the causes that resonate with management and employees, causes that make a real difference. Giving can do good, and do well, for the corporation at the same time.

And while the Porter and Kramer variety of giving is aimed at creating tangible, short-term returns, there are certainly other kinds of returns. Giving that is less business focused, such as giving to organizations that one simply believes in, can generate returns that may be less tangible in the near term but more measurable over the long term. Such returns can help bolster a company's position in a community, make its employees feel good about being on board, and build the company's brand. All of which sounds a lot like competitive advantage to me.

For more than 25 years, our small strategic communications practice has donated communications services to a range of cultural, health care, and research organizations – contributions that have helped these organizations attract much-needed audiences, constituents, and funding. Because I can't actually remember the telephone ringing in response to all this giving, Porter and Kramer might say it's been a tactical disaster, money wasted. But if we look at it through another lens, we've seen plenty of positive results. Our employees stay for years and are proud to be part of our organization. And when we're talking to prospects and clients, this giving is recognized – and it means something to them. Often, prospects directly comment that we're an organization they'd like to work with because we espouse beliefs they value and respect. And they invariably say "thank you."

Roger Sametz
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How to Stay Stuck in the Wrong Career

Having worked in the field of career management for the past 30 years, and having dealt with thousands of clients, I read with great interest Herminia Ibarra's article "How to Stay Stuck in the Wrong Career" (December 2002). But I was shocked to see Ibarra portraying career specialists (both theorists and practitioners) as commonly failing to address key aspects of the career change process as they work with their clients.

Ibarra asserts that through her close examination of 39 people in the throes of career change, she has learned that career specialists encourage their clients to proceed in ineffectual ways, setting them up for failure and disappointment. These career specialists, Ibarra writes, have totally ignored the "test and learn" features associated with her career change methodology, which, if employed, would foster truly effective career change.

There is just one problem with Ibarra's thesis. It doesn't conform to the realities of the career management field. Ibarra suggests that career specialists have traditionally focused on introspective or "internal" client dynamics, instead of her externally directed test-and-learn steps. In actuality, career management theory and practice has commonly incorporated and called for integration and use of both perspectives and techniques to help the client.

Perhaps Ibarra can be excused for failing to recognize the test-and-learn features associated with most contemporary career theories, given that her background seems aligned with the field of organizational behavior. Yet Ibarra has also overlooked test-and-learn concepts and theories that have long resided within organizational behavior and business management. For example, Weick's enactment theory, the idea that action shapes thought as much as thought influences action, is not a new theory at all.

As much as I welcome articles like this, it's unfortunate that Ibarra overlooked the realities of the career management field. Had she applied her test-and-learn techniques more fully to her examination of the field, she might have gained a clearer picture of how it truly operates. The result might have been better decisions and judgments around the final composition of her article.

Robert Tiell
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What's a Business For?

Charles Handy's article "What's a Business For?" (December 2002) gives new meaning to the term "corporate philanthropy," for isn't investing in employee satisfaction another kind of corporate philanthropy? Sadly, things like education and training are too often considered perks or benefits rather than investments in corporate viability and vitality. Maybe companies need better models for cost-benefit analysis, those that include projections of employee turnover (and all the associated costs) and opportunity costs (due to lack of staff with the right skills and company-specific knowledge).

If companies were to reevaluate the importance of kowtowing to investor greed, they might appoint qualified CEOs rather than trophies to be put on public display. But instead, these companies suffer the costs of employee cynicism – the result of corporate (and often industry) outsiders coming in and flailing about until the lack of fit, so apparent to the average bystander, finally dawns on the board of directors.

Eric A. Sohn
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Thanks to Charles Handy for his excellent article "What's a Business For?"

During my coaching conversations with senior executives, I've heard many of them express their desire for more than business success. As these leaders reflect on the legacy they will leave behind, they often discover that what's missing is a sense of genuine pride in doing something useful for humanity.

Handy makes a strong and important case for defining a business's success in terms of its contribution to improving the world. He writes: "We should, as charitable organizations do, measure success in terms of outcomes for others as well as for ourselves."

But if we want to promote Handy's vision, we must also deal with some practical questions: How can we develop this new breed of leaders who will bring about the cultural changes necessary to turn this vision into reality? How can we enlarge the scope of business scorecards, currently aimed at achieving competitive advantage without genuine consideration for environmental and social objectives, unless an obvious link with business success is established? Which scorecards will reflect the need to balance work with the rest of people's lives?

Executive coaching facilitates the unleashing of human potential to reach sustainable results in the service of multiple stakeholders. Furthermore, coaching across cultures (an approach that integrates multiple cultural perspectives into the practice of coaching) allows executives to gain valuable new insights by taking a step back and systematically looking at their circumstances from fresh angles.

Philippe Rosinski
Principal
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In light of the corporate behavior that scarred the business landscape in 2002, Charles Handy's article reminds us that optimism and ethics are still alive. Both qualities must be nurtured with the care of a constant gardener.

The fall of the centralized economies of Eastern Europe proved that capitalism is a better system than communism. Now Handy has raised a subtle and critical question: Can capitalism be a good system on its own?

A strong school of thought in foreign policy defines the three greatest problems facing the world as corruption, barriers to trade, and war. The business world has its own corollaries: greed, deliberate miscommunication, and the value of market share. Contrary to what some Hollywood screenwriters would have us believe, greed is not good. Greed is to solid corporate growth what cancer is to cell reproduction. It brings about a collateral set of decisions that are at best shortsighted and at worst poisonous to the marketplace. It leads to the deliberate miscommunication of every aspect of a business. A pattern of premeditated deceit in everything from accounting to forecasting creates a toxic environment.

The battle for market share could be the most difficult obstacle to overcome. The tendency to manage a business as though it exists in a restricted universe of 100 share points not only increases the likelihood that greed and miscommunication will flourish, it also inhibits creative thinking and business expansion. Simply put, more attention paid to market share means less attention paid to the marketplace.

Joseph T. Smith
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Charles Handy's outstanding article outlines the importance of trust in a capitalist society. The author puts less emphasis on the importance of information flow.

The current accounting and corporate reporting frameworks used around the world today function satisfactorily for asset-intensive, industrial companies. But they deliver inadequate and outdated information for a modern, knowledge-intensive company that must orchestrate its various intellectual resources, most of which it may not actually own. Developing the will and the capability to describe and evaluate such sources of competitive advantage in a more honest, transparent fashion will play a central role in restoring faith in the capital markets.

Language is a key problem. Companies now operate in a knowledge economy, but they have inherited mind-sets from a manufacturing-dominant economy. Executives must be able to conceptualize and build organizations along the sustainable lines Handy maps out. The all-encompassing obsession with shareholder value must give way to broader considerations and expressions of stakeholder value, all linked to a longer-term perspective and a commitment to sustainability. Value, not cost, should be the primary focus of the twenty-first-century business.

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Beyond Empowerment: Building a Company of Citizens

I have just read Brook Manville and Josiah Ober's article "Beyond Empowerment: Building a Company of Citizens" (January 2003). The authors make a good point that an organization becomes more powerful when all of its employees have bought in. Common striving for a shared goal is a great motivator.

Yet there's a flaw in the authors' position: The Athenians could give the necessary time to mutual ruling and continuous self-improvement only because they generated their wealth through a system that was based on extensive slavery.

Perhaps Manville and Ober's vision will come to pass when we have machines to do the work for us, thus freeing our time for legislation and strategic thinking. However, we have tried mechanical machines, we have tried electronic machines. What's next? The coffee machine is a focus for discussion, but it stops short of helping us reach any useful decisions.

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Erratum: In the Big Picture "What Becomes an Icon Most?" by Douglas B. Holt (March 2003), filmmaker Richard Linklater was incorrectly identified as Richard Linkletter. We regret the error.