



P E R S P E C T I V E S



by **Rinaldo S. Brutoco**

Rinaldo S. Brutoco is the Founding President and CEO of the Santa Barbara-based World Business Academy and co-founder of JUST Capital. He's a serial entrepreneur, executive, author, radio host, and futurist who's published on the role of business in relation to pressing moral, environmental, and social concerns for over 35 years.

Gratitude and Hope

Seeing a Better Future Can be a State of Mind

The Economist cover from the November 14th issue is a picture of a curving tunnel with bright light at the end emanating from a hypodermic syringe. The words below the image state simply “Suddenly, hope.” It is a powerful image with a dramatic headline. You can’t miss the message: recently released data on two Covid vaccines that are 95 percent effective with no detectable side effects is the “light at the end of the tunnel” for eventually getting this pandemic under control. What a fantastic source for global hope. And yet, there is even more to hope for than merely ending our global health nightmare.

Former President Barack Obama was the political author of “hope and change” as a political ideology. He continues to articulate his hope for the US to once again become “A Promised Land.” How does he reach such a conclusion when his very place of birth was made into a disingenuous “birther” movement to delegitimize him and his presidency since 2008? From reading his writings, it appears to me that his hope, like mine, springs from a deep sense of gratitude.

You see, it is impossible to avoid being hopeful if one immerses oneself in gratitude. When one experiences gratitude, one sees each new development as something to be celebrated—the beautiful fluttering of a butterfly landing on a leaf, a particularly interesting cloud formation, the gaze or smile of a loved one, neighbors helping patch each other’s homes after yet another devastating storm, and the simple pleasure of stopping to experience that one is living on the most beautiful speck of dust in the cosmos.

When you think about it, we each have infinite possibilities to experience and express gratitude each and every day. I had the personal good fortune to meet and befriend Brother David Steindl-Rast, a lifelong Benedictine monk, more than 25 years ago. Many, including the Dalai Lama and Mother Teresa, saw Brother David as the embodiment of gratitude on the planet, basked in his constant good humor and celebrated his total commitment to all citizens of the globe. I was so taken with the power of his thinking and “beingness” that we enrolled him as a Fellow of the World Business Academy two decades ago.

I’ve often been asked, “Why a monk as a Fellow of a ‘business academy’?” The answer we give is simple: when executives learn to run their businesses from gratitude rather than greed, they create a “win” for all their stakeholders, especially their employees. Vendors, suppliers and shareholders benefit greatly as well. We call that stakeholder capitalism—the idea that we are in business to serve all our stakeholders in a balanced manner rather than slavishly pursue profits for shareholders alone to the disadvantage of everyone else.

As we approach the Thanksgiving Holiday, I am reminded of one of Brother David’s best quotes (and he has a lot of them!). It reads,

“The greatest gift one can give is thanksgiving. In giving gifts, we give what we spare, but in giving thanks we give ourselves.” Let’s all give thanks for all we could stop and appreciate if we just gave ourselves the opportunity to do so. And let’s bring that grateful heart to the workplace where we can share our gratitude with our co-workers. It is from that trajectory of gratefulness that hope springs. How does that work?

Well, that is rather simple too. We just ask ourselves what we are grateful for in the future that could come our way, so we could experience yet more gratitude. Those manifestations of desire for future gratitude opportunities is the springboard for hope. Hope is the emotion we experience when we want to be grateful for something in the future. Great how that works. Be grateful today and it leads to hope, which leads to more opportunities to be grateful. It’s a magical circle.

With a grateful heart for so much, even in this dire time of Covid, let’s think of what else we can be grateful for that will provide the wellspring of future hopes. How about being grateful that the US will re-enter the Paris Climate Accords with the hope our participation can turn climate change around because there is no vaccine for climate disasters. How about being grateful that the US will soon be rejoining the World Health Organization, so we can assist in getting the rest of the world vaccinated against Covid, so it won’t reach our shores again. How about being grateful that hundreds of thousands of people are able to access food banks across the country so that we can hope to create a true safety net to eliminate hunger and food insecurity in our land.

Let’s be grateful for body cameras and cell phones that have recorded so much police brutality, so we can hope for the day Black and Brown lives matter as much as White ones. We can be grateful for the dialogue around institutional racism, so we can at last deal with the “original sin” we have not yet excised and hope for the day where people will truly be treated equally regardless of their race, gender, sexuality, and birth origins. Let’s be grateful that we still enjoy the fruits of a badly damaged economy that continues to support our nation, however feebly, and hope for the day when the economy works for everyone.

Yes, we can be grateful the nation and business community has started to recognize and increasingly embrace the necessity for “pay equity” and hope for the day when the yawning gap between the top 2 percent and everyone else noticeably shrinks. We can be grateful for the vibrant discussion Andrew Yang has catalyzed to create the “Freedom Dividend,” and we can hope for success in seeing a Uniform Basic Income adopted even as robotization takes over more jobs. Yes, there is so much even now to be grateful for, and so many reasons for hope beyond just the vaccines. Let’s all give thanks this week and hope for the better tomorrow we can co-create.