

The Spiritual Side of Human Capital

After reading “*A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America*” and “*The New Bottom Line, Bring Heart & Soul to Business*”, I was immediately struck with a sense of comfort. I experienced the comfort of knowing that the issue of spirituality in the workplace had finally begun to be recognized as a valid and valuable component of successful business operations and sustainability of human capital. For me, they redirected the thinking on how people approach working with the whole person, the one that comes to work each day. More specifically, in these readings I was struck with the awareness and the acceptance, around the spiritual relevance of human performance.

It has been my experience, that to talk about spirituality, particularly in a business setting, is a taboo. It requires political savvy, extraordinary alertness, and exquisite timing to carry on a conversation on this topic. Why, because, not everyone is ready to hear about or talk about the spiritual aspects of them themselves. And for good reason. Long ago if you acted or alluded to, believing something spiritually different than what you were expected to believe, you would have been burned at the stake. There was also a time when anyone caught talking outside the parameters of church or places of worship about new beliefs, new age thinking or new moons, were considered irreverent hippies or sacrilegious freaks. Typically people acknowledge that spirituality had its place, and it was in a holy place of God or in a foxhole. Spirituality did not have its place in business or in a meeting.

Through the years I have been personally challenged by how I could appropriately address the issue of spirituality in business. In my quest for learning, I became president of an advisory board for a non-profit organization called Spirit In Business. The group offered monthly programs and resources to anyone interested in attending. I thought, by ‘hanging out’ with business professional interested in this topic, I could understand the role spirituality played in organizations.

I wanted desperately to understand how to speak of ‘spirituality’ without having people run away or shut down when the very mention of the topic came up. Additionally, I chose to enter Duke Divinity School to study, practice and experience the role of serving as a hospital chaplain. I wanted to better

understand how the concept of spirituality affected people's lives both in business and non business setting.

As I assumed the role of business consultant, facilitator and chaplain, I began to talk with people more openly about spirituality. I regularly ask about the status of their soul, their spirit and their personal comfort within the organization they worked. Each person I spoke with, consistently and willingly talked about their spirit as an inner strength or inner power from which they could draw from. The spiritual side of their being managed their entire life and was critical to their existence.

I noticed the concept and awareness of spirituality came more easily to those people in crisis or who have experienced crisis. They were the people who were more open to accessing the inner strength of their spirit out of the necessity to cope. It was very evident to me, that people placed great importance on their inner power and their natural resource of their spirituality, when it came time to manage the more difficult times of their lives.

I began to accept that people recognize that there was a spiritual part of them. They just weren't comfortable talking about it the work environment. Consequently their work environment began to lose its spirit.

I believe one reason for this, is the confusion over religion and spirituality. I found the S- word "spirituality" was often confused with the R-word "religion". I would say there are fundamental differences between religion and spirituality. Religion is external- seeking outward expression. Religion is about; ceremonies, rites, scriptures, methods for worship and belonging to a group. Spirituality is internal- operating from an inner presence. Spirituality is about; having personal awareness, having direction of purpose, practicing universal values, extending help to others and experiencing inner happiness. Spirituality is the internal power in people and organizations that generate the principles and practices of; achieving a sense of worth, creating direction of purpose, offering clarity of judgment, operating with integrity, providing compassion, openness, and collaboration.

For business leaders to promote religious concepts at work can be dangerous. The legal department might show up at your door reciting excerpts from the constitution, employee rights and court dates. What the leaders I work with are doing, is making a shift to use more spiritual approaches in dealing with employee needs. I am experiencing more businesses offering services to enhance interpersonal relationships, looking for ways to help employees balance

life and work issues and providing methods to promote employee wellness. Good business practices are beginning to recognize the importance being concerned with the well-being of their human capital as well as their financial capital. Business leaders are beginning to looking at their's and their employee's spirituality as part of business even if they don't use those terms.

For me spirituality refers to the components of life that incorporate intelligence, personality, self-consciousness, will and methods for nurturing the spirit within you. It is about how to bring intentionality to work. What I found myself doing in my work to address the spiritual need of organizations was to create opportunities for employees to have their spiritual side come out and be present. Realizing that work can coat and suffocate the internal essence of a person, I began to help clients find opportunities to retrieve their true potential. If you don't recognize the spiritual part of your person you have tremendously underutilized an asset in yourself and your organization.

I found employees and businesses are beginning to realize that technology cannot solve all business problems. The spiritual principles of loyalty, openness, honesty and collaboration are where leaders are focusing their efforts to enhance work environments and increase performance. Facilitators and facilitative leaders help with this process.

One of the issues that get in way of spirit, is ego. Employees and organizations can have big egos that are not healthy. Being open and practicing the human traits of humbleness, compassion and honesty help move mind sets towards spirituality and towards working from the heart. When a person moves past protecting their inner self and working from their natural internal power, their spirit becomes alive and at peace to work on anything they want and are moved to work on.

The purpose of emphasizing spirituality in the workplace, for me as a consultant and facilitator, was to increase awareness of the universal principles that help people work together more peacefully and productively. While president of 'Spirit In Business', and after many hours of facilitating meetings to reach consensus on the principles we would profess, we created the following list of components for leaders and facilitators to use in striving towards a more spiritual work environment. They include:

1. Possessing freedom to express one's self honestly and openness

° establishing environments for employees to contribute their wisdom and experience for feeling more connected to the organization.

2. Integrating congruency between the inner person and outer environment.

° attempting to understand what the employee needs and how they can best work in their surroundings.

3. Respecting others and valuing their differences, strengths and weaknesses

° honoring people's perspectives in all situations, not only when it is easy to do.

4. Being considerate of other's needs and desires

° recognizing that people rarely do things for your reasons. When you understand the issues you can work towards mutual gain.

5. Promoting an emphasis on growth and learning

° understanding that an organization that is stagnant soon smells and acts like a swamp.

6. Accepting ownership for one's personal and professional styles

° accepting accountability and knowing that blaming directs the energy on destruction.

7. Encouraging flexible attitudes

° knowing "if you always do what you've always done then you'll always get what you've always got."

8. Allowing laughter, joy and playfulness to be present in your day

° increasing creativity, productivity, morale, satisfaction and retention with a more relaxed attitude.

9. Recognizing the benefits of emotional and intellectual components in life

° allowing and valuing people to work from both their heart and their head, both are necessary for attaining real value and results.

10. Creating a physical environment conducive to performance (privacy, lighting, air quality)

° honoring the physical, mental and spiritual components of your body which are sensitive to their surrounding. When you enhance the environment you enhance the person.

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