Workers must feel secure enough to ask questions of management. Management must feel secure enough to keep financial records open, so the truth is not hidden from those within the 'ohana of the firm.

On a deeper level, each person must be given space and time to find their own "self." Vacation for such "self actualization" is granted, as well as encouraged. Workers who are self-respecting and have a deep, inner spirituality tend to be more secure about their place in society. These workers are more productive and satisfied. Often, family lives improve, so the entire family, from the biological to the business one, is at ease, leading to less conflict and greater understanding of the surrounding environment.

Once the kalo is planted and watered, the sprouts burst forth from the soil to reach toward the sunlight. The sprouts of the kalo signify a myriad of ideas. From the business and its products or services, will come a successful idea leading to financial and social profit. The sprouts also signify the children of the organization reaching towards enlightenment. The sprout soon reaches maturity and is harvested to feed the hands that harvested it. The fact that eventually a mature plant, organization, or individual gives back to the earth what it was given is important to the kalo metaphor. However, when the plant is harvested, it is not completely consumed, for a stalk of the plant is always thrust back into the ground to grow once more.

The idea of a mature plant contributing to the growth of a new entity is symbolic of today's treatment of older workers. There is no retirement age. Anyone who wishes to leave the workplace for any reason, regardless of age (as long as they worked at least twenty years for the business) is entitled to sit on the business's Council

of Advisors, a counterpart to the government's Council of High Chiefs ('Aha Ali'i Nui). What used to be a Board of Directors is now a council of elders who lend their wisdom to decisions made by the upper echelon of management. This council has replaced the stockholders, people only concerned with the growth of their stocks. The council consists of at least twenty elders (businesses are small operations, after all) and about five managers, five current workers, and the head of the organization. The board leader is elected from the elders and the board makes the long term decisions.

When businesses adopted the "kalo principle" they could never have imagined the positive consequences of their actions. Worker absenteeism fell dramatically because the workplace was hospitable. Stress levels were contained and quality improved. Employee health was better and employers paid less for the nationally mandated health insurance. The most important consequence was that lives revolved around the family instead of working schedules.

One hub around which Hawaiian society revolves is the school. Each business is required by law to provide health coverage and educational opportunities. Schools are no longer the responsibility of a central government. Businesses are set up as co-operatives with other businesses to be a mutual economic support group and to provide quality Hawaiian education to the children of the employees. The quality of education is a key indicator of social profit. Businesses adopted a policy of educating our youth to the highest levels attainable. The education of today emphasizes that there is never enough to learn. Because profits are measured, amongst other things, by educational progress, it is in the business' best interest to increase the skills and knowledge of the young people.

The school is often located on the same grounds as the business so parents can make sure their children are progressing. Sometimes school is held in the workplace to show the students the applicability of what they are learning to real life. If students can grasp the importance of school they tend to perform better. Students may go to a kalo processing plant to learn the science of pressure, heat, and production. Workers in the plant (some the parents of the children) explain how each batch of kalo must be appropriately weighed and measured so the pressure pounders (the modern equivalent of the poi pounder) mash the kalo to a certain consistency within a specified number of hits.

Recalling the ancient talks of the menehune, each worker must be treated individually and with respect. Each menehune had to be given not a piece of meat from a large fish, but a fish of their own. The menehune of Pi, an ancient mythological hero, would work the wonders they did only because Pi treated them with utmost respect. Some legends say that the menehune were brothers of Pi, so the respect was brotherly in nature. What this teaches us in Hawaii, 2043, is that workers will work to their best abilities if treated with respect. As a sign of respect a salary ration of 1:5 (lowest salary to highest salary) is law and strictly adhered to. It is not only a sign of respect for the worker, but also a sign of humility for those who lead.

Respect spills over to the environment. The ancient creation myths tell of Papa and Wakea, Earth Mother and Sky Father, respectively. It is from our Earth Mother that we spring, so as the creator of life, Papa is treated with utmost of respect. It is in Papa that the most sacred of symbols is planted -- kalo, therefore everyone must be as kind to the environment as possible. "Malama ka Aina" - care for the land - used to be a popular environmental expression, now, as we have come to accept the Earth as a living entity, it has changed to "Malama ka Papa" - care for the Earth Mother. Businesses are prohibited from the use of toxic or environmentally dangerous substances.

Papa, as the Mother of creation, is the embodiment of a woman in Hawaiian society. Because the woman is the vessel in which the waters of life surround the child in her womb, she is the most vital link to life. As a

result, the woman is seen as an equal to men. There is no "glass ceiling,": as women of fifty years ago termed it. The woman is often seen as the leaders of business, of the creators and as nurturers of life. Leave because of pregnancy and for child rearing is no longer a stigma, but rather the inalienable right of woman to create life.

Probably the most well known woman in Hawaiian mythology, Pele, has become the new mythic figure of Hawaii (as opposed to Kamehameha). In business, those leaders who succeed in earning social profit are those who exhibit Pele-like qualities. The legend of Pele is strong in its condemnation of those who do not follow the Hawaiian way. For example, it is said Pele destroyed the old town of Kalapan due to its drug industry -- an evil used by the Westerner to subordinate the native Hawaiians of old. Pele cleansed the land of foul material and replaced the foul with new land. Therein lies Pele's womanlike quality, that of creation. With every swing of her destructive hand comes life, from death comes a re-birth.

Just fifty years ago, life was very different. Now, with the help of the ancient Hawaiian myths, our homeland is an abundant land of life, food, and harmony. The kalo has not only fed us for these many years, but has become the prime figure in our lives, as have the stories of Hi'iaka, Pele and Papa. In Hawai'i, there is now a distinct way of doing business, it is unique throughout the world. It has combined the eternal of mythology with the mundane of economics. It is, indeed, a Hawaiian way.

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