



# USING ARISTOTLE'S TRANSCENDENTALS TO BUILD A GOOD ORGANIZATION

Dave Durand

# Everything hinges on whether you build a united, true, beautiful, and good organization.

These ancient principles are timeless and instrumental to the modern context of building, scaling, and leading a business. All organizations flourish only to the degree that they have Transcendental qualities, but most leaders are not intentional about their importance.

The Transcendental Desires of goodness, truth, beauty, and unity are universal. They are hardwired into our human nature and every human wants them, without limits. Nobody thinks: *I've had enough goodness; please serve me up some badness now. No thanks to all that beauty; I've had enough. I'm tired of all that truth; please deceive me now. Or, This unity and cohesion are tiresome; let's create division and chaos now.* Because these are universal desires, they have a universal set of mirroring repulsions or antonyms. Badness, lies, ugliness, and division are all things that repel all humans unless they have developed a warped conscience, in which case you don't want to attract them into your organization anyway. Building an organization that is united, true, good, and beautiful is a sure way to attract and retain great talent and long-term customers and clients.

## UNITY

Unity is sometimes left off the list of Transcendentals, but it is very important to include as you build a great organization. This Transcendental desire is about cohesion and alignment, first and foremost within yourself, and then infused into the organization you lead.

When building and leading a company, it's essential to have a singular, unified vision. Today, forced diversity is an enemy of unity. Actual unity is a product of virtue, merit, and alignment, and it is the foundation of any healthy culture, regardless of size or influence.

Being a united organization is more than just maintaining an image; it's about ensuring that every employee, from top leadership to the new hires, aligns with the core mission. Unity is not just a strategic advantage but a cultural one that begets an even greater strategy and vice versa. When employees feel they are part of something bigger, they are more likely to rise up, take initiative, and emerge as leaders.

And if your number one goal is to recruit the best people, you will likely end up diverse and united.

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## TRUTH

The truth is utterly attractive but lies repel people and make your gut uneasy. When you lie, you also get uneasy, which is why lie detectors work. When you tell the truth and hear the truth, you feel better. We all desire truth. It's only dysfunction that warps that desire. Therefore, to lead a healthy and motivated team, keeping truth at the core of your culture is imperative. The truth retains great people, whereas lies repel them.

There are three steps to mastering a decision: to **desire what is good, know what is real,** and **do what is good.** For you to desire, know, and do what is good and real means you and everyone around you is operating in truth. Truth is the correspondence or agreement between a statement or belief and actual reality. While truth can be proven via data or evidence, there's something credible to the idea that we can feel what's true through intuition or gut instincts.

I admire those who operate in search of and in reverence to what is true, knowing it can and should be found. The pursuit of truth is the greatest sign of strength. The denial of truth is the greatest sign of weakness. If you don't desire and embrace the truth, you are weak.

The truth is the most simple, clear, and direct explanation for all things. Yet if you entertain the notion that no ultimate truth exists, you can never be a strong leader, and that weakness opens the door for you to be subject to manipulations. Conversely, the pursuit of truth makes you strong but isn't an excuse to forgo empathy and humility. Why? Because it risks morphing into authoritarianism. Both conservative and liberal ideologies can descend into tyranny, and they find their way into companies quite often.

The only way societies can have harmony is by having a common understanding of truth. And you must know, on your own, how to identify the truth and equally how to identify people and ideas that are not true. The good news is that there are several ways to do so, of which I will focus on two. The first is to be humble. Pride clouds judgment, as does bias. Pride also blocks learning, which is essential to disseminating the truth on matters. The second way is also powerful, and when things are debatable, it's the gold standard. That is by using the law of non-contradiction. "The law of non-contradiction states that nothing can both be and not be at the same time and in the same relationship. Put more formally, 'A' cannot be 'B' at the same time and in the same relationship."

The reason some people tell you that you can't know truth is simply to overpower you. If you can't know truth, then you can't point out their errors, plain and simple. This allows them to act any way they want without hinderance. Imagine having a roommate who steals your wallet but tells you it's his wallet because that's his truth. While most people are not that brazen, even slight degrees of that way of thinking are damaging to your team. As simple as it sounds, if a person says you can't know truth, they mean you can't know *any* truth; otherwise, the statement is false to begin with. That simple example is why you can't work with people who don't believe in truth. They will not hold themselves accountable.

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They can't be humble, either, because humility relies on a truthful examination of oneself. If they lie, cheat, steal, etc., but say "their truth" is that they are honest and trustworthy, they won't change, and they will be angry with you if you challenge them.

In business, you must be honest about the capabilities of your products or services. As businesses scale, leaders often face the temptation to inflate numbers or overpromise to attract new talent or increase sales. Resisting this and maintaining a commitment to the truth ensures long-term trust and credibility. As a virtue-based leader, embracing truth means being transparent, admitting mistakes, and being genuine in all interactions. When a leader commits to the truth, it helps empower employees to rise up as leaders themselves. This begets Giants leading Giants.

## **GOODNESS**

It's been said that the enemy of great is good. There have rarely been wiser words. "It's good enough" as a mentality can crush performance. However, there is a time when good enough makes sense, and you need to know the difference. However, when it comes to the Transcendental desire for goodness, you must understand it more practically. Goodness has perfection as its aim. Goodness happens when something is created and used perfectly for its intended purpose. That means it realizes the purpose of the one who created it. If you hold a meeting to solve a production problem, and the meeting solves the problem, that's good. If you only discuss the social lives of the attendees, it's a bad meeting. The distinguishing difference is that the former did what it was designed to do, for the purpose it was designed for by you, the creator.

Goodness is related to Prudence and Justice. If someone doesn't desire what is good, know what is real, or if they pursue an unjust mission, then it can't be truly good, even if it is used for its intended purpose. For example, consider an individual who intends to make a plan to trip someone to cause injury just for laughs. The successful creation and execution of the plan, meaning it fulfilled the purpose of its creator, is still not good because its end is bad. However, if the same plan were devised to stop a murderer from pursuing a victim, it would be good. Keep this in mind.

Getting back to "good enough." There are times when a major goal needs to get done and a minor goal needs to be good enough. For example, if you're trying to win a stock car race and you pull into the pit, you may want your team to clear off the windshield while the tires are changed, but you may not have time for them to get every last smudge. If you wait for it to be thoroughly cleaned, you will lose the race, so good enough is acceptable. When you stop a lower good at "good enough" in order to pursue a higher good, you are doing smart work. The purpose of cleaning the windshield is to have enough vision to win the race, not to win a spotless windshield contest. So, you meet your purpose. It's when you do the higher goods sloppily that you suffer, and so does your team. This may sound simple, but when you begin to reflect on this idea you will note that there are times when certain team players have fixated on the wrong things and have missed the point.

Goodness like this is possible only in light of truth, which is why I wrote about Prudence (second step is: know what is real, aka truth). Since goodness is the manifestation of something fulfilling the purpose of its creator's intention, you must ask what your intention is when you create. And you must make that intention known. If the mechanic cleaning the windshield is not made aware that the purpose is to win the race, then he will be frustrated when he can't complete his job. He will cause division and hold up the rest of the team.

So, you need to make sure your entire team sees their role as part of the whole if you want goodness to permeate your organization. When you create a product, does it do what it is intended to do? When you establish an incentive program, does it really incentivize? When you have a meeting about your budget, does that meeting stay about the budget or is it sidetracked? When your team leaves a meeting, they sometimes say that it was a good meeting. What makes them say that? The answer is that it fulfilled its purpose.

Start with the basics: Is your product bad or is it good? What is its purpose, and is that being fulfilled? Are your opportunities for advancement a lie or genuine? Are you building something that, at the end of the day, makes the world better?

Knowing and doing what is good establishes a strong foundation because you become a purpose-driven organization. As your business scales, you need to renew your commitment to understanding your purpose. That perpetuates the commitment to do what's right—be it in terms of fair pay, safe work practices, or honest advertising—which will always win in the long term. It's not just what you do, it's how you do it that Matters.

**A successful and united business or organization that is based on what's good, true, and beautiful ensures the legacy you leave will uplift and inspire.**



Incorporating the Transcendentals into business is not just about metrics or profit margins; it's about creating a legacy. A leader rooted in these principles doesn't only create a powerful business, but begins leading individuals who, irrespective of their roles, carry forward the values set forth, making impactful decisions aligned with unity, truth, beauty, and goodness.

## BEAUTY

The Transcendental desire for beauty includes more than mere visual aesthetics. It is defined by Thomas Aquinas as, "That which gives pleasure [delight] when seen." Although this definition suggests that it's limited to seeing, it is not meant to confine beauty to visual delight alone. Music, for example, is beautiful. Beauty has within it three parts: integrity, proportion, and clarity.

**Beauty has integrity** because it somehow presents completeness to its witness. You are not left lacking something about it when you experience it. A building half built is not as beautiful as it is when it is complete.

**Beauty has proportion** because it contains symmetry, harmony, and balance. We can't define this as much as we can feel it. A lack of these three makes most people uncomfortable to a mild or even strong degree.

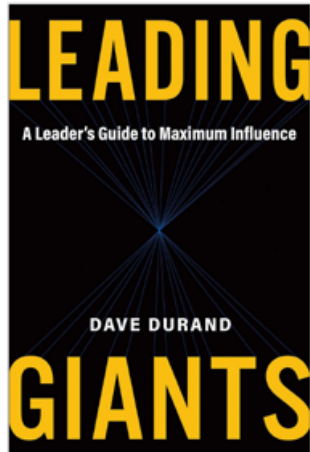
**Beauty has clarity** because it has the power to impress or reveal a greater reality about a given thing. We know it when we see it, even when we aren't looking for it. When watching sports, commentators will quip when they see a great play, "That was a thing of beauty."

In business, it refers to cultivating a pleasant, extraordinary experience for both employees and customers—e.g., a product that doesn't just function but brings customer satisfaction, a service that goes above and beyond, and an organizational culture that inspires. A beautiful culture is a harmonious culture. So, when building a business, prioritizing beauty uplifts how everyone experiences your company. As you scale, you'll increase your impact on families, communities, and even society, creating more beauty.

Many people say they want success when really what they mean is they want the fruits of success. A great way to succeed is to incorporate the Transcendentals into your business. But it's not just about getting great metrics or huge profit margins; it's about creating a legacy. A successful and united business or organization that is based on what's good, true, and beautiful ensures the legacy you leave will uplift and inspire. **Attaining your goals through commendable means makes the fruits of your labor even sweeter, and by doing so, you "transcend" the common struggles and sufferings inherent to our human experience.** 📖

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