

Spiritual Life in the Land of Cubicles

The sources of the world's largest spiritual traditions emerged during a 700-year period called the Axial Age, from 900 to 200 BCE. Their legacy is still with us in the works of Socrates, Plato, Lao-tzu, Confucius, Mencius, Buddha, Jeremiah, Isaiah and others - they laid the foundations of philosophy, insight and intellect. Each one sought to establish social movements that addressed human suffering rather than create doctrinaire religious institutions. These movements were later called Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, monotheistic Judaism and democracy. The later evolution of this Axial Age birthed Christianity, Islam and Rabbinical Judaism. Again, their goal was to bring forth a compassionate society. The existence of an omnipotent God was irrelevant to how one might lead a moral life.

Those ancient sages preached a spirituality of empathy and compassion; they insisted that people abandon their egotism and greed, violence and unkindness. They believed that if people behaved with kindness and generosity to all they would change the world. They encouraged focusing and guiding the mind with simple precepts and practices whose repetition on a daily basis would gradually and truly change the heart.

Our modern sages have the same message. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, Ram Dass, Matthew Fox, Marianne Williamson, Eckhart Tolle, and others exhort us to slow down, pay attention, be awake to the here and now and act with deep compassion.

Underlying these messages to awaken are 2 simple principles:

- 1 – The Golden Rule – do unto others as you would have them do to you
- 2 – The sacredness of all life

In the best seller [Megatrends 2010](#), Patricia Aburdene identifies 7 trends that are compelling business to recognize the financial power of integrity, trust and moral UU. Spiritual Life in the Land of Cubicles.

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1

leaders. A megatrend is a large over-arching direction that shapes our lives for a decade or more.

1. The Power of Spirituality. 78% of people are seeking more “spirit.” Meditation and yoga are now common activities. We read of senior executives from companies like Redken and Hewlett-Packard transforming their companies.
2. The Dawn of Conscious Capitalism. Top companies and leading CEOs are reinventing free enterprise to honor stakeholders as well as shareholders. Study after study show that corporate good guys make great profits.
3. Leading from the Middle. Charismatic overpaid executives are in more disfavor than ever. Midlevel managers who lead with values, influence and moral authority are making major changes in companies.
4. Spirituality in Business. People speak of faith at work. Eileen Fisher (women's clothing) and Medtronic (pacemakers) have won “Spirit at Work” awards. On a monthly basis San Francisco's Chamber of Commerce hosts a “spiritual” brown bag lunch.
5. Value driven Consumer. People are buying hybrid cars, green building supplies, organic foods – they back up their values with their wallets.
6. The Wave of Conscious Solutions. Sounding like the touchy-feely experiences of decades past, workshops with names like Vision Quests, Meditation, Forgiveness Training, HeartMath are showing up in corporate settings and the results they are tracking show very positive results.
7. The Socially Responsible Investment Boom. Green stock portfolios are popular and profitable.

So where can you find spirit at work? Everywhere.

You might find a chaplain on staff – estimates are that over 5,00 chaplains are working in corporate settings – from pizza parlors in Florida to boardrooms at Intel. They are on hand to help people with counseling issues they bring with them to work, like how do I deal with putting my mother in a nursing home? They help with referrals to community support services. They help with prayer, they officiate at weddings, funerals, and go on hospital visits. In companies with

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2

chaplains turnover has been significantly reduced and morale is higher. In fact companies with spiritual services are presenting them to potential employees as a value added to their benefits package.

There are chaplains on staff at Ford, Intel, American Airlines, Merrill Lynch, Texas Instruments, NASCAR, Proctor and Gamble, Hewlett-Packard, Microsoft, Coca Cola, American Express and more.

In 2000 Ford initiated the Ford Interfaith Network to promote understanding and inclusion among people with different faiths. As a result of their efforts there are now dedicated areas for Muslims to wash before prayers, rooms for meditation, Religion 101 classes to educate about various religions, and more.

Even more of the spiritual activities at work – remain unseen but felt.

More people are meditating, taking time to breathe deeply, react more slowly to perceived insult or injury, and being gently still as we heard of Paulien's reactions to criticism. They are being more generous, going beyond their job description to help a customer or a fellow employee whether in their own department or another. They are initiating volunteer projects, raising money for charities. They are donating their accumulated sick time to others who need extended sick leave. And like George, they are speaking up for the moral choice when injustice and harm is being done.

The search for morals and meaning at work and the desire to experience the peace and purpose of the Sacred is the search for "inner" truths, alive in the hearts of millions. The great paradox here is that by going deeper inside our own hearts our attention actually shifts away from preoccupation with ourselves and allows us to focus on the life around us. We wake up to the here and the now.

We all make changes based on new values and/or necessity – whether economic, healthwise or any other basis that becomes important. I started meditating in earnest when I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. The necessity

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of making every moment count in terms of appreciating the life I have and bringing compassion to my suffering changed me from the inside out. Now that I am cancer free I still use daily practices to ground me and light my way.

Most people who use spiritual practices don't need science or research to convince them of the benefits of living in a heart-centered way. So why measure the results at work? Because our society values what it counts. From the use of biofeedback or the use of auditory stimulation to manipulate our brains, new scientific and spiritual technologies help confirm what the sages have known all along. The benefits of applying the guiding principles of a spiritual life – living with compassion, gratitude and generosity – are evident to anyone who uses them.

I know I am preaching to the choir here – UU's seven principles that they covenant to affirm and promote:

- ☉ the inherent worth and dignity of every person
- ☉ justice, equity, compassion in human relations
- ☉ acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth
- ☉ free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- ☉ the right of conscience and use of democratic process
- ☉ goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all
- ☉ respect for the interdependent web of all existence

fully exemplify the precepts and practices that the ancient sages believed would change the world.

As Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

When we live a compassionate life, with an open heart, a listening heart, when we value our moment to moment connection with each other and the wholeness of life -- work becomes our spiritual practice.

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Amen.

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