

# CHARLES HANDY



WAITING FOR THE  
MOUNTAIN TO MOVE

REFLECTIONS ON  
WORK & LIFE

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REFLECTIONS ON  
WORK AND LIFE

Charles Handy



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# THE AUTHOR

 Charles Handy was born in Kildare, Ireland, in 1932, the son of an archdeacon, and was educated in England and the United States. He graduated from Oriel College, Oxford, with first-class honors in Greats, the study of classics, history, and philosophy. Handy has said that this discipline “gave me the ability to think.”

After college, Handy first worked for Shell International in southeast Asia and London as a marketing executive, an economist, and a management educator. He then entered the Sloan School of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. While there he became fascinated with organizations and how they work. After he received his master's in business administration from Sloan in 1967, he returned to England to design and manage the only Sloan program outside the United States, at Britain's first graduate business school, in London.

In 1972 Handy became a full professor of management development at the school, specializing in managerial psychology. From 1977 to 1981, he served as warden of St. George's House in Windsor Castle, a private conference and study center concerned with ethics and values in society. He was chair of the Royal Society of Arts in London from 1987 to 1989 and holds honorary doctorates from four British universities. He is

known to many in Britain for his “Thoughts for the Day” on the BBC’s radio program *Today*.

Handy’s main concern has been the implications for society, and for individuals, of the dramatic changes that technology and economics are bringing to the workplace and to all our lives. His bestselling *The Age of Unreason* first explored these changes and was named by both *Fortune* and *Business Week* as one of the ten best business books of the year. The sequel, *The Age of Paradox*, was awarded the JSK Accord Prize for the best business book of 1994. In total, his books, which include *Gods of Management*, the standard textbook *Understanding Organizations*, *Understanding Schools as Organizations*, *Understanding Voluntary Organizations*, and *Inside Organizations*, have sold over a million copies around the world. An article for the *Harvard Business Review*, “Balancing Corporate Power: A New Federalist Paper,” won the McKinsey Award for 1992, and another article for the same journal, “Trust and Virtual Organization,” won the McKinsey Award in 1995. *Beyond Certainty* is a collection of his articles and essays. In his latest book, *The Hungry Spirit*, he surfaces some of his doubts about the consequences of free-market capitalism and questions whether material success can ever provide the true meaning of life.

Today, Handy is an independent author, teacher, and broadcaster focusing on the changing shape of work, organizations, and capitalism, which has an impact on every aspect of our lives. He describes himself now as a social philosopher. Handy and his wife, Elizabeth, a portrait photographer as well as his business partner, have two grown children and live in London and Norfolk, England, and in Tuscany. They have what Handy has termed “a portfolio life,” balancing their skills and their time to make the most of their independent careers.

# BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION . . .

“Would you like to do a ‘Thought’?” asked Robert Foxcroft one day. I knew what he meant and, because I knew, was both flattered and surprised. “Thought” was short for “Thought for the Day,” a three-minute religious reflection slotted between the news headlines and the weather every morning on the BBC’s early-morning radio program *Today*. Robert was the producer. That question of Robert’s, years later, gave birth to this book of reflections, or thoughts.

The god slot, as “Thought for the Day” was popularly known, was conventionally filled by bishops, priests, and rabbis, and I was none of those. But I was known to Robert, who acted as producer of this one daily spot as well as being vicar of St. Peter’s Church in Hammersmith, London. Robert felt that I, as a rather renegade professor of business with theological affinities, might relate particularly to the many thousands of business and professional people who regularly tuned into this program.

“Actually,” said Robert, “a few million people are listening, but don’t get conceited; they won’t have tuned in to listen to you. Half of them are in their cars and use the program to distract them from the thought of the day ahead; the others are naked in their bath or using the radio for wallpaper sound or an alarm clock as they go about their early morning chores.

Your task is to say something interesting so that they really start to listen."

I was, as I said, flattered. The first "Thought" was scheduled for months ahead. I had a holiday in Provence looming up, and I planned to use it to polish my ideas. I came back with some sample scripts. Robert read them carefully. "Yes," he said, "they're about right for length, but, well, this is supposed to be a thought for *the* day, not the encapsulated wisdom of a lifetime. Ideally, it needs to relate to something that's happening in the news or in your own life, a little nugget to chew on as they go to work." I tore them up and started again—or rather I learned not to start on them until the day before so that they would be fresh and relevant.

Sadly, Robert died not long afterward, to leave a huge gap in the lives of his many friends. I shall forever be grateful to him because he made me think—think about what mattered to me in life, think about my beliefs, such as they were, and how they came about, think particularly about how those beliefs shed light on the countless dilemmas and worries that seemed to make up the workaday world of myself and people like me.

Three minutes, 540 words or so. It doesn't sound like much, but it's the most difficult thing I ever had to do and in many ways the most rewarding—when and if it came out right. It is a great privilege to be allowed to share your personal beliefs with millions of others, whether they're listening or not, to be given three minutes with no interruptions, no questions asked, no editing. The presenters in the studio have no warning or knowledge of what I'm going to say, and the rules are that they must let me say it. I sometimes wonder what would happen if I abandoned my script and started to hurl abuse at the BBC, the prime minister, or the queen, calling down on them the wrath of God. Would anyone then interrupt?

Most of these reflections are slightly edited versions of those early-morning "Thoughts." Some arose from other occasions.

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They spread over ten years, years that saw the end of the Cold War and the start of a Gulf War, as well as the goings and comings of prime ministers and presidents everywhere. Ten years that, nearer home and the lives of most of us, saw stock markets and housing markets boom and burst, earthquakes in San Francisco, and hurricanes in unusual places like southern England; but ten years, too, that saw the ups and downs of life in home and office continue as they always have, whatever happens in the big world outside.

My task, as I saw it, was to look for the meaning or the moral in those happenings, if there was one, and to put them all to the test of my beliefs. Sometimes I have thought that everyone ought to be invited to compose their own "thought for the day" because of the way it forces one to think. These reflections, therefore, are just that, my reflections on life as I see it happening around me. They carry no authority, they may well be heretical, they do not pretend to tell anyone else how to think; but if they goad or encourage people to do their own thinking about these things, I shall be well content.

The reflections reflect me. Inevitably. I have therefore added a "personal preface," in which I try to reveal a little more of me and the way my beliefs about life and the meaning of life came to be shaped.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

 Every writer needs a friendly critic, every broadcaster a skilled producer, and every author an insightful publisher. I am lucky enough to have had all three to help bring these reflections to life.

Elizabeth, my wife, is the friendly critic. She keeps me honest and humble. "Speak from your heart," she tells me, "not from your head." And she is right because these are meant to be reflections, not sermons.

These reflections made their first appearance as "Thoughts for the Day" on the BBC's morning program. There, Robert Foxcroft was my first producer. I am grateful to him and to all his successors, most recently David Coomes, Christine Morgan, and Amanda Hancox. They coach me over the telephone lines, proving that you can have a wonderfully productive relationship with someone you never meet.

My British publishers, Gail Rebuck and Paul Sidey, made this book possible in the first place. Cedric Crocker at Jossey-Bass helped me share these thoughts with readers in the United States. I am endlessly grateful to them all for their creativity and support.



