



# BEING BUDDHA AT WORK

108 ANCIENT TRUTHS ON  
CHANGE, STRESS, MONEY, & SUCCESS

**FRANZ METCALF AND BJ GALLAGHER**  
FOREWORD BY HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA

An Excerpt From

***Being Buddha at Work:  
108 Ancient Truths on Change, Stress, Money, and Success***

by Franz Metcalf & BJ Gallagher  
Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

# Contents

xiii Foreword by *His Holiness the Dalai Lama*

1 Introduction: *Putting Buddha to Work*

## **PART I** **Becoming a Mindful Worker**

---

### **9 Choosing Mindful Work**

*Creating Right Livelihood*

- 10 Advantages of mindful work
- 11 Choosing the right career or job
- 13 Becoming a great employee
- 14 Self-esteem
- 15 Dealing with distractions

### **17 Practical Enlightenment**

*Chop Wood, Carry Water*

- 18 Beginner's mind
- 19 Establishing priorities
- 20 Time management
- 21 Procrastination
- 22 Too much e-mail
- 23 Getting lost in cyberspace
- 24 Selling without selling out
- 25 Really distasteful jobs

- 27 **Quality of Work Life**  
*The Middle Way at Work*
- 28 When smart people do dumb things
  - 29 Discouragement
  - 30 Rumors and gossip
  - 31 The company you keep
  - 32 Achieving work/life balance
  - 33 The cost and benefits of integrity and wisdom
- 35 **Being Successful**  
*How Do You Define Success?*
- 36 Achieving goals
  - 37 Multitasking
  - 38 Finding the “right” answer to a problem
  - 39 Admitting mistakes
  - 40 Getting promoted
  - 41 Celebrating accomplishments
  - 42 Happiness vis-à-vis success
- 43 **Money and Happiness**  
*What’s the Connection?*
- 44 “The root of all evil”
  - 46 Personal wealth
  - 47 Creating a long-term spending plan
  - 48 Greed
  - 49 Getting rich
  - 50 Financial setbacks and losses
  - 51 Financial hardship
  - 52 Planning for retirement
- 55 **Dealing with Change**  
*Riding the Waves of Impermanence*
- 56 Resistance to change
  - 57 Anxiety, fear, and stress

- 59 Losing your job
- 60 Changing careers
- 62 Finding new work
- 64 Taking care of yourself in difficult times

## **PART II** **Cultivating Mindful Work Relationships**

---

### **67 Working with Others**

#### *Unity in Diversity*

- 68 Getting along with others
- 69 The golden rule
- 70 Influencing others
- 71 Doing something extra for others
- 72 Double standards between ourselves and others
- 73 Work spouses
- 74 The importance of listening
- 75 Receiving negative feedback
- 76 Teaching or training a coworker
- 77 Criticizing someone
- 78 Encouraging personal accountability
- 79 Helping others deal with change

### **81 Dealing with Difficult People**

#### *Seeing All Beings as the Buddha*


- 82 Dealing with jerks
- 84 Coworkers who lie
- 85 Handling people pleasers
- 86 Being bad-mouthed
- 87 Anger
- 88 Adulterous affairs at work
- 89 Whiners and negative people
- 90 Conflict with a teammate

91 **Customers—Love ’Em or Lose ’Em**

*Customer Service as Bodhisattva Activity*

- 92 The importance of customer service
- 93 Encouragement for customer service people
- 94 Handling an angry customer
- 96 Bad customer service
- 97 Public relations

---

**PART III**  **Creating a Mindful Workplace**

---

101 **Leadership and Bosses**

*Lead, Follow, or Get Off the Path*

- 102 True leadership
- 103 Identifying and selecting good leaders
- 104 Becoming a great employer or boss
- 105 Bosses who surround themselves with “yes” men
- 106 Tough, demanding bosses
- 107 Executive egos
- 108 Power struggles
- 109 Terrible bosses

111 **The Big Issues**

*Beyond the Bottom Line*

- 112 Making a profit
- 113 Bottom-line thinking vs. Buddha-mind thinking
- 114 Writing a mission statement
- 115 Investing in the future
- 116 Developing a learning organization
- 118 Encouraging creativity and innovation
- 120 Corporate responsibility
- 121 Going green

**123 Work Practices and Processes**

*Practice Is Awakening*

- 124 Short-term versus long-term thinking
- 125 Designing work processes
- 126 Technology
- 127 Business gurus and consultants
- 128 Improving communication within an organization
- 129 Running a mindful meeting

**131 The Care and Feeding of Employees**

*Your Team as Your Sangha*

- 132 Selecting and hiring the right person for the job
- 135 Motivating people
- 137 Expectations
- 138 Employee training
- 139 Increasing employee morale
- 140 Job security
- 142 Guiding career development
- 143 Incentives and bonuses

**145 Solving People Problems**

*There Are No Answers—Pursue Them Lovingly*

- 146 Policies and procedures
- 147 Employee diversity
- 150 Stereotyping
- 151 Sexism
- 152 Sexual harassment
- 153 Squabbling coworkers
- 154 Firing someone for poor performance
- 156 Lack of trust

157	<b>Organizational Change</b> <i>Everything Changes; Nothing Remains without Change</i>
158	Reorganizing, mergers, and acquisitions
159	Outsourcing and rightsizing
161	Corporate crises and scandals
162	Turning around a business
163	Starting a new business
165	<i>Glossary of Buddhist Terms</i>
171	<i>Notes on Sources</i> <i>A Word about Sources</i> <i>Notes</i>
175	<i>About the Authors</i>





## THE DALAI LAMA

### Foreword

**M**ORE THAN 2500 years have passed since the Buddha lived and taught in India. We Buddhists remember the Buddha as a great teacher who showed the path to ultimate peace and happiness for all sentient beings. His teaching remains refreshing and relevant even today because he invited people to listen, reflect, and critically examine what he had to say in the context of their own lives.

It is a fundamental truth that whatever our social status, background, age, or gender, we all want happiness and dislike suffering. However, all of us regularly experience suffering and are caught in the sway of disturbing emotions. Like all religions, Buddhism deals with basic human problems, but what distinguishes the Buddhist way of thinking is its employment of human intelligence in dealing with our disturbing emotions. In addition, the Buddhist view of interdependence and the advice not to harm anyone emphasize the practice of compassion and nonviolence. This remains one of the most potent forces for good in the world today.

From a Buddhist viewpoint, all that we do originates in the mind. The quality of our actions depends primarily on our motivation. If we develop a good heart, then, whatever field we work in, the result will be more beneficial. With proper motivation, our activities will be helpful; without it, we are likely to make trouble. This is why the idea of

compassion is so important. Although it is difficult to bring about the inner change that gives rise to it, it is absolutely worthwhile to try.

The ultimate purpose of the Buddha's teachings is to serve and benefit humanity, which entails applying them in practice in our day-to-day lives. This in turn reflects a practical approach to human problems, and I don't believe you need to be a Buddhist to benefit from such an approach. This book, *Being Buddha at Work*, attempts to relate the Buddha's advice to the modern workplace. I trust that readers will find inspiration here and pray that those who do will meet with success in putting that inspiration into effect.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Henery".

October 27, 2011

## Putting Buddha to Work

**T**HIS BOOK IS for people who seek to apply ancient spiritual wisdom to current workplace situations. Sometimes this means ancient solutions to today's problems. Sometimes it means new perspectives on timeless troubles. In all cases, we put Buddha to work because he was not some solitary hermit; he was the founder and CEO of a growing organization. As you get into this book, you'll see what we mean.

Most people who perform paid work outside the home spend more of their waking time at work than anywhere else. They see their bosses more than they do their spouses. They spend more time and energy dealing with difficult coworkers than they do with their own difficult children. For many of us, work itself has become an important way to establish personal identity, to meet social needs, to build satisfaction through accomplishment, and to find purpose and meaning in life. It's also a place where we face the fundamental truths of the world according to Buddhism: everything is frustrating, everything is interconnected, and everything is impermanent. (Note that these are translations of *dukkha*, *anatta*, and *anicca*, the "three marks" of existence. See the glossary for more information on these and many other Buddhist terms.)

It should come as no surprise, then, that workers at all levels, in all kinds of organizations, are bringing their spiritual beliefs and values to work, or are seeking to discover new beliefs and values *through* their work. Many people see work as a place where they can live out their personal spirituality or their relationship with ultimate reality (however they define it); some even see their place of work as their primary spiritual community. We agree. We are trying to build the house of work on the rock of wisdom. This brings us to a vital question.

Buddhism has for thousands of years provided a spiritual foundation for the daily lives of millions around the world. But does Buddhism have anything to offer us—Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike—in today’s world of work? It does, and we offer it in this book. Such wisdom can inspire and instruct us in how to live a good life—a fulfilled, happy life. We offer you the teachings of the Buddha and his tradition, as well as our own application of these teachings to your work situations.

### *The Buddha and Buddhism*

The Buddha was a human being, not a god. He compared himself to a doctor, dispensing the medicine of mindfulness—insight into our human problems, both as individuals and as groups. But more than offering insight into our problems, he taught us how to transcend them. Beginning with his own experience of enlightenment, or awakening (the word *Buddha* means “awakened one”), he created a system of thought—the Buddhist tradition—that provides helpful, practical answers to typical human situations we face in our work lives today. Buddhism is, above all, useful. It is not about pie in the sky; it is about here and now. It is not about theory; it is about *practice*. It is not just a way of thinking; it is a way of *being* and *doing*.

The Buddha was not born “Buddha”—he earned that name. He struggled with life just as we do today, and he discovered the keys to living. He sought to teach his discoveries to others, and we seek to continue his teaching by sharing it with you.

The core of the Buddha’s teaching lies in his very first sermon. In it, he taught that both self-indulgence and self-mortification are useless. They do not, in the end, lead to happiness, no matter the context. He then went on to teach the four noble truths: (1) Life is full of dukkha. We suffer because we get what we don’t want; we don’t get what we *do* want; and, even if we do get what we want, either we can’t keep it or we just worry about losing it. (2) Dukkha is caused by desire for things and attachment to things.

(3) Desire can be ended (and so dukkha can be ended!). (4) The way to end desire is by following the *eightfold noble path* of right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration (again, see the glossary for more details).

It's easy to see how relevant some of these aspects of the path are to the workplace. Others are harder. We're here to help.

### *The Buddha in You (and Us)*

This book is founded on the belief that the Buddha was not just a historical figure who lived 2,500 years ago. We believe that in a profound sense, the Buddha also exists within each of us at every moment. The Buddha exists in what has been called the *Buddha mind* or *Buddha nature*, the mind of the Buddha that lies sleeping within us, waiting to be awakened. We've all had moments of awakening—even if we're not Buddhists—when something has roused the Buddha mind from slumber; moments when we've lived outside our limited selves, in union with all things, flowing with the unending current of life. This liberation (Christians might call it grace) does not come when we ask for it but when we're open to it. When we think and act with this freedom, we don't just act like Buddhas, we *become* Buddhas. Not *Buddhists*—that doesn't matter—just Buddhas. Of course, we fall back into ourselves, but this fundamental freedom remains in the moment if we can just expand into it.

In this book, we draw on a wide variety of Buddhist texts, both ancient and modern, to help you experience that expansion. The *dharma*, the teaching of the Buddha, has grown through the centuries. In this way, Buddhism is a living thing, fostered by those who seek awakening in their own lives. A contemporary haiku by a poet writing from Buddha mind is just as sacred and legitimate as an ancient scroll by a venerated monk. Each inspired writer expands the dharma in his or her own work. We humbly try to expand the dharma in ours here.

This book aims to help you be the Buddha that you already are, to find your own Buddha nature, and to allow that nature to guide you in your workaday activities. The Buddha in you is your best teacher. We believe the workplace issues and challenges we've outlined here will help you bring that Buddha to life.

### *A Note About Using This Book*

Our book is divided into three main parts. Part 1, "Becoming a Mindful Worker," explores the Buddha's wisdom for *individuals*. Here we cover such things as how to choose right livelihood, how to be a good employee, and how to be successful. Part 2, "Cultivating Mindful Work Relationships," focuses on how to work with *other people*, including bosses, coworkers, work teams, difficult people, and customers. Part 3, "Creating a Mindful Workplace," deals with broad *organizational* topics, including policies and procedures, human resources issues, technology, work processes, and organizational problems.

If you have a specific work problem on which you'd like some guidance, just look it up in the table of contents and go straight to the answer. Of course, we can't list every possible situation in one book, but 108 issues is a pretty substantial sampling. You can also read straight through the book to get the big picture and begin to put together your own thoughts and practices for becoming more mindful and more accepting, wherever you are.

We have written for the broadest possible audience, from frontline workers to supervisors and managers to senior executives. There is wisdom and guidance here for entrepreneurs and small businesses, as well as Fortune 500 companies. Many of the ideas apply to nonprofit organizations as well as for-profit businesses. But of course, not all answers will be equally useful to all readers. Some are directed more to managers and business owners, while others are directed more to worker bees. But remember, like bees, we are all in this game of work together, so you may gain by reading answers that at first glance seem not to apply to you.

We have also written for a broad audience in terms of familiarity with Buddhist teachings. Some readers are practicing Buddhists who seek to further their understanding of and commitment to the *bodhisattva* path; other readers may not know what a bodhisattva even *is*. Some seek to practice the Buddha's teachings in every aspect of their working life; others may simply be seeking a few tips and tools to help them make it through the workday. We welcome all readers to these pages. We do not insist that you become a bodhisattva, but if you wish to do so, you can find many wonderful books that will take you deeper into this. Our book is a more applied, practical, how-to approach to workaday problems and difficulties—a Buddhist tool kit for the workplace.

The Buddha isn't here to answer our specific questions for us, but we have done our best to understand his teachings and apply them as we think *he* would. Some of these teachings are general and philosophical; others are detailed and specific. That's because some workplace problems are basic or universal, so we can point to basic and universal solutions, while other problems are more complex and require more detailed answers. The wide variety of topics addresses the wide variety of situations we face in our different jobs, different organizations, different times, and different careers.

Finally, it is important that you not accept the Buddha's teachings just because he was the Buddha. He famously told his followers to think for themselves—to question his teachings and test them against their own experience and understanding, only retaining what worked. If that was true for the Buddha, how much more so is it true for us! Test the Buddha's teachings and test this book's. Your path is unique to you, and ultimately only *you* can decide what advice is useful and what advice isn't on that path. Please take what you will, and use it as you want.

## Becoming a Mindful Worker

*To study the Buddha way is to study the self.*

—Dogen Zenji, Genjo Koan

**A** GREAT BEAUTY OF the Buddha's teachings is how they always return our attention to us, to our minds. Everything we feel and do is driven by mind. This means you can follow the path of awakening, no matter what anyone else around you is doing. Your awakening and growth are not contingent on others. You might find this thought frightening; you might find it liberating.

Some people want to put their faith and future in others' hands:

- “Just tell me what to do, boss, and I'll do it,” they say.
- “Leaders are supposed to have the answers; that's what they get paid the big bucks for,” they emphasize.
- “I just work here; I don't make the rules,” they deflect.

For such people, realizing that fate, or karma, lies solely in their own hands can be upsetting—or at the very least, unsettling.

Others may find the Buddha's message terrifically empowering:

- “You get out of it what you are willing to put into it,” they suggest.
- “If I own the problem, I also own the solution,” they point out.
- “I create my own future, through my thinking, my decisions, my actions, and my attitude,” they assert.



For these people, the profoundly personal nature of mindfulness and awakening is exciting, and following its path is deeply satisfying. These are the lucky, the bodhisattvas (beings who are focused on awakening).

But most of us are not yet bodhisattvas—at least not consistently. We feel mixed emotions about the prospect and path of becoming mindful workers. Sometimes we feel great, eager to embark, devoted to continuing. At those times, we, too, are bodhisattvas. Other times, we feel discouraged, in need of guidance, spiritually inadequate. That is when we need help.

In this section, we apply the Buddha's words to many aspects of work. You may be discouraged in trying to find the right job. You may be shaky in marshaling the strength and skill that your work demands. You might be looking for new solutions to old problems. Or you might simply be looking for confirmation of the work values and attitudes you've long held. Maybe your own Buddha nature is already well awakened. Whatever your interest or need, the Buddha has wisdom for you. His example and his teaching can help you bring your spiritual life to work and bring your work to life.

In these answers, the Buddha often returns to two fundamental teachings. First, no one is inadequate. Each of us has the Buddha nature within. Second, we always have a choice. To be awake is always optional. Mindful or mindless—our decision.



## **Choosing Mindful Work**

*Creating Right Livelihood*

## What Are the Advantages of Mindful Work?

---

*Since there is nothing to attain, the bodhisattva lives by the perfection of wisdom with no hindrance in the mind; no hindrance and therefore no fear. —The Heart Sutra*

**W**HAT ARE THE advantages of mindful work? The Buddha would simply say they're the advantages of awakening, because mindful work brings awakening to the workplace. This is true because, fundamentally, awakening is the state of being fully aware—fully mindful, having your mind *full*—of reality. The first person to see the Buddha after he was awakened asked, “What are you?” The Buddha answered, “I am awake.” Enlightenment is being awake to the reality of reality.

So the question becomes, “Reality—what’s that, and why would I want to awaken to it?” And the answer is, “Reality is the interconnectedness of all things, and you want to awaken to this because it frees you from your limitations.”

Awakening/enlightenment, full mindfulness of reality, is the core of Buddhism, and there is no reason why it cannot be the core of work as well. Mindful work wakes up the workplace and the world. The “perfection of wisdom” that the Heart Sutra describes is a Buddhist spiritual practice, but what does that mean? Work practice can be spiritual practice. And Buddhist spiritual practice comes down to mindfulness. So these spheres of life are not separate. And this non-separateness is not about attaining anything; it’s about being there, at work or at home, without hindrance and without fear.

“Which comes first,” you might ask, “mindfulness or mindful work?” Well, where are you, right now? Do the work of the moment. Take a first step. Sure, a first step is not a whole journey; nor is a first answer a whole book. Keep on.

## How Do You Choose the Right Career or Job?

---

*A bird catcher said to the Teacher, "My family's always been bird catchers. If we stop, we'll starve. But doing this [evil] work, can I still reach Buddhahood?"*

*The Teacher answered, "The mind goes to hell, not the body. So when you kill a bird, take your mind and kill it too. Doing this, you can reach Buddhahood."*

—Suzuki Shosan, Roankyo

**A**LMOST EVERYONE AT one time or another has asked, "How do I find the right career, the right job, where I will be fulfilled and happy?" If you are seeking to learn from the Buddha's teachings, this question is especially important, because part of the very core of Buddhism, the *eightfold noble path*, is right livelihood. Simply put, that means doing work that helps, rather than harms, all living things. As the Buddha brought work into the spiritual life, he brought spirituality into work life. Right livelihood is being the Buddha at work.

For many people, this is a serious problem. What if you work for a company that makes instruments of destruction? What if you work for an organization whose fundamental mission is not aligned with your own values? Can you still do mindful work? Can you still pursue right livelihood?

The Zen teacher Suzuki's answer here is very interesting. He taught that we should try hard never to harm other living things, and yet he reconciles enlightenment with bird catching. How can this be? The key issue, it seems, is not so much what your body is doing but what your mind is doing. Of course, the mind and the body are intimately connected, and one often follows the other in day-to-day life. But this need not always be so. It is possible to have the body engaged in one activity and the mind focused on something else. Here, he advises the bird catcher to kill the bird if he absolutely must (he recognizes that people have to make a living), while keeping the mind not on killing the bird (which would

be wrong livelihood) but on killing the mind—that is, killing desire and attachment. A creative solution, and one that acknowledges the power of our environment over us. There are times when we cause harm without meaning to.

Of course, the Buddha would never accept this as a long-term solution. He would encourage the bird catcher to change jobs if he could. Bird catching simply is not right livelihood. But perhaps for the time being, there is no choice. You must feed yourself and your family, and this means you must make a living in a compromised fashion. You'll simply have to work that much harder to keep your mind pure until you can find work that *is* right livelihood.

You can pursue enlightenment no matter what job you have, and you can often transform your boring or unfulfilling work into mindful work by changing how you *think* about your work, by changing your spirit. You can be a garbage collector, in the spirit of love and service, and be well on your way to Buddhahood. There's no question that garbage collecting is right livelihood, while a creative and high-paying position in a corrupt and greedy field is not. Whatever your job is, start there; adopt the right mind and take that first step on the path. Yes, the path may lead you to change careers, but the Buddha does not demand that you harm yourself in doing so. In the end, only a career that helps will make you truly fulfilled.

this material has been excerpted from

***Being Buddha at Work:  
108 Ancient Truths on Change, Stress, Money, and Success***

by Franz Metcalf & BJ Gallagher  
Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers  
Copyright © 2012, All Rights Reserved.  
For more information, or to purchase the book,  
please visit our website  
[www.bkconnection.com](http://www.bkconnection.com)