



*An inquiry into the nature, activities and results of leading from a spiritual basis*

Full transcript of an  
interview with:

**NILOFER  
MERCHANT**  
USA



**Interview conducted 3 June 2002**

**Specific information related to interview:**

**Organisation:** Rubicon Consultants  
**Location:** California, USA  
**Industry:** Marketing  
**Position:** President  
**Years in Position:** 3  
**Gender:** Female  
**Age:** 34

**Current information (as of 2006):**

**Current Organisation:** Same  
**Current Location:**  
**Current Industry:**  
**Current Position:**

**General information:**

**Total Years in All Leadership Positions:** 8

**Previous Positions/Organisations:** (All positions/organisations are in California, USA) Market Research, Apple Computers; Vice President of Sales and Channel Marketing, GoLive Systems; Revenue Manager, Autodesk, Inc.

**University Degrees:** MBA, Santa Clara University, California USA

**How to refer to Nilofer Merchant:**

“President and founder of Rubicon Consultants, a marketing consulting firm in the USA”

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# CAREER

## Career History

While I was in college, I got involved in student governance issues. The actual topic was something I wrote in an article that got circulated and became well known. It focused on how students should be allowed to participate in the governance of the university because we are stakeholders in that community. From this, I ultimately was appointed to the Student Board of Trustees. I was then asked to speak on these issues of governance, sometimes to audiences of over 200 people.

After speaking at a national conference to students on this subject, a man approached me and asked if he could talk with me. He seemed quite odd and so I was cold to him and walked away. My board president came and found me, and told me that this man worked for the governor and that I should talk to him. I was just too naïve at that time to even think about asking him who he was and why he wanted to talk with me. As a result of this connection, I was appointed to the State Board of Governors, which is the largest leading governance organisation for 106 community colleges. So early on at the age of 19 and 20, without any real work experience, I was sitting across from senators and writing legislation about student governance.

After I left college, I worked for Apple Computers in their market research. I changed jobs within Apple about every 18 months and ultimately ended up running a channel programme. A channel programme means the partners that a vendor works with in order to sell its products. At that time I was in my mid-20's and was the youngest manager on the VP staff. While I was head of this programme, our small team won an award for the best VAR programme. VAR means "value added reseller" channel. What was unique about winning this award is that Apple had not won this award for 8 years.

After I left Apple, I went to a company called GoLive Systems, which was later acquired by Adobe Products, and was their Vice President of Sales and Channel Marketing. I set up worldwide distribution systems and did some direct sales. I wanted the experience in direct sales because I only had experience at that time in marketing. I had a disagreement about ethics while in that position and was fired.

I then went to Autodesk, Inc., which is a technology company that developed CAD (computer aided design) software. I reported to the Vice President and my role was a Business Development Manager – the actual title was "Revenue Manager". So any problem with a pricing issue, product launch issue or channel issue came to me; I had cross-functional responsibilities. I had lots of influence, but no power really, because I had no technical skills.

## Current Responsibilities

In 1999, I left Autodesk and started my own consulting practice, Rubicon Consulting. I am pleased with the growth of the company, and now in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, we will have over US\$500 thousand in revenues. This has also been done during a major recession in the technology industry. We have a good stable client base and are doing well in the area of market strategies. I manage all of the client interfaces and then contract with other consultants when the need arises.

In choosing the name Rubicon, I was looking for a name that would reflect my own personal transformation. The story of Rubicon has to do with Caesar before he became the ruler of Rome. Caesar crossed a river called the Rubicon along the northern part of Italy. The river was unprotected, so he took a huge army and crossed the river, which was something he had never been able to do.

So the phrase, “crossing the Rubicon”, came to me and I realised that there was no turning back. At that time, this was certainly the case in my personal life as well as my professional life. This concept of “crossing the river” or “crossing a chasm” also really works in my business.

# SPIRITUALITY

## Spiritual View of Life

I have a phrase I really like that I feel best defines spirituality for me: “Living fully the glory of God is being fully alive.” To me this means using your gifts to the fullest, working in a position that is using all of you, and being in true, intimate relationships with other people in the community – all of those things that bring you fully alive. The second element is the aspect of being present. To me this means that when you are there, you are really there; you’re not distracted by being somewhere else.

I think there are two things that every person needs. I think people really want to know who they are, their essence; and then I think that people want to be acknowledged and recognised for that. In other words, I think people want to know for themselves, “Who am I and why am I here?” And, then I think they want other people to listen to them well and help them to use their gifts.

I think it is so clear that we were each born with our own unique essences, but we get distracted. We look in the mirror or to the outside world and think, “this is it”. It’s not easy to hear and feel that inner voice, especially since it’s not visible. I’ve never found that the answer comes from outside, even from a spiritual teacher. The answer is truly within you, and all of the spiritual methods and processes are designed to help you get quiet enough, fearless enough, courageous enough, compassionate enough, loving enough to discover who you really are. Sometimes I think we are our worst enemies and unfortunately, throughout our lives we haven’t been given permission by our parents, teachers or bosses to really pursue the fullness of who we are.

## Spiritual Theme

“Living authentically” speaks a lot to me.

Also, I am looking outside at that beautiful tree and thinking about how spirituality helps me to draw strength from the roots of life. The tree doesn’t get nourishment from the leaves. And yet what do we see when we look at the tree? We see the branches and leaves and not the root system. So I think spirituality is about defining where our true strength comes from as the root system. We have a chance to consciously change the wellspring from which we draw our nourishment. So another theme would be “a wellspring of nourishment”.

## Distinction Between Spirituality and Religion

To me, I see this as three circles that may or may not overlap each other. One would be religion, the other spirituality and the third would be faith. I believe that people can be spiritual without being faithful and can be religious without being either spiritual or faithful.

I am a practicing Christian and go to church every Sunday. However, I do not consider myself a religious person. I consider myself to be a spiritual person and I use my religion as a way to express and nurture my spirituality.

## Spiritual Purpose, Principles, and Values

I aspire to be a person of high faith, and I am going to use my spirituality to get there. To me, faith is a belief that everything is as it needs to be, and to be in acceptance of that. To me, there is such a

sense of peace and grounded-ness when I have faith. I know when I have it; I know those moments, even though I don't have them everyday all the time. But I aspire to that.

When I do my spiritual practices, then I remember that everything is just as it should be. It's holding onto this in the middle of tension or conflict or stresses and multiple demands that I am working toward. To keep that presence and consciousness is important to me.

So my own personal spiritual purpose is to figure out who I am and live that out authentically and to help other people to do the same. To me this means creating a climate where I help someone to discover his or her calling and to seek and hear God's Will in it.

### **Consciously Growing Spiritually**

To me, my greatest spiritual practice is the practice of "being": being present with whatever is going on, not having to solve a problem, not having to do anything. As business leaders, what are we good at? We're good at taking action. We're so biased toward taking action that we immediately think we have to solve the problem.

I lead a Bible study group at my church, and that is very rewarding because I can watch other people's faith development. It's not over a weekly basis; it more like over a year. You can see that quite often what people prayed for six months ago has come true in their life. Sometimes they pray for one thing and get another, and yet what they actually got was much more rewarding for their soul. I don't think I would be as conscious of God's work in my life if I couldn't see it in this way in other people's lives.

I also do what I call "daily prayer", which I do through journaling, quiet time, contemplative prayer, devotional readings or actively praying out loud. As a result I feel that I have been changed by all of this. I finally realised that I wasn't the one who could drive everything and that if I could invite God into my life I could release the burden I was feeling. I was no longer the big "doer" and I felt that I could relax.

Another thing I do is read spiritual books. Reading and reflecting upon spiritual matters is such a natural part of my day that I don't readily think of it as a part of my spiritual practices.

### **Spiritual Influences/Evolution**

At the age of 18, I started living on my own. Because I was raised Islamic I didn't go to church, and I lived quite apart from God. I thought at that time that life was just up to me. I was going through a very difficult marital time, and since my husband was raised as a Christian, I thought maybe we should go to church and see if that would help. As a result I had an incredible experience of healing.

I had been abused as a child, and one of the sermons at my husband's church was based on a book called *A Child Called It*. In a few words, the author described what a wounded person feels like: alienation, separation, etc. I had never so succinctly heard anyone express my experience of life before. Inside I thought, "This is me!" I began to cry and then I heard her say another thing that is still a transforming notion of who I am today: "We can move from a place of fear to a place of love. The things that caused us to be wounded today are things that human people did. But God doesn't do this, and God can love you fully."

I really did have the self-belief that I deserved the abuse that happened to me, and that I would be wounded for the rest of my life. So you can imagine how powerful these words were to me. It was in those moments that I realised I could live a different life, and I made a choice to do that. I think that I

had always wanted a different life, but I had never understood that I would have to give some part of myself up in order to have it. I had to give up being that wounded person, even though at some levels “being wounded” was somewhat comforting and reinforcing. And somehow it always gave me permission to fail.

I ended up being baptised in an Episcopalian Church, which is highly unusual for someone with an Islamic heritage. I believe that Christianity is one way that I can develop my spirituality, but I don't rely on it entirely.

I met a professor named André Delbecq during my MBA programme at Santa Clara University. He taught two courses: one on Innovation Leadership and Management and the other on Spirituality for Organisational Leaders. I was very impressed with how he taught people to be fully integrated and how to use and work from their gifts. He also taught how to build teams using other people's gifts. His last lecture in the course on Innovation Leadership and Management, which was over 3 hours long, was quite powerful. During that lecture he talked about how to balance your work life, and how to become a more innovative leader. This was very life shaping for me. I then took his course on Spirituality for Organisation Leaders, and it too was quite life altering for me. I cannot imagine doing the work that I do now without that experience.

One of the assignments Professor Delbecq gave us was to identify an issue or a cause that caused us tension. Then we had to go and just “be” in that setting. It was so difficult for every student in the class. As a result of this experience, I now go on a regular basis to a homeless shelter and do service. Now I do not think of any separation between me and them. I feel like we are just here together and I can look them in the eye and speak with them with a respect that I would not have had earlier. Before, I would have felt the desire to solve their problems and be of use to them as if I were separate. So he taught us that just “being” was a compassionate exercise. The act of just recognising yourself as one part of the whole.

I went to a 2-3 day silent retreat not too long ago. If you would have told me that I would be able to sit quietly for that many days, I would have told you that you had lost your mind. But it was really Andre's course that helped me to understand about silence. For several days after this, I was so conscious and present and connected and could clearly hear God's voice from within.

Before we went into silence, the leader said something that really struck me, he said, “Even in silence you can have community. And in fact, in silence you can actually have a deeper community than you can while talking.” When I first heard him say this, it was hard for me to believe. If you think about it, anytime we are in a social setting, we always go through the social protocol to find out how the other person is doing and that's how we think we should get to know each other. While in this silent retreat, we were not able to do this. By the end of the 3 days I felt so connected to every person in that setting and I really understood what he was saying. I was amazed by this and found it to be the greatest gift.

## STORIES OF SPIRITUAL-BASED LEADERSHIP

### First Story – Addressing fears in a group

I do believe in people's goodness and in the redemption quality of people – that even if they do make a mistake, they can come back tomorrow and do it right. And I think I am often the voice of truth in a group, so that whatever is unsaid I am usually the person who can articulate that. This is how I use my gifts in my work.

A lot of what I do is to design solutions and then help people to do their best in evaluating the options. So being the voice of truth in that process is very important. Many people are afraid to speak their underlying fears, and so I help create a safe environment for them to do that. Once people are able to name these fears, they are able to address them in a whole new way. I have found that every fear can actually serve the process.

Not long ago, one of my clients with whom I was doing marketing strategy work (which is what I do 90%-95% of the time) was at the same time going through an organisational change. The ramifications of the decisions on marketing strategy they were about to make were also going to make a quantum shift in their organisation.

We were in a group discussion with the Senior Directors, Executive VP's and VP's where everyone was talking about this in a very intellectual way, the way you normally proceed in business. We had presented all of the options, along with the pros and cons. I was watching the dynamics going back and forth and was well aware that there was lots of tension in the room, which no one was addressing; everyone was in their minds speaking intellectually.

I had really prayed that morning that the group could come to a consensus and use their decision as a positive move forward. Since I had done so much of the legwork beforehand, I did have some apprehension going into the meeting as to whether I had given them all of the right information that they needed.

I was very quiet for some time as I watched the group, even though I was actually leading the group. I was fully present, and I kept feeling as if there was an important question that needed to be asked. I closed my eyes for a second and when I came back I said, "What is it we are not saying? What is it we are not addressing?" These were actually very neutral questions in many ways and people could have answered them from many different perspectives. However, because of the way I asked the questions, it created a sense of safety and people were able to respond and say what was true in their hearts.

Someone who had been very reluctant the whole time spoke up and said, "I am really afraid about what this will mean for my people." It brought the whole group together and people began to step forward and say, "I'll take 50 of your people" and "I can really see your people transitioning into this new organisation, we'll take care of them."

For the first time in that discussion, that one Vice President was able to agree to the new organisational structure even though it meant he would be sacrificing his organisation. This was really the big decision that was on the table, even though it had not been said explicitly. He was able to let go of his positions that he had held tightly to, and offer up his organisation for the benefit of the whole team.

When I was being that voice of truth in that meeting, I came across as neutral to the group, even though I personally did have some biases that I had formed given the amount of research I had done. Even after I thought about it later, I realised that I had no idea those questions were going to come out of my mouth. It was one of those moments where I just offered to the group the gift from my heart that happened to be there. I just happened to be the one who could help them find the truth that was already there.

I think this process drew upon people's goodness. I think sometimes we forget that most people really do want to live in alignment with their values, but they just don't know how. So often it's up to the leader to create the environment so people can live their values.

### **Second Story – Helping people manifest their gifts**

When I was managing people while leading in my corporate positions, I always wanted to find a way to use their gifts well. So I often spent time with them personally, rather than on their job duties, and talked to them about what they personally most wanted to do. I would ask them what they felt their natural gifts were, such as organising or working with teams. I tried to help discover what their base strengths were. I would then tailor their jobs so that they could use these skills and strengths optimally. In places where their job required them to do something that they just did not really have the gifts to do, I would find someone else on the team to help them. I would create a team around the responsibility, so that they would not fail.

I feel that the greatest thing a leader can do is to help people manifest their gifts fully. Finding out what those gifts are, and helping people to match up well to the job they have, is an important process to me. I also took a long-term view of this and tried to find the best place for the employee in the organisation, which sometimes meant that they would not stay in the job they were in. Sometimes I had to create a new role for them and sometimes I helped them to acquire new skills so they could find a new job outside of the company that would be better for them.

I never wanted to spend any energy trying to get a person to do something that they did not want to do. I always wanted to find a way to bring out the person's essence. One gift I have is that I can often see what other people cannot see, so that is what I can offer to people that I lead. I can give them a reflection through my words, which may or may not be true for them, but will help them to look and see for themselves what is true for them.

This has been an important part of my own spiritual development, and I have tried to pass that on as a leader. I've always had an opportunity to impact all of the organisations I have worked in by trying to use the people well. This was true whether it was the people who worked directly for me, or the social impact I had while trying to contribute to the organisation as a whole.

### **Third Story – Fostering collaborative work**

I think that the greatest conversion I have had spiritually in my work has to do with the many times in my career where I thought that I was responsible for finding and convincing others of the right answer, and that everything that happened was based on my sheer intelligence. In other words, it was up to me to figure it all out. I thought that if I just worked harder at the solution that I could come up with something. I worked from sheer individual will power and intelligence.

Now that I look back I can see that this type of attitude and behaviour is what caused me to fail the most. Yes, I might have made it through the project okay, but did I really contribute to the organisation? Did I really help people to unite around a common vision? To me, this way of operating was not what I would consider to be good leadership on my part.

Today, I feel that it is much more about working together in a collaborative way. It is much more about inspiring others to use their gifts well. It is really not about me at all; I am just a vehicle. I may be the person with the most resident knowledge, so I will offer that, but I do not own it as if it is solely mine. I no longer cling to my identity or to the results having to be a certain way. I no longer feel that I am the one who has to have the right answer. When we all work together and apply our gifts, we will manifest what is right. And, whatever it is that I need to learn and offer will manifest itself as well.

Initially, this was very difficult as a consultant because clients are paying you to be their resident expert and to be a driver of their solutions. But now I have a balance between being in the driver's seat, or leadership position, and also letting them steer the course. I will sit in the seat and drive, but I make sure that they take ownership of where they want to go and how they want to get there.

I often use the following metaphor with my clients. I tell them that we must be very open in our communication so that we can be successful together. I also tell them that we must agree on what we want as a shared goal and we must agree on the roles we will all play. And I am willing to be their chauffeur so that they get where they want to go. If you think about this metaphor you'll see that even a chauffeur has to communicate clearly to the people in their vehicle so that he or she knows exactly where they want to go.

#### **Fourth Story – The value of prayer**

I think that the greatest gift I give myself is to pray. I often ask people who are sharing their problems with me if they have prayed about it, and so many times they say no. So I tell them to pray and listen to God. So I am one of those converted people who has really learned the gift of prayer.

For me, prayer is very simple. I always name all of the things that I am struggling with and I ask God to help me with these things. If I have done something that I do not appreciate within myself – if I have said something or had a feeling that I didn't like or if I was competitive – I will name that and ask for a transformation in my heart. Then I will ask, "God please shed your light on the work I am to do today and show me what it is you want done. Please help me to serve and act as You with all of the people that I touch." This really does set my priorities in order.

I also pray when I am working out at the gym. I will think of everyone that I want to pray for, and I will call him or her by name. So at least 3 times a week I take the quality time to pray for people in my life. I pray for anyone whom I have touched recently; I pray for their health and for their spiritual well-being. This is very intentional for me. To me, when I pray for others, I see them differently, and as a result I cannot do them harm. When I pray for others, I can see our connectedness; I cannot see any separation. I can only see us as one doing God's Will that we were all meant to do, and using our gifts. It really shapes my heart, even when we disagree. I can see and feel consciously how it is changing me, so to me it is a miracle. When I am not praying for people, I feel separate and have a tendency to make them wrong and myself right.

For the last 30 days, I have been dealing with a new client who has been extremely demanding in a way that is quite outside of my comfort zone. As a result, I stopped doing my practice of daily prayer and became very stressed out. It makes such a difference when I follow this practice. When I do not follow it, I can feel the tension I have, and I am not as present to what is unfolding. I am really making it harder on myself.

It was one of those things that was very fear based. I was very fearful that I would not do this project well enough and thought that I had to do more. Intellectually, I knew all of the way through that the answer was not to hold on tighter; it was to let go. But it has been the hardest thing for me. I kept

thinking, "Well, tomorrow I'll let it go." I was negotiating with God. As I have returned to this daily practice of prayer, I feel somewhat embarrassed, as I know that stopping this practice was not good for me. I was so living in bliss and stepped out of it for this client. So this was hard for me.

# LEADING A BUSINESS FROM A SPIRITUAL BASIS

## Purpose of Business

Business can be a great instrument for giving us opportunities to learn and apply ourselves in new ways. For me, the overall purpose of business includes:

1. Contributing productively to the greater community, which includes the local, state, national, and international sphere
2. Serving others (i.e. to be of service to one another)
3. Using the skills and gifts God has given us all
4. Learning and growing into a more conscious person so that we might fully be alive.

The purpose of my business is the same as all of this.

## Defining and Measuring Success – for Career and for Organisation

To me, success means that I get a chance to use the gifts that God has given me everyday. I get a chance to serve other people with those gifts and I help other people to feel heard and cared about and help them to use their gifts. If I keep my focus on this, then the whole dynamic of work will happen.

It's so easy to think that success is about the work that's getting done, but to me it is not about that. It is entirely about how people connect and the process by which you live your life. You show up, you are fully present, you offer up your gifts fully, and you collaborate with other people. When you do this, the rest takes care of itself.

Success for my organisation would be that we get opportunities to work with people who can use our gifts, who are in alignment with our values, and who want to work in collaboration and partnership with us to build something great.

I believe that if clients truly want to use my gifts well, then it is an indication that they value good marketing strategy and they value the process of bringing their organisation together. From this, I know they will be people of honesty and authenticity and care about their people.

## Importance and Priority of Financial and Productivity Goals

Before I began my spiritual path, I used to think that work was all about productivity. I once learned this triangle diagram that showed how all of life could be plotted on three points: people, process or results. Since I was a highly results oriented person, I would sometimes sacrifice the people or the process in order to get the results. As long as we got the results, then somehow that justified the process.

But today if I were to draw that same triangle, I would place God at the centre and look to Him to help me to see where we need to balance those three areas so we can get where we want to go. Today, I look at this from much more of a holistic perspective, and balance is very important.

Some recent thinking I have had with respect to financial goals is that if I am using my gifts well, then I do not need to worry about where the money will come from. I am at the point in my business where I have managed my money well and I do not have to make decisions based on money. I used to think about this differently; I used to think that money was very important and that I needed a lot of material

things. Now I focus on using my gifts and that continues to open me up to an even greater awareness of what my gifts are.

I feel it is important for me to be a good steward of the finances of my organisation. I make a conscious effort to have my spending follow where my values are. I give 10% of the profits away to good causes, I save, and I spend less than I earn.

Unfortunately, I think that most of my clients still set a high priority on their financial goals and once a project looks like it could be financially successful, then they commit to it. And I see them struggling with this perspective because they know that at some level this isn't really the right prioritisation.

I have one client who has gotten over-extended in her personal expenses and now this has become a real source of anxiety for her. She is a managing director and her annual review is approaching. Because of her financial difficulties she is totally focused on trying to get the highest rating so that she can get a larger increase in her salary. She is completely attached to this goal for this reason.

I really feel compassion for her because I can see the spiritual implications of the choices she is making. All of her decisions are based on getting this number one rating, not on what is best for her or her team. I can see how she is holding herself captive and she is not free to follow God's Will. She has really enslaved herself as a result of this. I am really praying for her in all of this. The next time we are in the proper setting, I will share this with her and try to help her see the source of her anxieties. I believe that one of my gifts is to help others be good stewards.

### **Developing an Organisational Culture**

I have been thinking about the type of organisation I want to create a lot lately. I'm not sure if I want to grow to be a large firm and deal with all of the challenges associated with that or if I want to remain a small firm as I am now. I haven't really made that decision yet, because I am not ready.

What I do want for all people, whether they work specifically in my organisation or not, is to empower them to be fully engaged, fully alive and use all of the gifts they have. For me, this means having fun, laughing, being creative, having lots of great ideas and framing them in a way to share with others. This to me is experiencing a vibrant life. What I most aspire to is to help others feel passionately about their life.

One time, we were working on a large project, and one person spent all of his time during the entire project telling everyone why it was going to fail. He was the biggest nay-sayer I had ever met in my life. But I loved him dearly and recognised that this was his way of expressing his fears and that he genuinely wanted to be helpful. I feel that fears are gifts and that they can be helpful if used properly. Because I knew he could not be productive until he felt he had really been heard, I would typically spend the first minutes of any meeting and let him share his fears. So the group really learned a lot during this process and learned better how to accept him.

I also found that my sense of humour really showed up with him. For Christmas I gave him a sign that said: *What would you do if you knew you could not fail?* I noticed that people started treating him differently after they saw this sign in his office.

There was one person on the project who said that she wanted to leave the company as soon as the project was over. When I asked her why, she explained that it was because this person was so negative. I helped her to see that this person was in reality only a reflection of her own fears and that unless she resolved those fears within herself, she would continue to have this same type of difficulty no matter where she worked. As a result of this, she has not left the company and instead she now

makes a list of the things he does to annoy her and tries to find ways to resolve those difficulties within herself.

I do believe that people have their own best answers within themselves, and so these are ways that I try to help the people on the client teams I work with learn and grow. My goal is not just to help them while we are working together, but to teach them wisdom and skills that will help them grow long-term. One of the ways I do this is what I call an “internal audit”. I meet with everyone on the team and I hear their perspectives. I ask them what they think needs to be fixed and why, and I ask them what they most want out of the project. I write all of this down and organise it into an overall report, which also includes my marketing insights. Then I present this back to them and make sure that everyone agrees so we can develop a common perspective and goal for the project. This process helps me to connect with everyone on the team and helps me to understand where everyone is coming from. This also makes sure that everyone’s voice gets heard.

This type of “internal audit” works with people at all levels of the organisation. Right now I am doing this with an executive team that bought another company and wants to find a way to bridge the two companies’ models together.

### **Role of Business in Benefiting the Local Community, Nation and Society as a Whole**

If I start from the perspective that “work is holy” and think about where the power is today, there is no other organisation than a multi-national company that crosses so many boundaries. The churches do not cross these boundaries, and neither do governments. So I believe that businesses have the most amount of influence going forward to cause transformative change in society. And then, because there are so many people working in these companies, if they were all using their gifts well and serving one another well, just imagine how transforming the organisation could be not only to their employees, but to everyone they touch. I believe that when people are working to their fullest capacity, they naturally go out and serve society well. Business naturally creates wealth, and I believe it can also naturally create positive social change.

I am aware that in developing countries sometimes people are not motivated to get an education because there are no jobs available if they did. What might happen if businesses created a huge demand for jobs such that it empowered people world-wide to get an education? This could stir a great social change.

Right now I must admit that business does drive consumerism, and does encourage people to consume beyond their means, which causes them to not be free and to be spiritually drained. Business also reinforces the fact that “being busy is good” and that “more is better”. If you really think about this, it is just not good for anyone. If you are working 60 hours a week and are so drained that you cannot be creative or do your best work, how can this be good for the person or for the business? So to me, the more spiritually aware and living in the light of God people are, I think they will live and work much more wisely and will go out and make better business decisions.

## BEING A SPIRITUAL-BASED LEADER

### Continued Growth as a Spiritual-Based Leader

Sometimes I still jump into the owners' seat of my organisation and begin to worry about where my next good client will come from. This continues to be one of the hardest things for me to give up. I still get confused as to what "I" need to do to cultivate clients, versus what I need to turn over to God and let Him do. This is what I still struggle with from time to time. One day I was sharing this with a colleague and realised that I had never turned this struggle over to God in prayer. So I have begun doing this.

Not too long after I turned this over in prayer, someone introduced me to a prospective client. This seemed like the perfect client I would love to have, and yet when I looked at the work I had already committed to, I saw that I could not accept that new client at that time. At first it was so difficult for me to accept that, I kept trying to figure out a way to do it. But then I realised that if it were meant to happen, the opportunity would come again. It's not like God only gives you one opportunity; if it is meant to be in your life, God will continue to present it to you when the time is right.

One thing I still want in my life that I do not have yet is to be so free that I do not say anything that is out of integrity for me just to get a new client. What I mean by being free is that I feel a sense of compassion and caring, while at the same time I am open and honest.

I feel that I still need to grow in my ability to be compassionate and patient with others. I would like to grow in my ability to recognise others' limitations and needs. Sometimes I am still wilful in trying to get someone to see the solution that I see.

To me spiritual enlightenment seems to be like a cycle. I learn something new, and once I start to feel like I have some mastery, then I get to learn something else that's new and it starts all over again. I actually see this as a blessing; I don't think I would want to be stagnant.

### Inner Processes that Guide Decision-Making

One time, I had a week where all of my projects were not going well. At the same time my step-daughter needed a lot of my attention, and one of the people who worked for me also needed some extra care. There was a part of me that was feeling very, very frustrated and I felt like I was really being spiritually tested. I finally stopped and asked myself a question, "Who do I want to be?" A friend once asked me this question about three years ago and since then it has become an important question for me.

As I reflected upon this question, I saw that I wanted to be a caring mom for my step-daughter, I wanted to be a great coach for the person who worked for me, and I wanted to deliver on the projects that were already on my plate so that they were beautifully done. I knew that I did not want to be resentful or angry. I saw that what was causing my frustration was that I wanted to take on a new client, but the timing was not right. So from this inquiry I knew that I had to let go of the prospective client and tend to the current responsibilities I already had in my life and work.

### Guidance and Advice for Aspiring Spiritual-Based Leaders

I would first say that being a spiritual-based leader is much like falling off of a cliff. It takes a certain act of faith to believe that you can lead differently than what the outside world might reward; even

though there is a reward in it, you just cannot readily see it. So even though you may feel as if you are falling off of a cliff, the arms of God will catch you. However, there will be moments of absolute fear and trepidation, which are the moments of faith, and yet everything will be okay.

It takes some major changes internally to choose to measure your leadership different than the way the world now measures things. Right now the things that can be outwardly seen and stated on a piece of paper are valued, such as money, title, position, and power. Sometimes you may not even have the words to describe how you are going to measure your spiritual-based leadership; it may be something you actually have to discover over time. It will require a whole new skill development and you will often feel as if you are a new baby and that you will fail.

The upside to all of this is that this will cultivate a true sense of confidence and clarity knowing that you are living in alignment with your values, that you are living true to yourself. You won't have an inner dull, aching pain anymore. You will have purity and bliss, and a sense of being connected to all things. This will show up in the way you walk and smile, and many may not even know you are experiencing it. So even though you won't be able to mortgage a house with this true sense of joy you have, it won't matter.

One time a friend of mine acknowledged the struggles she had watched me go through as I grew spiritually, and stated that it must have been very painful for me. After thinking about it, I told her that even though it was painful for me to make these major internal and external changes in my life, the truth was I had always had a dull pain within myself that was always with me, all the time. It was like having one arm tied behind my back – this dull, underlying pain totally hindered who I was.

So the difference between living with this dull pain and going through a major spiritual transformation that is painful is well worth it. What is on the other side is bliss. Now I no longer fear losing something that I have built my identity on, such as my business or home. The spiritual path is a sustained joy that nothing in this world can take away.

In the past I had never defined myself as a big risk taker. However, as I have walked the path of becoming a spiritual-based person, I can see the courage that it has taken. To me the greatest definition of courage is to be willing, without any prior knowledge or experience, to take the risk to transform into someone that you have no idea how to become.