

## **CREATING EXTRAORDINARY ORGANIZATIONS**

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**Volume Two, Letter 5**

**March 26, 2004**

I am writing this letter for those innovators, explorers, and pioneers who want to move beyond the ordinary to the Extraordinary in creating business organizations.

Please feel free to pass this letter on to anyone you think would like to join this journey to Extraordinary.

Sent only to recipients who have personally opted to receive it. To change your sign-up information, please follow the instructions at the end of this letter.

Please see the Announcement below concerning future phone conversations!

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### **EXTRAORDINARY ORGANIZATION CORE BELIEF ABOUT – FREEDOM**

Welcome to Letter 2-5 of Creating Extraordinary Organizations. In this letter, I am going to discuss the fourth core EO belief, which concerns freedom of members. This is not an easy concept nor an easy belief to put into action. Therefore, let me start with my definition of freedom in the context of an EO.

#### **What Does Freedom Mean?**

Freedom is a yes/but concept. Yes—you can do whatever you want. But—when you do, you cannot interfere with the freedom of another. If you see that this will happen, you must curtail your freedom or work it out with the other person.

In an organization, this extends to any act that will harm the group and its purpose. This would, of course, harm not only one other person but also all other members. This definition of freedom acknowledges the fact that when we join an organization, we do have to limit our freedom to some extent.

#### **Who Sets the Limits?**

In our representative democracy, we authorize certain bodies to regulate behavior. In a business organization, those in control make the rules. They generally do this without input from those who must follow them. In an Extraordinary Organization, the prior beliefs in no hierarchy and equality prohibit this. Members must find a way to do this together.

As I have said before, the Sudbury Valley School is a true Extraordinary Organization. At SVS, all students and staff set the boundaries through the School Meeting. These make up the School Meeting Lawbook:

The Law Book is a living document. Everything in it has been passed by majority vote of the School Meeting, and can be changed or added to at any time by vote.

It covers such areas as General Welfare, Use of the School Facilities, and the School Meeting. The preamble to the General Welfare section describes the responsibility of members. It could apply to any Extraordinary Organization.

All School Meeting members are responsible for the general welfare of the school, through actions that contribute to preserving the atmosphere of freedom, respect, fairness, trust, and order that is the essence of the school's existence.

## **Limits to Freedom**

What are the limits on individual freedom of action? How do we know if we are harming someone else's freedom? This is generally clear when we are in contact with the other person. However, in an organization members engage in myriad actions. How do they know whether these affect others? What about actions that may harm the individual who is acting. What behaviors do we need to regulate?

The SVS Law Book has a "Personal Rights and Their Protection" section. Two of its rules capture the essential approach to this issue. Again, it might apply to any EO...

No one may knowingly infringe on anyone's right to exist peaceably at school, free of verbal or physical harassment.

No one may knowingly disrupt people's activities in the school. "Knowingly" means that the person has either been warned that his/her activity is disruptive or that, without prior warning, the person can reasonably have been expected to know that his/her activity is disruptive.

In addition to these general statements, the Law Book enumerates many rules governing specific behaviors.

## **Protecting Basic Rights**

When we start limiting freedom, we must protect certain basic individual rights. We must protect the individual from arbitrary intrusion by those with power. At SVS, this is not an issue. The members themselves are the law-making body. This is an issue in society as a whole and especially in business organizations.

As a nation, we have protected certain essential rights in our constitution. For instance, the Fourth Amendment guarantees "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures..." The Fifth Amendment likewise assures certain rights with regard to "capital, or otherwise infamous crime."

Unfortunately, in business organizations those in command have essentially unlimited power to regulate the behavior of members. Seldom do those who must follow them have any say in making the rules.

In most business organizations, members do not even have some of the rights guaranteed in our Bill of Rights. Because of excesses over the years, government has had to step in to impose rules. These protect members from at least some of the more abusive rules and practices.

## **What of Those Who Break the Rules?**

Rules to protect the freedom of individuals are useless if not followed. People cannot function if they do not trust that everyone will play the game according to the rules. For instance, I play soccer, which we play according to the Laws of Soccer.

We entrust referees with the responsibility to deal with behavior outside these laws. If they do not do this, the game will become dangerous. Players are not free to play well for fear of injury or unfair advantage.

The process for dealing with boundary crossers has two parts. First, we must identify those who we believe have violated rules. Then we must determine whether they have indeed violated them; and, if they have, what to do about it. The referee calls a player for an infraction for which the Laws specify a certain response.

SVS has a judicial system that has these two parts. Every member of the community has the task of identifying anyone who violates a rule. They consider this an essential part of being a good citizen. They see it as so important that they consider not reporting a violation as a violation.

Many of us think this violates our personal beliefs against “ratting” on our friends. However, the preamble quoted above points out that every person is “responsible for the welfare of the school.” We can only guarantee personal freedom if everyone follows the rules. Thus, every person must do what s/he can to protect the integrity of the system—even if it means “ratting” on a friend.

The SVS judicial system also includes a Judicial Council that investigates reported violations. This protects individuals from unwarranted accusations. If an accusation appears valid, there are procedures to determine if it is true. These even include provisions for a trial before the School Meeting if necessary. Finally, there are procedures for determining what violators must do if found “guilty.”

The question of how to deal with those who have violated the rules is complicated. The ideas of “punishment” and “justice” need careful thought when developing an Extraordinary Organization. I will address this subject in a future letter.

## **Conclusion**

Freedom is not a simple concept. We cannot have “total” freedom, but we must find ways to provide as much as possible. We face the paradox that we must have rules that limit freedom in order to protect it. However, we have great freedom in how we determine those rules.

Likewise, we can choose how to deal with rule breakers so they remain in the organization as fully responsible members. With no hierarchy and equality of rights, those in an Extraordinary Organization must carefully and thoughtfully design systems and procedures with great care. These must assure every person freedom to fulfill his or her needs as well as those of the organization as a whole.

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## **ANNOUNCEMENTS, INFORMATION, AND COMMENTS**

**Ongoing Phone Conversation Series** — On Tuesday, March 9 we had our first phone conversation. I had called it a conference, but conversation describes it better. There were only three of us, but it was a lively and productive time. I enjoyed it greatly, and I believe the others did too. One of them said this about it:

I found myself stretched by the ideas you developed, and I have to go examine some of my own perceptions.

He also suggested holding these conversations as a continuing series. I thought this a great idea. Therefore, I am going to schedule a conversation midway in the time between E-letters. You are welcome to join in any one or more. I am sure each one will present a new experience but one that will continue to help us on our journey.

You can join in at any time by clicking on [Participate](#) to send me an email. I will send you an invitation with the phone number and access code.

If you would like me to invite you every time, please say so in your email. I will add you to a list of regulars who will receive the invitation automatically.

The next conversation will be at 10 am PST on Wednesday, April 7. I will have 90 minutes open although we may not use all of it. Of course, your only expense will be your telephone charges to "attend." I hope you will join us [whoever that may be].

**Comments and Questions Please!** — I want to make this exploration of EO's as interactive as possible. Beyond the phone conversations, I would like to include thoughts of others. Please let me have your questions and thoughts so I can include them. Just click on the email link in the Contact Information section below. Thanks.

**Active Shared Involvement** — As another way to allow people to get involved, I have set up a Yahoo group called **eogroup**. It allows you to send messages to all others in the group and get a written conversation going. You can join by clicking on [Join EO Group](#). When you get there, just click on the "Join This Group!" button and follow the instructions. You will not find this group listed in the directory. I set it up that way so it will only include people we have invited through means such as this letter. Once you join, please let others know you are there and post your questions or ideas so all can read and respond.

**New E-letter Options** — Remember that you now have the opportunity to:

1. Forward Email – If you know someone you think would enjoy receiving this e-letter, you can forward it to him or her. Just click on the Forward email link at the bottom of this letter. You will receive a form on which you can add a personal note and the name and address of the recipient.
2. Receive notifications – You can now sign up to receive notices of future phone conversations as well as EO events. Click on the Update your profile link at the bottom of this letter, and you will be given a form to indicate your choices.

**On Line Interview** — To hear a recording of my VoiceAmerica.com interview on "Creating Extraordinary Organizations" just click on [Listen](#).

**E-Letter Archive** — If you would like to read PDF versions of published CEO E-Letters click on [CEO Archives](#).

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## **UNTIL NEXT TIME**

Freedom is essential for an Extraordinary Organization. Assuring it will probably look somewhat different in each EO. However, it will always need ways to protect essential rights.

It will also require processes and systems to assure that freedom is alive and well. Without it, members will not be able to fulfill their needs. Of course, this means they are not fulfilling the purpose of having the organization — especially an Extraordinary one.

In the next letter, I will look at the fifth core belief relating to the concept of ownership.

Be Well and,  
Be Extraordinary!  
Don Yates  
Extraordinary Organizations

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