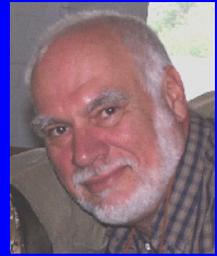


**HIGH & COMPELLING IDEALS  
—ARE WE CONTROL FREAKS?**

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US Americans have high ideals, and the gap between the ideals and their actual accomplishment fuels their efforts for achieving them, even though outsiders are often prone to see this gap as hypocrisy. Most in the US assume that, given the choice, the majority of the world's people would choose to be like them or to live in the USA. They take a missionary approach to spreading US style business practice, US values, and US democratic principles around the world whenever it is in their interest to do so. Indeed, because of the power of US media worldwide and the strong US influence in global business. If you come from another culture recently you may be surprised to find that some of the practices and attitudes now commonplace in your own culture had their roots in US cultural values.

Knowing our underlying values enables us to resolve many seeming contradictions in US behavior, for example, the belief in power and control or taking charge may lead some of us to demand immediate pharmaceutical and surgical interventions when they are ill, while others, operating out of the same values, believe they can heal themselves if they personally make the right lifestyle changes. Both are born of a desire to control.

While the strong US separation of church and state is seen as a protection of individual's freedom of belief from coercion from by churches, the influence of the dominantly Protestant civil religion strongly underlies each of the cultural values we have been discussing in this series of articles. President John Quincy Adams (1767–1848) observed that, "The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: It connected in one indissoluble bond, the principles of civil government with those of Christianity," and, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

This belief has been turned into a real agenda to justify "a US empire" in a "new American Century during the Bush administration by think tanks dominated by what we are now calling "The Religious Right." It is a paradox that the country with the most severe separation of church and state has also the most powerful sense of civil religion that undercuts religious freedom in political and military policy.

**Take charge of the Earth**

The earth had not stopped shaking from the aftershocks of the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake when then California Governor George Deukmejian told NBC-TV: "I've never once been told by our people that we had any kind of a problem with respect to our freeways holding up under an earthquake situation, the severity of the one that we experienced here. So this came as a big surprise to me, a terrible disappointment. His assumption was that technology should have prevented the effects of a natural disaster. I don't think we can say this earthquake was sent by God, said Evangelist Billy Graham.

On June 21, 1990 a quake of similar magnitude in Iran resulted in 50,000 dead, 100,000 injured, while 500,000 were made homeless. I can't do anything and I don't want to think about it. Where can I go? I live here,' said 29- year old accountant Amiri Farhad. My job is here, and I think when your time has come, you leave the world, and you can't do anything about it. "It was the will of God," was a theme echoed again and again as both mullahs and lay people reflected on the disaster.

Both Californians and Iranians are concerned about earthquake safety and expend resources to secure themselves against natural disaster. They differ in the extent of power and control they feel it is possible to exercise as humans and as individuals. US Americans strongly believe that it is important to take charge of situations and be in charge of their individual lives.

US Americans tend to believe that they can control their world and their destiny. Self-reliance and freedom would make little sense if people did not feel in charge of their own fate and in control of their world. They like systems and products that will enable and broaden the span of their power and control. "Empowered" is a favorite term of US managers.

US Americans feel that the world of material and human resources was created to be used and exploited. Nature, the environment, like the legendary endless US frontier, is to be conquered and made over to suit current needs. Many believe that they have a God-given right to do so or even mandate to do so.

### **Control leads to bigger, better, more...**

As a nation, we believe that progress is linear and upward. The company should always be growing, the economy always expanding. Successful careers mean steady promotions and pay increases.

If problems arise they are not a matter of destiny, fate or chance, but should be looked on as challenges that can be met with optimism, ingenuity, hard work and technology. Power and control extend also to the mind, the spirit, to health and personal lifestyle, where it is assumed that the right thinking and behaviors can prevent or cure problems and diseases.

There are lots of words and images that go along with our passion for control. Here are some examples:

- ★ Take charge. Where there's a will there's a way. Explore every option. Be creative.
- ★ American know-how. It ain't who you know, it's what you know.
- ★ Can do. Just do it. Don't just stand there, do something.
- ★ Goal setting. Management by objectives. To-do lists.
- ★ Pragmatism. What can be done will be done.
- ★ Ads which glorify our control—some classics are: "Progress is our most important product," "Better things for better living through chemistry," and the ubiquitous "New and improved..."
- ★ Books like "The Power of Positive Thinking," which tout: Mind over matter. Think big. You can have it all.

- ★ Belief is stronger than disease. Conquer the pain, rather than endure it. If you live right you will live long. Smoke-free, scent-free environments. Labels with ingredients and warnings.
- ★ Don't cry over spilt milk.

Since US Americans believe that they can control their destiny, it follows that they assume control over their life style, environment, and resources. People manage their lives with time management tools and numerous organizers, from agendas to grocery coupons. They are task and achievement-oriented.

They want to bear arms to ensure their own safety, set alarms for security, buy insurance and warranties for peace of mind, and take artificial measures to guarantee health and longevity. They have contingency plans for everything and would like to draw contracts for every possible situation, including prenuptials.

There are gadgets for doing everything. There is a thriving industry for natural foods and health, safety and hygiene products of all sorts. US Americans are likely to blame themselves for life's misfortunes and for their own ill health.

Power positions (numbers, economic strength, simple majority vote) may be wielded in negotiations and decision making. When the stakes are large, opposition may be dismissed as irrelevant and dissidents may be fired or cut out of the arrangement.

Power extends to the spiritual realm where there are claims of power and miracles ranging from traditional faith healers to the panoply of "New Age" nostrums and practices.

Even in business, having the right attitude and permanent optimism is seen to overcome all obstacles and change the world. There is a religious, missionary cast to doing business, sometimes explicitly so. Because of US economic success, US business people tend to assume that others will follow US norms and practices and may be surprised when this is not the case.

All of this may have its upside, but not always. When outsiders look at the USA they often observe:

- ★ High blood pressure and stress resulting from Type A or compulsive behavior and "workaholism."
- ★ They think they will never die.
- ★ US people are perceived to be difficult to work with and are often described as "control freaks." They want instant solutions and lose patience when not in control, resulting in arrogant and overbearing behavior.
- ★ Missed opportunity for serendipity. Quantity over quality.
- ★ There can be an obsession with what is "big" and powerful. SUVs crowd the streets in many areas.
- ★ Tolerance for a high level of violent behavior in civil society. Machismo, masculinized feminism.
- ★ Might makes right. Prone to use bullying or force to compete or get agreement.
- ★ Crusaders--out to conquer the world, destroy the evil, to "make the world safe for democracy" (read: US business interests).
- ★ They are obsessed with bigger and better, gluttons for power. Some outsiders connect US obesity with what they is an insatiable appetite to "have it all."

Having high ideals has produced much good in US society, and, indeed, in the world. They have also been stretched in ways that are plain to see that lead to violence against ourselves and others. Control likes simple formulae and so do US Americans. As President Bush has shown, look idealistic and repeat a simple formula over and over again and inevitably you and others begin to believe it, whether it is true or workable or not. But indeed, in life, as well as in policy, domestic and foreign increasing complexity is the name of the game and besides ideals, we need patience and empathy with ourselves and others to play well.