P U T Y O U R S P I R I T U A L I T Y T O W O R K

Conversation Starters for the Workplace

3.2 DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION AT WORK

> Spirituality is by nature inclusive of all people and religions. It allows people of all religions to work together in harmony, even in the "secular" world of business.

SEVERAL YEARS ago William spoke at a large business symposium in New Delhi on the many varied aspects of becoming a spiritual-based leader in the workplace. During the question and answer session, a business executive asked him in a strong tone, "You've talked about how you can be spiritual and successful in business at the same time. India is known to be a spiritual nation. If we're so spiritual, why aren't we more successful in business and why is there so much corruption?"

William answered, "Over the last 10 years in the U.S., there has been a growing awareness of a distinction that you may or may not make here in India – the distinction between 'being spiritual' and 'being religious.' Spirituality is the single essence of all religions, while religions are the set of rituals and beliefs that are designed to evoke our spiritual nature. A person can be religious – engaging in all of the rituals and discussing all of the beliefs – without necessarily being spiritual. Perhaps people here are engaging in religious rituals and beliefs, without living the true essence of spirituality in their lives."

The man then replied with a full-hearted response, "I would say that in many ways we are more of a religious nation, than a spiritual one."

Each religion has its own understanding of the nature of creation and the Creator; this diversity provides people with different avenues for realising the *one, unifying spiritual basis* that we all share. But a religion that only focuses on the outer form of rites and rituals has lost its essence. When the rituals become the prime focus, rather than the spiritual nature they are intended to unite us with, then the differences become all-important. The result can be divisiveness and outright warfare, rather than the inclusive, unifying nature of spirituality.

Because spirituality is the single essence of all religions, it is by nature *inclusive* of all people and religions, rather than exclusive. From a spiritual (unity) view, the differences in religious understanding and practices deserve respect. The role of any religion is to help people tap into their spirituality, and to support that spirituality in the shared circumstances

of life and work. Spirituality allows people of all religions to work together in harmony, even in the "secular" world of business.

So… how do you, as a spiritual-based leader, keep your attention on the inclusive nature of spirituality at work, while respecting the religious affinities of those you lead?

While interviewing spiritual-based executives, both in India and abroad, we asked them about their advice on this matter. Two of them told us:

When leaders have the clear conviction to lead from a spiritual basis it will become evident in their behaviour. They will always seek and speak the truth, they will take the time to understand fully and respond properly. They will have no need to convince; they will lead others through their own example.

It's okay to use religious texts at work if they are used to inspire or guide others, just as you would use other philosophical and meaningful works. The key is that the leader must be an example of one who puts the spiritual wisdom into practice and one who does not resort to empty preaching.

From these and other executives, we have learned that a focus on spirituality can naturally lead to work perspectives and decisions that are harmonious and inclusive. And the different religious backgrounds can be honoured as providing pathways for people to know and practise their spirituality at work, for the betterment of all.

So, ask yourself: *How do I distinguish between spirituality and religion at work? How can I focus on spirituality, while honouring the religious paths of those I lead?*

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This article is an excerpt from the book, *Put Your Spirituality to Work: Spiritual-Based Leaders*. 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