

# The Zen Art of Management

A Zen Meditation

Dr. Peter Fritz Walter

Zen is by itself the art of management, the art of managing life.

In Zen there are no theories. Yet it could be said that Zen is the purest form of management theory.

Zen management means to lead a life in the spirit of Zen, which equals being an artist of life. Zen followers are those who are not ashamed of their humaneness and who refuse to play the fake games many top-managers indulge in.

Zen means to be authentic and without false toward superiors and inferiors alike.

Zen management is leading others by virtue, and not by order. However, it is not following a Puritan nor a Spartan paradigm.

Zen does not put restrictions, but instead maintains a way between the extremes. Zen followers have less difficulties to be excellent leaders than those who are overly demanding trying to be perfect examples.

Nobody likes to follow a saint. Simply because it makes us feel bad about ourselves.

Zen teaches Self-leadership. Who can lead himself can lead others. Self-leadership and self-discipline go along well. However, the kind of self-discipline that Zen teaches is not rigid nor moralistic. It is not judgmental but natural, spontaneous. To be

disciplined is a necessity if one wants to follow the Tao. And it is a necessity for the manager.

The leader who is disciplined but not judgmental is followed with love.  
The leader who is undisciplined but not judgmental is followed with gossip.  
The leader who is undisciplined and judgmental is followed with hate.

Zen teaches wisdom and consideration by simply following nature. Nature is wistful and cares about all beings without discrimination. The leader who follows the Zen teaching, accepts his subordinates without discriminating. And he cares about them as he cares about his own children or relatives. He does not judge them and does not offend them. This ensures him their devotion, also in times of crisis.

The Zen art of management and the Zen art of life are not different. The art of life and the art of management are not two different things but two melodies played on the same instrument.

Practicing Zen means to be original - oneself, disregarding conditions and environments.

Zen means leading by attentiveness, by awareness. Awareness is twofold, inside and outside. To be aware means to be aware of one's own complexity. This awareness, and not virtue, is the

secret of simplicity. Being aware of my own traps, I do not fall in the traps of the world.

The Zen leader may be lonely. He may be misunderstood at first. Others may wonder why he does not like to attend noisy meetings, why he does not overreact and rather listens carefully, and why he does not shout at his subordinates nor bow in front of his superiors. They may take him for an arrogant, picky kind of guy.

The Zen manager is aware of what people are talking about him, but he does not interfere in their gossip. By no means does he try to justify himself, by no means would he explain why he is such and such. Does the sun justify why it shines? Does the moon justify why it is only visible at night?

The Zen manager is confident that people find out by themselves what is true and what is false, and that this ensures their building trust in him.

The Zen inspired manager, as all of us, has known many foolish managers but he does not force himself to be non-foolish. He knows that chasing the Buddha, he can never meet the Buddha. Thus, he can accept life, himself and others.

