



PUT YOUR SPIRITUALITY TO WORK

Conversation Starters for the Workplace

3.11 ENGAGING IN A SPIRITUAL DIALOGUE

You can establish a spiritual foundation for the work of your entire organisation by following six golden guidelines for a successful dialogue with your employees.

TOM CHAPPELL and his wife co-founded the American company “Tom’s of Maine” in 1971 on the principles of customer-focused, environmentally-conscious health products. As the company grew, profit maximization began to dominate business planning, and Tom considered selling the business, as it was no longer fulfilling to him.

But in 1989, a new degree of spirituality awakened in him, and he called a special board meeting to create a new strategy and culture based on, “Respecting people for who they are and not for what they can do for us.” As Tom said:

I wanted to change the way we saw work and the way we did our work, the business was to be a vehicle uniting values and work.

Their new mission, born from Tom’s spiritual-based leadership, began to give people permission to actualise the creativity and social responsibility that had been within them all along. At one point, Tom called his entire company to an outdoor meeting. The aim was to create a relaxed atmosphere where his executive team could listen as the employees talked about the new spiritual-based mission that the company was moving towards. The team heard many suggestions, and Tom made sure that they acted immediately on the key issues that the employees raised.¹

Now, suppose you too, as a leader, have identified your own spiritual theme and values, and have dialogued with other executives or colleagues to identify a spiritual theme and values for your work together. How do you now engage a larger group of people in the same dialogue – ultimately to establish a spiritual foundation for the work of the larger group?

From our research and our experience in organisations, here are six guidelines we can offer for having a successful dialogue with the employees throughout your group or organisation:

First, be sure that your core group is exemplifying in their own work the spiritual foundation you want to dialogue about. Nothing bolsters a dialogue more than sincerity – evidenced by a unity of your thoughts, words, and actions. Be strong and confident,

¹ Tom relates their experiences in his book *Soul of a Business*.

peaceful and persistent. Be unattached to how it looks at any point of time – knowing that not every conversation is going to be smooth, not every attempt to change is going to succeed. As one of our favourite quotes from Winston Churchill reminds us:

Success is all about going from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm.

Second, set “safe” conditions for having these open dialogues: make them voluntary, and focus on the commonality of spirituality, rather than religious differences. Honour the diversity of thoughts and feelings and practice “peaceful acceptance” of what others have to share. Listen “generously” to each other and be sure there is no attempt to “convert” others to a specific point of view.

Third, give people a chance to identify their own spiritual theme and values. They will naturally engage in the dialogue more enthusiastically when they can invest their whole heart and soul into it². You can “warm up” this type of dialogue by asking people questions like:

- *What are the 5 most impactful moments of spirit in your life?*
- *How can we appreciate work as a chance for spiritual growth?*

Fourth, share your proposed spiritual theme for the organisation and lead all the employees through a series of questions that will stimulate a deeper look into how they can embrace and live it in their work. For example:

- *From my personal spiritual theme, how can I align with this organisational spiritual theme?*
- *How can I specifically put this organisational spiritual theme into practice in my own work?*

Fifth, once you have involved everyone in this dialogue process, act on the applicable employee suggestions immediately, to provide the initial proof that “the executives are sincere in creating a spiritual-based culture.”

Finally, celebrate the changes. Make sure there is a way to recognise, highlight, and show the spiritual growth that is taking place. And be sure to celebrate not only the successes, but even the attempts that may have failed temporarily.

So, ask yourself: *How can I encourage and lead a dialogue in my company to establish a spiritual foundation for our work? What questions can I use to nurture this process along?*

² For more on this, refer to our previous article titled *Creating a Group Spiritual Theme*

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