



TAMKO's President and Chief Executive Officer  
David C. Humphreys on

## **Voluntary Association: A Concept Central to TAMKO's Culture**

When I have the opportunity of sharing my perspectives on TAMKO with prospective job applicants, or with customers or suppliers, it seems the conversation eventually focuses in on a key aspect of TAMKO's culture which defines our relationships with TAMKO employees, customers and suppliers: the concept of "Voluntary Association."

Voluntary Association is, at first glance, a very simple idea: the relationships we have are, and should be, entered into voluntarily – without any kind of coercion or threat of force. In other words, none of us should be compelled by another to begin or continue any kind of relationship (employer/employee; customer/supplier; husband/wife; friend/friend). All parties to any relationship should enter into the relationship because that is what they want to do (presumably because they expect to benefit somehow from the relationship).

This all seems like good common sense. And it is. We engage in relationships because we expect them to make our life/work/business better. In the employment relationship, I often explain Voluntary Association to prospective applicants in what I call my "Basket Speech."

In short, in deciding whether to enter into an employment relationship we need to consider the "basket of what we expect to give" versus the "basket of what we expect to get." As an employee we each give our time and effort; there are also other factors to consider what we give: day shift vs. swing shift; office vs. production line vs. dock (issues of flexibility of the work); physical aspects (manual labor); environmental aspects (hot and cold in the plants vs. air conditioning in the office); overnight travel frequency, etc. Each job function has its own set of demands that are required.

We also have to take into account the "basket of what we get": wages, salary, various benefits (health insurance, disability insurance, profit sharing, 401k plan, etc.) The "what we get basket" also has numerous intangibles to consider: are we proud of where we work or are we embarrassed to tell our friends and neighbors because of the public image of the company; do we like the people we work with; do we like and/or respect the company leadership and our supervisors; does the company provide decent facilities for us to work in; how far/how long is it to get to work from home. The key to this is answering the question: is this employment relationship in my best interest? That has to be answered up front and should be revisited from time to time.

Now, none of us should expect that everything should be just as we want it to be all the time. There will be times where each of us complain: “They can’t pay me enough to do this job.” But there should be an occasional “I can’t believe they pay me to do this!” All in all, the “what you get” should more or less outweigh over time the “what you give.” This is true whether you are the employee or employer, the customer or the supplier, or even in the relationship of two friends. In order for a relationship to begin, and certainly for it to continue, the “baskets of give and get” need to be positive for both participants. Otherwise, someone will be unhappy and ultimately the relationship will end. Life is too short to continue relationships that are not beneficial.

The more complex aspect of all this is that the assessment of what’s in the baskets is both (1) personal and (2) subjective – for both participants. What that means is that each one of us has our own set of values that we place on things. What one of us thinks is great another one of us may think is worth little or even see as negative. Some value a bigger paycheck over low deductible healthcare coverage (HSA health plans); some value job security over opportunities for advancement and higher wages (postal and government employees); some value fewer hours of work while some want all the hours they can get.

Each of us is a different human being with our own wants, needs, desires, and values. So the baskets can (and will) be measured by each of us in our own unique way. What does our personal and subjective evaluation mean to “voluntary association” at TAMKO? It means, first, that each of us is responsible for our own circumstances.

Our relationship with TAMKO needs to be recognized as being of our own choosing: we are not being forced into it (whether as an employee, customer or supplier). And we must be in this because we find it, in our own personal subjective evaluation, as benefiting us. (In other words, we both profit from the relationship.)

In sum, we are all in this together, working together as a united team of individuals who come together voluntarily, dependent on one another for our own success and for that of our team (as we each succeed when we all succeed).

Thanks for being on the TAMKO team.

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