

Spirituality in Workplace

Spirituality in the workplace is no longer an oxymoron. No longer content to tolerate the wide chasm between their deeply held values and the unfair business practices they encounter, people long for harmony between their values and their work. A workplace that is driven only by target achievement will soon become stressful and a place where egos will rule. A startling fact is that the maximum number of books on spirituality in the workplace has not been written in “spiritual” India but in “materialistic” America. In the last ten years, hundreds of books published on spiritual management reflect the yearning for spirituality in the workplace as work becomes the predominant factor in the lives of people.

Breaking the Chinese Wall

In their path-breaking book, **A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America**, Ian Mitroff & Elizabeth Denton quote employees as saying, *“I’m tired of constantly having to park my soul at the door before I go into my organization”*, or that, *“Organizations take up forty to sixty hours of our time. Then they put the burden entirely on us to repair ourselves on our own time so that we can come back for more!”* According to the authors, on the one hand, corporate culture declares spirituality strictly out of bounds; on the other hand, it tries to sneak it in through the backdoor by asking its workers to demonstrate unbridled enthusiasm and energy. Ironically, the word “enthusiasm” is derived from the conjunction of two Latin roots: *ens* which means within and *spiritus* which means god or spirit so literally speaking, the word “enthusiasm” means, *the spirit within*. Hence, not acknowledging spirit in the workplace is like creating a Chinese wall: it is external in the sense that it walls off employees from the deepest sources of creativity & productivity. It is internal in that it creates a split in the souls of its members.

Love & Truth: the Golden Rules of Leadership

Another eminent researcher, Dr Lance Secretan, PhD, rues the fact that his first book on management secrets ran into nearly 700 pages of surveys, charts and case studies. What a waste! he says. Years of experience finally taught him that management can be summed up in two words: Love & Truth. Says Lance, “I believe that inspired leadership boils down to two things: the world would be a better place if we loved each other and told the truth. If I express love will people think I am weak, flaky, without resolve? A leader who has the courage to be **humble, forgiving, loving** and therefore **authentic** is much more effective and inspiring than one who works using fear psychosis. I define love as the place where my heart touches your heart and adds to who you are as a person.” Many

corporate leaders have told Lance one of their parents never told them they loved them. He says such people build their leadership style around the only life lessons they have known- aggression, ambition and goal achievement.

Is Work a Punishment for our Sins?

Gregory Pierce, author of, *10 Ways to Balance your Life on the Job*, says most people are disdainful about work, seeing it as a necessary evil. This concept, he feels is at the root of stress. We all want to be valued as persons and work is a major part of who we are. So when we look down on our work or say that our work is not spiritual we are actually not valuing ourselves. And if we do not value ourselves then we do not value co-workers, customers, employees - treating them all with a subconscious or underlying contempt. **We are called, says Gregory, to communicate God's love in the world and we do so through our actions, including the work we do. We allow work to lose its sacredness when we devalue it and the people who do it.** This attitude allows us to send people into unsafe jobs or make them do unfulfilling tasks. We and not God make our work meaningless for ourselves and our co-workers. So is work a punishment for our sins? asks Pierce humorously. There is no getting away from the fact that the workplace is a complex, crowded, noisy, frustrating, dangerous place. To find God or spirituality at work there needs to be a heightened awareness. Work leaves its mark on us and those around us: children see their mothers leave for work either wearily or happily; teenagers hear parents discuss unemployment or office politics. Wherever we are we need courage and a deep awareness that we are not human beings having a spiritual experience but spiritual beings having a human experience. We re-imagine ourselves and those around us deeply believing that work is sacred and so are the people in our workspace.

God at Work

"*Bidden or Unbidden, God is Present*," read a sign over the famous psychoanalyst, Carl Jung's home in Switzerland. Dr Mahendra Raju, Provident Fund Commissioner, was credited with injecting new energy and work ethics in the laggard Kolkata Regional PF office. Earlier, the general public would be greatly harassed because their provident fund and pension claims would not get processed on time. During Dr Raju's tenure there was a quiet revolution as claims were systematically tracked and disposed within a monthly time-frame and employee absenteeism decreased significantly. After taking over, Dr Raju started conducting a morning meditation session with the entire staff. When asked about the seeming incongruity, he said managers must play a visible role in elevating the consciousness of their team members. The soul connection, he suggested, can be experienced through a meditation session before the day is started. Employees get the powerful message that:

- the management sees a higher purpose in its work
- the management is close to its employees and is not egotistical
- the management is participative
- the management will support the employees in achieving targets without creating stress

An extraordinary thing, said Dr Raju, is that it isn't really the amount of work we do that wears us out. Burn-out has more to do with the absence of enthusiasm and dedication. Blake called this sense of dedication a *firm persuasion*. To have a *firm persuasion* is to make a pilgrimage of our labors, to understand that the consummation of work lies not only in what we have done, but *who we have become* while accomplishing the task. To have a firm persuasion in our work and to motivate our co-workers along these lines is one of the great triumphs of human activity at the workplace. Researchers across the board say that it is the dharma of managers to create a sense of family among its team members. The "home spirit" encourages creativity and interconnectedness, pro-activity and responsibility among members of the "family" at work.

People First Initiative

From a personal standpoint, I take great comfort in having research validated by the principles of Sanatan Dharma. Hence, it was a morale booster to find the enlightened teachings of Swami Ishwarananda of the Chinmaya Mission on Spirituality in the Workplace. According to Swamiji, it is important to focus on people more than on tasks if the right atmosphere is to be achieved at work. Swamiji says that managers may be categorized as either task oriented or person oriented. The task oriented manager tends to focus on competition, efficiency, comparison and conformity. His message to his team thus becomes a litany of: *prove yourself, strive, strain and accomplish*. A person oriented manager on the other hand is a secure, sattvic leader. He understands that people have diverse natures and cannot be treated at par; such a leader is creative, innovative, a solution finder and encourages expression in team members. He exudes love, co-operation, connectedness and compassion to team members and uses these attributes to motivate and accomplish targets. Interestingly, Swami Ishwarananda further qualifies the **sattvic worker as one who is assertive while a rajasic leader is aggressive:**

Training with compassion

Personality Type->	Assertive	Aggressive	Opportunist
Philosophy at work	Detached, dedicated to work	Attached to work and results	Insecure, attached to status and authority
Intention of work	Selfless, Works out of compassion, Quality-conscious	Selfish, Works under compulsion, Quantity-conscious	Ego-centered, Works out of need to survive
Attitude at work	Considerate and always attempts to make everyone participate	Careful and dominates in all aspects of work	Careless and finds fault with others
Risk taking	Runs forward to take risk and protects others	Stays behind and make others take risk.	Never
Distribution of authority	Based on willingness to work and capabilities	Based on contribution to earlier accomplishments	Based on one's own pet preferences.
Relationship with others	Participates in others' life – shares ideas, feelings and emotions	Professional. Never involves in others' emotions & feelings	Prejudiced.
Outcome	Goodwill, Peace-of-mind, Security, Caring and harmonious relationship with others.	Stress, Loneliness, poor health and disharmony	Insecurity, hatred, restlessness

Source: Swami Ishwarananda, Chinmaya Mission

Wise or Otherwise

Peace at work says Swami Ishwarananda is not at all rare if we can:

- work with detachment
- focus on the accomplishment rather than what is accomplished
- demonstrate willingness to learn
- display courage of conviction
- be respectful of authority
- be respectful of others
- discuss rather than condemn or criticize
- seek solitude from time to time
- be confident
- know the limits
- talk about ideas rather than talk about people
- learn to manage worries

Characteristics of Spiritual Organizations

So, if we summarize both the wisdom of Sanatan Dharma and the findings of modern research, these are the hallmarks of a spiritual organization:

- Strong sense of purpose: Organizational members know why the organization exists and what it values
- Focus on individual development: Employees are valuable and need to be nurtured to help them grow. These characteristics also include a sense of job security
- Trust and openness: Organizational member relationships are characterized by mutual trust, honesty and openness
- Employee empowerment: Employees are allowed to make work related decisions that affect them, highlighting a strong sense of delegation of authority
- Toleration of employee expression: The organization culture encourages employees to be themselves and to express their moods and feelings without guilt or fear of reprimand

The mantra, according to Joan Marques, one of the pioneering researchers in spirituality in the workplace is thus this:

*Do all the good you can
In all the ways you can
With all the means you can
To all the people you can
For as long as you can*
