



We know that the Greatest Good of business schools is Growth – it is the ultimate goal of businesses the days and therefore an appropriate objective of business education. But what if you are in business and don't care that much about Growth? Can you still be happy?

I've come to believe that national conflicts, business disagreements, and even family disputes are informed—and possibly caused—by how we prioritize what I call our “8 Great Goods.” If your most important Goods are different from mine, there's a good chance we will disagree about something. If our prioritizations are vastly different, I may believe that you are evil. And you will probably feel the same way about me.

The 8 Goods are all really good things: Life, Stability, Relationships, Belief, Individuality, Growth, Equality, and Joy, and they guide every decision we make. The way each of us ranks these eight is almost certainly different from the people we work with, our family members, and even our closest friends. In a survey of 2,000 Americans, about 1,750 respondents had a completely unique ranking of priorities—they didn't share their order of the eight with any other person in the survey. In my five years of studying this phenomenon, I've also found that the same pattern holds true with non-Americans as well.

As business school graduates, we have been through a year or two of pretty serious indoctrination on one Good in particular—whether or not we realized it at the time. In textbook after textbook, and case after case, we learned that the Greatest Good in the business world is Growth. Classroom discussions often culminated in the conclusion that if a company wasn't making money, all other issues were probably pointless. Our finance courses made it clear to us that the business world was not just about making money, but making more and more of it—possibly to the exclusion of all else. And we learned to say, in either business settings or social ones, that a company's stock prices just won't go up unless shareholders believe in the company's growth potential. This is the way the business world works, we were told. You might even say we had it beaten into us, in a nice way of course, and some of us didn't really think to question it.

Over my twenty five years of teaching, I have interacted with enough students to know that more than a few develop existential questions (some even have crises) due to the heavy emphasis on Growth in business school. Some students begin to wonder if they should modify—or even make wholesale changes to—the personal priorities with which they started school so that they better align with the school's top Good. “Why isn't Growth at the top of my list? Shouldn't it be? Is something wrong with me?” They begin to seek out ways to justify their need to change, and they may even grasp at philosophical arguments that stretch beyond business rationales to support altering their priorities: “French biologist François Jacob said, ‘It is the dream of every cell to become two cells.’”

But, let me be clear: there is nothing wrong with Growth as your top priority, whether it is business, biological, or just personal preference. I have a number of close friends who value Growth more than all else. They are good people who do good things. They have other top-level Goods priorities like Belief and Relationships, and they use their wealth to help other people and give to good causes. They are true philanthropists, and they genuinely want to make the world a better place for everyone in it.

If you've long suspected that a Good like Equality, Joy, Relationships, or Belief is at the top of your list, rather than Growth, it is very easy to feel like a fish out of water in a business environment. You may feel like you have to subvert your most important personal Good when you go to work every day. Or it can feel that way, when you as a round peg try to fit yourself into a square hole during team meetings, projects, or conversations with colleagues.

But it doesn't have to be that like that.

Whatever your top Goods are, there is an organization somewhere populated with employees who share your priorities, or one that operates around a credo or mission statement that lines up remarkably with the priorities you value the most. If Equality or Individuality is your thing, government service may be for you. If Belief is at the top of your list, there are Non-Government Organizations and religious organizations in need of people with business backgrounds and acumen.

Within corporations, some functions lend themselves more to one Good than another. Human Resource employees may be more focused on Equality and Relationships. Marketing departments are big on Individuality (and given the trend toward more creative office environments, some might even emphasize Joy). Accounting departments value Stability, and perhaps Individuality. CEOs realize that the right mix of diverse people—sometimes very different—within companies is the key to high performance, innovation, and success.

But, each organization, each country, even each family has it's own culture surrounding these priorities. My experience as a teacher, consultant, and well, human being, has led me to conclude that finding your cultural professional fit is critically important to your longer-term happiness and success. There's just no way around that.

A few years ago, I took a job with a company at which I believed the Goods of the organization were highly correlated with my own. After a few months on the job, I felt something wasn't quite right but I couldn't quite pinpoint the problem. I could not understand how and why decisions were being made, and the processes and the people associated with them started to seem destructive, and even offensive to me. Understandably, they did not "get" me either.

After I had moved on, I asked some of my colleagues at my former employer to prioritize the Goods of that organization as part of my research. Their responses were not only surprisingly uniform, but portrayed an organizational culture diametrically opposed to my own Goods priorities. It was no wonder I had been miserable with the

firm, and no wonder the organization and its leaders never understood me. What I had not detected, not during months of interviews and not after accepting the job, was immediately evident from a brief survey of only 13 employees.

How can you avoid my mistake? Obviously, the first step is to be clear about your own Goods priorities—not just the Goods you aspire to have, but how you actually behave. This last part is critical, and may require you to pause for enough time to think about your life in a way you have never done before. If you say Relationships are your most important Good, but you'd actually prefer to spend the majority of your time doing something like surfing (the web or the ocean) alone than with your family, you should rethink your top priority. If you would like to rank Belief as your greatest Good, but you have not prayed in years and can't think of a "cause" you really support, maybe that's an indication that your priorities have changed—it happens. Once you've laid out your 8 Great Goods in the proper order, and you are behaving in harmony with that order, you can begin to assess how your Goods fit into your personal relationships, your company and your community. But it all starts with knowing your Greatest Good, and understanding that just because you are a business school graduate, your top priority does not necessarily have to be Growth.

John Beck has recently released the book [Good vs. Good](#), which draws on the disciplines of brain science, management, moral philosophy, public policy, and psychology to explain how we each prioritize the "8 Great Goods:" Life, Stability, Relationships, Belief, Individuality, Growth, Equality, and Joy. The way we rank the 8 Goods—explicit or unspoken—determines who we are and what we will become as individuals and organizations. [Good vs. Good](#) shows us how our differences can actually build understanding and create solutions that may permanently improve our lives and the world around us. To find out your Greatest Good, you can go to www.great8it.com