

# Windhorse:evolution Ethos Statement

Windhorse:evolution is a Buddhist Right Livelihood business<sup>1</sup> which is part of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO), an international Buddhist (Order and) spiritual movement. The business imports, wholesales, and retails gift and home ware from around the world. It employs over 200 people, about half of whom are Buddhists. The fundamental purpose of the business is to promote the practice of living in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha (particularly the ethical precepts that he identified) and, for those who are Buddhists, to use the process of working together as a means to deepen our experience and practice of his teachings.

Windhorse:evolution is based on 5 principles or values. We formulate these in general terms (rather than specifically Buddhist ones), so as to make them accessible to all our employees. These principles form a base line for employment within the business. Although the last principle derives from our being a commercial Buddhist business, the first four derive directly from the Buddha's teachings of the five ethical precepts<sup>2</sup>. There are many jobs within the business where it is not necessary to be a Buddhist, but every employee needs to be at least sympathetic to all five of these principles as a pre-requisite for employment in the company.

1. The first principle is **generosity** - we are in business to make money in order to give it away. This is fundamental to the purpose and ethos of the business. Roughly half our profits are ploughed back into the business. The rest we give away primarily to Buddhist projects around the world and also to social projects in communities associated with our suppliers. As an expression of this principle of generosity, many of those we employ accept a fair, but lower than commercial rate for the work that they do in the company.
2. The second principle is **ethics** - we intend the business to be a tangible expression of Buddhist values in the modern world and for Buddhist ethics to be practised through all the interactions involved in the running of the business. As well as being Buddhist these are basic, human values that can be summarised as kindness, honesty and awareness:
  - *Kindness* here means trying to develop and maintain an attitude of goodwill and care towards each other in the workplace and towards anyone we encounter in the course of the working day, for example our customers. It also means care and consideration in relation to our use of the natural environment.
  - *Honesty* – in the sense of not taking things without permission, and in the sense of telling the truth, is crucial to developing trust amongst ourselves and with our customers and suppliers.

- *Awareness* as an ethical principle is concerned with being aware of other people as human beings, with feelings, thoughts, needs and qualities, rather than merely as objects that help or hinder us in our pursuit of our own desires. This kind of awareness is needed in order to be kind and to be honest, and to develop the atmosphere of trust and care that we aspire to maintain in the business.
3. The third principle of windhorse:evolution is **personal development** - the business is based on the Buddhist belief that all individuals can change, grow and unfold their potential, moving towards what Buddhists refer to as Perfect Wisdom and Compassion. We aim to promote the personal development of all employees, from training in a new task or learning better communication skills through to supporting spiritual practice in a range of ways.
  4. The fourth principle is **collectivity and communality** - we aim to be a community of like-minded people, supporting and encouraging each other in our collective project of making money to give away. At the same time we also aim to support each other's personal development and ethical practice. We work together within our own team and with other teams, co-operating and collaborating with each other as creatively as we can in order to achieve the collective aims of our own team and those of the wider business.
  5. The fifth and final principle is **commercial viability** – we are running an ethical giftware business and it needs to make money and be commercially successful for us to accomplish our purpose.

The Buddhist purpose of the business and the manner in which we operate cannot be separated. This is the case with regard to our internal relations and in our relations with those outside the business. Whenever we advertise a job we make it clear (through this Ethos Statement) that we are committed to maintaining our distinctively Buddhist ethos as a business. Whilst doing this we welcome a broad spectrum of employees within our working community of like-minded people.

Some jobs in the business have a Genuine Occupational Requirement (GOR) to be filled by a Buddhist<sup>3</sup>. This means there is a central requirement that these jobs are filled by a practising Buddhist who has an understanding of and sympathy for Buddhism as practised within the FWBO. This requirement can be for one of two reasons: either because a position is in a core team of Buddhists within which a Buddhist mode of working is central, or because a position is a senior one having particular influence on the ethos of the whole business. In both these situations the business requires that the post holder personally upholds and exemplifies the practice of the Buddhist teachings and ideals that underlie the ethos of the business. This requires someone with a deep personal faith in those teachings and ideals, and with a strong commitment to working out their expression, in an ongoing way, within the role. In these circumstances we will positively advertise for, recruit, train and promote people who are practising as

Buddhists and have an understanding of and sympathy for Buddhism as practiced within the FWBO.

Not all senior positions in the business have this GOR and it is possible for individuals who are not Buddhists to hold senior task positions on the basis of sharing the broad values expressed in the five principles of the business.

Whilst we are committed to maintaining our Buddhist ethos and to providing a context for Buddhist spiritual practice, we are also very committed to welcoming and involving everyone whom we employ. We believe that all employees should be enabled to contribute as fully as possible to the task dimension of the business and be supported to develop as individuals whilst doing so. By asking all employees, whatever their faith, to assent to the ethos of the business as outlined in the five principles above, we ensure that we all share a common base line for our engagement in it and can function as a genuine community of like-minded people.

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<sup>1</sup> One of the Buddha's central teachings is the Noble Eightfold Path, laying out the Buddhist Vision and the steps towards realising it. The fifth step is Right Livelihood, the injunction to make your livelihood ethical and in keeping with the Buddhist path. We intend windhorse:evolution to be an effective form of Right Livelihood in the modern world, a tangible expression of Buddhist values.

<sup>2</sup> The five ethical precepts each have a negative and positive formulation:

- ❑ Not killing or causing harm to other living beings – cultivating deeds of loving kindness
- ❑ Not taking the not-given – cultivating generosity
- ❑ Avoiding sexual misconduct – cultivating simplicity and contentment
- ❑ Avoiding false speech – cultivating honest, harmonious speech
- ❑ Abstaining from drink and drugs that cloud the mind – cultivating mindfulness and awareness

<sup>3</sup> Under the terms of the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003