

## **Taking Care of Business — as Buddhists**

**BY BILL ENDSLEY**

**Chicago, Aug. 17**

**Chicago members raise important questions about faith and business** at the first SGI-USA meeting for business people, entrepreneurs and executives.

What does it take to become successful? Can a person climb the ladder in today's business world without smooth talking and back-stabbing? Isn't a Buddhist supposed to be poor?

In a first for the SGI-USA, members from the business world met today at the Chicago Culture Center to develop a network of support and understanding. Nowhere do members have more contact with society than in the work world. And it is in this world of bottom lines, lay-offs and take-overs that the Buddhist ideals of wisdom, compassion and courage often face their severest test.

"These people have a unique mission and there isn't yet an avenue for them to develop that mission," said Doris McCloskey, who was instrumental in getting today's conference off the ground. "These people need support and want an opportunity to talk to people who are dealing with the same problems they are. This is not a place to teach business or to make business connections but a place where people can encourage one another in applying Buddhism to business."

The idea for business people, entrepreneurs and executives to meet was proposed last year at a Central Executive Committee conference. Each area was invited to hold a special meeting this year as the first step toward developing programs to better serve this important membership.

One of the main topics explored today was the successive Soka Gakkai presidents' guidance on doing business among members. "There is this whole idea that if it has to do with money, it's dirty," Mrs. McCloskey explained. "Many people have been told to avoid business dealings with members altogether." More questions were asked than answered today, but if the mystery and apprehension surrounding doing business with members is to be dispelled, then asking the right questions is the place to start.

Gail Dugas, who presented the topic, emphasized that it is important to understand the spirit and context of past guidances. When the Soka Gakkai was rebuilt in Japan after World War II, desperate times saw some members exploit other members for financial gain and saw others allow their faith to be tarnished because of business relationships with other members. And it was then that Josei Toda, the second president, first cautioned the membership about this. Today it is important to make sure that business dealings reflect positively on the organization, Ms. Dugas said.

Many members may find themselves in the position to sell to other members or become their landlord. During the day's discussions, one dilemma raised was when a landlord needs to evict a tenant who is also a member. Should that tenant be given special consideration? What would be better in the long run, to throw the person out or to let him or her slide for another month?

The difficulty of practicing SGI principles in an environment where people use others and rule through fear and insecurity was the subject of Tom Friese's presentation. CEO of a multimillion dollar packaging company, Mr. Friese said: "I found the world of big business to be a world of jealousy, hatred and grudges. Executives were constantly covering for one another and in the end hurting people and the business. I put myself constantly in front of the firing squad because I refused to play along." He went through a succession of powerful positions in multinational companies before starting his own business.

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“Even though I was constantly surpassing my sales goals, my bosses were always creating reasons to fire me because I spoke the truth,” he said. “I have learned that only by bringing out the negative in people can you get to the positive. To create a business that is practical, productive and in harmony, you have to be willing to deal with negativity and divisiveness head on.”

During the closing session, Senior Vice General Director Guy McCloskey reminded the group that a strong Buddhist practice can provide the wisdom to make tough decisions. He cautioned that while the organization is not a network for contacts — that we should not use the organization for personal profit — there is no need to avoid business dealings with members or to treat them differently, so long as we do business in a way that protects our organization and the members. He summed up by saying, “Common sense is good business sense.”

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