

BACKTALK

Educators Tell Business How to Stop Ruining America

BY CARL GLICKMAN

We feel compelled to report to the American people that the business and financial foundations of our society are currently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur — companies that extolled themselves as models of excellent practices have deceived the American people with sloppy, undisciplined, and greedy practices that are driving Americans out of their homes, threatening their retirements, and dashing their hopes of a financially secure future. Indeed, if an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre corporate financial performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.

Business has allowed this to happen, with greedy CEOs and upper management taking enormous benefits for themselves while preaching and dictating to schools the need to adopt their “sound” business practices of unbridled free markets, privatization strategies, and the notion of competition as the force for change. Taxpayers are now bailing out some of these companies, whose CEOs have been actively involved in dictating to policy makers that America’s schools should model the management style of the private sector.

God forbid that our schools become more like these kinds of businesses! Our business and financial communities have, in effect, been committing rash, thoughtless acts of unilateral financial disarmament, dragging our citizens and their children into economic insecurity while having many of these same citizens pay the bill. By making their terminology, practices, and transactions incomprehensible to the lay audience, these business leaders enjoyed a decade-

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long end run around the public and our alleged watchdog agencies. The hubris of high rollers on the top floors of America’s giant companies permitting unfettered profit-taking at the expense of others has no limit. To be blunt, the business community has become an industry at risk of implosion.

To help our colleagues in the business community, we educators hereby recommend a new guiding and monitoring organization for business and financial institutions. The Education Roundtable will gather a team of the country’s top educators, whose charge

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will be to set business standards, goals, and accountability structures for all corporations and financial institutions. To promote a greater culture of accountability, the Roundtable will also require each entity to publish a report card every year, based on a series of standardized assessments.

Our final word, perhaps better characterized as a plea, is that all segments of our population will give close attention to the implementation of our recommendations. Our present plight did not appear overnight, and the responsibility for our current situation is widespread. Reform of our corporate and financial system will take time and unwavering commitment. For no one can doubt that the United States is under challenge from many quarters.

Epilogue

Some readers will bristle as I have lifted some of the exact wording of the *Nation at Risk* report of 1983 and changed the words “schools” and “public education” to “business and financial institutions.” And yes, I have taken plenty of liberties to extend and add sentences to define all business and financial leaders and stock market manipulators as untrustworthy, immoral, dangerous people who have let our country down, crushing the day-to-day lives and long-term hopes of the majority of Americans who cannot afford to lose their jobs, their homes, and their savings. And my business friends will bristle at the idea that educators, with no experiences in business or finance, should be taking charge of what they need to do. If so, the point has been made and, I hope, sincerely taken before further policy is made. ■

KAPPAN welcomes your essays. E-mail BackTalk contributions to Kappan@pdkintl.org.

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