

Anita Roddick warns businesses to pay more attention to the vigilante consumer.

Anita Roddick has been speaking out about issues of corporate social responsibility for the last quarter-century, but her passion seems undiminished. Her ideas come out in a breathless blur—about entrepreneurship, environmental activism, her journeys to the world's far corners, the “two or three” books she plans to write next. As founder and co-chair of The Body Shop International PLC—which, along with Ben & Jerry's Homemade Inc. and Patagonia Inc., has led the social-responsibility movement of the last two decades—Roddick, 57, has long used her high-profile corporate position as a platform to call for reforms.

Based in West Sussex, U.K., she spoke to *ATB* managing editor Matthew Budman from her vacation home in Montecito, Calif., between a business-related trip to Argentina and a trip to Australia, Singapore, and Hong Kong to promote her second book, *Business as Unusual: The Triumph of Anita Roddick* (Thorsons).



In *Business as Unusual*, you write, “Leaders in world business are the first true global citizens. As businesspeople, we have world-wide capability and responsibility.” Is business shirking that responsibility?

Business is the fault of so many problems now. Not small-scale businesses—they're the whole underbelly of American and English and other countries' economic well-being. The real criminal behavior is in the large multinational corporations.

A business should, of course, make profits, or it can't survive—that's like breathing. But if you concentrate your entire life on profits, it makes for a pretty bloody pathetic existence. I think socially responsible companies have shown that you can make a profit, that there's no invisible

divide between culture values and workplace values. You can keep your company breathlessly alive. You can be more about public good than private greed.

What should business be asked to change?

Number one, businesses should be audited socially and environmentally—as stringently as they are audited financially—before they're allowed to get onto a stock market. I think that there have to be real new barometers of measurement of cost—you know, what does it cost to clean up your environmental messes? In terms of your social or environmental auditing, you have to be transparent in your business behavior to all of your stakeholders, not just your financial investors. And

I think businesses shouldn't whine endlessly about wanting to get fewer restrictions. We should be penalized if we mess up and if we act in an appalling way.

And if goods are made with slave labor or child labor or sweatshop labor, they should be taxed—have a social penalty put on them. That would help level the playing field for those workers in this country and in Europe who have lost their jobs because companies have been pitting worker against worker.

Finally, there should be a code of conduct that should be legal, should have teeth to it and should probably be audited and checked. Not so much by government, because governments are now in the pockets of business,

but possibly by the United Nations. There should be penalties. And I think nongovernmental organizations should have a huge play in this.

In your new book, you ask the rhetorical questions, “What on Earth is a skin and haircare company doing getting involved in political activism anyway? Why don't we just shut up and stick to selling shampoo and soap?” I had a different question: Why aren't you heading an NGO rather than running a skin and haircare company? After all, as you write, “No one needs anything we sell.”

I think it's because The Body Shop is acting like an NGO as well, and so we're getting the best of both worlds. Also, the voice I have is solely because I'm on a business panel. If I was an

erudite, smart activist that had an NGO behind her, I would not get a quarter, a nano-percentage of the press I do when I stand up against the WTO. I do things in a way that is contrary, and the media loves controversy and confrontation.

I stand on the company to trumpet these issues and the criminal behavior of business in many cases. For instance, I've just been in the center of an enormous storm in England simply because I stood up and said something that I've been repeating for 20 years, which

But I don't think in terms of penalties the movement has gotten through yet. You still won't be penalized for screwing up.

Outside of penalties, how do you get hard-nosed corporate types to pay attention to "the soft side of business"?

Trying to show them the fruits of their behavior would be one way. For example, if I could—and I've never been able to do this—get a group of Shell officials to show them what their behavior has done

So legislation isn't the answer?

Oh, no. Unless you're in Scandinavia, change is going to come by popular protest. Look at the genetically modified food scandal in England. Monsanto came in with huge financial support from the British government, and then we had the entire movement organized by *The Ecologist* magazine, by Greenpeace, by Friends of the Earth. This is what worked in England. We got the tabloids and the broadsheet press on our side of the cause, and the government was just scratching

want to shove you onto the religious program, because it's dealing with spiritual development, and they think it's fluffy. They call it soft, when in fact it's the hardest thing in the world to run a socially responsible company.

I can tell—in *Business as Unusual*, you tell one story after another about dealing with professional consultants and executives who don't care about preserving The Body Shop's values.

The hardest thing for me are the marketing people,

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is that to claim that a wrinkle cream is "anti-aging" is disingenuous, and that it's God's gentle way of defining the stupid from the smart. So this huge industry—which makes an enormous amount of money on one issue, on one phony medical condition—has suddenly realized that the power that I've got to challenge that is very frightening. And it's only because I'm in business and it's only because I'm in the beauty industry that I can say all this.

Do you feel as though you and the social-responsibility movement are having an impact on the *Fortune* 500?

I don't think the movement has made a hoot within the big corporations, except for words—they've corralled all the words of social responsibility for their advertisements. And there's this bloody stupid initiative in the United Nations, Global Compact, where big, rapacious companies [make a contribution] and they can wear the United Nations logo.

in Ogoniland, Nigeria, they would say, "We'll never do this again." People are basically good, you know.

And dialoguing is really essential. You sit with your battlefield enemies—say, the Ogoni people vs. the Shell officials—and keep open the channels of dialogue. This is where third-party groups like myself or the NGOs can help: We can come in and position that dialogue.

And the change is going to happen anyway, because one of the most important things that I've seen in the last 10 years is the role of corporate reputation. They talk about brand equity, and equity usually equates with financial worth. So reputation is really important, and I think changes are going to be forced on the companies by this group of vigilante consumers—the activists, the social dissenters, the fair traders . . . all of those people who collectively, through the Internet, have an enormously powerful voice.

their bloody heads and thinking, "What in hell hit us?" Poor Monsanto fled. So it's got to be a movement, a people-power movement.

But most people are skeptical of the whole idea of a company that's in business to do good. How do you overcome the cynicism of people who assume that your motives are financial rather than altruistic?

You can't. You tell them what you're doing, and they can check it out. They do it, or they don't.

Why do you think so many businesspeople and observers gloat when progressive companies such as The Body Shop fall prey to everyday business troubles?

I don't know the human psyche at all. Maybe there's just no generosity of spirit. Maybe it's because we stick our heads out, and people love conformity and homogeneity.

There is a conspiracy in the media about this. They will not talk about the social-responsibility movement, and anytime they want to talk about it they

because they focus on us as a brand and our customers as consumers. We've never called it a brand; we call it The Body Shop. In 20 years, we've never, ever, ever called a customer a consumer. Customers aren't there to consume. They're there to live, love, die, get married, have friendships—they're not put on this planet to bloody *consume*.

After all these years, do you still feel as great a need to work toward social change?

If I don't do this type of stuff, it's like a death to me. Right now, I'm looking at the Southern California sky, I'm buying a new pair of shoes, I've got people coming over for dinner. It's wonderful. But it's a death unless there's a purpose for what I'm doing. Somehow or another, I managed by total accident—an amazing accident—to trip over an idea of creating wealth and position and empowerment and resources for a lot of people. And bummer me, I'm bloody going to use it for public good. ♦