



Business Lessons from A Quiet Gardener, by William Rosenzweig

The people who know me best know that at heart I am just a quiet gardener. My garden has probably taught me the most about how things grow - and thrive in a vibrant and sustainable manner. These lessons have shaped my approach to encouraging responsible growth in business and to the ways I apply my intention, attention and energy.

A gardener sees the world as a system of interdependent parts - where healthy, sustaining relationships are essential to the vitality of the whole. "A real gardener is not a person who cultivates flowers, but a person who cultivates the soil." In business this has translated for me into the importance of developing agreements and partnerships where vision and values, purpose and intent are explicitly articulated, considered and aligned among all stakeholders of an enterprise - customers, employees, suppliers, shareholders, and the broader community and natural environment.

The garden has taught me about patience and persistence and the ethical principles of generosity and reciprocity. It has illuminated the importance of appreciating the cycles of life and decay. For the gardener, composting is a transformative act - whereby last season's clippings (or failures) can become next year's source of vigor.

I've learned that it's not just what you plant, but how you plant it that brings long - term rewards in life, work and the garden. Gardeners know that once strong roots are established, growth is often exponential rather than linear.

Also gardening, like business, is inherently a local activity, set within an ever-changing and unpredictable global climate. Showing up in person, shovel - and humility in hand is essential.

Gardeners, like entrepreneurs, are obsessed with latent potential - and can be known to be pathologically optimistic. We can vividly imagine the bloom and the scent of the rose even in deepest of winter. As the American naturalist Henry David Thoreau once wrote: "I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders."

In essence, the gardener's work is a life of care. We cultivate abundance from scarce resources. We nurture, encourage, fertilize - and prune when necessary - while being respectful of the true and wild nature of all things. We know that creating enduring value requires vision, passion, hard work and the spirit of others.

I am just coming to understand this work of business gardening - and investing in keeping people healthy - as an act of universal responsibility. His Holiness Dalai Lama reminds me: "Each of us must learn to work not just for one self, one's own family or one's nation, but for the benefit of all humankind. Universal responsibility is the key to human survival. It is the best foundation for world peace."

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--William Rosenzweig, from his Acceptance Speech
[<http://www.physicventures.com/news/william-rosenzweigs-remarks-upon-accepting-business-peace-award>]
for "Oslo Business for Peace Award"

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