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By Bernard Rapoport

For one who came into the world as a child of a Russian Jewish radical father and an Hasidic mother, I had firmly implanted within me a sense of assuming responsibility for making the world a better place in which to live. I took this challenge seriously and really have for most of my 86 years. Well, I have tried and I tried, and I'm getting a little impatient so if I appear overly strident perhaps it is because time is short (certainly in my view!). Frustrated? Yes! But more understanding after reviewing these words from Ignazio Silone: "I can see you're tired, son, and disappointed," said Guiditta to Rocco. "You have the sadness of one who set out to go very far and ends up by finding himself where he began. Didn't they teach you at school that the world is round?"

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In the USA Today edition of Friday, November 28, 2003, on page 3B, this was one of the headlines: "Some Companies Trying to Outsmart New Rules." It brought to mind a famous and admirable coach, Vince Lombardi, by name, who said that "winning wasn't everything, it was the only thing." But a very good friend of mine, Darrell Royal, whom I consider the greatest coach in the history of football (admittedly a prejudiced point of view as he was at the University of Texas from which I am a graduate), challenged this view. For him, his WHAT, too, was to win! But even more importantly was HOW he won.

It seems to me that there are too many instances in today's business world where the only consideration is to the WHAT and ignoring the HOW. The news article to which I am making reference reported: "Other companies are already maneuvering to outsmart new accounting guidelines intended to kill off so-called special purpose entities and variable interest entities that were widely abused in the late 1990s by Enron and others, says Lynn Turner, director of research in Glass Lewis."

After all of the horrendous suffering of thousands and thousands of employees of companies that had the "WHAT" only philosophy, 51%, according to this article, have said that in their regulatory filings that these rules do not apply to them.

When one seeks profit, the limitation on the seeker should be integrity in pursuit of the objective. These WHAT companies the article affirms continue to use off balance sheet accounting—meaning their debts or their liabilities are not shown in their statement. This is one of the primary reasons that Enron's figures were so misleading. It names companies, gigantic ones, today that seemingly are avoiding the new laws. Especially revolting is that these companies hire the "best lawyers anywhere. Their main purpose is to construct new approaches to circumvent the intent of a good law." Yes, I suppose they try to do it legally, but it is another glaring example that being legal and moral are not necessarily one and the same. In this article there are three major, major giant corporations that are mentioned as those that are avoiding the intent of the Sarbanes-Oxley legislation.

Am I anti-business? I'm just the opposite. I founded a life insurance company that is very successful. I know first-hand that you can play by the rules and build a successful and profitable business. I know so many others that have done likewise.

It seems like these "Enron" experiences have occurred in perhaps different ways, but with the same effect over a period of the last hundred years. There were robber barons in the late 1800s and Teddy Roosevelt in 1912 looked at the situation and said, "Bigness in itself is bad" and that's when he proposed the anti-trust laws. And then there were the utility Insull scandals in the '30s and the savings and loans fiascos in the '80s. And now the new disease is "Enronics." These economic catastrophes timewise are getting closer together where there is less time between each of these occurrences than the previous one. One wonders what's in store in the next ten years. It might be well at this point to reread Silone's admonition.

The word "limits" seemingly is old-fashioned. We want to be free. We want a world without limits and that's the direction in which we're going. I learned about limits when I was 5 or 6 years old. I came home and the furniture was in the street; we'd lost our home. I couldn't understand. My father worked 8 – 10, sometimes 12 – 14 hours a day with a pushcart selling blankets. He couldn't pay the mortgage. Because of that we couldn't have that home anymore. And so we rented a home. I got a very early education about limitations.

I played marbles with my best friend and we used to play for keeps. If either won all the marbles; he gave back ten. Not because we were good. If we had wanted someone with whom to play there had to be a limit and included in that understanding is that if one of us had it all, there was no game.

Our giant businesses in America act as if they want it all. They don't have the vision and understanding to recognize that when they have it all, they, too, will not have anybody with whom to play. That is, more accurately, no one to buy what they sell. If the 15 or 20% of our population in poverty had livable incomes, business would prosper as never heretofore! A good businessperson should understand that 10% of a million is a lot more than 50% of 100,000. Yes, there is such a thing as too much in too few hands and in that situation it finally gets to where virtually no one has anything. Then comes the Revolution!! Don't believe it can't. Remember it did a short 225 years ago. Yes, right here in the good ole USA!!