

# The Business Principles of Zhou Enlai

## Zhou Enlai's Example for 21st Century Business Leadership

Michael North

The Zhou Enlai Peace Institute

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### **Introduction**

Zhou Enlai, one of the founders of modern China, was the first Premier of an emerging young nation. Through his leadership of China's independence from 1922 to 1949, and as Premier from 1949 to 1976, Zhou Enlai laid the foundation for modern China.

Today, China has regained its position of responsibility among the family of nations, but it is easy to forget, amid the gleaming skyscrapers and bullet trains, that the foundation laid by Zhou Enlai required success in nearly impossible struggles. It required great management skill, personal leadership and courage, and the ability to communicate a

long-range vision to millions of people. Those skills were expressed by Zhou Enlai, and they changed the world.

The questions posed by this paper are: how did Zhou Enlai accomplish so much, in so many fields? What were the qualities of management leadership he displayed, and how can we understand them in today's terms, with the perspective of history? And most important: what lessons of Zhou's leadership can be absorbed by the business leaders of China and the world right now?

### **Dimensions of Leadership**

Zhou Enlai was a leader in many fields; his high principles, energy and intelligence are recalled vividly, and his achievements are embedded in Chinese society. He was not only respected, he was (and still is today) genuinely loved by the Chinese people for his selfless dedication.

To fully understand modern China, one may begin by understanding Zhou Enlai. Here are some of the best-known dimensions of his leadership, familiar to every Chinese today yet little-understood by the rest of the world:

1. He was a tough and intuitive military commander with great physical courage and endurance, fighting twin foes in the Japanese and Nationalist armies for decades, developing strategies of popular resistance.

2. He was a philosopher and political leader, forging difficult alliances and uniting diverse groups into a new nation. He was a powerful speaker, whose careful, understated manner commanded attention. He was a writer, poet and journalist of fierce conviction.
  
3. He was a creator of education and culture, helping to establish many of the leading universities, medical institutions and cultural programs that are the backbone of Chinese society today. He was an actor, singer and dancer of some amateur accomplishment -- talents he employed skillfully as elements of his leadership.
  
4. He was a pioneer in the field of citizen diplomacy, people-to-people informal connections that he developed outside of formal channels, that were often sources of leadership breakthroughs.
  
5. He was a moral leader, establishing personal standards of integrity, humility and simplicity that still inspire respect and emulation.
  
6. He was the country's senior diplomat, re-establishing China as a leader for peace between the rest of Asia, the West and the developing world, after decades of isolation. He was a skilled and tireless negotiator, who overcame huge obstacles by creating understanding and respect, even among his enemies. He concluded an historic rapprochement with the United States, and with many other nations who initially opposed

China. His Five Principles of Peace <sup>1</sup>, first published in 1953, are still referenced in world diplomacy today.

7. Zhou Enlai was also an economic leader. He established policies of trade, technology, industrial and agricultural organization, and the foundations of open business enterprise, that began to unfold with the Four Modernizations in 1963 <sup>2</sup>, and are still unfolding today. His tight focus on China's economy is at the root of China's phenomenal rise in prosperity, virtually unprecedented in history. His innovations began to lift hundreds of millions out of poverty, hunger and disease.

Zhou Enlai was not, however, a corporate businessman in the mold of today's successful managers in Shanghai or New York. He did not operate a private business for profit; he operated a public business -- the affairs of China itself -- for the long-term benefit and profit of its people. Nonetheless -- are there qualities of Zhou Enlai's leadership that could provide useful insight for today's business enterprise?

### **The Chief Executive Officer of China**

At the start of Zhou Enlai's career in the 1920's, China was a poor, disunited country. Today China aspires to be one of the economic leaders of the world. This transformation

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<sup>1</sup> The Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence: [http://wiki.china.org.cn/wiki/index.php/Five\\_Principles\\_of\\_Peaceful\\_Coexistence](http://wiki.china.org.cn/wiki/index.php/Five_Principles_of_Peaceful_Coexistence)

<sup>2</sup> The Four Modernizations: agriculture, industry, national defense, science and technology. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four\\_Modernizations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Modernizations)

was the result of detailed, deliberate planning by Zhou Enlai, one of the most educated and cosmopolitan of China's early leaders, applied diligently over many decades.

Zhou realized that with a productive economy, China could control its own destiny and share the wisdom of its 5000-year old culture with a peaceful world; these two objectives, inextricably joined, were his ultimate purpose.

Zhou Enlai would not have considered himself a businessman; he was a patriot, who applied principles of co-operative economics and social responsibility to feed, clothe, house and take care of people first. Then he began to build a modern infrastructure of electricity, transportation and technology that would enable profitable trade and allow China to compete in world markets.

He was a leader who communicated purpose and responsibility to millions, helped to unleash the inner genius, ambition and discipline of the Chinese people -- and made China the business powerhouse of the world.

With this perspective on history, we can see now that Zhou Enlai was, in effect, the Chief Executive Officer of an immense young nation in its initial, painful decades. He practiced Chinese socialism, yet some of his methods, and aspects of his personal character, have parallels in the leadership principles taught by today's leading international management schools.

## **Principles of Business: Leading Business Schools**

It is useful to examine some of the principles taught in leading business schools, so comparisons can be made between Premier Zhou's work decades ago, and the advanced business principles that are taught today.

Harvard Business School in Cambridge, Massachusetts is one of the leading business schools in the world -- a favored destination for the best management candidates in the world, including a great many from China. Its courses are used as models by leading Chinese management schools, including those at Peking University, Tsinghua, Nankai University and Fudan University. Many faculty at those schools have spent time in Cambridge.

So an examination of the curriculum needed to earn a Masters of Business Administration at Harvard is a valid standard by which Zhou Enlai's leadership can be measured. Of course, such comparisons cannot be exact; the world in which Zhou Enlai helped to lead China to independence and emergence as a world power is vastly different from today's world. The skills needed to lead a revolution are different from those needed to compete in the multinational corporate world.

But parallels can be drawn. As much as external circumstances may change, there are fundamental human factors that are consistently present in great leaders -- whether in business or government. It is those factors that draw our attention here.

One of the most fundamental required courses in the Harvard syllabus is Leadership and Organizational Behavior. It is amplified in different parts of the two-year MBA course:

“This course focuses on how managers become effective leaders by addressing the human side of enterprise.

The first modules examine teams, individuals, and networks in the context of:

- 1 The determinants of group culture.
- 2 Managing the performance of individual subordinates.
- 3 Establishing productive relationships with peers and seniors over whom the manager has no formal authority.

The intermediate modules look at successful leaders in action to see how they:

- 1 Develop a vision of the future.
- 2 Align the organization behind that vision.
- 3 Motivate people to achieve the vision.
- 4 Design effective organizations and change them to achieve superior performance.”<sup>3</sup>

Also vital to the MBA syllabus is a required course called simply “Strategy” -- here are some highlights:

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<sup>3</sup> Curriculum - MBA- Harvard Business School, 2013; Required curriculum; “Leadership and Organizational Behavior (LEAD)” <http://www.hbs.edu/mba/academic-experience/curriculum/Pages/required-curriculum.aspx>

- “sustaining competitive advantage
- generate superior value for customers by designing the optimum configuration of the product mix and functional activities
- balancing opportunities and risks
- take an integrative point of view”<sup>4</sup>

Another course required for a Harvard MBA is Leadership and Corporate Accountability.

From the course description:

“In this course, students learn about the complex responsibilities facing business leaders today. Through cases about difficult managerial decisions, the course examines the legal, ethical, and economic responsibilities of corporate leaders. It also teaches students about management and governance systems leaders can use to promote responsible conduct by companies and their employees, and shows how personal values can play a critical role in effective leadership.”<sup>5</sup>

An elective course at the Harvard Business School is “General Management: Processes and Action.” Some key excerpts from the course description:

- Strategic processes: how leaders set strategy, develop vision and mission, create a sense of common purpose...
- Decision making processes: how individuals and groups generate alternatives, manage conflict and debate, and reach agreement...
- Learning and improvement processes: how individuals and organizations create and experiment with new approaches, learn from their past successes and failures...

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<sup>4</sup> Curriculum - MBA - Harvard Business School, 2013; Required curriculum; “Strategy” <http://www.hbs.edu/mba/academic-experience/curriculum/Pages/required-curriculum.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* Harvard MBA Curriculum “Leadership and Corporate Accountability” (LCA)

- Change processes: how managers initiate and lead change, take charge of their organizations, and build momentum for change... <sup>6</sup>

Other courses offered at Harvard worthy of attention in this light include “The Moral Leader in Literature, Film and Art” <sup>7</sup>, “Negotiation” <sup>8</sup> and “Authentic Leadership Development” <sup>9</sup>.

Each course studies skills that that Zhou Enlai mastered; with his academic background, one can easily imagine Zhou Enlai teaching such courses today at Harvard Business School.

If he did so, what would he teach?

An objective analysis, based on historic accounts, follows.

### **Examples of Leadership**

We begin with a few words about Zhou Enlai from the man himself. Not given to public introspection, he observed to author Han Suyin about the forces that shaped him in his youth. They suggest much about his later career, and the source of his future genius as a leader:

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* Harvard MBA Curriculum; “General Management: Processes and Action.” <http://www.hbs.edu/coursecatalog/1556.html>

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* Harvard MBA Curriculum; “The Moral Leader in Literature, Film and Art” ; <http://www.hbs.edu/coursecatalog/1562.html>

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* Harvard MBA Curriculum; “Negotiation”; <http://www.hbs.edu/coursecatalog/2240.html>

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* Harvard MBA Curriculum; “Authentic Leadership Development”; <http://www.hbs.edu/coursecatalog/2090.html>

“My own mother was gentle and tender...from her I learned kindness, forbearance. I have some of her character...ambition has been left out of me. My adoptive mother was well educated, her parents were enlightened. She taught me to love knowledge and use my mind. My nurse took me to her home by the Grand Canal, and from her I learned how the working people lived. She taught me unselfishness.”<sup>10</sup>

Kindness, forbearance. Love of knowledge. Unselfishness. The basic building blocks of character, of a strong leader.

Another recollection from his youth is the story of Han Hsin, a loyal minister of the Han Dynasty in 206 B.C. He was bullied and shamed, but responded quietly in order to survive. Han Suyin recounts the words of Lady Chen, his adoptive mother, and the young Zhou Enlai:

“He knew he had great things to do...he saved the dynasty. In later years he met the bully, and instead of killing him, he rewarded him. ‘Thank you...you taught me a good lesson.’”

“But did he not want revenge?” asked Enlai.

“Only mean, small people seek vengeance for personal offenses. The superior man rises above resentment.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Eldest Son, Han Suyin, 1994; Farrar Straus & Giroux. p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> Eldest Son, Han Suyin, 1994; Farrar Straus & Giroux. p. 17.

These qualities earned Zhou Enlai many friends, and they were highly loyal to him. In politics and in business, durable friendships are the key to survival, adaptation and success:

“Because of his small size and apparent delicacy, he was sometimes beaten by older boys. He devised his own protection by acquiring many friends, who would walk with him out of school, so he would not be alone. These friends he kept throughout life. Even when he was a man with a price upon his head he went to see them, and not one of them ever betrayed him.”<sup>12</sup>

On graduation from Nankai Middle School in Tianjin in 1917, the head of the school, Zhang Boling, paid Zhou Enlai a public compliment:

“He is mellow and rich in feeling, attentive to friendship. Whatever has to do with the public good, or with a friend’s need, that he will attend to with all his might.”<sup>13</sup>

Zhou Enlai emerged quickly as a fine young student. But he was not overly introspective; he felt called to urgent action each day. This is another quality that one recognizes in today’s successful business managers:

“Zhou Enlai would never be a pure intellectual, content with the play of ideas...skirting away from action. To think was also to act, and throughout his life

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<sup>12</sup> Eldest Son, Han Suyin, 1994; Farrar Straus & Giroux; p. 23

<sup>13</sup> Eldest Son, Han Suyin, 1994; Farrar Straus & Giroux; p. 30

he would serve what he believed in. Because of this linkage between thought and action he became a leader...”<sup>14</sup>

This driven character is something Harvard can't teach, but which its courses seek to cultivate, channel and discipline. Zhou Enlai had this quality of action, and shares it with every successful entrepreneurial manager today, in small companies and large.

But Zhou Enlai understood that action alone was not enough. It must be guided by an inner sense of balance, proportion and serenity. He was able to transmit this to others. His goal was to change society, from within. This principle could just as easily be applied to change in any kind of business organization.

He made a fiery speech during his university days in Tokyo:

“...the country can neither plan for the new nor preserve the old, nor can it undertake reforms.’ He went on to say that...it was up to the Chinese people to conquer themselves...A thorough spiritual renewal was necessary. Zhou Enlai was stating what would remain, for him, a lifelong conviction: that man must change himself before society can be changed.”<sup>15</sup>

Another quality that made people remember Zhou Enlai and respect his leadership was how he treated his enemies. Like every manager of innovation, Zhou Enlai encountered many who opposed him. His enemies were often deadly, not just competitors in the

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<sup>14</sup> Eldest Son, Han Suyin, 1994; Farrar Straus & Giroux. p. 23

<sup>15</sup> Eldest Son, Han Suyin, 1994; Farrar Straus & Giroux; p. 35

marketplace. How he dealt with enemies can be applied universally, in this description of his student days in France, at age 24 in 1922:

“There were clashes, and in one of these violence erupted and a few students were hurt. Zhou Enlai insisted on visiting not only the sympathizers, but all those who had been wounded, including his opponents.”<sup>16</sup>

Much later, in 1936, this experience was put to a severe test. Zhou Enlai had a confrontation with a powerful enemy that has become legend; it is known as the Xian Incident.

Zhou had been pursued relentlessly for many years by agents of the Nationalist Party, headed by General Chiang Kaishek. They repeatedly sought to kill him as he moved through the country, helped by friends, often in disguise. Those who protected Zhou Enlai were often tortured or killed, to try to discover his whereabouts.

Finally, the General was captured in Xian by Zhou Enlai’s forces, and Zhou came to see him. He protected Chiang Kaishek from those who wanted revenge. The two men spoke long and earnestly, and reached a peaceful understanding. The General was released, and though the struggle between them continued, he never forgot Zhou Enlai’s tolerance -- and neither did the followers of either man. This was key to uniting China many years later.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Eldest Son, Han Suyin, 1994; Farrar Straus & Giroux; p. 56

<sup>17</sup> For more on the Xian Incident, see “Zhou Enlai and the Xi’an Incident; by Ruiqing Luo; 1983, China Publications Centre (Guoji Shudian)

Today's hyper-competitive corporate managers may profit from considering Zhou's example -- that competition need not be destructive, and that often competitors have mutual interests to pursue.

“He was cool, shrewd and painstaking. He was gifted with the power of persuasion, and would exhort, discuss, convince the hesitant, reassure the confused. He never lost his temper and had great patience... whenever there was any work to do, his comrades always thought of Zhou Enlai.”<sup>18</sup>

Zhou Enlai had a rare combination of common touch with ordinary people, understanding and sharing their world -- yet maintaining an elegant separation, a dignity that moved people to follow him.

This quality comes from deep inside a person's character; it cannot be faked or synthesized. But it can be learned, and cultivated. Zhou Enlai did this throughout his life, and there are many stories told of his compassion, fearlessness, and his desire to connect with people.

The most successful corporate managers share this quality with Zhou Enlai -- they understand their company from top to bottom, the people who do the smallest and largest tasks, the products and services, the problems and struggles. And they're able to connect with their people in productive ways, to find solutions, inspire responsibility, stimulate leadership from within, and secure loyalty. These abilities are priceless assets to a company's long-term identity, continuity and financial success.

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<sup>18</sup> Eldest Son, Han Suyin, 1994; Farrar Straus & Giroux; p. 62

Here are some useful examples to illustrate this point. The first begins in the spring of 1925, when Zhou led his first major military actions near Guangzhou:

“It was a new kind of army...and the first battles were crowned with success. Zhou Enlai and Ye Jianying personally led the battalions in combat. The response of the peasantry was remarkable. The villagers lined the roads to welcome the troops, brought water and food, carried the wounded on improvised litters -- the wooden doors of their own houses. ‘Never has this been seen in China before,’ wrote the newspapers. Zhou personally investigated any lapse of discipline. He collected the names of the dead, to give them honorable burial. He condoled with the families.”

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“[During the Long March]...he refused to eat a pear because it could not be paid for -- no one knew the owner of the pear tree. The soldiers’ feet would walk them to victory. Feet became an obsession for Zhou. They must be cared for. Up and down the lines he went, looking at feet.”<sup>20</sup>

“He and [his wife, Deng] Yingchao were seen everywhere in Wuhan...the childless Zhous... intensified a search for war orphans, and they became the proxy parents of some forty such waifs. When well-meaning friends commiserated with Zhou for having no posterity, he would throw back his head and roar with laughter. ‘No

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<sup>19</sup> Eldest Son, Han Suyin, 1994; Farrar Straus & Giroux. p. 71

<sup>20</sup> Eldest Son, Han Suyin, 1994; Farrar Straus & Giroux; p. 132

children? Little Chao and I have so many children...every child in China is our child.’”<sup>21</sup>

“He led 250 of his State Council vice-premiers, ministers and staff to work for a week on a new reservoir eighty kilometers from Beijing. He toured coal mines, and when a major flood washed away a bridge on the Yellow River, Zhou arrived at night and did not leave till he had satisfied himself that the rescue work was efficient.

“He visited a barren North China village. It was winter; an icy, dusty wind blew. The assembled villagers faced the wind, while he was protected by a mat alcove, the wind at his back. He ordered that the villagers turn around, and the mat be displaced, so that he now faced the wind.”<sup>22</sup>

Premier Zhou Enlai was a tough, demanding, but fair man to work for. People on his staff were driven to keep up with him, and they endured many hardships on his behalf. But it was regarded as a high privilege to work in the Premier’s spartan office.

“Very soon ‘Premier Zhou’ became a byword for frugality, meticulousness... relentless commitment to work, aversion to inefficiency. Because he did with so little sleep, he forgot that his staff did not have the same stamina. Wang Bingnan, who ran his office, received one day a stiff note from ‘Premier.’

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<sup>21</sup> Eldest Son, Han Suyin, 1994; Farrar Straus & Giroux; p. 163

<sup>22</sup> Eldest Son, Han Suyin, 1994; Farrar Straus & Giroux; p. 272

‘Why is there no one to answer the phone at three in the morning?’ The young man in charge had fallen into deep slumber. ‘It won’t do, one must always keep alert,’ said Zhou....

“[He] never shouted, he did not call people names, but the colder his voice, the more he said -- ‘It is my fault...I have not taught you properly -- the more we felt as if we were being sliced through by a steel blade,’ says Wang Bingnan.”<sup>23</sup>

To say that Zhou Enlai had a strong work ethic is an understatement. Today, some corporate managers are so dependent on their career for their identity that they are called ‘workaholics’ -- addicted to work. This was not the case with Zhou Enlai; he went about his work with an infectious joy. He spurred others to go beyond their limits, without using coercion or forced discipline.

One can sense in the following example the restless, contagious pattern familiar in today’s successful business entrepreneur:

“Zhou walked into city markets, into shops, checking on the efficiency of razor blades, the quality of shoes, the fabric of ready-made trousers. Unannounced, he appeared at public canteens, queuing up with bowl and chopsticks, to check on the quality of the food. If it was bad, Zhou lined up the cooks, the waiters, the manager and delivered a lecture.

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<sup>23</sup> Eldest Son, Han Suyin, 1994; Farrar Straus & Giroux. p. 218

‘No one ever knew what he would do next, where he would turn up, and the people loved that. It made everyone take pride in doing their work right. Everyone did his best,’ says his secretary, Pu Shouchang.”<sup>24</sup>

Sirin Phathanothai is a member of a prominent Thai family who was sent to Beijing in 1956 to live under the care of Zhou Enlai, as a way of connecting Thailand and China. Her book, *Dragon’s Pearl*, has many acute observations:

"Zhou had expressed surprise to [Prince Warnwai of Thailand] about the degree of anti-Chinese hostility that pervaded other Asian governments. He spoke of those who sought to isolate China and urged Prince Warnwai to help bridge the gap between the two countries. And he reiterated that only contact would foster genuine understanding.

'To see something once is better than hearing about it a hundred times,' Premier Zhou said. Zhou was an extraordinarily charming man, the prince concluded, and a natural diplomat: astute, patient, unfailingly courteous."<sup>25</sup>

John Service was an American diplomat who met Zhou Enlai many times during China’s formative years. They were friends, negotiators, and trusted partners. Zhou Enlai saw America as China’s natural partner for growth in the future, and the two countries came very close to being allies. Service recounts:

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<sup>24</sup> *Eldest Son*, Han Suyin, 1994; Farrar Straus & Giroux; p. 219

<sup>25</sup> *The Dragon’s Pearl*, Sirin Phathanothai, with James Peck. Simon & Schuster, 1994. p.45

‘Few people who met Chou En-lai face-to-face were likely to forget him,’ John Service wrote in an article for the *Los Angeles Times*, recalling their intense wartime talks and their 1971 reunion in Beijing. As the two probed to understand each other’s position, Zhou had always been ‘the more articulate and adroit...’<sup>26</sup>

By 1972, the leader of men and women and the resourceful negotiator was in full flower. With years of accomplishment, toughened by experience, we can see the mature character of Zhou Enlai through the eyes of an initially-skeptical American observer, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger:

“In some sixty years of public life, I have encountered no more compelling figure than Zhou Enlai. Short, elegant, with an expressive face framing luminous eyes, he dominated by exceptional intelligence and capacity to intuit the intangibles of the psychology of his opposite number... He had made himself indispensable... translating Mao’s sweeping visions into concrete programs...Mao thought of himself as a philosopher; Zhou saw his role as administrator or negotiator.”

“Zhou conducted conversations with the effortless grace and superior intelligence of the Confucian sage.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Honorable Survivor: Mao’s China, McCarthy’s America, and the Persecution of John S. Service, by Lynne Joiner, Naval Institute Press, 2009; p. 338

<sup>27</sup> On China, Henry Kissinger, The Penguin Press, 2011. p. 241, p.438.

In addition to Zhou Enlai's leadership qualities documented in this paper, some others deserve further comment, and may be elaborated in future work.

## **Transparency**

Zhou Enlai was a champion of transparency, before the word acquired its modern meaning in corporate communications.

He simply told the truth, to friend and foe, to the powerful and the powerless. He knew that accurate information and fearless adherence to the truth were the most effective way to establish leadership, command respect, and to unify people. Even if the truth revealed uncomfortable realities, it was better to face it and deal with it.

His credo could be summarized best in the phrase: "Say what you do, and do what you say." Those who dealt with Zhou Enlai may not always have been happy with the truth he presented, but they always knew where he stood -- and that he would act consistent with principle.

As a basis for business, honesty is vital. Today's corporate leaders recognize that for employees, customers, partners, allies, vendors, the financial and investment community -- honesty is the lifeblood of commerce. No business can survive for long without precise, accurate information, acted upon quickly and decisively -- "transparency."

## **Social Responsibility**

Zhou Enlai was not a proponent of economic advantage for its own sake. He managed immense state enterprises that were expected to turn a profit and pay a portion of their revenue to the state. Many of them, for the first time in years, began to turn around under his management. And he believed that a vigorous private business sector was an important partner with government enterprise.

By the time he turned the reins of the economy over to a new generation, led by his protege Deng Xiao Ping, China was on the road to economic renewal.

Yet Zhou measured the effectiveness of his work not by the balance sheet of industry or the tally of gross national product. His purpose was to enrich the common man and woman, to provide them with the independent means to sustain themselves and their families, build their communities, plan for the future, provide an education for their children. These goals were the primary purpose; a healthy economy was the means.

Today's most progressive businesses hold themselves to a similar standard. They recognize that they are key members of a broad human community, a texture of human hearts and spirits. Like Warren Buffett and Bill Gates, they give back a portion of their wealth to society, and understand that when they do, their employees flourish and are more creative and committed; that their products become better and are produced more efficiently; that their customers remain loyal.

These competitive advantages are conferred by what people today call “socially responsible investment.” It is a vision of leadership that sustains great businesses through good and bad times.

### **Compassion**

Zhou Enlai believed that the true value of a society was reflected in how it treated its weakest members. But this commitment went beyond material help; it was accompanied by sincere humility -- by a helping, compassionate hand.

Today’s best businesses follow this example. They nurture a culture of giving by helping those in need, and by taking executive time to personally pitch in when needed. They do this without fanfare, calling attention to themselves, or asking for credit. They lead their employees, partners and customers to do the same.

They understand, as Zhou Enlai understood, that the true profit of life is measured in a peaceful, moral heart.

When someone says the word “Zongli” in China today (“Premier”), there is only one person they can be referring to: Zhou Enlai. Nearly forty years after his passing, though there have been many Premiers since, there will always be only one “Zongli.”

### **Conservation**

Zhou Enlai lived a simple life. He wore his clothes until they were worn out, and didn't use the power of his office to enrich himself or his family. He loved to cook, and to serve his family with his own hands. Zhou Enlai lived as the poorest people in China lived, so that he would never forget who he served.

He never wasted anything, used every material well and wisely, and required the vast engine of China's economy to live by the same standard. In Zhou Enlai the people had an example of care, conservation and efficiency that allowed them to thrive with dignity, even though many were still poor. As their prudence conserved resources and made savings possible again, the roots of the national economy were nurtured, and real growth became possible.

Zhou Enlai did not encourage sacrifice for its own sake; he encouraged a conservative way of life because he knew it bonded people together. In Zhou Enlai's turbulent lifetime, unity was the virtue that China needed most.

The austerity that was necessary in Zhou Enlai's time is no longer needed, but his original spirit of conservation needs to be revived. The developed nations of the world have long used energy, water and natural resources wastefully, and now the developing nations are beginning to follow. If this course is maintained, the skies will darken, the rivers and oceans will die, people will sicken, conflict over resources will arise, and the climate of the planet will change.

Business everywhere in the world has a responsibility to lead. With ingenuity and investment, every product can be made more efficiently, with less waste; recycling can be made a natural part of every product's life cycle; less energy can be consumed. New sources of energy, beyond hydrocarbons, can be developed without compromising balanced industrial growth. Every company can do its part.

If he were still working today, Zhou Enlai would be a leading environmentalist.

### **Dignity**

In the Chinese tradition, Zhou Enlai sought the middle way, to achieve balance and compromise, relying on his dignity to find solutions to the most difficult conflicts.

For business, there is a great advantage to treating employees with dignity, not just as producers of products or services. When the inner life of people is respected, and when they receive sincere, open-minded listening from their employer, great new human resources are released. The employee who is asked his opinion, who is challenged to find a better way, becomes more fulfilled; the more he or she is fulfilled, the more value is realized by the business.

Zhou Enlai understood this virtuous cycle well. To this day, when speaking of Zhou Enlai with people who knew him, the most common words are, "He was a good man." This is the most basic, and the highest compliment.



## **Conclusion**

The work that Zhou Enlai began, as CEO of the new China, was not complete during his life. He passed the torch to a new generation, and they have passed it again; the work is still not finished, as too many of China's millions are left in the wake of China's economic miracle.

Were he alive today, Zhou Enlai would be the leading advocate of economic equality and opportunity, of open co-operation with the global economic system, and of prosperity as one of the wellsprings of peace.

The leaders of China today openly acknowledge their debt to Zhou Enlai. He remains one of the most admired public figures in the country, honored and emulated with great pride and feeling. This is important for those around the world to understand -- as they seek to comprehend the immense complexity of modern China.

The character of a nation is best understood by understanding the character of its heroes.

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## References

A major source of insight into Zhou Enlai's life comes from the comprehensive biography written by Han Suyin, who was born in Xinyang of Chinese and Belgian parents. She was a prolific journalist and novelist, traveling all over the world -- always returning to China and to her favorite subject, Zhou Enlai. She wrote the novel, "Love is a Many-Splendored Thing" upon which the Oscar-winning 1954 motion picture is based.

Han Suyin interviewed Zhou Enlai many times, spent time with him and his wife, Deng Yingchao, and travelled extensively all over China for decades, witnessing history unfold. Her biography of Zhou Enlai, *Eldest Son*, remains the best objective account of his life available in English, uncolored by political preconceptions.

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