

Spirituality in the Workplace – An Emerging Trend

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As older, experienced folks might say, “There is something afoot on the job these days.” The evidence is all around us here in Atlantic Canada and in the rest of the world.

Last summer the School of Business Administration at U.P.E.I. successfully conducted the first ever, in Canada, credit course in Spirituality in Business.

In June of this year, after two years of development and planning, Saint Mary's University in Halifax launched a new “Centre for Spirituality in the Workplace”. According to Dr. Cathy Driscoll, the Centre's Founding Executive Director, and an Associate Professor at the Sobey School of Business at Saint Mary's, the Centre “seeks to positively and strategically influence the conversation and accomplishments about spirituality and the workplace globally.” The Centre backs up its claim to global action with active and engaged people from six different continents who have volunteered to be part of the Board of Directors, Board of Advisors, and Academic Advisory Board.

Many seek to understand what is behind this new interest in spirituality at work. Clearly the nature and meaning of work is undergoing a profound evolution. Many factors are at play including massive corporate downsizing, increasing globalization, a diminishing sense of security around one's work. Mega-realities like these can be the source of alienation for individual workers who see themselves as powerless in their presence. The result is often emotionally experienced as fear, anxiety, suffering, and a loss of a clear sense of self worth. The “spirituality at work” movement is seen by many as a way to address these realities.

Martin Rutte, a co-author of *Chicken Soup for the Soul at Work* has worked in this field for over 20 years. He sees it as a “sense of dis-spiritedness in individuals and in the overall workplace. The spirit has been shut down. It can't express itself fully. There is a sense of dis-engagement. It may not be completely quantifiable, but people can feel the lack of spirit in a workplace. They do know when it's diminished.”

The same folk who sense something afoot might also be heard to say that “It's an ill wind that doesn't blow some good.”

It is possible to think about the changes in the world of work and see an immensely positive picture with enormous potential for business and society. Many achieve this positive view by trying to look through spiritual eyes.

In the spiritual view, real security comes from a connection to that which is truly secure—the Spirit. We are in the process of moving from dependent children at work, with the parental company looking after us, to really coming into our full, responsible Selfhood. From this new reality we begin exploring and expressing more of our true spiritual selves. People have a compelling inner longing for spiritual fulfillment.

What Is Spirituality?

Many people who ask the question "What is spirituality?" do so seeking an answer, a dogmatic response with which they can agree or disagree, accept or reject. While dogma can spawn or support a spiritual view, others find it more helpful to consider spirituality, not as an answer, but as an inquiry, an on-going question. This kind of approach encourages the individual to search for his/her own truth.

A reflective inquiry encourages you to look more deeply. It allows you to search for what's true for you, and in so doing, deepen your own experience. But ultimately, what moving from answer to question does is make it safe and permissible to explore this "territory" in a way that is useful. What is spirituality for you? Where is spirit or spirituality shut down in your workplace? Where is it flourishing? Explore these kinds of questions, at work, for yourself, your relationships, your division and your company. And in this questioning, in this delving into, notice the deepening of your own experience of spirituality at work.

Remember, work is an act of creation.

Spirituality in the Workplace

What would a more spiritual workplace mean for people? It would mean that work would move from merely being a place to get enough money to survive, from just earning our daily bread, to being a place of "livelihood." When Martin Rutte speaks of "livelihood" he means a place where we both survive and are fully alive. We are alive in that our Spirit fully expresses itself and that expression contributes to others allowing their spirits to be nourished and to flourish.

There are many benefits of more spirituality in the workplace, some of which are:

- People are more in touch with the Source of creativity and therefore more creative and innovative.
- Increased authenticity and genuineness in communication.
- A greater sense of solid teamwork based on trust.
- Increased ethical and moral behavior.
- Increased sense of self-fulfillment, contentment and a deeper sense of belonging.

Opening Up the Workplace to Spirituality

In most businesses today spirit and spirituality aren't talked about. The first thing that needs to happen is to make it safe and permissible to talk about it, if people choose. It needs to be as normal and as natural as the other conversations we have at work: about profitability, about new products, about research, about accounting, about career, about personal issues and so on. Our first step then is to open it up.

And we do this simply by beginning. Talk to those you trust, talk to others in business, talk to your colleagues, but do begin to talk about it. Then look for ways, programs, initiatives which engage you and others. There may be an initial fear, but after a while the momentum will be unstoppable.

An Invitation

The next phase of the evolution of work has begun. Spirituality is now being openly recognized as an integral part of work. If this is something that speaks to you, that you want more of in your workplace, step into the arena. You may be challenged, you may be criticized. It doesn't matter. What is important is what is true for you. We invite you to jump in.

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