

## **Thoughts on Spirituality at Work**

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When Bob first asked me to share my thoughts on Spirituality at Work I immediately was interested. This is a topic that has fascinated me for the past year and I did have a few thoughts on it. I came home and told Hans about Bob's question and the idea of Spirituality at Work. Hans asked me what I would say about it. My answer was: well, that depends on the time of the day. Suppose I have a staff meeting with my team at the beginning of the day. Then I ask everyone to stand, hold hands and recite a prayer together. If we have a meeting in the afternoon, we also hold hands and sing Kumbaya together. Now *that* is spirituality at work. After a silence Hans just rolled his eyes at me and Hans being Hans he immediately offered some free advice on how I should approach this: scientifically. He said you have to first agree on the definition of "Spirituality" and find out what the dictionary and Wikipedia have to say about it. Actually, I think he was right; there are probably different interpretations of the word spirituality and what they mean to all of us and I want to preface upfront that what I am talking about here is my interpretation of spirituality and mine alone.

When you think about Spirituality at Work your first thought may go to certain professions like doctors, or nurses or priests, people caring for other people. You may not actually think you can be spiritual at work when you're on the payroll of a large for-profit company, whose only interest seems to be long term financial survival. And by the way, that's what I do: I work for a large pharmaceutical company, in what people would call "Corporate America". I lead a team of people, responsible for developing and implementing the pricing strategies worldwide for our products.

So, what is spirituality? Is it closely tied to religious beliefs and faith or does it go beyond that? According to Wikipedia, traditionally, spirituality is contrasted with the material, the temporal and the earthly. And I agree, for me there certainly is

that "higher, non-material sense", but I think it can only be meaningful if you CAN make the connection to your day to day life and move to more wholeness. I have always felt, intuitively, that for me there is no point in seeking spirituality and being a spiritual person if you don't make that "vertical vs horizontal" connection. And since work is such an important part of one's life, I am striving to regard "work" more than a means to provide a living and pay the bills. For me it creates a sense of meaning, of purpose, and a need to continuously keep improving myself, professionally as well as personally and emotionally.

I have to say, after I discovered "spirituality at work" a little miracle took place. When I started applying my own personal approach to spirituality to my day to day actions, I suddenly found that I so much more enjoy my work than I used to, I don't take myself and my work so seriously anymore. And yet, I seem to be successful at it. So what do I mean?

Let me throw out a few thoughts that describe what I mean with spirituality at work in my day to day life at work:

- First of all, my definition of "SUCCESS" has changed over the course of the years. It used to be coupled with traditionally accepted things like position, title, status, salary. Not anymore. For me success is now more centered on: did I give my professional best to solve an issue? How much did I enjoy my day? Did I treat my people and colleagues with respect? Did I give them my 100% attention?
- Secondly I no longer worry about the end result of my work anymore and especially not: is what I am doing benefitting my own position in the company, in other words: "is this a career enhancing move". Just focus on the work you are doing here and now and let the results speak for themselves.
- I ask myself: did I just greet the handyman I met in the hallway in the same way I would greet the CEO?
- I recognize and respect each and everyone's unique qualities and give them the projects that are best aligned with their talents (and you may call this just common sense leadership as well!!)

- I tell myself to listen without judging , which if you really try it, is not always easy, but a great exercise nonetheless
- I also tell myself that "it is not all about me" or my position or whether people approve of me or not. People's opinions are their business, not yours.
- I don't take criticism or even attacks personally anymore. Instead, I even see them as an almost welcome challenge and turn them into a game: how can I transform this negative situation into a positive one? It's really fun actually. If people show criticism they EXPECT you to either defend yourself or deny it. If you don't do that, you'll be surprised of the effects.
- "Corporate America" is a lot about internal politics. This is often associated with negativity. But I think you can also use "politics" in an ethical way and making connections and relationships from a position of mutual respect and not with your own personal best interest as the highest priority.

So, you may wonder: is this really spirituality or just good moral sense? I would agree to some extent, but one difference for me is, that I want to be aware of the choices I am making throughout the day, whether at work or not and that they are deliberate and not "knee jerk" or driven by personal survival or worse, by ego alone. Connecting that higher, non-material vertical dimension (me and God, or the Spirit) with the horizontal dimension (me and my fellow human being) is really what Spirituality at Work is all about for me.