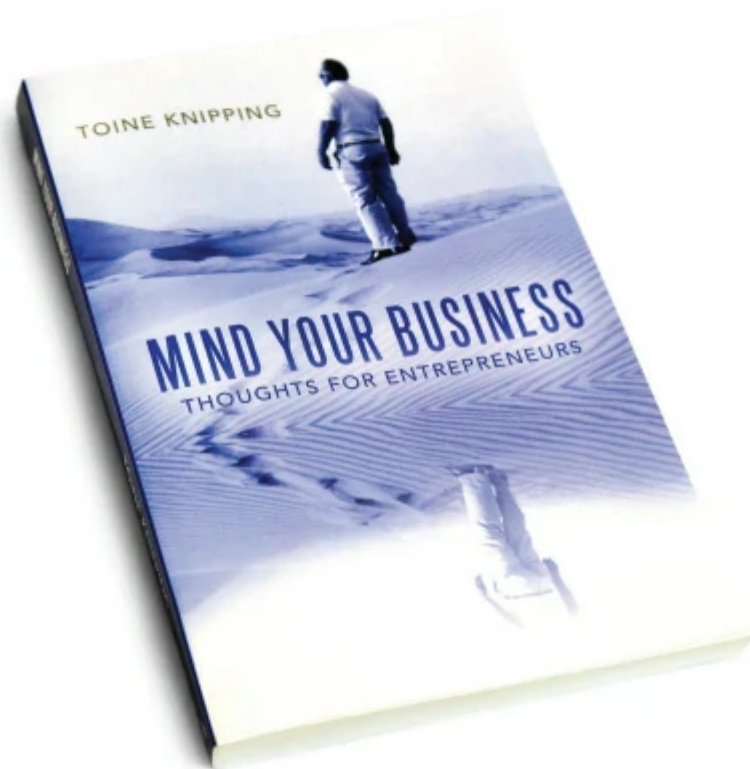


A Holistic Approach To Business



Toine Knipping, one of the founders of Amicorp Group has been an entrepreneur from a very early age and he has been keen on nurturing and advocating a balanced and holistic approach to business. His book *Mind Your Business: Thoughts for Entrepreneurs*, Knipping says, is not a 'how to' guide but a narration that portrays business as a part of life.

By Prasadini Nanaykkara and Krishani Peiris

What led you to write this book, what was the motive or the inspiration behind it?

I had been thinking about the concepts mentioned in the book for years, in some cases for over 30 years. For instance; what motivates and drives people or how to make a thought or dream become reality have been occupying me for years. I have been looking at Hindu and Buddhist culture since I first travelled as a backpacker in the region in 1979 and 1980. People have been asking many times why our company became so successful in a very competitive market. Often they did not want to hear the answers, as they were so simple I made it sound like everyone could do the same, and of course everyone could (which many people would not want to acknowledge).

Then one of the students in the INSEAD MBA course I followed challenged me to write a book and I did. I had the feeling that many people aspiring for success tried to do things the wrong way. You need first to be happy with yourself to become successful, not the other way around. Just like you need to eat healthy to stay healthy, not swallow pills. The same way you need to treat the people around you with respect, generosity and grace; and not cheat, be a penny pincher, take advantage of any relationship. Just like you can only make your partner happy by both being happy and being generous towards your partner, the same is true in any other relationship, especially business relationships where people have a choice with whom they work. By being self-centered, thinking in scarcity, own interests first and being greedy, nothing ever comes off the ground.

This book takes a holistic approach to business, it is based on your philosophy and your journey could you elaborate on this?

The journey is described in the book. As we mature we all realise sooner or later that we can not live in a vacuum, that we are not standing alone or even on our own, but we all are an integral part of a much larger living organism, the universe. By realising we are both part of the universe and we are all of it (as it exists only exactly as we see it in our own mind), we automatically realize how we can influence it to achieve our life's goals, by adjusting our attitude to anything and everything we experience, understanding we are not the victim, but the cause of all that happens. We need to learn we need to be grateful for our unlimited blessings and also that we can be successful only if we mobilise our forces by helping other people to be successful as well.

Employees Work Best If They See That Not Only The Company Makes Money, But If They Feel Valued, Have The Idea They Contribute Something Positive To The Society Around Them...

Dog-eat-dog achieves exactly the opposite (it reduces the forces you can mobilise), that is why so many multinationals, once their founders are gone have a lacklustre performance even if they dominate a market segment. They no longer appeal to the hearts of their employees, clients and suppliers. If one does, the whole world will align to make a company successful, as the success of you and your company is at the same time the success of many others. Employees work best if they see that not only the company makes money (and pays their salary), but if they feel valued, have the idea that they contribute something positive to the society around them, the world at large and not damage the environment and the future of their children. The exact same is true for clients, suppliers and other people in any way related to the company. I did not invent those concepts, they are thousands of years old and can be found back in the earliest civilisations in India and China. We at times tend to forget them by over simplifying our role on earth as a result of forgetting where we fit in nature and how we give meaning to our lives.

In sharing your experience, what do you hope readers will take away from this book? What was your aim in writing this book?

My aim is to explain to people what I have learned about life and about business, especially our employees and potential investors. That creating a successful business is the result of HOW you treat other people. You will never achieve anything durable and meaningful at the expense of others. Unnatural systems, one-sided efforts ultimately always fail, irrespective of the effort invested. My aim is to put my ideas on paper so they will survive me and help people to reflect about what I have learned. They can do whatever they want with it. Many people have commented that I make it seem very simple to become successful, and it is.

I have helped quite a few people on their path to becoming an entrepreneur, and it worked for those people as well. I hope that by presenting some ideas I can make people think about what really makes them happy and what they can do to best use their talents and in that way lead a fulfilling life.

We Can All Achieve Great Things If We Align Ourselves In Harmony With Our Environment And Our Talents.

With so many 'how-to' books in the market what does "Mind Your Business" offer to the reader?

This is not a 'to do' book. There is no recipe for 'how to' become happy with yourself and 'how to' use your talents to the fullest. But I do hope to make some people think about where to start. We can all achieve great things if we align ourselves in harmony with our environment and our talents.

You underscore the larger purpose in doing business rather than monetary gain can you talk about this philosophy?

Money is a by-product, not a goal in itself, as many people who have become very successful will be able to attest. You cannot eat money and you cannot take it with you when you die. You can buy some things with it, but none of the essentials in life: like fresh air, good friends, a happy family and a healthy lifestyle. Money should not be a goal in life, it is a tool, just like a golden coffin can not be a goal for your funeral. Money is no more than a tool one can use to enhance some happiness around you. Money only has value in giving it away; like friendship can only be given, not bought, respect can be earned, not bought and, love can be given, not demanded. By focusing on money people tend to forget what it is all about. You can not ride a bicycle by focusing your look and your mind on the pedals, you need to look at the horizon while your legs do their work. People who think money is important either never obtain a lot of money because of greed, lack of generosity and thinking win-lose or scarcity will not pay off, or they do obtain a lot of money and then realise it does not make them happy, as it was obtained at the expense of the more important things in life: family, friendship and love. By reflecting on and following the simple truths in my book, earning money will become effortless and simple, but money will also lose its importance, as one learns to realise that many things are much more important than money.

Whom do you perceive as the target audience for this book?

Anyone who is thinking that making money is important (I guess that is why many people read business books). And anyone who is interested in leading a successful and fulfilling life, making the best possible use of ones time on earth and the many opportunities passing by. There is something in this book for everyone. I have received many positive comments from people from very different walks of life. Life has only two real emotions: love and fear. love is what it is all about: love what you do and all the people around you, try and contribute to the happiness of the people around you and they will in turn give you experiences and rewards in return beyond belief. Fears are what keeps you back, because you initially do not want to believe it is so easy. Understanding those fears and breaking free from

the prison they create around you is what paves the path to success. Once you realise how you fit in and what crucial role you play in the universe, you can more easily unmask your fears for the illusions they are.

You have used anecdotes and quotes from notable personalities and entrepreneurs, how much have they influenced your life?

I have met quite a number of people in my life from whom I have learned a lot (my coaches). The more famous writers I refer to I have unfortunately not met, but I have quoted them as they found a good way to phrase eternal truths or things that I was also experiencing. A few quotes have given me food for thought and took a long time for me to fully understand. We all need to learn through our own experiences even if they are mistakes. Some people travel around the world and never see a thing, and others never leave their home town and understand the whole world. I have the hope that phrasing things in the words of famous people, they will carry more weight and are taken more seriously when pondering the underlying thoughts or theories.

There Is No Life-Work Balance, As Work Is Part Of Life And One Needs To Be Alive To Work... Making Money Is Just One Small Aspect Of Doing Business And Is Not Even One Of The Most Important Ones.

What can a general reader who is not looking at entrepreneurship, gain or learn from your book?

Running a successful business is not different from running a successful sports team, a successful marriage or a happy family. The concepts are eternal and self explanatory. They apply to all ages, in all situations in life. I have used business, as many people tend to think that values, beliefs and humanity are to be checked in at the door before entering a business. I would like people to realise that doing business is one way of realising ones potential as a human being rather than a separate activity. There is no life-work balance, as work is part of life and one needs to be alive to work.

The book often brings the reader's attention to the spiritual and holistic approach of doing business, what do you say to those who believe that business is all about money and making profits? What do you tell the people who spend most of their spare time watching soccer or TV, who never open their eyes and ears to other aspects of life, or the people who never read a book, enjoy nature or make a trip.

You spend eight hours or more a day working, why limit that time to just making money, while you could do so much more on your path to self realisation and build so many more interesting and important relationships during that time at work. Making money is just one small aspect of doing business and is not even one of the most important ones. Of course making money is what pays the bills, but anyone who can think can easily make plenty of money. Business is about using all your talents and skills, and making the best out of your life, by serving the people around you.

Final thoughts?

Business is a great tool that helps you to define and build yourself to the best you can be. Learn to enjoy it and it will give you great satisfaction and challenge. Whatever your belief system, whatever your hopes, living a principled life and living it to the fullest, will create purpose for your life, which in turn will make you feel happy and fulfilled.



