

## **Finding spirituality at work**

### **Saint Mary's program aims to help people find a new kind of meaning in their jobs**

By David Swick

Work, for many people, has no connection to what they love. It has little to do with family or friends, nothing to do with making the world a better place, and does not allow them to express themselves or their deepest beliefs.

No wonder millions of Canadians would rather be anywhere but at work.

This fascinates and disturbs Cathy Driscoll. She and some Saint Mary's University colleagues are working to understand this situation - and change it. SMU has just officially approved a Centre for Work and Spirituality. It will be the first academic-based centre for work and spirituality in the country.

"For me, a big part of spirituality is feeling connected," says Driscoll, an associate professor of management in SMU's School of Business. "People have different ideas about what we're connected to. But if in your work you are connected to people, and the natural environment, and future generations, and thinking we are part of a bigger whole ... you are going to find (meaning at work)."

This often isn't the case now.

"It's a job, a paycheque," Driscoll said. "Or it's all about getting to the next level, the next job. It's not living in the here and now. It's not about enjoying your work and finding meaning in what you're doing."

The centre will promote the idea of spirituality in the workplace. It will teach, publish, conduct research and hold conferences. Through relationships with universities all over the region, it aims to make Atlantic Canada a leader in the field.

And the field is quickly growing. Spirituality in work is a major trend in the U.S. More than 140 books have been published on the subject.

Sometimes it is narrowly defined, aiming to serve people of one faith, or convert others to that faith. A new bank in Minnesota, for example, is primarily geared to people of one religious denomination.

The SMU Spirituality and Work Centre takes a broader view, says David Sable. A professor in the department of religion, he's one of 14 SMU faculty who helped the project achieve university approval. He says the centre will have "due respect for people who have certainty in belief, but will also help other individuals be reflective and decide issues for themselves."

Getting our minds out of the routine way we look at things can make a tremendous difference, Sable said. He's already had success with a

transformative learning program, which encourages students to be reflective, and so find meaning in their studies.

"It enables people to take a view greater than themselves, and so get a perspective not just of self-interest," he said. "To me, that's key in spirituality."

Not everyone is expected to embrace the centre. According to Driscoll, criticisms come in four different kinds.

"You have the anti-religion, the idea that religion has no place in business. You also have religious resistance: people who feel that this is spirituality lite, and has no connection to a higher being or anything sacred.

"Then there are people who feel it's too airy-fairy, too fluffy. Still others feel you are only bringing spirituality into the workplace to manipulate employees and increase profit.

"Some businesspeople will say, 'Wow, this is going to help me make more money.' You'll always have that interest. But in the business community there are also a lot of people who are setting standards higher in terms of ethical conduct.

"There are people who are trying to do business in a better, more humane, more sustainable way."

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Spirituality centre is Canadian first

'Nothing evangelical': Saint Mary's University follows international trend

Laura Fowlie

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When a board meeting in Halifax opened with a prayer, former advertising executive David Hawkins was not surprised. While not all companies feel comfortable in expressing their spiritual principles in such an overt way, he says many others are "quietly praying for alignment between their humanistic feelings and their corporate work."

"Spirituality at work is a big topic, and one that seems to be a lot easier to have the conversation about today than it was 10 or 20 years ago," Mr. Hawkins says. "In an increasingly liberal, humanistic society, you are seeing individuals who really want to bring their whole being to work, including their spirituality. They also want others to be able to express their spirituality in appropriate ways -- without being evangelical about it."

Spirituality at work, which can take on many forms from meditation to bereavement programs, is rapidly gaining currency among business leaders, consultants and academics, partly as a response to the ethical concerns that have surfaced in the wake of corporate governance scandals.

While companies for years have created mission statements, credos and codes of conduct to express their corporate ideals, consultants say there is a difference between saying it and really meaning it. Where corporate spirituality exists, they say, companies make a subtle shift from being exclusively bottom-line-driven to simultaneously pursuing profit and a higher set of values.

This fall, the Frank H. Sobey Faculty of Commerce at Saint Mary's University in Halifax became the first business school in Canada to launch a full-fledged centre devoted to the teaching and study of spirituality at work. Saint Mary's is following the example of similar centres that have sprung up in the United States, and overseas, most notably at Harvard Business School.

Rather than religious dogma and theology, spirituality at work is about "creating better workplaces," says Allan Miciak, dean of Saint Mary's business school.

"The people issues of business are becoming more and more the most complex issues, and there is a growing recognition

that paying attention to the people issues has a really big payoff," Dr. Miciak says. "I admit, spirituality in the workplace is a bit on the fringe, but we are trying to bring some academic rigor to a very new, emerging topic in business."

The surge in interest around spirituality at work is, in large part, a function of basic demographics, says Martin Rutte, co-author of *Chicken Soup for the Soul at Work* and a speaker at a Saint Mary's conference on the topic. At a time when Baby Boomers are hitting mid-life and beginning to question their true purpose and legacy, the corporate world has offered them fewer answers than ever, he says.

"Over the past several years, there have been dramatic changes in the world of work, such as corporate downsizing, that have forced people to do more with less, and technologies that have replaced people," Mr. Rutte says. "These things have broken the feeling of security that came with work and changed people's attitudes about their jobs."

The result, Mr. Rutte says, is "fertile ground" for a search for greater meaning at work. He says corporations would be wise to support the kind of spiritual inquiry that many of their workers are demanding.

"The benefits can be quite astounding," Mr. Rutte says. "Aside from offering people a sense of authenticity, [so] that they can truly be themselves at work, a more spiritual workplace can be very beneficial from a mental and physical health perspective."

Fostering a more spiritual, team-oriented workplace can have a direct impact on the bottom line, says Michael Stephen, a career coach and the former chairman of insurance and financial services firm Aetna International. After he began meditating more than 30 years ago, Mr. Stephen transformed himself from an authoritarian executive to a more inclusive, spiritual leader who focused on developing a "team spirit" within the organization.

"Statistics tell us that people in the workplace typically expend about 60% of their talent and ability at work," says Mr. Stephen, who has also written a book about spirituality at work. "I found that when people are trusted with more responsibility, and are given more accountability, they bring more of that talent and ability to their roles."

Spirituality in the workplace does not include a heavy focus on religion or ritual, consultants say. Because many people carry a fear of dogma or "childhood baggage" about religion, it is important that

spirituality initiatives remain voluntary and non-threatening, Mr. Rutte says. As a result, many initiatives borrow from religion, but avoid religious language or ritual.

Dr. David Sable, one of the speakers at the Saint Mary's conference, for example, led workshop participants through an exercise designed to promote self-discovery through a form of meditation. The exercise, borrowed from Buddhist tradition, asked participants to think beyond their knee-jerk response to a question or statement, and to "engage others in genuine and creative dialogue."

Participants completed several minutes of breathing exercises, mulled the question over for several more, and finally responded in a thoughtful manner, with "fresh language" that carried no connotation or hidden meaning. In the fast-paced world of business, finding the time required to implement such exercises can be difficult, Dr. Sable admits.

"It's true that in the beginning, it takes some time to put into practice," says Dr. Sable, who points out that most major religious traditions employ some method of contemplation. "There may be a lot of people who say they don't have time for it, but when you are looking at business issues from the whole, from the big picture, it may just be the most efficient way to make a decision."

Most consultants say spirituality does not need to come as a grand gesture to have an impact on the organization. For example, before he sold his Moncton-based advertising business, Mr. Hawkins kept a paperweight on his desk with the word "kindness," a symbol of his commitment to "giving permission for people to bring their humanity to work."

"The only barrier to spirituality is when you wrap it in religious wrapping paper," he says. "Love and respect are universal concepts. As a manager, I took the position that everyone had access to infinite intelligence, goodness, creativity and energy. Sometimes that can be hard to follow, but it's well worth it."  
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## **As U.S. Grows More Spiritually Diverse, the Debate About Faith in Workplace Rages**

**By Emily Crawford**  
*Journal Staff Writer*

Imagine a prayer or meditation room at your workplace. Imagine feeling comfortable having a Bible or Quran on your desk. Imagine your job as a place where your spirit was fulfilled. As our workplaces become more ethnically diverse and more Americans look for spiritual meaning in their lives and jobs, religion at the office has become an important social issue.

In our predominantly Christian nation, Muslim employees may not appreciate an invitation to the annual company Christmas party. Jewish employees may struggle to attend High Holy Days services while their Christian co-workers have Dec. 24-Jan. 2 off without having to make a special request. Others may question why they can only be spiritual after work.

Various individuals and organizations are seizing the challenge to address the complications and effects religion has on the workplace.

Organizations like the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, in New York City, help companies reduce religious bias in the workplace. Companies might do this by providing a room for Muslims to pray five times a day, or having speakers give informative talks about different religions, said Joyce Dubensky, the executive director of the center.

The Renaissance Lawyer Society supports a "more visionary, humanistic approach to the law" that is not specifically spiritual, but is supportive of attorneys who want to practice a more holistic form of law. Donna Boris, a holistic lawyer and a former president of the group, discusses spiritual practices and beliefs with her clients.

Martin Rutte, an author and management consultant in Santa Fe, believes that spirituality and work are not mutually exclusive.

Rutte's agenda is not to proselytize, but to make a conversation about spirituality "as normal as paper clips at work." He plans to publish his book, "The Work of Humanity," later this year.

The changing demographics of our country are helping to drive the small yet growing movement of addressing religious and spiritual issues in the workplace.

Changing immigration patterns and an aging, largely Christian workforce have changed the makeup of the American labor pool, said Georgette Bennett, the president of the Tanenbaum Center. In recent years, more immigrants are entering the United States from countries whose primary religion is not Christianity, she said.

"Religious bias and accommodation is the next big civil-rights issue," Bennett said. "And it's going to get bigger and bigger because it is demographically driven."

### **'A bottom-line issue'**

A nationwide study conducted by the group showed that 66 percent of the employed persons surveyed felt there was some kind of religious bias or discrimination at their job. Nearly half of those said the bias affected their performance and 45 percent of those

reporting discrimination said they had thought about changing jobs.

By allowing religious diversity on the job, companies will have more satisfied and more productive employees, Dubensky said.

"This really is a bottom-line issue for companies. Our work is really much more concrete" than just making employees happy, Dubensky said.

Rutte believes that companies should allow their employees to express themselves spiritually, whatever their religion.

Rutte is the best-selling co-author of "Chicken Soup for the Soul at Work," and the impetus behind the new Centre for Spirituality and the Workplace at the Sobey School of Business at St. Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The center's goal is to nourish and foster spirituality in the workplace, and to address the "very real ethical and spiritual problems for organizations and their employees."

Rutte's philosophy on work and spirituality is one that caters to both individuals and corporations: both employees and employers will be more successful and generally more satisfied if their souls or spirits are nourished at work.

### **'Profound epiphany'**

Rutte's drive to bring a sense of soul into the hard world of business stems from his own experience.

In 1986, he was a successful management consultant in Toronto with his own business. His life was good on all counts, but he fell into a "funk" that seemed causeless. He decided to visit an Augustinian monastery where he had a "profound epiphany experience." He heard a voice that told him that the issue was about God, he said in an interview at his home in Eldorado.

At first, most of his close associates, friends and clients who he shared his experience with told him he would lose his reputation and business if he brought up the topic of spirituality with business clients who consulted him. They encouraged him to use terms like "ethics" or "integrity." But Rutte didn't want to hide behind "code words," he said.

Instead, he offered his clients the option of discussing their spirituality and how it might fit into their work. Rutte is Jewish but in no way pushes his own personal faith or any other. Many people, he said, are terrified of proselytizers, and fear conversations about religion or spirituality.

His only agenda is to make a conversation about faith topics "OK to talk about," he said.

### **'Feed the soul' at work**

For Rutte, spirituality at work could be a prayer group, or it could be someone building a small altar on their desk. Spiritual or religious symbols, like having a Bible next to one's Yellow Pages, should not be offensive, he said. Allowing people to be "authentic" at work, whether they are Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu or any other faith makes for happier and more productive employees, which in turn makes for a more profitably company, Rutte said.

"People are desperate for something to feed the soul," Rutte said. "People are looking for a sense of fulfillment," they want to say, "This is a part of me that can be fulfilled at work."

Rutte points to the 1990s as the beginning of a "spiritual hunger" on the part of the American worker. Corporate downsizing, the great leaps of technology that made many

jobs obsolete, and an aging baby boomer population facing mortality, all accelerated a need for a greater inner or spiritual security, he said.

### **Find a higher meaning**

For some, job dissatisfaction is the catalyst for bringing higher meaning to the job.

For years, Boris, a civil lawyer in San Diego, felt like she had to live two lives, one as a lawyer, and one as a spiritual human being. But her increasing dissatisfaction with law practice led her to try to apply universal spiritual principals to her work. Boris is now on the board of directors of the popular Renaissance Lawyer Society, formed in 2000, which has a large networking Web site at [www.renaissancelawyer.com](http://www.renaissancelawyer.com).

Like Rutte, Boris doesn't subscribe to a particular type of spirituality with her clients and does not proselytize. But if her client is willing, Boris will attempt to deal with their case in a holistic way. She does this by explaining how various legal options like litigation might impact the client's family life and lifestyle. Boris tries to be in touch with her own emotions, something many lawyers are taught not to do, she said.

Not all of her clients are open to the topic, so she tailors her language to their comfort level. In some cases, she teaches her clients breathing techniques to help calm them before they testify in court, she said.

Overall, Boris believes that lawyers and other professionals need reminders of why they are doing their jobs in the first place. A picture, a statue, a poem in the office might be sufficient, she said. For her, spirituality helps her to "look for the meaning and connection, what is common to all people."

That doesn't mean "that you just roll over," Boris said. "There are times when litigation may be the best course."

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## **“Spiritualität” in Kanada und den USA: Die Eröffnung des “Research Center for Spirituality and the Workplace” an der Sobey School of Business der Saint Mary’s University, Halifax, Canada**

Spiritualität am Arbeitsplatz ist in den USA und nun auch in Kanada ein geläufiges Thema. Der Begriff und das Thema „Spiritualität“ werden hier offen angesprochen und erforscht. Berührungsängste, wie sie auch dort existierten, scheinen von diesen öffentlichen Institutionen überwunden worden zu sein, die damit zu mutigen Vorreitern und Pionieren in einem unter der Hand schon längst weit verbreiteten Themenbereich werden.

Seit mehr als einem Jahr arbeiten Professoren und Studenten der Universität Saint Mary’s in Halifax der Fachbereiche Management, Wirtschaft und Religionswissenschaften zusammen mit Martin Rutte, President der Beratungsfirma Livelihood, Santa Fe daran, die Fachabteilung “Spirituality and the Workplace” an der Business-Universität Saint Mary’s in Halifax, Kanada, zu installieren. Martin Rutte dürfte einigen von Ihnen noch in Erinnerung sein, da er im Oktober 2001 auf Einladung von Sabine Bredemeyer einen Workshop zum Thema „Storytelling“ geleitet hat, in dem er das Thema Spiritualität auch explizit ansprach.

Am 23. Juni findet nun die offizielle Einweihung statt. Die Saint Mary’s Universität ist die erste in Kanada, die dieses Thema offiziell benennt. Die Zielsetzung dieses Forschungszentrums ist es, Katalysator zur Erforschung des Themas Spirituality and the Workplace zu sein, Lehrinhalte zu erarbeiten und diesen Themenbereich weiter zu entwickeln. Dies soll durch die fächerübergreifende Kooperation aller Disziplinen erfolgen. Das Zentrum soll das Konzept der Spiritualität am Arbeitsplatz fördern, unterstützen und nähren. Mit dieser Einrichtung soll Kanada eine führende Rolle in diesem Bereich übernehmen. In ihrem Vorschlag an den Senat schreiben die Initiatoren: „For puposes of the Centre, spirituality will not have a fixed definition, but rather be seen as an open-ended inquiry. Although spirituality has multiple meanings, there are themes <http://www.smu.ca/academic/sobey/welcome.html> in common to many wisdom- and faith-based traditions”. (Für die Ziele des Zentrums wird Spiritualität keine festgelegte Definition haben sondern eher Gegenstand einer offenen Untersuchung sein. Obwohl Spiritualität multiple Bedeutungen hat, sind Gemeinsamkeiten in vielen Weisheits- und religiöse Traditionen zu finden).

Das Zentrum wird mit anderen, in den USA ansässigen Forschungszentren zusammenarbeiten, die dieses Thema ebenfalls erforschen. Darunter „The Center for Faith and Culture”, Yale University; „The Center for Spirit at Work“, University of New Heaven; “The Center for Meaning and Work”, Washington, D.C.; “The Institute for Spirituality and Organizational Leadership”, University of Santa Clare, Californien und andere internationale Forschungszentren.

