



Workplace Spirituality

Expressing spirituality in the workplace through your career calling, ethics, economic justice, spiritual practices, and spiritual values.

SPIRITUALITY, CREATIVITY AND BUSINESS

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From *The Inner Edge*, Vol. 2 No. 5, October/November 1999

I am always doing things I can't do, that's how I get to do them.
-- Pablo Picasso

New product ideas abound after DuPont finds its creative spark

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Former US President Calvin Coolidge once bluntly stated, "The business of America is business" – a statement that appears to share little in common with a more spiritual view by Joseph Chilton Pearce, author of *The Bond of Power*. Pearce wrote, "We are created to develop the ability to create. The creature is designed to mature into the creator, the Son into the Father. The creation is the way by which God the One becomes many, and why Eternity is in love with the productions of time."

Although these statements appear antithetical to some people – certainly, their focus is different – are they really? Business aims to transform ideas into reality through innovation. We, as individuals, aim to transform the deepest longings of the human spirit into reality. I believe the two missions can become one.

Infusing Spirit: The Creative Spark

I once consulted with DuPont to develop marketing opportunities for its newly created material called Nomex. The first day of our session produced about 300 ideas, but nothing really sparked. There was no flash of brilliance. I drove home puzzled.

The next day I asked the participants which aspects of "the world situation" concerned them most profoundly. Instantly the room became alive with real-life issues that elicited their passion: hunger, drugs, crime, resource depletion. The next step, I told them, was to form groups combining the people with similar concerns to brainstorm ways in which Nomex could contribute to a solution.

The creative energy in the room rose exponentially. Ultimately more than 1,000 ideas were organized into 50 top "key concepts," 10 of which were later tested for technical and market feasibility. Over the next two years, one of those concepts (only #8 on the initial top 10 list) achieved a significant profit and market share. It was using Nomex to protect precious art during shipment from museum to museum. The idea was proposed by a manager whose passion was art and its preservation.

What turned the #8 concept into the #1 business? When the managers anchored their creative energy in something they found personal, compelling, and emotionally real, they touched their creative commitment. Thus they sparked a success for their business by bringing in their own deep, personal values, such as caring for others and responsible action.

According to India's spiritual leader, Sathya Sai Baba, fundamental human values such as concern for well-being, responsibility, love, truth, and inner peace provide the foundation to every major spiritual tradition. These fundamental human values also directly support established business values such as how:

concern for well-being fosters great service

responsibility fosters trust and quality

caring fosters collaboration and daring

truthfulness fosters honest relationships

equanimity fosters creative, wise decisions

As business leaders, we can learn how to integrate personal and spiritual values into the workplace to stimulate quantum leaps in creativity, process improvement, customer service, and other business values (see box below).

Regarding the source of creativity, St. Augustine stated in his Confessions, "All the loveliness which passes through men's minds into their skillful hands comes from the supreme loveliness which is above our soul, which my soul sighs for day and night."^[1] In Tolstoy's *What is Art?* we read, "Art is a human activity whose purpose is the transmission of the highest and best feelings which men have attained."^[2]

Looking at these quotations, together with the opening quotes from Coolidge and Pearce, it becomes clear that business is a form of creative art. The *artistry of business* is the creative right of all those who desire true prosperity, economically and spiritually, as well as personally and globally.

Consummate artists demand from themselves a level of dedication and practice most people cannot imagine applying to themselves and their work. Andre Previn once said, "If I miss a day of practice, I know it. If I miss two days, my manager knows it. If I miss three days, my audience knows it." Without mastery of whatever God-given talents we each have, we desert a quiet voice within us that wants to be expressed, a "muscle" of creativity that wants to be exercised.

Similarly, peak-performing organizations also demand a mastery of their own, collective creativity. Yet somehow, all around this planet, we've lost touch with how our work contribution can be an exercise of our deepest value and a training ground for discovering more of who we are as spiritual/human beings. If we focus primarily on material growth, we miss the very basis of healthy, economic prosperity. That basis is giving our best to enrich our surroundings, our environment, and our planet.

By seeing ourselves first and foremost as spiritual beings, transcending our time on earth in these physical bodies, our spiritual nature becomes the context for everything else. From that point of view, intrinsic motivation to be creative cannot be understood without the context of our spirituality!

I achieved a breakthrough in my understanding of this expanded sense of spirituality and its application to business in 1982 when I read *The Way to Shambala* by Edwin Bernbaum, which showed me that virtually all spiritual stories across cultures have the following “plot line”:

- You're on a quest, and you come to an impassable river (or some other obstacle), guarded by a demon.
- The instructions are clear: Withdraw to gather strength —identify with a power (the divine) so its energies merge in you; then call forth the demon to see exactly what you have to deal with.
- Do battle until you are victorious in defeating, befriending, or taming the demon.
- Engage the subdued or tamed demon as an ally to get you across the impassable river; on the other side, take an account, with gratitude, of what you've gained to assist you on the next stage of your journey.

In 1987, Lorna Catford and I adapted these ideas in teaching Michael Ray's course called “Creativity in Business” at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business. The most powerful insight for me lay in understanding the stage of personal empowerment for facing the river and demon, and its parallel in the innovation process – that this tapping into character, including spiritual values, enables us to put our values to work. Suddenly, the basic “confidence curve” of the innovation process became clear, and I saw the power of including the emotional and spiritual as well as the mental steps in a model of innovation.

Box 1: Understanding the Emotional Cycles of the Creative Process

Becoming creative – personally and in our organizations – requires a willingness to feel the fears associated with its risks and uncertainty, the unknown, and then to gain the necessary confidence (the word confidence comes from the Latin, *con + fides*, meaning “with faith”) to tap into our character for solutions. By tapping into our character, we find in ourselves the inner source of acting with faith and courage. If we don't, our creative minds shrink and we come up with only the meekest, most ordinary ideas.

Stage	Journey	Steps
Challenge	"Begin the quest; come to impassable river/demon"	Establish goal and assess the risks.
Focus	"Take on inner power and call forth the demon"	Tap into character and analyze priority issues.
Creative Solution	"Do battle and defeat/tame demon"	Generate options and decide on solution.
Completion	"Cross impassable river and take account of gains"	Implement change and celebrate results.

“The Love Connection”

The goal of all mystical spiritual traditions is to realize our inherent Oneness with the Creator and then give service to others from this

experience of Oneness. We are born of creation and share in its creative powers. From Oneness with God, we co-create with God in this world. Work is the opportunity to deepen and express an experience of Oneness with all beings through selfless service. While the notion of selfless service flies in the face of our normal desires and beliefs about compensation and benefits programs, it is one way to begin experiencing the true nature of God as one's own nature, purified through more and more selflessness. The intrinsic motivator – our inner nature of love – is the very nature of divinity and the very life principles behind all organisms, including organizations.

Thus the big question changes from “How can we show that spiritual values can contribute to the bottom line?” to “How can we bring business into an expanded sense of our spirituality?” Business is a learning ground for deepening our spiritual awareness. With this approach, ask yourself: “How would we conduct ourselves differently at work? How would rewards and motivations be different? How would we communicate differently? How would we work to meet our commitments to our customers? How would we deal with pollution, recycling, and ‘green’ issues? How would we measure the health of a company (would quarterly earnings still be important)?

The answers to these questions might imply incremental or radical changes in how we operate, depending on who we are and our circumstances. The one thing I feel confident about: the answers would lead us to greater prosperity, both materially and spiritually, rather than less.

[1] *Confessions of St. Augustine*
[2] Tolstoy, "What is Art"

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From ***The Inner Edge, Vol. 2 No. 5, October/November 1999***

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