

SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSMEN/WOMEN NEEDED FOR NIBBANA!

By Suwanda H J Sugunasiri

Anathapindika was a **millionaire**.

Anathapindika **attained to the Path**. He was Buddha's Chief benefactor.

Surprise? Contradiction?

But let's think through this for a minute. Just how does a businessman (sorry, meaning businesswoman, too, like using 'actor', banishing 'actress', to mean both) succeed in business?

First, there's the (1) **mental preparation**. You tell yourself that doing business is a good thing. Let's call this *valuing*.

Then you develop a *confidence* in yourself – "I can do it. I know can do it.", *overcoming self-doubt*.

Third, you make a *determination* to somehow succeed. Shall we call it *will-power*?

Now, after preparing your mind, you come to the (2) **exploration** stage.

Here, you first do a *market research* – Who are the clients? Where are they? What's the competition?

Then there's what may be called a *resource research*. How much capital is needed? Where do you get it from? Then, along the same lines, you ask yourself, "What else is needed to make a success of it?"

Then you develop a *business plan* that includes strategy.

Next is the (3) **implementational** stage, wouldn't you say?

Here, one begins with an *effort* to do it right, putting your best foot forward.

Then you make some pragmatic and practical decisions – what's the best, most suitable, *location*?

Then you find the needed *capital*.

With the financial and human resources in hand, you *start* the business.

Finally, you *discipline* yourself – self-discipline, to make it a success.

Ah, the result! Self-pride and an oozing confidence, of course, and a happiness all around. But soon, you'll not only be laughing all the way to the bank, but you'll also be enjoying your hard-earned wealth, too! And you can't wait for that mortgage-burning party.

So where does Anathapindika come into the picture in all this? Because, as a successful businessman, we can envision him attending to all the ingredients of business success as above. Then we wonder, how on earth did a man of this material world gain the spiritual path?

To answer this, we may want to see just how the above, needed for successful money-making, compares with what the Canonical texts recommend for the spiritual life:

<u>Stage</u>	<u>Money-making</u>	<u>Cultivating spirituality</u>
1. Mental preparation	Valuing	Valuing
	Confidence	<i>saddhā</i> 'confidence';
	Banishing self-doubt	<i>vicikiccā</i> 'self-doubt', as 'obstacle' (<i>nīvaraṇa</i>)
	Resolution / determination / will-power	<i>adhiṭṭhāna</i> 'resolution'
3. Implementation	Effort	<i>virīya</i> 'effort'
		<i>padhāna</i> 'energetic effort'
	Identifying best location	<i>rukhamūla gato vā, senāsana gato vā, suññāgāra gato vā</i> 'under a tree, on a bed, in a cemetery'
	Banishing laziness	<i>thīnamiddha</i> 'lethargy' as another 'obstacle'
	Stop worrying (about success, etc.)	<i>uddhaccakukkucca</i> 'worry and anxiety' as yet another 'obstacle'
	Discipline	<i>Sīla</i> 'discipline'
	Capital	<i>kusala citta</i> 'skillful mind' as spiritual capital

The parallels when it comes to exploration are obvious:

(2) Exploration	Market research	Am I ready for this?
	Resource research	What meditation techniques are available?
	Business plan	What technique(s) would I like to try out?
		How much time to allocate? What time(s) of day?
		Any particular life-style to follow, anything to be avoided, etc.?

The successful businessman does one more thing. At the end of each business cycle, s/he **takes stock**: what the weaknesses, what the strengths, avoiding past mistakes, and looking to do better. And guess what? Interestingly, the Buddha recommends that we do just that:

- **getting rid of** (*pahāna*) bad habits relating to *language, everyday conduct* or *livelihood*;
- **guarding against** (*nivāraṇa*) any new bad ones getting in;
- **protecting** the good habits and thoughts you already have (*anurakkhana*) and
- **cultivating** new ones (*bhāvanā*).

All this constitutes, as I translate it, ‘Excellent Mental Exercise’ (*sammā vāyāma*) in the Noble Eightfold Path.

So we can see that **the skills needed for business is no different from what is needed for living the good life and/or cultivating spirituality**. Only, the goal remains different.

Now we have some understanding of how that Buddha’s chief benefactor Anathapindika was able to scale the highest spiritual peaks even as he astutely bounced on the material trampoline.

But what more do the Buddhist texts have for us relating to successful business?

First, it is clear that the Buddha did not ask Anathapindika to stop making money. Indeed when he speaks of ‘**the happiness of having**’ or ‘**the happiness of wealth**’ (*atthi sukha*), he seems to have given the green light to make more and more. So things spiritual must have begun for Anathapindika when he began to *value* taking to the spiritual life **seriously**, just as he had, before meeting the Buddha, valued making money.

And imagine his elation when he heard the Buddha say that he could both have the cake and eat it, too! Because Buddha talks about the ‘**happiness of enjoying (the fruit)**’ (*bhoga sukha*), meaning, literally, either or both ‘happiness of food’ and ‘happiness of enjoying’.

This meant that Anathapindika could both make wealth (have the cake) and enjoy it (eat it), too!

A bank today advertises, “Enjoy today, Invest for tomorrow”. It is as if the Bank has taken a page from the Buddha who suggests that the **wealth be cut up into 4 quarters**, with 2 quarters (= ½) being put back into business, ¼ to be used for the necessities of daily living and the last ¼ for a rainy day.

About re-investing fully one-half, now does this sound like a wise business strategy, or does this sound like a wise business strategy? Isn't that what keeps a business from falling behind, and help keeping in step with advancing technology? Did I hear you say R & D – Research & Development?

As for personal enjoyment, sure, a mere quarter would not go far for all the living expenses today – food, mortgage, car, kids' schooling, a film or two, downloading music on to the I-pod, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera? But we need not miss the forest for the tree. All we need to get from it is the Buddha pointing us in the direction of ‘little wanting’ (*appicca*). Not shop till you drop, nor conspicuous consumerism. Out of this quarter was also to come gifts and other forms of sharing and giving – reining in the greed, and encouraging the tightening of belts. Encouraging all this is a ‘balanced life’ (*samajīvikatā*). Now wouldn't that be what the doctor prescribes, to anyone any time?

But what about today? There is nothing in what the Buddha suggests etched in stone. So if today's world of materialistic living, a far cry from the little wanting life-style, requires more money to be put into living than into the business, then Buddha, the Pragmatist, is sure to say, “Then, do it.”, and add, “But, only .. consider the consequences”.

As for the quarter to be put away for a rainy day, this surely must help steer the ship of ups and downs in the business judiciously, ensuring that the millionaire never once goes bankrupt! Or a country, for that matter.

If the guidelines for cutting the pie of wealth into four quarters were found to be useful for Anathapindika, he could only have benefited from two other teachings as well. One relates to the **‘happiness of not being in debt’** (*aṇana sukha*). Wouldn't we give anything to have that mortgage-burning party yesterday? And businesses take note, before going into debt after debt after debt in the greed to acquire more and more and more, and then get oneself caught in the vicious quagmire of bankruptcy.

But it is the next piece of advice that would have made the hearts of anyone working for Anathapindika leap for joy. And it was the **‘happiness of blamelessness’** (*anavajja sukha*). Just exactly what does that mean? A recent media headlines how business will thrive when employees are treated well. That is, *doing well by doing good*.

And let's see how the Buddha, then, seeks to encourage blamelessness. It is by treating one's employees well, the guidelines for good employer-employee relations (*Advice to Sigala Discourse*) being as follows (hopefully, allowing no need for strikes):