

# Thoughts on Growing a Magazine

*What we are, what we're not, and why we're doing this anyway*

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By Marjorie Kelly

I find myself thinking a good deal about growth these days—how wild it can be, and insistent, and unstoppable. I'm fascinated by people and things that are growing. As *Business Ethics* enters a new stage of its development, I sometimes suspect I know more about growing begonias than I do about growing myself, or this magazine. Even the things I think I know often turn out to be wrong. I might imagine, for example, that it was my green thumb that kept my poinsettia in full bloom into April, and that it was my lack of watering that finally made the petals fall. But I no more command the poinsettia's progress than I command my own.

Much as we might wish it, growth is not something entirely within our control. It is the world that grows us. And wisdom lies not so much in making right choices, as in knowing which things we have choices about, and which we do not.

I used to think of change as something private, something that happened secretly and invisibly inside me or inside my business. But I'm coming to see it's the world that's growing *Business Ethics*—just as it's the sun and the soil that grow the begonias. A remarkable change is occurring in business today, a change that makes a magazine like this not only possible but inevitable—a change that is like a current, sweeping us along.

On the marketing front, we're seeing a tremendous response. Our most recent—and largest—direct mailing pulled an impressive 5.6 percent gross response. (To give you an idea of what this means, Robin Wolander's test mailing for *Parenting* magazine drew a 5.7 percent response—and on that basis, she sold the concept to Time Inc. for \$5 million, before she had published a single issue.) In other words, business people seem to like the idea of *Business Ethics*.

We've also recently brought in a lead investor—someone so ideal we couldn't have invented him—who put in place the first piece of a capitalization plan we aim to complete by the end of this year. We're searching for a publisher/business manager, as well as a half-time associate editor, and we hope to have both those positions filled by early fall.

Another new staff member is Customer Service Manager Barbara Doty, an English major fresh out of the University of Vermont (Phi Beta Kappa), who previously interned for our friends at Seventh Generation, the catalogue of environmentally sensitive products. We also have a new editorial intern, Ranja Yusuf, whose multiple talents are evident in the writing and graphic work you'll find in *Working Ideas* (page 8). Co-founder Miriam Kniaz is working with John Raatz at CDI Communications Group to create a Business Ethics Speakers Bureau, which will bring national publicity both to the magazine and to the ideas it represents. Every day brings wonderful new calls and letters, new encouragement and opportunities from the extended family of *Business Ethics*.

Much as I love this new growth phase we're entering, it means we're less insular than before, with more people to whom we're accountable—more people pulling and tugging us in various directions. As the person who ultimately sets the direction for the magazine, I find it an opportunity to reassess what we're about—to re-think what *Business Ethics* is, and what it isn't.

What we are *not*, first of all, is a business-bashing publication. There is certainly no lack of that in the press, and we see no need to add our voice to the cacophony. Equally emphatically, we are not an academic journal—our purpose is not to publish authors but to serve readers.

What we *are* is a magazine of socially responsible business—and this issue we've added a cover line saying precisely that. Our role is not to be neutral reporters or business apologists, but advocates. We don't just talk about ethics, we aim to promote ethical practices. And we believe we can do that best not by clubbing people over the head and insisting they change, but by supporting the people who are trying to do things right.

We're a business magazine with a point of view—in the tradition of opinionated business magazines like *Forbes*. Except our opinions are a bit different. The most fun example is the case of the contrasting cover stories. The topic was global warming, and *Forbes* weighed in on December 25, 1989, with its

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usual curmudgeonly bias: "The Global Warming Panic," they blared, "A Classic Case of Overreaction."

In contrast, our September/October 1989 cover asked, "Can Business Solve Global Warming?" and the subhead answered: "The tools that helped damage the environment can be used to heal it."

**W**e don't see socially responsible business as a "movement" in the sense that some are in and some are out, some are for and some against. Rather, it's a maturation process. We in business can go crashing through the world like adolescent boys on a destructive, self-absorbed path—or we can put our heads up, and see there's a world out there beyond our own ego, beyond our own balance sheet. Business people can, in other words, make the full passage to maturity. We're not talking about a renaissance of starry-eyed optimists out to change the world, but the emergence of a mature and caring business community.

This process is already well underway. The fundamental premise behind *Business Ethics* is that there exists today an active and growing community of business people trying to live and work in responsible ways. It's a magazine for the marketers who see potential in environmentally sensitive products. It's for human-resource people who want to create a healthy workplace. It's for CEOs and VPs at companies large and small who believe in things like vision and employee involvement. It's for anyone who's figured out there's more to running a company than the bottom line. It's a magazine for people who represent the cutting edge of executive evolution. Responsible management is the direction business must inevitably move—and those that lead the way will profit.

We're an ethics magazine that believes in profit. We believe in the importance of financial health, because a wounded company cannot make a contribution to society. Therefore, with this issue we add

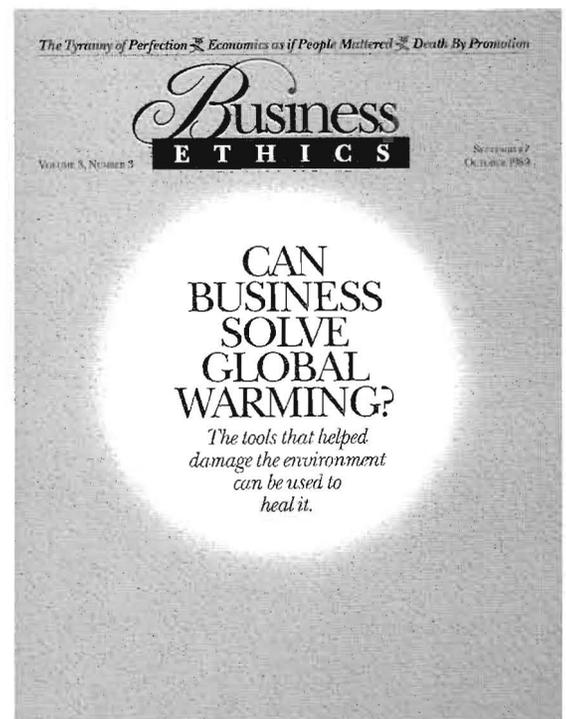
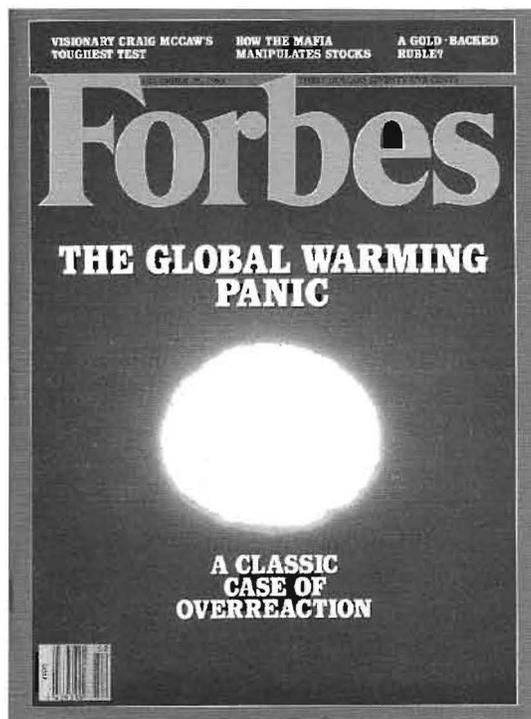
a clause to our mission statement:

*The mission of Business Ethics magazine is to promote ethical business practices, to serve that growing community of professionals striving to live and work in responsible ways, and to create a financially healthy company in the process.*

To have the greatest possible impact, we aim to serve the broadest possible audience. Socially responsible business is not a closed club, and there are no membership criteria. For us, the challenge is to serve this broad audience without losing our unique voice.

Some say our editorial focus is too spiritual, but I believe that's precisely the point: that business has focused for too long on the hard stuff, the numbers, and it's the human side, the social side, the environmental side, that needs our attention now. We do, however, intend to make our reporting more pithy—

*Socially responsible business is not a closed club, and there are no membership criteria.*



*Judging a magazine by its cover: Old paradigm vs. new paradigm business thinking.*

for example, beefing up our Not Business As Usual section with more inside stories of responsible business practices.

I want *Business Ethics* to be a different, inspiring, spiritual, practical, hard-hitting magazine that ends up being a significant presence on the business journalism scene. Getting there is definitely more complicated than growing begonias, but ultimately it's not up to me to figure it all out. There's something else that's growing this little magazine. Something wild and unstoppable, and really, I think, pretty friendly. ✕