

Netuitive's

Nick Sanna

A young CEO allows students to discover the Economy of Communion—most recently at two Texas universities—reconciling their idealism with the demands of business.

BY MARILYN BOESCH

What were your impressions of the conferences in Texas?

What struck me most were the reactions of the students. They indicated that this was something that they had been awaiting for a very long time, especially now that they will soon be starting their careers. They were concerned that they would gradually lose their ideals.

Just seeing Tom Rowley, myself and others who have been able to reconcile their highest aspirations with their business life was an important discovery. They really felt hope that they could have a great life, serving others and at the same time running a flourishing business.

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We have a responsibility within the Economy of Communion to reach out to young people in their formative years, when they are not yet entrenched in materialistic ways of thinking.

Netuitive is not entirely an Economy of Communion business, but you try to implement the philosophy and work ethic of the EoC. Is that right?

Yes, I am an individual member. If I develop more businesses in the future, they must be animated by the spirit of

the EoC. Today I happen to be in Netuitive, which is a venture capital-backed company. Investors want to maximize their profit.

I was fortunate in being asked to lead this company from the beginning,

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hiring the very first employees. I tried to instill a set of values, so that when we deal with colleagues, customers, vendors, and even competitors we always show the highest respect and consideration for their needs.

We try to apply the Golden Rule, doing to others as you would want done to you within the business. After a number of years, we have a group of employees that are very motivated to participate in a value-driven company, where ethics and integrity come first and customer care is paramount.

This attitude fosters teamwork. Awesome ideas have emerged when we meet

together, listening to each other, empty of ourselves, each asking themselves, “Do I really understand the other party?” We talk back and forth, with no one judging the other.

Incredibly rich, providential ideas come out as each one expresses himself fully. We could never have had these ideas just thinking by ourselves, motivated by the selfish goal of having only our idea emerge.

I make sure that prospective employees know that, besides their professional competence, they will be evaluated on how well they have been living company values. Their performance ratings are determined not only by their supervisor, but also by their peers and a select number of subordinates.

Our company values include the values of honesty and integrity, teamwork and what we call “fun” (celebrating successes and creating a positive





LINDA SPECTOR (2)

Nick Sanna (left) conversing during the EoC course at St. Mary's University in Texas

environment). When someone comes to work for us, we tell them who we are and what we are about, so they understand what they are getting into. They make a conscious decision to participate.

This way, we can create a caring culture and not lose our soul as we grow.

Everyone is involved, with a high sense of ownership. We have a very low rate of employee turnover.

For me as an entrepreneur, I feel this is a way in which I can reach holiness in life. Working together in this way helps others to discover a higher calling in their everyday professional life.

Have you had ethical situations come up where you have made the choice to live by the principles of the EoC when normal business procedures might have led you a different way?

Absolutely, we have faced the question many times. If a sales person offers us a database from a previous employer, we would not accept this without the permission of his previous firm.

Also, we would not hire a person who engages in shady business practices. In cases where we have had conflicts with customers over a particular situation, we have made concessions, even though we probably were right. People ultimately recognize our good motives.

On one occasion, we were being considered for work with a large, publicly owned company. We are a small growing company. They had some doubts

about working with us.

A consultant for the large company called to tell me: "I was at the board meeting when they were discussing whether to partner with you. They were raving about your product, but they emphasized most the employees of Netuitive. They recognized that your people go beyond what is strictly necessary; you follow the highest ethical standards and can be trusted."

I was very proud at that moment. It is our biggest reward when we hear praises like this.

We've been growing 300 percent each year, thanks to the trust of our investors who have funded this business, and to the positive dynamics among the employees.

What motivated you to become part of the EoC?

In 1991, when Chiara Lubich launched the Economy of Communion, I was a graduate student in economics. I was a little depressed at the prospect of going into the business world, thinking I might be compromising some of the ideals that had animated my life.

The EoC was the best thing that could have happened to me. I was looking for a job and applied for a sales position. With the idea of the EoC in mind, I no longer thought of sales as just a money-making job, but as a way I could put into practice many of those ideals I had learned as a young person, as a young person of the Focolare.

Sales became a way of serving custom-

ers, meeting needs, finding possible solutions. If my product did not meet your needs, I would be the first to tell you. It was a job where I could play the game of making myself one with the customer, of putting myself in their shoes.

When someone asked me where I had learned about sales and management, I would respond, "Chiara Lubich," even though they might not know who she is. She taught me how to put myself in the shoes of other people, how to serve them honestly and properly. This attitude resonates with customers, who want their needs met without being pressured or taken advantage of.

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Businesses are built on meeting customers' needs. With great products, I continue to work this way. The EoC put this spark in me.

This working environment seems as if it would foster not only the growth of the business, but the human formation of your employees.

We celebrated a positive business quarter last week with a dinner. Our chief financial officer thanked the other team members not only for their professional growth, but also for their personal growth. He said that this was the first environment where he felt free to be himself and was encouraged to grow on a personal basis.

The supportive environment we have at Netuitive, is built on the positive relationships we have created among us.

Relationships built on reciprocity are at the core. 

Sanna lives with his wife Corinne and their three children in Virginia.