



PUT YOUR SPIRITUALITY TO WORK

Conversation Starters for the Workplace

3.25 FROM LEMONS TO LEMONADE

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AS A BUSINESS LEADER, we sometimes have to deal with the consequences of someone else's mistake. How we handle those situations can make all the difference to the morale, and spiritual upliftment, of everyone involved. We liken this to a saying we heard growing up, "When something goes wrong – use the lemons to make lemonade!"

Anand Pillai, former Vice President of Sales and Marketing for a leading IT company in India, told us how he handled such a situation by drawing from his spiritual basis:

We were submitting a bid for a World Bank tender for US\$4-1/2 million. We worked through the night to prepare the documents and gave the bid just at the time it was due. When the bid was opened, it was discovered that our supporting document for the annual maintenance contract was not there. As a result we were disqualified.

The first reaction everyone had was to find the guy who made the mistake and sack him. However, I said, "No, there is no point in doing that. It was a mistake. If he did it intentionally, then yes, there is no reason for him to continue with the company. But if he did it unintentionally, that is a different matter."

So, instead of getting angry and upset and sending nasty e-mails, I said, "Let's take control of this situation and see what we can do to salvage this. Let us focus our creative energy on supporting him, so that he has the initiative to stay on through the night when we have the next bid."

This is what motivates people to go beyond the call of duty, to do what they are supposed to do. I took the lead and told them, "I am not getting angry, and so I am asking you not to get angry either." I started to give them direction and ideas and told them to go to the evaluation committee, explain what happened, and give the document to them in writing.

The committee said they would follow a law which says that if you have not submitted a bid for a component, it will be assumed that your quote is the highest quoted figure from

among the other competitors. As a result, our quotation became costlier and we were out of the race.

We received this information and again kept our focus on trying to find a solution. After some further research, we found out that the other competitor had also violated one of the specifications. As a result this vendor was disqualified and we won the bid. For that year, it was the largest contract we received.

The moral of this story is this: we focused our creative energy not on the person who made the mistake, but on the process. The question we asked ourselves was “what” went wrong, not “who” made this mistake. The customer also had a lot of respect for us because they watched us go through this process. We took the person who had made the mistake with us and admitted the mistake, and we all worked together to find a solution.

The spiritual basis that I came from in this situation is that I knew this person had not made this mistake intentionally. If I had berated him for being irresponsible, then I would be telling him that he is an irresponsible person. That would have demeaned my faith in him. So instead I focused on the process and showed him respect. I also gave him the liberty to do wrong.

In the Bible there were times when Lord Jesus did this very same thing. One time he sent his disciples to cast out demons, and they failed to cast out the demon of a small boy. Jesus then cast out this demon and said to them, “I will empower you even more. After I go, you will receive the Holy Spirit and you will be able to do even greater things than this.” He gave them a task to do and then reassured them that he was always with them.

So, ask yourself: “How would I have responded differently to a past mistake made by someone else if I had drawn from my spiritual basis to guide me?”

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