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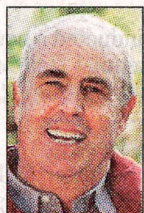
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Taking a spiritual slant on success

Monks' ways inspire speaker

By JOHN MURAWSKI
STAFF WRITER

The busy circuit of success experts is rife with testimonials from athletes, coaches and dime-a-dozen executives. But one local business consultant



Turak will speak on Tuesday.

has found everlasting truths of capitalism in a quieter place: among medieval monks.

Specifically, Trappist monks who live speechlessly at Mepkin Abbey in South Carolina in accordance with a 1,500-year-old monastic regimen that demands selfless dedication and self-sufficiency.

The humble Trappists uphold the highest ideal of industriousness and productivity, says August Turak, a writer, speaker and executive coach who lives in Franklinton and founded the nonprofit Self Knowledge Symposium in Chapel Hill.

Turak, winner of the \$100,000 Templeton Prize in

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2004 for an essay about the Trappists, has spent 13 years among the rural ascetics, living with them on and off and performing menial labor at their monastery. Turak's experiences will be the focus of a lecture presentation at Duke University on Tuesday.

"Why do I go down for three months at a time and pack their eggs for them and thank them for the privilege?" Turak says. "I want to be absolutely sure people understand that this can be achieved in a corporate setting."

Turak says the monks, who operate an agricultural enterprise, are successful because they "aim past the target" and don't regard the production of commodities as their primary function. Their *raison d'être* is to lose themselves in a greater cause — in this particular case: serving God.

Likewise, Turak says, organizations that offer their workers a sense of fulfillment and deeper purpose will be rewarded by employee loyalty and excellence. Examples that Turak likes to cite are the camaraderie of the U.S. Marine Corps, the culture of excellence fostered by IBM in the 1950s and 1960s, and the solidity of Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway.

"All of us are looking for something — a mission, a purpose, a calling — that we can lose ourselves in," Turak says. "Basically most of us don't like ourselves, we want to be someone else, we want to be different."

Turak's message attracts more scoffers than disciples. He says the skeptics are most commonly found in the risk-averse ranks of middle management — the people have the most direct influence to motivate or stifle rank-and-file workers.

A common criticism he hears is that monks, who take vows of poverty, and Marines, who are willing to sacrifice their lives, don't represent America's work force.

Turak is most irked by comments that his spiritualistic message suggests he's out of touch with the hard realities of business.

That's his cue to rapidly reel off his corporate bona fides, including sales for MTV, marketing for the A&E network and the Adelphia Corp., founder of Raleigh Group International, a software firm.

Turak started off in his 20s laying carpet for five years while he studied under a Zen Buddhism master. Now 57, Turak casts himself as a world-experienced friar who is not above using a choice expletive or two to make a point.

"I probably learned as much about business running my little carpet installation business," he said. "That's the big difference about me. I've been a salesman, director of sales, [vice president] of sales and marketing, CEO, consultant at major corporations, entrepreneur. So don't tell me this doesn't apply to business."

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