

It's All of Our Business

Human relationships based on trust make our organization work. Anything that dilutes this trust weakens the bonds between members and can adversely affect people's faith and ultimately their happiness. Hence, the Soka Gakkai's long-standing cautions about the borrowing and lending of money and joint business ventures among members. As SGI President Ikeda has said, "When money is involved, people sometimes deviate from correct faith and capitalize on our organization."

In Chicago last month, the local organization held SGI-USA's first meeting for business people (please see p. 1). Similar events will be held in other areas as a first step toward devising programs to better serve this group. In Chicago, a crucial dialogue began and many important questions were raised about faith and business, specifically about the intent of the successive Soka Gakkai presidents' guidance on the subject.

Since the time of the first president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, business partnerships between members have been a cause of concern. Makiguchi's reasoning: When a business does poorly, the partners tend to blame one another, and when it does well, greed can jeopardize the partners' friendship.

Toda, too, a savvy businessman himself, saw many examples of this tendency. Because he rarely knew of such business partnerships bringing happiness to the parties involved, he discouraged joint ventures as a general principle and urged people to go it alone. He reasoned that if he didn't take such a stand, people might take joint business ventures too lightly, not understanding the potential negative effects that might arise if the partners were influenced by their baser natures.

"In the final analysis, however, if those with beautiful hearts and great conscience decide to go into partnership with their trustworthy and respectable friends who are members — and they have a strong determination — they can go ahead," Toda said. "And I want them to succeed" (*Toda Josei Zenshu* [Complete Works of Josei Toda], vol. 2, pp. 243–45).

He added that while it generally may be wiser for members to avoid partnerships with other members, the organization has no regulation or rule prohibiting joint ventures. "There is no such law in the Gakkai," he said (*Ibid.*).

President Ikeda, too, has reiterated this concern, urging us to keep our organization of faith pure. He's shared stories of leaders and members who've taken advantage of their positions or abused the organization in other ways for financial gain. He has strictly warned against money-lending or borrowing schemes or allowing anyone to abuse the members for profit. He has pointed out that we should be watchful for such people and use common sense to protect ourselves and our organization.

Plots and schemes differ from legitimate business, however. As they discussed in Chicago, financial relationships among members are not necessarily bad. Toda cautioned against joint business ventures — not against every possible exchange of money for goods and services. We all probably know, for example, members who are hairdressers, restaurateurs or sales people. There's no reason we can't get a haircut, a meal or a bottle of vitamins from them. But we might rightly question someone who passes out business cards at a world peace gongyo meeting or gives a sales pitch at a discussion meeting.

The SGI is an organization of friends. As friendships develop, the opportunity to do business together may naturally arise. Especially as more and more people are getting involved in home-based businesses. The SGI can't and doesn't want to control people's behavior or the human tendency to form networks. As Toda said, sometimes such

Title: Editorial: It's All of Our Business

Subject: World Tribune 09/12/97 n.3156 p.2 WT970912p02

Author:

Keywords: Business Daily Editorials Life Opinion Practice Tribune World

partnerships work. And there are no mere rules that can cover every possible situation. Dialogue and reason are what are needed.

So long as we remember that faith and the happiness of people are the sole “business” of the organization, and we do everything with a determination to further that purpose, we will be on the right track.

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