

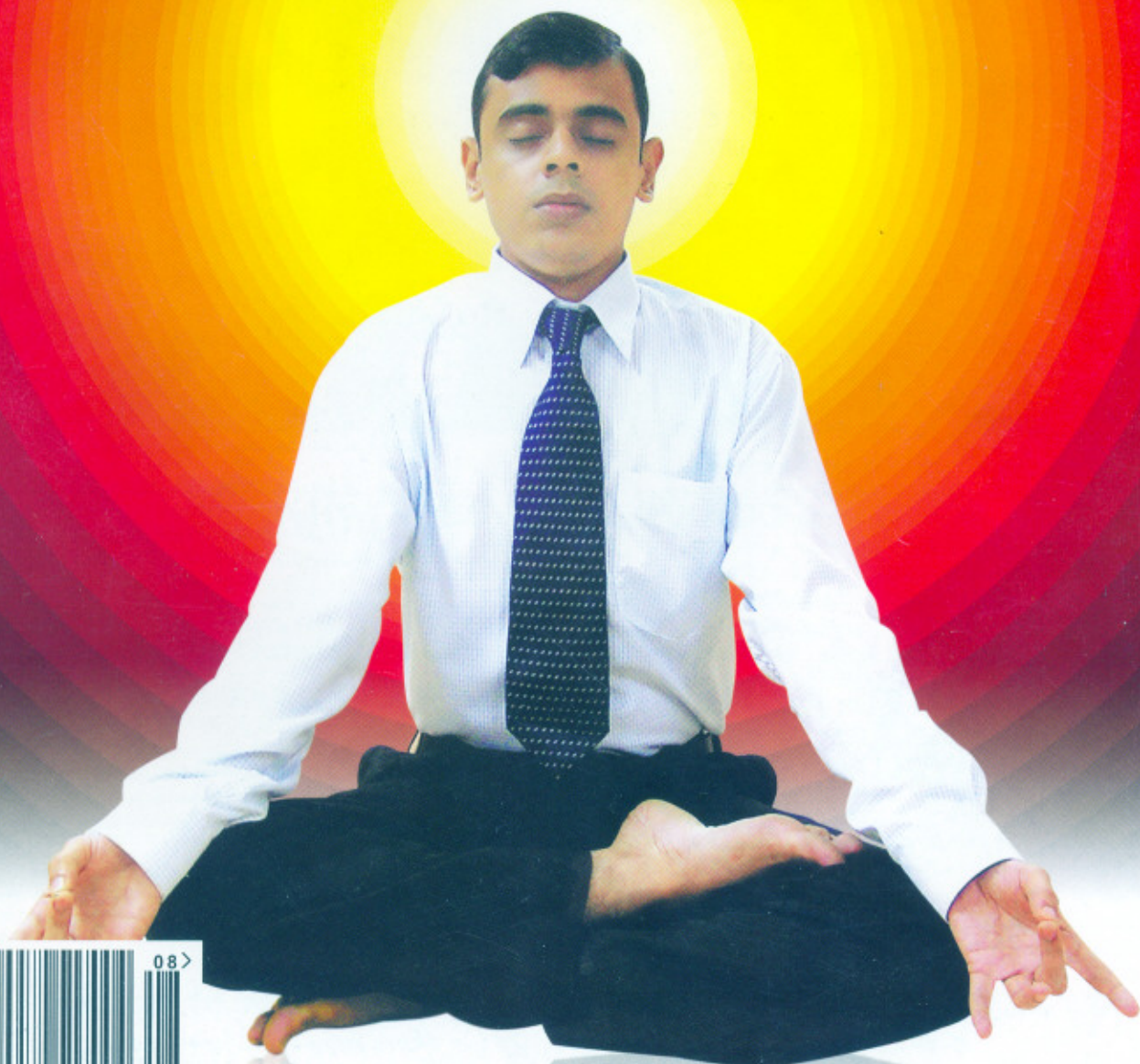
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Spirituality in the Workplace



Debra and William Miller on Spirituality

"Increasing interest in spirituality in the workplace is due to an overall evolution in consciousness, which we are experiencing as human beings."

Many of us fail to distinguish between religion and spirituality. Is there a difference between the two? If yes, what according to you is the difference?

Each religion has its own understanding of the nature of creation and the Creator; this diversity provides people with different avenues for realizing 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 rituals become the prime focus in a religion rather than the spiritual nature it is intended to unite us with, then the differences become all-important. The result can be 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.

What are the challenges faced by the world of business today? Can spirituality play a role in overcoming these challenges?

Regarding the challenges of globalization: Spirituality is relevant to globalization in that it is naturally inclusive. Since spirituality is the thread that connects all beings and all religious/spiritual traditions, it allows us to connect at a deeper level in order to overcome language and cultural barriers. The inclusive nature of spirituality allows us to respect the local cul-

tures while reaching across cultures to promote greater collaboration. It also supports us to harmonize diversity and generate goodwill solutions that benefit everyone.

While speaking at the 2004 World Urban Forum in Barcelona, Spain, we were acutely aware of the global consciousness that is fast becoming a reality in our world. But how do business leaders embrace this global consciousness from a spiritual basis? While pondering over this, we found a speech given by Steven C Rockefeller in August, 2004, at the University of the Philippines. Steven Rockefeller, Chairman of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, worked with a large number of international groups to produce the Earth Charter, a UN initiative calling for establishing

"a sound ethical foundation for the emerging global society and to help build a sustainable world based on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice and a culture of peace." In his speech, he gave a unique perspective about globalization:

"A new planetary civilization is beginning to emerge, and it is interconnecting all cultures. The communications, transportation, and economic systems that are creating this global society are expressions of an industrial-technological society. In order for this new planetary civilization to fully realize its potential, it must generate a spiritual and ethical consciousness consistent with its geographical, ecological, intellectual, social, and economic situation.



Debra Miller



William Miller



Debra and William Miller co-founded the US-based Global Dharma Center (www.globaldharma.org) as a non-sectarian, non-profit spiritual institution in May, 2000. As a way to focus on leadership in the South Asia region, they co-founded an India-based NGO, the Center For Dharmic Leadership, in January, 2005. Together, Debra and William have dedicated more than 50 years of their combined corporate and consulting experience to inspiring and empowering people of all professions to live and work from a spiritual basis. They have authored numerous books and audio programs and currently co-author a column on "Spirituality at Work" for the spirituality website of the *Times of India*. (<http://spirituality.indiatimes.com/articlelist/8365009.cms>)

We are globalizing the outer world, and I doubt we can stop the process even if we wanted to. We can, however, work to guide and shape the process by giving it a soul—that is by creating an ethical vision of where we want the process to go and committing ourselves to it in a spirit of solidarity and hope. This is the inner globalization that must occur to build global cooperation and community and reverse negative trends that threaten the future.”

Regarding the challenges of rampant consumerism: Spirituality is relevant to consumerism in that, it adds a deeper perspective to what we consider to be truly meaningful in our personal, family and work life. This leads us to make ethical choices in our consumer trends, rather than get swept away by materialistic greed. Spirituality also leads us to make wiser decisions about our true needs, rather than trying to fill unlimited desires with the limited resources of the planet (and thus bankrupting both the ecology and the economy).

Our dictionary showed us how much the idea of “wealth” is

wrapped up in material considerations—defining it in terms of “an abundance of valuable material possessions or resources; all material objects that have economic utility.” Yet, spiritual literature from around the world goes beyond this, saying that wealth includes wisdom, love and health. For example, the universal spiritual teacher Sathya Sai Baba says: “*Artha* does not merely mean wealth of money. It means wealth of wisdom. Seeing unity in diversity is the true wisdom.

All wealth and prosperity cannot confer true happiness. Without love, no object can give you real happiness. Hence, the primary wealth for man is love.”

There is no greater wealth than health. What is the origin of this word ‘health’? It is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word ‘*Heilig*’, meaning that which is sacred and pure.

Even the original Middle English root of wealth (“weal”) was much more expansive than our current definition; weal means welfare—the state of doing well, especially with respect to good fortune, happiness, well-being or prosper-

tion management at SRI International (Stanford Research Institute, USA). As president of the Global Creativity Corporation since 1987, he has explored with clients—who have included over 100 corporations in more than a dozen countries worldwide—how creativity, business, and spirituality are all facets of the same jewel. Two of his four books have been rated among the top 30 business books of the year in the US and his 4-CD audio program, *The Art of Spiritual Leadership in Business*, was released in the US in 2003. He has been a guest faculty member at the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning (India) and the Stanford University Graduate School of Business (USA). Throughout his career, William has maintained his devotion to his most deeply-held spiritual values, continually finding ways to create work as worship.

ity. It’s as if in our consumer-hungry fervour we’ve become absorbed with well-having rather than well-being!

Regarding the challenges of ethical behavior and social responsibility, we see both as a natural consequence of living from a spiritual basis. India has a rich history of acting in accord with *dharma*, which translates in one way into ethics and responsibility; Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* is a great guide to this. We believe that if India were to revive this *dharmaic* aspect of its culture and build it into “the way things work” in business and government, then India could be the shining light for the world in this regard.

Regarding the challenges of attracting and retaining a high quality workforce, people of strong values are always seeking companies that also practice such values. The companies around the world that have been awarded the International Spirit at Work (ISAW) award are organizations that do attract and retain a high quality workforce by their commitment to high spiritual principles. ISAW honors companies that have implemented specific policies, programs, or practices that explicitly nurture spirituality in their organizations. A list of people who received this award from 2002-04 and details of their workplace policies and practices can be accessed at www.spiritatwork.org.

ServiceMaster in the US states one of its company objectives as: “To honor God in all we do”, while Kyocera from Japan has its corporate motto as: “Respect the Divine and Love People.” Even leaders from Indian companies are speaking about applying spirituality in business. What is the reason behind this increasing interest in spirituality? Is it a fad?

At the macro level, we believe this increasing interest in spirituality at the workplace is due to an overall evolution in consciousness, which we are experiencing as human beings. Willis Harman, a noted futurist (who also was the inspiration for the ISAW award noted above), has chronicled this shift in consciousness quite a bit,

especially in relation to the rise of consciousness and responsibility for business leadership. One quote of his:

"Leaders in world business are the first true planetary citizens. They have worldwide capability and responsibility. Their decisions affect not just economies, but societies... and the world problems of poverty, environment, and security. World business will be a key actor in the ultimate resolution of the macro-problem. The business corporation is far more flexible and adaptive than the bureaucratic structures of government."—Harman W. (1990) *Global Mind Change: The New Age Revolution in the Way We Think* New York, Werner Publ.

You might also make the link between this evolution of consciousness and the prophecies of

the Mayan Indians of Central/South America, of Jesus Christ's second coming, and of the Hindu *yugas*.

At a more micro level, in our day-to-day life, we have found two major NOs and one major YES that people are making to current lifestyle conditions in societies around the world.

People are beginning to experience the emptiness of a materialistic, consumer-focused, high-stressed lifestyle and are beginning to say "no" to that way of life. They are finding that a rich and fulfilling life is seldom directly related to material wealth, power or a workaholic lifestyle.

Secondly, due to the ability to access global news, people are aware of the negative consequences of our current business paradigm that strives to maximize shareholder wealth by promoting rampant consumerism. As a result they are speaking out and saying "no" to the current trends toward environmental degradation, unethical business practices, lack of respect for fundamental human rights, and an

increasing gap between the rich and the poor.

Thirdly, we have seen an immense personal hunger rise in people for deeper meaning in their lives and work, for greater peace of mind, and for more caring relationships with their family, friends and colleagues. They are realizing that spirituality holds the key to their search.

Our own exploration of spirituality and work began in the mid-1980s. We began discussing spirituality and business with corporate executives and reflected on it in books and articles, as well as in audio programs

and the media. We have also played a role in the evolution of spirituality and business at numerous international gatherings in North America, Europe and South Asia. What started roughly 20 years ago as an inner calling to ex-

perience a new perspective on personal and organizational leadership has evolved over the years into a primary focus of our work that reflects and expresses our own search for fulfilling our life's purpose.

Regarding whether spirituality is a fad: This is a response we gave to a BBC Asia reporter who asked us if we had any statistics to show that spirituality had improved profitability in the Asian region: "We strongly discourage making any implication that spirituality is a new fad or (even worse) a new tool for being more successful at work or in business. We have found that the media seems to focus a lot on this angle. For us, spirituality is a timeless, ageless, source of our being, not a here-today, gone-tomorrow fad. For us, the new focus on spirituality as it relates to work, business and leadership is a natural reflection of the spiritual awakening that is happening with all of humanity. It is part of our human evolution."

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We sent him a statement we made in a white paper we wrote called "Spirituality: The New Emerging Context For Business Leadership", "To catch a glimpse of what this spiritual context might look like in the future, and where it might take business leadership, we are all faced with two challenges:

1. To inquire into the nature of spirituality and its impact on business leadership requires that we be willing to explore beyond the world of our day-to-day senses and thinking.
2. To attempt to paint a picture of how spiritual-based business leadership will unfold is much like trying to predict the impact of the internet in 1980, when we had just barely invented personal computers."

Are concepts like "spirituality in the workplace", "organization renewal", etc., meant only for mature organizations which have financial and human resources to support such activities? What about start-ups/small scale industries, etc.?

The first year we moved to India in 2000, the young men at the university we live, did "*grama seva*" in the nearby villages, giving food and clothes to hundreds of families. Each time they or the professors who accompanied them speak about their experience, they speak about how the pure spiritual culture of India has been most preserved in these village people.

This humbly reminds us that spirituality is an inherent part of our nature as human beings and has nothing to do with how educated we are or how wealthy we are. To live from a spiritual basis at work requires our loving devotion, discipline and dedication, which are available to anyone, anywhere, at any time.

Also, we've noted that companies ranging from ServiceMaster in the US to Excel Industries in India were started as entrepreneurial companies by spiritual-based founders. Thus, the principles by which they operated from the very beginning—as small, perhaps under-capitalized, firms—were already spiritual. Those

principles were the foundation upon which such companies have grown.

The point here is that spirituality in the workplace does not require substantial finance or human resources—as if it were a luxury that only the well-to-do companies could afford. In fact, one might make the case that it's actually easier to be spiritual as a start-up or small scale business rather than a mature one with lots of resources. In the latter case, with a large influx of people with many worldviews, it can sometimes be more difficult to create the spiritual unity that one enjoys in a smaller enterprise. In many cases, within larger corporations we've seen spiritual-based leaders making a difference within their sphere of influence, which often does not include the entire company, only their division/departments/unit.

Are there experiments/studies to show that tapping spirituality at work has resulted in a positive impact on business? Can you cite examples of companies boldly engaging in spiritual dialogues inside and outside the organization? Any specific examples you would like to share?

We've already mentioned the International Spirit at Work awards above, which include three companies in India. That is the best resource for well-documented examples.

Your message to a business leader who would like to tap spirituality in her/his workplace...?

We love the advice our spiritual teacher, Sathya Sai Baba, has given us regarding these matters: "Start early, drive slowly, arrive safely." To us this means:

■ "Start early" by first focusing on your own inner spiritual development and using it as a foundation from which you do your work. Seek our books, spiritual programs and

teachers who can nurture your spiritual growth. Strive to embody the spiritual principles that are most meaningful to you in your everyday work.

■ "Drive slowly" by building a supportive community around you at work. Share your spiritual thoughts and feelings with a select group of people at your workplace who can understand and encourage your perspectives. As you explore your spiritual views with such people, you will gain the self-confidence for sharing with a wider range of colleagues, and for fostering the ongoing growth of this culture. Also, begin to put your spirituality into action at work one day at a time. At the start of each day, select one or two areas of your work to specifically apply your spiritual principles to. Be aware of your inner motivation and notice how

that shapes your thoughts, words and deeds.

■ "Arrive safely" by continuing to build your confidence and strength, noticing how the quality of your work life is shifting, slowly but surely, week after week. Take the time to recognize and celebrate your spiritual growth and the growth of those around you.

Any other thoughts or views you would like to share with our readers?

As we wrote in our very first article for the *Times of India*,

"Many people see life as a pie, with different slices belonging to family, personal time, health, learning, work, and spirituality/religion. We see it differently. We think of the pie of life as all spiritual, rather than spirituality being only one slice. Therefore, family, personal time, health, learning, and work are all spiritual activities.

"From this view, work is an important aspect of spiritual life. But how well do we use that time for

spiritual development and for expression of our spiritual values? Most working adults spend 50% or more of their waking hours engaged in work. What a waste of spiritual time if we don't consciously put our spirituality to work!"

In relation to this, we encourage people to make spirituality the basis for all of their life, especially their work. We have them start by defining what spirituality means to them and then creating for themselves a "spiritual theme" in three or four words. (You can see and do this exercise for yourselves from our article on "Spiritual Character" available on the website <http://spirituality.indiatimes.com>).

The key practice from this exercise is to see every situation through their "spiritual lens", asking, "From my spiritual view of life, what do I see in this situation?" Only then do we encourage people to respond, again in accord with their spiritual view.

Given our perspective that true spirituality is always inclusive, rather than exclusive, this naturally leads to thoughts, words, and deeds that exemplify spiritual values found in all spiritual/religious traditions we know of: Truth, righteousness, peace, love and non-violence. Then there is true spiritual character being brought forth.

And as President Abdul Kalam told our colleagues in an interview for our spiritual-based leadership research:

"The most important thing is righteousness (*dharma*). When there is righteousness in the heart, there is beauty in the character. When there is beauty in the character, there is harmony in the home. When there is harmony in the home, there is order in the nation. When there is order in the nation, there is peace in the world. You see the beautiful connectivity between these. The question before all of us today is, how do we get righteousness in the heart?"

The Interview was conducted by Pradip Sinha, Associate Consultant, The ICFAI Center for Management Research, Hyderabad.

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In many large corporations, spiritual-based leaders have been making a difference within their sphere of influence, which often does not include the entire company
