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So, let us see what is in the news these days…..

…Amazon air conditioned a 615,000 square foot distribution center in Pennsylvania as part of a reported $52M program to cool distribution centers around the country. At the Pennsylvania warehouse the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (www.osha.gov) reported the heat index (a measure of heat plus humidity) broke 100 degrees multiple times in 2011 even going above 110 degrees at times. In response to this effort Donna Hoffman, co-director of the Sloan Center for Internet Retailing at the University of California in Riverside stated: "It behooves them to not be responsible for negative publicity if they can control it." But Sucharita Mulpuru of Forrester Research has a different opinion, stating: "Amazon ships a lot of electronics and food now. It's not good to have that stuff in extreme temperatures. I would like to think there was an element of humanity to the decision, but there's nothing in Amazon's history or in Jeff Bezos' public persona that would lead me to think that was the driver of the decision." In November and December 2010 fire alarms at this same facility forced employees outside into freezing temperatures. Apparently unable to get their coats beforehand and without hats, gloves, and blankets for protection some workers were taken to a hospital due to extended exposure to below-freezing temperatures.

…Foxconn CEO Terry Gou, in response to his company's apparent labor violations and working conditions, stated: "What's wrong with sweatshops? We toil hard with blood and sweat, so long as we don't break any laws. I believe in reaping what you sow." The working conditions at Foxconn are blamed for resulting in employee suicides. The U.S.-based Fair Labor Association (www.fairlabor.org) interview of 35,000 Foxconn workers uncovered labor violations including extreme work hours and unpaid overtime. After interviewing 170 workers and visiting several Foxconn factories, the group Students and Scholars Against Corporate Misbehavior (http://sacom.hk) reported "The front-line management continue to impose humiliating disciplinary measures on workers." Foxconn is Apple's primary contract manufacturer.

…As a $24M Mexican bribery scandal continues to unfold, Wal-Mart CEO Mike Duke who, according to The New York Times was a senior executive during the bribery scandal and knew what was going on, recently informed a gathering of employees that integrity was a core value of the company, stating "It's doing the right thing, every single day."

…After the February 2010 death of killer whale trainer Dawn Brancheau at SeaWorld Orlando the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (www.osha.gov) spent six months investigating the killer whale training program. Presiding Judge Ken S. Welsch issued a ruling in support of the OSHA recommendation that future shows have no physical contact between trainers and the whales. (Physical contact between humans and the whales can continue during relationship-building exercises and for medical treatment.) Welsch was particularly harsh in his assessment of SeaWorld management when they cited a lack of awareness that working with killer whales could be hazardous. He rebuked an executive who stated that SeaWorld could predict whale behavior with 98% accuracy, and wrote: "Because it is not part of SeaWorld's corporate culture to acknowledge unpredictable behavior by its killer whales, it must necessarily find that its trainers are implementing the program incorrectly. SeaWorld holds trainers to a near-impossible standard set by upper management, who engage in a form of Monday-morning quarterbacking. Any trainer unfortunate enough to have to file an incident report is subject to second-guessing by his or her superiors, who will always find the trainer did something wrong, otherwise there would be no incident to report."

…Walmart reportedly takes out life insurance policies on its employees (extending even after employment) with the goal of collecting upon the employee's death, hedging it would seem that the employee will not have a will and thus no court-appointed administrator, even if the employee had immediate family members.

I can understand how executives at publicly traded companies are under pressure to meet the short-term outlooks of financial analysts and shareholder expectations of continual dividends while ensuring their companies are planning for long-term growth and success, and that these perspectives are something of a dichotomy. I can understand how the drive to be #1 can be intoxicating and financially rewarding. I also understand how protective one can be of a core tenet of a business model especially when it separates you from your competitors. I can't say I'm a supporter of companies looking to profit or recoup expenses from the death of their current or past employees, but I can understand the black-and-white of the cost-benefit analysis.

I can understand all it but I cannot accept any it. The business of America is business, to quote former president Calvin Coolidge, but that buck has to stop when laws, ethics, morals, values, confidence, and integrity are breached. Profits attained at the cost of health and safety should be forbidden.

I think that public companies – and some private ones too – should institute a new CEO role, Chief Ethics Officer, who would have full knowledge of all company goings-on and the authority to stop a company from doing the wrong thing. Someone who can lead a company down the path of doing what is right, what is just, what is fair.

It is time consumers start to give their appreciation – and money – to companies who act ethically and legally, sending a message that doing the right thing is good business, and that bad behaviors are being noticed and will not be tolerated.

Sell without selling-out: that's doing the right thing. It is high time business leaders practice what they preach and act as examples of the messages they convey. The world will be a better – and still plenty profitable – place for it.

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