

Building the Buddha Land at Work **JUDI HENDERSON, OAKLAND, CALIF.**

Because you embrace the Gohonzon, you attain Buddhahood. Wherever you go becomes the Buddha land. How many of you find the Buddha land when you go to work?...If you chant daimoku to the Gohonzon in the morning with the determination that: "I am going to bring the life of the Buddha with me, and I will transform my workplace. I need wisdom. I need strength. But I'm going to make the difference," you will be amazed at the power you already possess to transform your environment.

— excerpt from a 1995 study lecture by SGI-USA Vice General Director Greg Martin

Six months after receiving the Gohonzon, I was downsized from a company where I had worked for eight years. I saw it as a benefit — although I was highly paid, the job was emotionally draining and personally unfulfilling, but I never would have had the courage to leave on my own. I longed to work in a more creative and supportive environment instead of the technical and competitive fields I had always worked in.

I started my own business in the arts field. After two years, I realized I had made a mistake and dissolved the business. I was financially and emotionally devastated, and it took one agonizing year to find steady employment.

Although I viewed my self-employment as a time of failure, the United Airlines representative who hired me as an account executive viewed it as an asset — he felt self-employment meant I was self-motivated — and selected me over hundreds of applicants. I had always dreamed of traveling internationally, and it was ironic that after several years of barely having enough money for gas and bridge tolls, I now had a job that would enable me and my parents to fly inexpensively all over the world. We could now regularly visit our extended family members across the country, creating the family unity I had been chanting for.

My position with the airline required that I use my personal car to drive more than 100 miles a day to make sales calls on travel agents. Although I hated the extensive driving, I tolerated it because I adored my manager and the travel benefits. My hectic schedule and frequent trips out of town made it a struggle to fulfill my growing responsibilities as a young women's division leader and Byakuren member. However, every time I exerted extra effort in my SGI activities, I would get an unexpected benefit at work, such as all-expense-paid trips on company time to Costa Rica, France, Thailand and the Napa Valley wine country.

When my manager was transferred, I found myself working for a manager I felt was chauvinist, racist and incompetent. Our cultural differences caused us to distrust each other and battle constantly. In addition, he assigned me to a new list of accounts that required driving even further from home. Suddenly, a job that was once tolerable was now sheer misery.

For most of my professional career, I've never been supported by my managers or co-workers, so I knew that changing jobs wasn't the answer to this problem. I needed to change this karma. I began an intensive daimoku campaign, including hosting 10-hour chanting sessions (one hour for each of the ten worlds) at my home.

Soon after I began this campaign, a new secretary was assigned to my boss, and she and I got along fantastically. She in turn got along well with our manager, and she willingly served as a diplomatic liaison, communicating messages and providing advice to each of us on how to work together.

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One day, with no warning, my manager told me he was recommending me for a newly created six-month assignment in another district. The assignment would require significant sales results in a short time, and the success or failure would be closely watched by senior management. In addition, this assignment would require that I sell a technical product I wasn't familiar with, nor interested in. I didn't see this position as an opportunity to excel, but as a chance to fail — in public, no less. I told my boss I was not interested.

“Too late,” he said. “I've already recommended you. Your interview is next week.”

“How could you recommend me for a position without knowing if I was interested in it?” I demanded.

His response was that my personality would be better suited for this position, and there was no need to discuss his decision further. I was livid! I was convinced that he was not only trying to get rid of me but deliberately putting me in a highly visible position so I could be humiliated if I failed to produce results.

That evening, I was so angry I could barely chant, and when I did chant, my eyes were full of tears. I decided to request that my manager withdraw my name from the interview process. The next day, when I shared my plans with the secretary, she wisely advised me that if I refused the interview it would embarrass my boss, which would only increase the tensions between us.

“Besides,” she said, “going on the interview is no guarantee you will be chosen since a lot of people are interviewing.” She suggested I use this as an opportunity to practice interviewing skills in case I wanted to apply for work somewhere else.

This helped me to see the opportunity rather than be the victim and enabled me to chant with a sense of appreciation rather than anger. Since I wasn't interested in the assignment, I wasn't intimidated by the panel of three who interviewed me. My life-condition was so high, the interview was actually enjoyable. In fact, it went so well, I got the job over more experienced candidates! Rather than feel elated, however, I was again filled with despair.

It was at this point that I heard Greg Martin's guidance. I chanted to have the strength and wisdom to transform my work environment in the next six months, despite my doubts and fears. Immediately after I started chanting with this attitude, I was told that this assignment would allow me to set my own work schedule and work from home 80 percent of the time, with a home office supplied by the company. The time I used to spend commuting could now be spent having a leisurely breakfast, going to the gym, chanting more daimoku and visiting members. Plus, I could work in jeans, a sweatsuit or even my pajamas!

Focusing on this guidance when I did morning gongyo helped me realize what wonderful results can be created when I “bring the Buddha to work.” I listened to my customers with more patience and understanding, as opposed to being concerned only with accomplishing my sales agenda. I focused on supporting my new manager, even if I didn't always agree with her decisions, and she in turn respected my insights and opinions.

On those few occasions when I came into the office, I was happy and enthusiastic and acknowledged the efforts of everyone in the office, not just the people in my district. My co-workers would consistently say how much they looked forward to my visits and wished I came in more often. Instead of a competitive environment, I now had an environment of camaraderie. Never before had I felt so much support in my work environment.

My fear of failure on this special assignment due to my discomfort with the technical aspects of the product was unfounded. What my customers valued more than my product

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knowledge was the compassion, trust and confidence that I exuded. My continuous efforts to polish my Buddha nature brought forth the qualities that they valued in me. I was so successful in this temporary assignment that I exceeded the anticipated results, was honored at an awards ceremony, received a cash bonus and got my first outstanding job evaluation with United Airlines.

At the end of the six months, the assignment became a permanent position, and I was offered the job. I thanked my previous manager — the one I hadn't gotten along with — for recommending me in the first place. He hugged me and told me how proud he was of me, and now we communicate like old friends. In retrospect, I could see how this experience helped me learn to trust the strategy of the Lotus Sutra, versus the strategy of my own cowardice and arrogance. I realized that I had a deep-seated lack of confidence in my abilities, and this attitude was a way of slandering my life.

With my newfound confidence combined with my flexible work schedule, I had the time, energy and fortune to develop a community project that uses the creative talent I have been longing to express. I am collaborating with Buddhist and non-Buddhist friends to produce a local weekly cable television program called *Yes, You Can!!* The program profiles individuals who have a product, business or nonprofit organization that inspires people to take new risks, create new possibilities and make positive changes in their lives. Our goal is to empower viewers to believe that “yes, they can” overcome whatever obstacle is in the way of their happiness. The chance to work on a creative project I love, with interesting people and that contributes value to the community, is a benefit.

Initially, I was reluctant to tell my co-workers about this project due to that old fear of not being supported. However, when I told one co-worker, it resulted in a very memorable benefit.

The co-worker nominated me for a company-wide contest to win an all-expense-paid trip for two to the Olympics last summer. In the letter, the co-worker wrote about the television show, my inspirational attitude and my outstanding sales results. To my surprise, I received a call from the company president congratulating me for winning, selected with nine other winners from a pool of 1,500 nominees! It's as if I am not only supported and appreciated by the people in my department but the entire company as well.

The personal growth I experienced over the last 10 years enabled me to develop a level of compassion, confidence and faith that would not have happened without the struggle to be happy in my work environment. I thank all my seniors in faith and my fellow SGI members who encouraged me to continue to make efforts for world peace and never stop practicing even when it seemed to me that the lotus blossom was never going to bloom from the muddy swamp I was in.

But it always did.

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