



PUT YOUR SPIRITUALITY TO WORK

Conversation Starters for the Workplace

3.18 EMPOWERING SPIRITUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

If you are a leader that would like to bring spirituality more to the forefront of your organisation's culture, you are not alone. There are many examples to inspire and guide us on how to do this.

BUSINESS LEADERS we've met, and William's MBA students at the university where he teaches in India, sometimes ask us if it's really possible to make spirituality an *overt and explicit* part of an organisational culture – without causing religious conflicts or being inappropriate to an otherwise “secular” way of operating.

As we've interviewed spiritual-based leaders around the world, we've found that some feel it's best to lead by example and keep spirituality *implicit* in their leadership. Magnus Vrethammar, former President of Pergo Flooring Europe, told us his views:

After many hours of thoughts on this, I have to say that my conclusion is that the explicit part of business is the house-holding, or economic operation, and the implicit part of business is to support the employees' spiritual quest in opening up.

Others we've interviewed bring spirituality quite *explicitly* into their organisational culture. In fact, we've found that this is beginning to happen more and more. For example, in the 1920s, Marion Wade founded a company called ServiceMaster in Chicago, USA. Wade and the executives who followed him in building a Fortune 500 company made their number one company objective to “Honour God in all we do”:

We believe that every person — regardless of personal beliefs or differences — has been created in the image and likeness of God. We seek to recognize the dignity, worth and potential of each individual and believe that everyone has intrinsic worth and value. This is not an expression of a particular religious belief, or a basis for exclusion. Rather, it is a mandate for inclusion, and a constant reminder for us to do the right thing in the right way.

And Kyocera, a Japanese company that makes cell phones, prominently displays these spiritual covenants on their website:

Corporate Motto: "Respect the Divine and Love People." Preserve the spirit to work fairly and honorably, respecting people, our work, our company and our global community.

Management Philosophy: To coexist harmoniously with nature and society. Harmonious coexistence is the underlying foundation of all our business activities as we work to create a world of abundance and peace.

To encourage more leaders to have confidence in bringing spirituality explicitly into their organisations, four international business organisations¹ began sponsoring the “International Spirit at Work” award in 2002. In honouring various organisations, the intention of the award, as stated on their website², is to “bring to public recognition organisations whose spiritual-based practices, policies and procedures help to make the world a better place.” The award honours organisations throughout the world that explicitly nurture spirituality inside their organisations.

Among this year’s honourees is Excel Industries Ltd. of Mumbai, under the executive chairmanship of G. Narayana. They see spirituality as “self-improvement and world service” with the Divine lighting the way, where every human can become Divine light. They exercise this spirituality through a strong focus on social responsibility and sustainability – demonstrated by conscientious attention to concerns such as natural waste management.

Another honouree this year is Planters Development Bank in the Philippines, which serves the financial needs of small and medium enterprises. Senior management regularly acknowledges the role of Divine Providence in the organisation’s success, and the employees are committed to serving their customers with their “whole heart and mind.”

Past honourees in India include: SREI International Financial Ltd. in Calcutta, for its respect for all religions and for grounding all company practices and policies in a belief that everything they have is derived from the blessings of God; and the Times of India for its workshops that assist employees to achieve “human excellence” through spiritual practices, helping them to “catalyse the latent Divinity in each of us.”

If you are a leader that would like to bring spirituality more to the forefront of your organisation’s culture, you are not alone. You can take comfort in knowing there are many leaders around the world who are blazing that path, providing examples to inspire and guide others to do the same.

So, ask yourself: *Do I feel called to bring spirituality more overtly and explicitly into my organisation’s culture? What can I learn from other leaders and companies to help bring this about?*

¹ Association for Spirit at Work, the World Business Academy, the Spirit in Business Institute, the European Baha’i Business Forum

² For a full list of honourees of this award, please visit: www.spiritatwork.org

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