

1



Aloha

*Aloha is a value, one of unconditional love
Aloha is the outpouring and receiving of the spirit*

The arms of *Aloha* are inclusive, and they seek to serve.
Aloha is an attitude, one that is positive and healthy, for
Aloha is the value of unconditional love and acceptance.
To be a *great* manager is to share the intent of *Aloha*.
You must give your employees an outpouring of your spirit,
and you must receive theirs.
This is *Aloha*. This is the calling of great managers.

Managing with Aloha

There is one way I best know how to share with you the management lessons I have learned. It is the same way I now teach and coach emerging leaders to manage their own people, helping them to become value teachers and coaches themselves in the process. In the chapters to follow I will teach you my interpretations of the Hawaiian values I feel best guide great managers. When you weave them together, they define a way to work that I call *Managing with Aloha*. We will explore how this approach can work for you, bringing you success personally and for your business.

The arms of *Aloha* embrace values that perfectly align themselves with the requirements of fundamental business principles. For instance:

- The values of *Ho'ohana* (work with purpose) and *Imi ola* (seeking your best life) are in perfect alignment with centering one's business with mission and giving it the focus of vision.
- If you are a manager who lives within the value of *Mahalo* (thankfulness), appreciative of what you already have, you are one who constantly takes inventory of the strengths of your team and applies them to the job at hand (*Lōkahi*).
- The most effective managers are the ones who do not foolishly go it alone: They get everyone involved in ways that are stimulating, challenging and inclusive (*Kākou*).
- They trust their people because they know them well (*Ike loa*), and they dole out very generous portions of meaningful assignments (*Ho'ohana*) and the authority to effectively get them done (*Kuleana*).
- They give advice vs. approval, forgiveness vs. permission, and find that results are achieved faster, in more nimble ways through-out their operations. They are *Alaka'i* (leaders) who excel and innovate, leading with their good example and confident in the trust and respect they have gained from their staff.

We will explore Hawaiian values that are thought of as ancient and very traditional; stories are told of them as taught and practiced with reverence in our islands' history, whatever one's ancestry may be. I am a *kama'āina*, a person who is native born in Hawaii, however not of Hawaiian blood; literally the word *kama'āina* translates to "land child." I am a fourth generation native with the chop-suey of ancestry that makes up the vast majority of Hawaii's present-day population. Yet growing up here, isolated from the cultures of my blood ancestry, gaining my education here and spending my entire working life here, these values are what I know. They are who I am.

Upon becoming a manager I learned to incorporate these values into my language at work and not just at home, finding that the surest way to change your own work behavior for the better is to speak the words that will force you to make it so. You have to walk your talk if you are to internalize new learning, build your confidence and keep your credibility and

integrity with others. We *can* change our behavior, and these values helped me change mine in a way that made me a much more effective manager.

My interpretations of these Hawaiian values are offered to you with *Ha'aha'a* (modesty and humility), knowing that they encapsulate only the limited scope of my own learning and management practice. I fully realize that there are many *kumu* (teachers) and *kūpuna* (elders) in Hawaii who know much more than I; as charted by their own life's course, they may tell you of more insightful experiences. I encourage you to listen to the stories that are shared by elders, for their lessons learned can inspire you, and may enrich your own understanding. Values can be as complex as the people who have them, but by their very nature, values will always teach us to be better.

There are more values within the Hawaiian culture than there are within the pages of this book; mine is not an all-inclusive listing.¹ The values we explore here are specifically aimed at improving management practices and our working lives as a whole. I present them to you as modern everyday applications for what I have experienced and still see as today's challenges in business. Businesses seek to please customers through the predictable and consistent actions taken by their employees, whether they are in Hawaii or elsewhere, and those employees are driven by their personal values. I have found that the successful business owners are those who consider their staff to be their partners: they know them, they trust them and they count on them. These things have been made possible through the values they share.

Values are both universal and personal

As we discuss them you will find that the Hawaiian values I've included in the *Managing with Aloha* philosophy are very universal, and you may recognize them by another name in another culture or language. If they call to you in some way, put my book down momentarily: Look to your own history and define your thoughts. For not only are values universal, they

¹ The best texts I have read on Hawaiian values from a historical perspective are *Kū Kanaka, Stand Tall* by Dr. George Kanahēle, and both volumes of *Nānā I Ke Kumu* published by the Queen Lili'uokalani Children's Center. You will find more information on both within my listing of Recommended Reading.

are highly personalized. They come alive with one's personal *mana'o* (one's thoughts and beliefs) and they are strengthened and continually reinforced with the nuances of their own experiences—a value can have *kaona* (hidden meaning) for someone in a way that is very uniquely meaningful for them. There is a self-awareness that is uncovered for you. When coupled with your mission and with *Ho'ohana* (working with intent and purpose) the result is powerful self-motivation.

Our values drive our beliefs, and often they give our thoughts clarity. When we are true to our beliefs, the decisions and choices we make come to us naturally and easily, especially when we have a goal or objective in mind. It is easier to act on that which you believe. I am a strong advocate for the writing of mission statements, as you will discover when we reach the chapter on *'Imi ola* (to seek life). Our mission defines our goals, and our goals drive our actions. And actions taken, true to clear beliefs that have been borne from good values, give us our integrity. Acting with integrity makes things right for us; it feeds our hunger to be intelligent, ethical and morally just.

Aloha is a value, one of unconditional love

I cringe each time I hear a Hawaii travelogue intone that *Aloha* is simply a greeting, a word the visitor to our islands can use to mean both hello and goodbye. Throughout their visit, that is how most visitors hear the word *Aloha* used, and they will depart believing they understand it, and that they have experienced the *Aloha* spirit because “Alooooooooooha!” was said with such enthusiasm at a *lū'au* (a feast) or by their tour bus driver.

Unfortunately most children growing up in Hawaii today believe this is the only definition of *Aloha* as well, and as much as I hate to admit it now, at one time so did I. To manage with *Aloha*, I first had to learn and understand that *Aloha* is a value I had to choose to believe in, and that when shared with others, my own *Aloha* spirit would be as real and tangible as something you felt you could physically touch.

While a manager for Hualalai Resort at historic Ka'ūpūlehu, a resort community on the Big Island, this defini-

tion of *Aloha* was shared with me: “*Aloha is unconditional love, for it is the outpouring and receiving of the spirit. It is an expression of unconditional kindness, hospitality, spirituality, cooperativeness with humility, unity and graciousness that touches the souls of others.*”

I’d read these words over and over, and I found I had a need inside to have this statement of *Aloha* ring true for me. “*Aloha is unconditional love, for it is the outpouring and receiving of the spirit.*”

As you read on, I ask you to keep something in mind whenever I use the words “spirit” or “spirituality.” Where I say spirituality, I refer to the spirit within; you could call it the breath of your life, the voice of your soul. For me, the individual religions of the world are merely different expressions people have for their own spirituality within them, and they have made a choice as to who they will honor in their gratefulness. I am not suggesting religiousness; that is your own choice. However I do believe that we should acknowledge our own spirituality and get comfortable with it. One’s inner spiritual power is assumed in the Hawaiian culture, and it is celebrated. In many ways *Managing with Aloha* is about tapping into the spirit that is inside you; it embraces your intuition and gut-level feelings.

The purest definition for *Aloha* itself is unconditional love. Love can be an uncomfortable word for many people, for we associate it with sensitivity, raw emotion and other touchy-feely concepts that are not easily discussed openly or with much frequency—certainly not with employees we manage! Ironically love is probably the most universal of all values. Love is a word of complete unselfishness and beauty.

Culturally, our freer use of the word in Hawaii is very much a reason I have intentionally chosen to raise my children here. When we say “I have *Aloha* for you,” we are saying we have love and the utmost respect for who you are.

My *Aloha* for you is my unconditional love and acceptance of the spirit that was created within you upon your birth. *Aloha* can be literally defined as the breath of the life within. It is my unwavering belief that the spirit within you is innately good. *Aloha* is the outpouring of my own spirit, freely given to you to receive from me, as well. In doing so, I have faith in you,

and I trust you to respect and honor my *Aloha* in return, accepting without question that I have given it to you with nothing but good intent.

Great managers have the intent of *Aloha*

I am convinced that good management must start with good intent. There simply is no other way. Managers who feel that people inherently need to be worked on and reshaped to their own design are dangerous. They shouldn't be in any aspect of management that affects people at all. To be a great manager is to share the intent of *Aloha*. You must believe that your staff is innately good, worthy of the faith you place in them, and capable of great things. Without this core belief to start with, everything else will just be too difficult, and you will fight battles you cannot win. You cannot win as a manager if your employees cannot succeed working for you because you lack faith and trust in them.

Luckily for me, this understanding was one created in my own value system very early in my management career when I was a restaurant manager at the Hyatt Regency Waikiki. It was in the late 1970's of flower power, free love and the open experimentation with hallucinatory drugs. Most managers during this time became very good at diagnosing those employees who reported to work high and giddily happy or deeply brooding. One afternoon I had a case of both collide in my restaurant kitchen, when a deeply brooding cook got into an argument with a giddily happy busboy and threw a knife at him. Thankfully he missed, because the groggy busboy didn't have the instinct or reflexes to duck out of harm's way.

At the time, I was too green a manager to know I couldn't—or shouldn't—do so, and I fired both on the spot. I then left the restaurant in the hands of my hostess, grabbed another manager for help, and drove both employees home so they could “come down,” delivering them safely to their families, and explaining why. Later my human resources department would have to clean up the legalities for me, conducting the processes of investigation, documentation, and decision by committee that normally precedes actually terminating

someone. For my part, I was too obsessed with the question of what these guys would do now, knowing they both needed the jobs I'd so quickly and impulsively stripped away from them. And I'd met their families; wasn't there more *they* expected me to do?

Over the weeks that followed, I ended up checking them both into a rehab program with the agreement that the hotel would pay for it, a commitment well outside the realm of my own authority. Further, I promised they'd get their jobs back if they graduated clean, a promise I had no right to make. My own boss went nuts when he learned I was still involved. He wouldn't tell the HR director what I did—I still don't know who paid the rehab bill—and he made me promise I wouldn't tell her either. Fortunately he still wanted to keep me around in spite of his feeling that I'd suffered some serious lapses in judgment dealing with the entire episode. I believed I'd done the right thing. However, my boss didn't expect them to make it, and he was both amazed and outraged I'd accepted more responsibility for them.

My boss underestimated them: Both would graduate the rehab program. My reward came on the day I got a phone call from one of their mothers. She wanted to say thank you; she felt that my firing her son was the best thing that could have happened to him and for her family. I've never forgotten her words: "We are so very blessed that you gave him your *Aloha*, even on the day you fired him and brought him home to us. That was what he needed most of all, because we didn't know he had this problem. He is fine today only because you gave him your *Aloha*; you knew he wasn't just some terrible person." He was a good person who had made a bad mistake, a mistake *Aloha* allowed me to see beyond so he could get the help he needed.

To be a great manager is to share the intent of *Aloha*. You must believe that your staff is innately good, worthy of the faith you place in them and capable of great things. Their success will lead to your own. Do you have an employee who is disappointing you? Look for the reason, and look for the good within them. They may be in the wrong job at the wrong time in the wrong circumstance. Look for the ways in which

they are good and strong, and put them in a position where their goodness and their strengths serve them best. Share your own *Aloha* and you'll more easily figure out how you can get them back on track.

Can you do this with every candidate that walks through the door? Can you believe in the good in everyone? To be realistic about this, probably not. Therefore, as a manager, interview, recruitment, selection and hiring will be the most important things you do. In addition, your employees must have enough open capacity in their lives for the job you offer them. The point I must emphasize is this: When you do hire, select employees you believe in and are willing to create a relationship with. You must be able to give them your *Aloha*, sincerely and completely without reservations. Managers manage through other people—technicians manage systems and processes. Your own belief that the people you manage are innately good is the single most important prerequisite to your own success as their manager. You needn't say the words outright that you love them, but they must feel that you do.

Correcting behavior, preserving self esteem

There is a parenting lesson that can help you be a great manager. When I had my first child I was your typical obsessive new mother, seeking to find the perfect pediatrician for her care. My obstetrician tried to help me identify candidates to interview, but no one was quite good enough. So the day came that my daughter decided to arrive six weeks prematurely, and fragile as she was, she really needed that great pediatrician whom I still had not found for her. From the delivery room she was quickly taken from me to get the care she needed from some mystery man my own doctor summoned.

When I woke up in the recovery room two hours later, the mystery man was standing next to my bed, and he said, "Congratulations, and don't worry, your daughter is fine." Still not fully awake, I asked him, "Are you going to be her doctor?" He answered, "Well, that's up to you, and I understand you give a tough interview. I think she's really beautiful, and I'd like to be her doctor, so you can ask me whatever you'd like to

know. Can I share something with you first?” Not feeling much like talking anyway, I silently nodded, and this is what he said.

“I’m sure that the moment she is brought back to you, you will believe there is no possible way you could love another human being more completely. But being her mother will require a lot of you. Days will come that she will misbehave and make you furious, and you’ll have to be very careful about what you say to her. No matter what happens, you need to remember how much you love her at this moment, and never ever tell her that she is a bad person. You can tell her that you are disappointed in her behavior, but because you know how great she really is, you know she is capable of wonderful things, and she can behave better from now on. Then you ask her to, for she must choose to. Whether I’m her doctor or not, will you remember to do that for her?” Again, I nodded.

No other question came to mind for me. As far as I was concerned, the interview was over, and Dr. Galen Chock became her doctor. Three years later he’d begin to take care of my son as well, teaching me even more about being a good mom for my children with every well-baby visit, immunization and yearly physical. Over the years I’ve kept my promise to him, telling my children how great they are whenever I can, and telling them I am positive they are capable of making good choices for themselves. I applaud like crazy when they do.

I’d recall Dr. Chock’s advice on a day I was stewing about what to do with a particular problem-child employee: It was one of those “aha!” moments in management for me. I realized that what Dr. Chock had said in the recovery room held the same promise and potential for the staff I managed. Love and respect the person, treating them with the dignity they *will* seek to earn from you, correct and guide their behavior. If there are any variables to be sought out, they are probably lurking in the reasons behind the choices that had been made; talk them out.

My problem child was summoned, and I prepared my thoughts for our meeting. I thought back to when I first hired this employee, remembering why I’d considered him such a great candidate, and why I had been so excited about making him the job offer. I thought about all his successes as he sailed

through his introductory period, securing customer compliments, nailing his performance review with honors and graduating probation with flying colors. I thought about some great things he'd done just in the last few days.

When he entered my office, his feet did their duty, shuffling him reluctantly forward as his eyes avoided mine. He was embarrassed and filled with dread. He knew he'd disappointed me, and clearly he was disappointed with himself. This was an employee anticipating a lecture and bracing himself for punishment: He knew he'd done wrong and he expected me to hammer him for it. This was someone who clearly needed the arms of *Aloha* to reach out to him.

His demeanor did not change my resolve to tackle the problem head on, and that afternoon we did speak of why he'd made the wrong choice when he had other options. But I didn't lay into him as he expected me to. Instead I told him I knew he was capable of better, I'd seen it in him on an almost daily basis, and I knew how good he was when he was at the top of his game. So I asked him please, could that be the way he conducted himself at work from here on in? And he did.

We'd come to an agreement that afternoon: If he struggled with a future choice for any reason, he'd raise his hand, and I'd be there to help guide him through it. As I write this today he is known as an informal leader among his peers, for he has learned to carefully evaluate the choices that seem obvious and dig deeper for those that should also be uncovered. His opinion is consistently sought by his co-workers and by his manager. He is no longer a problem child: He is a role model of outstanding performance.

Aloha was in my office that day. As I recall, the word "*Aloha*" may not have specifically been spoken. It was there as the outpouring of good intent between us. It was a value we shared, one that gave us a comfortable and workable common ground. It centered our purpose for meeting as two human beings, and it gave focus to our conversation, even when there were difficult things to be said. The day was yet another example of what values-centered leadership can successfully do for a manager.

I share this story with you here for another reason as well;

discipline will not be discussed too much more as you read on. It is something that we as managers are called on to handle, probably more often than we care to, and *not* taking action is *not* an option – tacit approval is one of the mortal sins of management. Following up when discipline is necessary is critical within your role as Keeper of High Performance Expectations – for everyone, fair and square. When the need is there, I am confident that Dr. Chock’s advice will serve you as well as it has served me. Love and respect the person, treating them with the dignity they will seek to earn from you, correct and guide their behavior. This is the crucial belief managers must have when they seek to manage with *Aloha*.

Customers yearn for the Aloha spirit

Aloha is not just for managers and their employees, your customers long for it, as well. Every single day, somewhere in Hawaii, *Aloha* comes to life. I believe that as it lives and breathes, *Aloha* defines the epitome of sincere, gracious, and intuitively perfect customer service given from one person to another. It is a phenomenon that managers in Hawaii must proactively begin to sustain and perpetuate in a manner designed to help us thrive.

Ultimately, all businesses share the common goal of turning a profit. Long-term success equates to consistent profitability, and we achieve this by pleasing our customers, something that cannot just happen occasionally. It must happen constantly, and we need a way to turn every single customer into a loyal fan. What does it take to secure their loyalty? If you are to be a success in business, you have to take personal responsibility for the determining the answer to this question, and then delivering upon it, giving your customers what they want.

There is a rampant problem in business today that crosses all industries, and Hawaii has not escaped it. Most customers do not feel they consistently get good service from us, whether they seek it at the grocery store, from their utility companies, at their kids’ schools, from professionals, or in your business office. “Business as usual” does not mean “business colored

with the spirit of *Aloha*,” yet it should. You can be the one with loyal and devoted customers who have found *Aloha* in you and everything your company stands for, customers who keep coming back to you for more, happily buying your product or service because they sense it all goes together. You can have customers who become evangelists, telling everyone else about you.

The arms of Aloha are inclusive, and they seek to serve

Think of *Aloha* as an attitude—a *good* attitude. *Aloha* is an attitude that is positive, inclusive, and healthy. In the business environment, *Aloha* is the feeling of good service, given with genuine sincerity for the pure love of it. *Aloha* is a feeling you have because you believe in what you do and in what your business stands for, you feel your work is worthwhile and you are needed to deliver it. *Aloha* permeates your company because all your employees and all your peers feel the same way: They treat each other with openness, honesty, trust, dignity and respect. They freely share the caring and love of *Aloha* with each other, and so naturally, they treat customers that way, too.

And because those customers don't experience *Aloha* too often, they come back to you time and again to get another fix, confident that you will deliver. The actual service or product they pay for becomes icing on the cake, for if *Aloha* is the color of your company, they are equally confident your product will be infused with value, quality and worth: They trust you will not give your customers anything less. They may not be able to specifically give it a name, but they perceive *Aloha* in your character, and it is a discovery that excites them.

There's more! Not only do you keep loyal customers, your staff retention soars. Your peers and your employees stick around because they want to preserve the *Aloha* in their own lives as well. They tell their family and friends they have *Aloha* at work, and you find that recruitment is no longer an issue for you. Everyone wants your business to thrive so it will continue to sustain them, and you find that your staff takes better care

of all your assets, same as they have your customers.

As a manager you now have more freedom to learn and to innovate, for with so many invested in the success of your business you no longer need to spend time babysitting. You can work on your business rather than getting stuck *in* it. Because of *Aloha*, you have become an association of business partners where owners, managers and employees are all working cooperatively toward achieving the company's success. Both you and your staff develop a strong belief that it is meant to be that way.

Manage with Aloha

The arms of *Aloha* are inclusive, and they seek to serve.
Aloha is an attitude, one that is positive and healthy, for
Aloha is the value of unconditional love and acceptance.
To be a great manager is to share the intent of *Aloha*.
You must give your employees an outpouring of your spirit,
and you must receive theirs.
This is *Aloha*. This is the calling of great managers.