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LIVING ECONOMY PRINCIPLES

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BALLE BEAT

Don Shaffer

AS DEFINED BY BALLE - the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies, a "Living Economy" ensures that economic power resides locally, sustaining healthy community life and natural life as well as long-term economic viability.

Living economy communities produce and exchange locally as many products needed by their citizens as they reasonably can, while reaching out to other communities to trade in those products they cannot reasonably produce at home. These communities value their unique character and encourage cultural exchange and cooperation.

Living economy consumers appreciate the benefits of buying from living economy businesses and, if necessary, are willing to pay a price premium to secure those.

Living economy investors value businesses that are community stewards and as such accept a "living return" on their financial investments rather than a maximum return, recognizing the value derived from enjoying a healthy and vibrant community and a sustainable global economy.

Living economy public policies support decentralized ownership of businesses and farms, fair wages, taxes, and budget allocations, trade policies benefiting local economies, and stewardship of the natural environment.

Living economy media provide sources of news independent of corporate control, so that citizens can make informed decisions in the best interests of their communities and natural environment.

Living economy businesses are primarily independent and locally owned, and value the needs and interests of all stakeholders, while building long-term profitability.

They strive to:

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Source products from businesses with similar values, with a preference for local procurement; Provide employees a healthy workplace with meaningful living-wage jobs; Offer customers personal service and useful safe, quality products; Work with suppliers to establish a fair exchange; Cooperate with other businesses in ways that balance their self-interest with their obligation to the community and future generations; Use their business practices to support an inclusive and healthy community, and to protect our natural environment.

Bo Burlingham, in his new book entitled *Small Giants: Companies That Choose to Be Great Instead of Big*, defines human scale as "...a size at which it's still possible for an individual to be acquainted with everyone else in the organization."

Judy Wicks, co-founder and co-chair of BALLE, often talks about her business (the White Dog Café) growing deeper and deeper roots in the Philadelphia neighborhood where she has lived for decades. Instead of building outward exponentially by franchising her restaurant into other communities, Judy opened a distinctive gift store right next door. Next, she may open a coffee shop on the same block.

By contrast, most entrepreneurs in the U.S. are bombarded with coaching that urges them to "go to scale" as quickly as possible. Growth is the goal. One of the main problems with this coaching: so few entrepreneurs make it to the top of the mountain. And many individuals who could have built successful small or medium-sized businesses exhaust themselves, their spouses, their families, and often their resources in an all-or-nothing quest for the "big" time.

At BALLE, we want to shine a spotlight on inspiring entrepreneurs who are committed to these Living Economy principles. Please send us any recommendations from your community!

Don Shaffer is the national coordinator of BALLE, the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies, based in San Francisco. BALLE connects business networks across North America improving the social, environmental, and economic life of their communities. Visit the website www.livingeconomies.org.

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