

“Being entrepreneurs, a path to happiness”

Some concrete aspects of the entrepreneur life in communion

*“The guard is in an upper place,
not to look at the view
but to take care of the city”
Henry E. Shaw*

Introduction

Our present background indicates the urgency for truly entrepreneurs, ready to invest talent, time and resources, motivated by more noble reasons than personal benefit. People conscious of the social responsibility they are involved in, for the building of an integral and sustainable development. (1)

Speaking in particular of the entrepreneur of communion, we can point out that the main difference for each concrete aspect of his life in the company, are not just forms, but the basic concepts that inspire his actions, the culture of giving.

But, what is the culture of giving? Let’s see the definition that Chiara gives us: “... it does not always mean to break off something to give it. Really, these words express the inner culture that our movement radiates in the world: the culture of love ... of evangelic love ... That may seem difficult, hard, heroic. But it is not just so, because man, made at image and resemblance of God who is Love, finds his fulfillment precisely in loving, in giving. This yearning is very deep in himself, believer or not”. (2)

“How does this love become concrete in our life?: We have had the intuition that love is like a light. When a light ray comes through a prism or through a drop of water, it refracts in the seven colors of the rainbow. All colors of light that, at the same time, are being displayed in infinite gradations.

In the same way, our love is not a feeling, neither enthusiasm, nor mere activism. It’s something very concrete that expresses itself in the different aspects of our lives, in such a way that revolutionizes each action ... and shows that it’s always moved by an ideal ... the manifestations of love in us can be as uncountable as the acts of our lives are.” (3)

Let’s try to point out some characteristics that the actions of this entrepreneur may acquire, in each one of these concrete aspects, putting into practice the culture of giving. And as we define the culture of giving as this evangelic love, I thought about relating them to the beatitudes, synthesis of this message.

I. Communion of goods.

*"Blessed are the poors in spirit,
because the kingdom of Heaven belongs to them"*

The typical attitude of the communion entrepreneur, is the chosen poverty. That poverty that makes him feel in complete dependence of God. It's this attitude, as a guy who has blind confidence in his father, that opens up the doors to that indescribable and always bewildering experience of providence. That sweeping instant in which we get consciousness, that the most infinite being in universe, has taken care of our tiniest needs.

It's also important to develop our talent to take the risk and not try to instrumentalize providence, the Creator has made us completely free, and this freedom takes in itself the natural acceptance of consequences. We must be conscious, that we cannot take risks for and on behalf of our neighbors. To take over our natural poverty of means, will help us to improve the administration of these means, and to develop some unlimited ones, like creativity, reciprocity, gratuity, etc.

The EdC entrepreneur feels like an administrator of talents and resources that the Father puts into his hands. Not only because we have received for nothing and for that, it's naturally fair that we give without awaiting anything in return, but because we must be conscious that resource generation is not only produced by our creativity and business risk, but the fruit of very many internal and external factors. In our specific case, these factors (mainly those that have to do with collective life) are being exponentially enhanced by a positive input, that living the aspects of communion in our companies creates. So, the extraordinary wealth generated by this, logically and morally, cannot be considered like our own.

Besides, it is characteristic the detachment of worldly matters, the goods find their own must be in the use we give to them. The goods of the company cannot be considered by the entrepreneur as of free disposal, for particular aims, because in this way it's essence becomes denaturalized. The expenses increase the unnecessary goods produce and superfluous consumes are anti-economic, even in a capitalist company. It's important and reasonable, not to cross over the diffuse limit, where goods contribute no longer to the objective, and they start to hinder it.

A last point to underline in this aspect, is the experience of concrete deprivation, the fact of resigning something, even necessary for us, something that hurts, that makes us feel a bit of sorrow, to give it, or better to give ourselves through it, to people that need more than we do; this is the key to transcendence, it makes us discover that we re able to arrive beyond ourselves, it expands our frontiers, renewing us, making us be ever more "new men" and enabling us to live a new reality. We experiment its fruit like peace, happiness, joy, and more than all, freedom.

II. Relationships within and without the company.

*"Blessed are the peaceful,
because those will possess the earth"*

The individual conception of man has greatly complicated relationships. We are radicalizing the fight of particular interests, and this generates uncountable situations of disagreements. If we want to develop harmonious relationships, that may give us a more "livable" life, we should develop our wit to give birth to "win-win" relationships, where the result is the mutual benefit and not that of one part against the other one.

This kind of relationship presupposes to understand the other, and to be able to understand him, we need to put ourselves in a gentle attitude. Gentleness is not something passive, it asks us to master ourselves, so that we can "give ourselves", putting into the others' service. Those who are able to master themselves will have the necessary calm to see circumstances clearly and the other's possibilities. (4)

To take the other's place, to leave aside our points of view, to try to see from the other's perspectives, to understand his/her motivations, builds up true relationships, reciprocal relationships that go beyond the economic frontiers and they last forever.

Past situations are, in the majority of cases, determinants for our relationships. That's why it is necessary that we put into practice the quality of "looking with new eyes", that's to say, to eradicate pre-concepts. All of us believe that we are capable to improve ourselves and to learn from our own mistakes. So, we should think that the other person is also able to do so, and we should always give him/her an opportunity.

Something that can help us with this commitment is to explicit it. The place where we are, places us as referents or examples, so we must be coherent and we should be humble enough to ask for pardon, when we commit any mistake.

A common practice in our companies is to tell life experiences; this is a very efficient instrument to spread our values. It's highly important to give imitable examples. When we get to know that someone is capable of something, we discover that we are also capable of doing so, and we take the courage to try it. Within the company, this practice enables that values permeate the actions of the whole organization.

Summing it up, we should put into practice the golden rule, this general moral principle that says: "try the others in the same way you want to be treated", and it is present in almost all cultures. This fact suggests that it is related with aspects innate to the human nature. A key element of the golden rule is that a person who tries to live with this rule as a guide, treats everybody with kind consideration, not only the members of his/her group.

Meekness conquers hearts and unifies wills; as a consequence, affinity, identification, respect, faithfulness, recommendation, synergy are generated. With this attitude, we will be able to carry on any company on Earth, and it will survive for the new one.

III. Inner life

*"Blessed are those who cry,
because they will be comforted"*

The ultimate aim of EdC is to build up a human society where –emulating the first Christian communities- “the multitude of believers had one heart and one sole ... and there were no people in need among them”. (Facts. 4, 32-34). That’s why people in need are a relevant place in our projects and it is with them “crying with those who cry”, feeling like our own the sorrow of our brothers, that we will fulfill our objectives. It is just the need of the brother that give us the real dimension to our needs.

But we do not only speak about material needs, we must be ready to receive, with an open attitude, someone that raises his/her pains, even though it’s not the appropriate time to do it. An entrepreneur, when he is the most authentic “company man”, more contacts will have with these neighbors and most suffering will receive as a consequence.

Whether we like it or not, suffering bitters any existence. Even our own. Small or big pains come all day long. We can face these sufferings as the possibility to increase our relationship with our Father. If this is a constant attitude, immediate and happy, we will be light and love for the uncountable sores that lacerate humanity.

It becomes almost natural to address to Him, to ask for these needs, sometimes even the most insignificant of all, or to thank Him for His generous intervention. And He speaks to us, He answers us, with that voice that is in the heart of each man, in our conscience.

It is this conscience that leads us, mainly in the most concrete things of our business activity, having respect for the laws, the payment of taxes, the relationship with trade unions, combating corruption.

Many times people speak about “the loneliness of the entrepreneur”, sometimes in our culture, we feel misunderstood. Many think that we live a very easy life. However, the burden of responsibility very often overwhelms us. It is a load that we carry, even though some other people are near us. In these moments, only confidence in God pushes us to go on.

We have in our hands the concrete possibility to diminish suffering and give comfort. This comfort, that not only calms down but renews strength and makes us find new ways to overcome suffering. There where misery abounds, the grace will over abound.

IV. Life value

*"Blessed are the peacemakers,
because they will be called God's sons"*

It is very usual that we, entrepreneurs are full of work and worries, prone to get easily irritated; we end up stressed and many times even ill. How can we regain our inner peace and emotional health? We can make a proposal: "live the present moment", and this means, live each instant that we have, as it were the only thing to do in life. There's a time for every single thing. We can do nothing to change the past, we can just learn from what we have lived, and there's no sense in losing the present moment, worried about the future.

As we know, the aim of work is the accomplishment of every single person, to give him/her dignity. But this aim is relegated; it is usual today that companies, to be able to fulfill their objectives, require their personnel to the point that they see their health affected. That is why we should take special attention in our companies to everybody's welfare, mainly those we have some particular need. We cannot overload people, not even accept any kind of discrimination. We must promote and encourage those who work in our company, so that they feel completely accomplished.

Even more, we should support with time and money, those who are called to undertake, even if this makes us lose resources prepared in our company. We should be multiplying agents, of this essential service to humanity.

The biblical mandate "dominate the Earth" and the parable of talents, make us place ourselves at the head of every technological advancement that frees man, gearing up his creative capacity, and avoiding any spoilage of nature. (4)

True progress, is not only quantitative growth, but includes quality, that is to say the company's welfare, and therefore the entrepreneur's, does not always coincide with the growth of the company, nor with more money being earned.

One of the most difficult things for an entrepreneur is to put decisions into others' consideration; since his/her vocation is characterized by undertaking decisions. He has the intuition, the vision, the tendency to take risks, the capacity to motivate. Nevertheless, communion presupposes confronting with those that share the company. It is necessary to be conscious that a vision from our collaborators will always go beyond our own and therefore, efficiency in our organization will depend on our capacity to create the conditions, where everyone can put his/her talents in common, allowing to develop all our potential. The entrepreneur, in charge of the company is also the first responsible, and the vital factor of peace in it. (4)

V. Harmony

*"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
because they will be satisfied"*

Thinking a bit about the world where we live, with its vast inequalities, increasingly outstanding, can human righteousness, the defense of the personal rights give an answer to these problems? Surely not, as it is demonstrated day in, day out. Only an authentic search of justice for everyone, that justice that gives everyone what he deserves, can ensure us a sustainable future.

As entrepreneurs we must take an active role in society. If we are true entrepreneurs, and not just wealth seekers, our success, our fulfillment, depends on our capacity to give answers to each need. We must act a true RSE; if we can invest resources or time, it is not morally fair to privilege what gives us greater benefit, but what can generate greater benefit to the community.

We cannot stick to the false security of goods, we cannot lean on this ephemeral illusion. With prudent optimism, we can take some risks, mainly if it is about developing natural wealth of creating new and authentic jobs; or supporting those ventures that, even if risky or unproductive, can contribute to common good. (4)

It is necessary to eradicate exclusion, starting from the most urgent, we must generate jobs so that people can reenter society (ex-prisoners, ill people for drugs or alcohol, single mothers, people with different capacities, undocumented people, illegal immigrants, etc.).

Our companies must have dignifying working places, and not just applying legal requirements, but letting workers develop integrally as human beings, therefore with appropriate places, functional and as beautiful as possible, without luxury or ostentation. Places must be warm for everyone coming in, in such a way that anyone feels at ease.

In our daily work, we should give special care to social conditioners. We must not take decisions for vanity, "so that we are not considered less than the others". Sometimes companies consider urgent and imperative to act as competence, for example, even though it is non economic.

It is necessary to develop managing systems and organizing structures that foster group and individual work. But most of all, that make participation and communion possible, generating a familiar background among everybody.

Our pay to our personnel, cannot be restricted to money and incentives. Sometimes, they, same as we do, need to be have a day off for a family event, or an additional holiday, a day more to study, an unexpected reward for extra work, etc. In other words, they need to feel valued and recognized as persons. Filled with justice.

VI. Wisdom

*"Blessed are the merciful ones, because they will receive misery.
Blessed are those with a clean heart, Because they will see God."*

We know beforehand how we will report back our conduct, even more, we can establish our own sentence "because the measure you use, will be used with you" (Mt. 7,2) Saint Thomas asserts that the human trial will be even more true and real, when more merciful it is. To know how to forgive, not only the others, but ourselves. To be open to give new opportunities. To start again always. That is the secret that let us improve and learn from our mistakes.

To improve continually, cultivate virtues, will enable us to live a more coherent life.

Our incapacity cannot stop us, but can give us the possibility to verify that "nothing is impossible to God" (Lc 1,37) and therefore we must "aim high", "think high". If our dreams are mean, it is not worth living them. Woe to us if, at the end of our days we realize that we have not lived, given, loved enough. We will not need God's mercy, but our own to forgive us.

And to aim high, to have big dreams we must constantly develop our talents and donate them continuously. And not only professionally, but mainly in the "culture of giving". It is precisely putting into practice this culture and not despite that, our companies will be able to get the aim for which they were created, and therefore, get success.

A clean-hearted person is someone full, without folds, without tricks. There is a close relationship between the integrity of a person and his/her capacity to see clearly.

We must act only moved by love for the others, love purifies our intentions. If we are not emptied of ourselves, we run the risk of getting blind, with our pettiness and being unable to see reality, not only divine but human reality.

To see God means understand his action in our life and in history, to feel his voice in our heart, and get his presence everywhere He is. We taste the presence of God right in this life, where "we walk in faith and yet we do not see clearly", up to the moment when we "see Him face to face" in eternity. (5)

VII. Communication

*"Blessed are those persecuted for the sake of good,
Because the Kingdom of Heaven belong to them"*

If we promote the "culture of giving", contrary to the present economic model, surely we will earn contempt and even the wrong doing against us. We shouldn't be naïve and ignore that this model largely favors a group and they are not ready to resign this privilege.

But we must also know that many people in the world are looking for a change, thirty of a new culture, not only those in need, but many entrepreneurs that are not able to fulfill happiness, in a frantic struggle for efficiency, o just feeling that wealth is not able to cover his/her desires. There is an urgent need to put into common this reality.

Among us, entrepreneurs, it is essential to communicate our experiences, our successes and failures will help us to walk ahead, or perhaps to retrace our steps, if we are wrong. Reciprocal correction will improve our actions.

With our life and our experiences, we must give imitable examples to the world. And those we have the capacity of studying, as Chiara asked them, will give theoretical dignity and scientific basis to these new praxis.

It is also necessary to join forces with the very many people and organizations that work today with our same conviction: that a change is highly necessary and not only possible; as happens in experiences of solidarity economy, micro-credits, ONGs, cooperativism, ethic banking, etc. With them, we must combine vision and reciprocally enrich to create a synergy capable of generating significant results.

And lastly, if we want to be worthy of the infinite graces that He has promised us, this good, pressed down, shaken together and run over measure, we must give and give ourselves, that is to say to love every moment, each neighbor, even the enemies, those who hate us and persecutes us. Sometimes it will be competence, but not only. Even he who has a different opinion from mine, or even he who I like nasty. Yes, it is a very high price we must pay, but the reward justifies it. The kingdom of Heaven will come to us, and we will accumulate wealth where moth cannot corrupt.

"There where your treasure is, your heart will be" (Mt 6, 19-23)

Conclusion

"EdC is giving and receiving ... to give again"

Francois Neveux

Dating

- (1) To go deeper see: Luigino Bruni – The commitment of new entrepreneurs (“Repubblica” Secc. Florence – 18/09/2010) and Entrepreneur and poverty (“Economy of Communion – A new Culture” – May 2010)
- (2) Chiara Lubich (Discourse at the Congresso commemorating 10 years of the EdC – Castelgandolfo, April 2001)
- (3) Chiara Lubich – Rainbow Revolution (At the International Congress for the Gen Movement – Rocca di Papa, June 25th 1968)
- (4) Henry Shaw – Eucharist and Entrepreneur Life – October 1959
- (5) Chiara Lubich – Word of Life – November 1999