



PUT YOUR SPIRITUALITY TO WORK

Conversation Starters for the Workplace

2.14 SEEING THE ETERNAL IN THE TEMPORAL

To view everything that happens to us in our workday as expressions of the Divine, we must practice a new way of “seeing” – we must shift from seeing our work through our minds to seeing it through our hearts.

HAVE YOU ever faced a challenge at work and felt stuck in finding a solution? Or, felt alone in your work with no one to support you in your efforts? These are examples of when it’s important to step back and see our work from a broader perspective. Einstein explained this well when he said that we cannot solve our problems at the same level that we created them.

We’ve found that this ability to see our work from a broader perspective requires an internal shift in our vision that we like to describe as “seeing the eternal in the temporal”. This is the wisdom that Krishna taught Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

When one sees Eternity in things that pass away and Infinity in finite things, then one has pure knowledge. (18:20)

Sathya Sai Baba explains the relationship of the eternal to the temporal in this way:

When you see a film, you do not see the screen as screen; you forget its existence. But the screen is there all the time and it is only the screen that makes you experience the picture. A volcano throws up its lava on the screen, but the screen is not burnt. The screen is the truth; the film is an illusion, however realistic it is, however genuine the feelings it arouses. God is the screen and the objective world is the film. See all as but expressions of the same God, as appearances on the same screen.

Seeing all as expressions of the Divine – perhaps the ultimate spiritual practice – has an important practicality for us at work, as Swami Ranganathananda¹ points out:

When we learn to respect the dignity and inherent worth of ourselves and others as sparks of Divinity (Atman), we shall capture a high level of self-discipline, human concern, and practical efficiency.

But how do we “see” the eternal in the temporal world we work in each day? In order to do this we must practice a new way of “seeing”: we must shift from seeing our work through our minds to seeing it through our hearts.

¹ *Human Values in Management*, p. 56

When we say “mind”, we mean our capability to mentally focus and concentrate on the individual, separate parts of a situation. By “heart”, we refer not to our emotions, but to our capability to reach inside ourselves, connect to the very core of our reality, and then see the spiritual whole as well as the parts. Janiece Webb, formerly a senior vice president with Motorola introduced us to this aspect by telling us:

Spirituality means to be connected in a real way to life, with the centre, and to realise that this is all so much bigger than what we can physically see.

Ricardo Levy, Chairman of Catalytica, Inc., describes the value, and challenge, of reaching inside to see the eternal in the temporal as an on-going spiritual practice in our work:

This ability to reach within ourselves goes beyond our normal mental exercises and capabilities. The more you consciously attempt to reach within, the more the quality of your decisions will be enhanced. At first this type of contemplation was so difficult. Why? Because I am an engineer and my entire training throughout my life was to solve problems. It was so difficult for me to just sit back and listen and pray. This is a marvellous discipline that some of my business colleagues have helped me to develop.

Ultimately, bringing the eternal to the foreground of our awareness, and moving the temporal to the background, allows us to know the substance behind all of this worldly form – just as the 14th century Christian mystic, Jan van Ruusbroec, experienced it:

The image of God is found essentially and personally in all mankind. Each possesses it whole, entire and undivided, and all together not more than one alone. In this way we are all one, intimately united in our eternal image, which is the image of God and the source in us of all our life.

So, ask yourself: *How can I shift from my mind to my heart at work? What does it mean for me to see the eternal as well as the temporal in my day-to-day work activities?*

This article is an excerpt from the book, *Put Your Spirituality to Work: Book 2 – Work as a Spiritual Practice*. To download the full book of articles, as well as additional book chapters, articles, workbooks, and research on the subject of “spirituality and human values for leadership and work”, visit our website: www.globaldharma.org