



**JUDI  
NEAL**

# Spreading Spiritual Wisdom

Business Leader Tami Simon,  
CEO Of Sounds True

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**G**o to almost any conference on spirituality and business, and you will see Tami Simon, founder and CEO of Sounds True, Inc. She will probably be behind the scenes, efficiently managing her staff who are taping the CEOs, book authors, and conference presenters. Ms. Simon may spend most of her time recording the wisdom of others, but she has just as much to offer in front of the microphone. She is perhaps one of the most enlightened Edgewalkers in business today, and we can learn much from her wisdom, her values, and the way she runs her company.

“I have to disagree with your definition of *Edgewalkers*,” she tells me upfront. It’s different, she says, than “People who walk between the two worlds, the material world and the spiritual world.”

“There is only one world,” she asserts. “Nirvana (the spiritual world) and Samsara (the material world) are the same thing. To think that they are different and separate is an illusion.”

This not your typical statement from a CEO, and Tami Simon is not your typical business executive. She is a profound example of the new type of leader who is emerging in the business world today.

Sounds True, a \$9 million company, publishes spoken-word audio programs, videos, and music for the inner life. The company has been listed twice on *Inc.* magazine’s list of the nation’s 500 fastest-growing privately owned businesses.

“Sounds True came out of the vision and inspiration I received when I was 20 years old and went to India and Nepal,” Tami

relates. “I remember when I meditated for the first time, and I wanted to share it with others.”

Before she dropped out of college, she had gotten involved in the Swarthmore college radio station; and upon her return from India and Nepal, she moved to Boulder, Colorado, and began hosting a program on local public radio station KGNU. She interviewed well-known experts in psychology, religion, and personal development. These interviews were taped and archived because Tami has a strong sense of vision that it was important to save the knowledge of the wisdom teachers and to make it widely available.

In 1985, a \$50,000 inheritance enabled Tami to take the material she had recorded and to launch Sounds True. The mission of the company is simple and clear, “To disseminate spiritual wisdom.”

Every inch a spiritual seeker, Tami sees her work as a place for spiritual development for herself and her employees. As they learn from the wisdom teachers that they record, Sounds True employees strive to live and work in congruence with these teachings. One of the Core Aspirations of the company reads, “We aspire to honor and include a contemplative dimension in the workplace.” (You can see the complete list of Core Aspirations at the end of this article.)

There are many examples of how Tami’s company lives up to this particular aspiration. For instance, they offer ongoing training in the practice of mindfulness in the workplace. Sounds True begins its all-company meetings with a minute of silence. They have a meditation room on-site. They have used *feng shui* in the corporate headquarters. They have responded to employees’ requests for spiritual rituals. And they allow well-behaved pets to come to work with their owners.

In 2001, *Workforce*, one of the major magazines in the Human Resource field, did a profile on Sounds True and described many of these spiritual organizational practices in detail. This year, the company is a nominee for the Willis Harman Spirit at Work Award for the explicit ways in which they nourish the human spirit and embody the vision of business as an agent of higher consciousness in the world.

But what are Tami's personal spiritual practices and the ways in which she lives her spiritual values in her work?

One example is how she approaches product development. She says that it is really an issue of self-awareness, which is a key principle in spiritual development. "If I feel a need for a product, I know that others feel that need too," Tami explains. "I used to be afraid that this was ego, but now I know that its much better to come from a place of what you want than to guess what others want." It is also knowing that since we are all interconnected, that if you are feeling drawn to spiritual growth or spiritual teachings in a certain area, most likely others are too.

Intuition is one of the powerful outcomes of having a spiritual practice. Tami states, "Intuition is basically my entire existence." She studies with a meditation teacher named Reggie Ray. Reggie's teacher taught him how to "read the signs" and Reggie passed these teachings on to Tami.

"It's an art form and an indigenous survival skill. If you were on a hunt, you would watch for the tracks. That's how we pick projects. We read the signs. How many people are talking about it? How many requests do we get for a particular author? And what are our inner feelings about the project? That's very important, too."

The company "reads the signs" for internal issues as well. Tami describes a recent meeting in which they made a decision about how to pay out for profit sharing this year. The guideline they chose: "As much money as we can possibly give and I won't throw up."

The profit sharing discussion had focused on how the company can be fiscally responsible while also offering positive rewards. People made rational arguments, but Tami says that in the final go-round, they just go with their feelings. She says that they use group intuition and ask everybody "What does your gut tell you?"

Tami's primary spiritual practice is meditation and she says that it is extremely helpful to her as a leader. "It lets you see things from numerous perspectives. It opens you to a groundless

situation. You come to see that even your identity isn't solid. If you have an opinion, you see that there are many opinions."

One exercise that Tami finds useful for tapping into inspiration is a visualization exercise. She describes the process: "You visualize yourself going into the center of the Earth to tap into fresh waters and bring them to the surface. It's weird; totally new ideas just emerge. The visualization calms down the chatty mind and creates the space for vision to come forward."

She also says that meditation helps you to deal with the ups and downs of the business cycle. "It keeps you from getting hysterical. The number one priority is not ego acknowledgement; it's a sense of peacefulness and authenticity. I want to have this sense of peacefulness if I have money or not, if a project works or not. Meditation helps me to do that."

Sounds True is preserving the spiritual wisdom of some of the greatest teachers alive today. The following teachings are among the ones that guide Tami in her leadership of Sounds True:

- You can only create peace in the world if you have peace in yourself.
- The biggest help we can give is to create an amazing love field that extends to the world.
- Focus on the 24-hour period you have right now.
- You don't know the effect you are going to have on a person you touch and who they will touch. There's a mystery, and it's really hard to know the impact you will make.
- Change your view about your identity. Meditation deconstructs that identity. When your identity becomes more fluid and relaxes, then everything around you relaxes. We put so much energy into propping up and fabricating our identity. Without that, there's more room for compassion.

Tami's final words of wisdom for people who are Edgewalkers is that we have to accept our aloneness. This is something that we tend not to talk about in the material world. She says, "We are seriously alone. No one will ever know exactly what our experience is." Tami finds this feeling "beautiful, generative, and creative." She says it also creates in her a melancholic gentleness.

At the same time, this acknowledgement of our aloneness is freeing. She encourages us to accept our aloneness as part of the human condition, and to accept it as an aspect of reality, just as we must learn to accept our own mortality.

According to Tami, Edgewalkers do not numb out from these realities but embrace them and move forward in compassion.

### **Appendix: 19 Core Aspirations Of Sounds True**

1. Sounds True aspires to be both mission-driven and profit-driven.
2. We aspire to build workplace community.
3. We encourage authenticity in the workplace.
4. We aspire to have open communication company-wide.
5. Animals are welcome.
6. We encourage creativity, innovation, new ideas.
7. We strive to be flexible about work schedules.
8. We encourage individual teams to determine the best way to reach their goals.
9. We aspire to honor and include a contemplative dimension in the workplace.
10. We aspire to reach out to a diverse community.
11. We strive to protect and preserve the Earth.

12. We aspire to have a relationship with our customers that is based on integrity.
13. We aspire to take time for kindness, have fun, and get a lot done.
14. We aspire to acknowledge that every person in the organization carries wisdom.
15. We encourage people to speak up and propose solutions.
16. We encourage people to listen deeply.
17. We aspire to honor individual differences and diversity.
18. We strive for clarity of expectations.
19. Employees participate in profit-sharing and ownership.

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**Judi Neal** is Executive Director of The Association for Spirit at Work, a membership organization that supports personal and organizational transformation through coaching, education, research, speaking, and publications. She is the author of a forthcoming book titled *Beyond Profit and Prophets: Creating Inspired People, Teams, And Organizations*. She can be reached at [judi@spiritatwork.com](mailto:judi@spiritatwork.com). BH SmartDocs™ are published by BrownHerron Publishing and are sold exclusively on Amazon.com ([www.amazon.com/brownherron](http://www.amazon.com/brownherron)).

