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The Business Model Built for This Moment: Abundance — Why Scarcity Is Silently Killing Your Culture

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In the 1990s, Enron was the most admired energy company in America. For six consecutive years, Fortune named it the most innovative company in the country. Its employees were recruited from the best business schools in the world. Its stock price kept climbing.

And inside the company, every six months, managers gathered in windowless rooms to rank every employee on a five-point scale. The bottom fifteen percent were marked for termination — regardless of actual performance. Someone always had to lose.

CEO Jeff Skilling called it a performance system. Employees called it rank and yank.

What it actually was — was scarcity institutionalized. Resources are limited. Only the strongest survive. Your colleague is your competition. People stopped sharing information. They stopped raising problems. They stopped telling the truth — because the truth, if it reflected poorly on their numbers, could end their career. Bad news was hidden. Ethical compromise felt like survival.

Employees were afraid to express their opinions or question unethical practices. Not because they lacked integrity. Because the system had made integrity dangerous.

Strip away the language of “performance management,” and Enron’s system had one master: shareholder return. Every ranking, every quota, every quiet compromise existed to protect a single number — the stock price — over employees, over customers, over the truth itself. That is what made integrity expendable. We’ll go deeper on the connection between integrity and the numbers in a future post. For now, the point stands on its own: Enron’s culture was built to serve shareholders above everyone and everything else, and it collapsed under the weight of that choice.

Most organizations say they serve their customers. What actually drives the decisions is shareholder return. That’s one constituency — and it usually crowds out the other three: employees, customers, and the communities in which they do business. Fewer organizations notice when they’re quietly protecting one of those four at the expense of the rest. Enron protected exactly one. Everyone and everything else — employees, customers, the truth itself — was expendable in service of it.

Enron collapsed in 2001. Thousands of employees lost their jobs. Billions in retirement savings vanished overnight.

Scarcity doesn’t just damage cultures. Left unchecked, it destroys them.

The YOU and ME Paradigm

Most organizations don’t have a rank and yank system. But scarcity runs through more cultures than leaders realize — quietly, in the background, shaping decisions before anyone notices it’s driving them.

It shows up in the meeting where someone doesn’t speak up. The idea that never gets shared. The high performer who stops bringing their best because they’ve learned it isn’t safe to try. No one decided to disengage. The culture decided for them.

In the **YOU and ME** paradigm, abundance is not a feeling. It is not optimism. It is not a motivational poster on a breakroom wall.

It is an operating declaration — a chosen stance that there is enough: enough opportunity, enough creativity, enough possibility — when people are genuinely working together rather than protecting against each other.

The **YOU or ME** model assumes scarcity. The **YOU and ME** paradigm declares abundance. That single shift changes everything that follows.

What Abundance Looks Like in Practice – Bob's Red Mill

In 1978, Bob Moore founded Bob's Red Mill out of a restored grain mill in Milwaukie, Oregon. He was 49 years old — coming out of early retirement, following careers as a gas station owner and a store manager. He wasn't building an empire. He was following a conviction: that whole, honest food made with care, and people treated with dignity, were enough of a foundation to build something lasting.

He was right. Bob's Red Mill grew into a leading global food brand with over 200 products sold in more than 70 countries.

Along the way, major food corporations came calling — one offer after another to buy the company. Moore turned them all down. Not because the money wasn't there. Because selling meant risking what he had built and the people who had built it with him.

On his 81st birthday in 2010, Moore gathered his employees and announced something no one expected. He was giving the entire company to them — through an Employee Stock Ownership Plan that would make every employee an owner. By April 2020, Bob's Red Mill was 100% employee owned. More than 700 people owned what they had spent their careers building.

This wasn't a transaction. It was a declaration: people matter. Contribution matters. And the success of an enterprise belongs to everyone who creates it.

The numbers followed the conviction. In the decade after the ESOP began, employee-owner count nearly tripled. By 2020, the company was posting record sales — revenue roughly six times what it was in 2018. Taking care of employees and customers didn't cost the bottom line. It built it.

From a scarcity mindset, giving away ownership looks like losing control. From an abundance mindset, it becomes the source of everything — the loyalty, the innovation, the culture that held and grew long after Moore was gone.

Abundance thinking doesn't ask what do we have to give up? It asks what becomes possible when people stop operating from fear and start operating from shared purpose?

The Shift That Changes Everything

The leaders who make this shift describe the same experience: the conversations change. People start bringing problems instead of hiding them. Ideas surface that were always there but never felt safe enough to say out loud. The energy going into self-protection starts going into contribution.

That shift doesn't happen through a policy change or a town hall or a values statement. It happens when leaders model it — consistently, visibly, in the small moments — until the culture begins to believe it.

Bob Moore modeled it for over four decades. Then he gave the company away to prove he meant it.

That is what abundance looks like when it's real.

Mark Kamin & Associates has spent over forty years helping leaders and organizations generate extraordinary performance in any conditions. We would love to talk with you.
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