



PUT YOUR SPIRITUALITY TO WORK

Conversation Starters for the Workplace

2.25 “WHAT’S LEARNING YOU?”

When we approach our work and our relationships with a spirit of inquiry, it takes us into a realm of adventure, and thus into a work-life filled with creative responses to the opportunities and challenges we face.

ANGELES ARRIEN is a cultural anthropologist, author and consultant to businesses around the world. She is unusual and inspiring in her work as she draws upon the wisdom of indigenous cultures to help others bring out new, creative perspectives. She once told a story of a culture where people greet each other with a provocative, curious question, “What’s learning you?” instead of the usual greeting of “How are you?”

We love to ask people this question as it stimulates a whole new spirit of inquiry about their life and work. We know it isn’t proper English, yet it has a way of inviting others to look more closely to discover new arenas of learning about themselves or about their work projects. This compelling curiosity – this spirit of inquiry – is something we’ve noted in people who are dedicated to creative, “spirited” lives and work. Thus it’s the next quality in our acronym of a SPIRITED person.

When we approach our work and our relationships with a spirit of inquiry, we keep ourselves from getting stuck in what we already know – about a topic or about another person. It takes us into a realm of adventure, and thus into a work-life filled with creative responses to the opportunities and challenges we face. We don’t assume we know it all, which keeps our work and our relationships interesting and engaging.

Niran Jiang, a native of Inner Mongolia (an autonomous region of China), received her MBA in the USA and was an Assistant Professor at Shenzhen University in China. Later she worked as a Marketing Manager for S. C. Johnson, the third largest privately owned company in the world. She told us about her spiritual view of life and how it relates to this creative “spirit of inquiry” in her work:

Wonderment is a big part of my spiritual feeling, which includes a sense of curiosity. To me, what stimulates wonderment is when we connect our inner life forces. This interconnectedness of everything is what is most important to me; I believe in true equality because of this interconnectedness.

As a Marketing Manager at S. C. Johnson, my team’s breakthrough incubation of new concepts resulted in the largest acquisition in the company’s history. The company was

experiencing stagnant growth, as most established businesses do, so we invited the Boston Consulting Group, BCG, to do a major study of where growth could come from.

Three of us, who connected really well, identified the target for a new acquisition, which was Ziploc – a small plastic storage bag. Others had previously said “no” to this type of acquisition as it was not in our traditional category of household cleaning products; plus we didn’t have the manufacturing capability and didn’t have any knowledge about making bags. But intuitively this felt right; we felt a lot of wonderment about this, almost a passion. It was not just about valuation, but about future potentials.

My spirituality brought to this exciting project a true respect for and feeling of equality on the soul level with everybody in the small team; nobody was afraid of opening up. We were passionate. We had a strong curiosity, which I see as spirituality, as a life force. We got connected to a universal power, and we all felt a great commitment. This is why we succeeded.

After doing the traditional marketing research, we kept on brainstorming ideas. We talked it over in a restaurant one time where we were joking, having fun, a lot of humour, and all the ideas became very visual and graphic. We opened up to tremendous creativity and were able to catch all those ideas later on.

Ultimately, we put everything on the board for the CEO and said, “This is your future business.” After ten minutes he said, “I got it, we’re buying it!” The whole senior management committees’ jaws dropped. They said, “But what about manufacturing, we don’t know how to...” “We’ll learn,” the CEO said. As a result, the company bought Ziploc, which was their largest acquisition at that time.

So, ask yourself: *What’s learning me in my work? In what ways do I approach my work with a spirit of inquiry, curiosity, and wonder?*

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