

Spirituality in the Workplace

There is a new age (not to be confused with New Age) approaching. We have had the industrial age and the information age - we are now in the knowledge age. But it is the next one for which we now need to prepare – the wisdom age. We can define wisdom as a way of being – an in-depth understanding, empathy and compassion for the human experience and our own maturation process. Acquiring wisdom is about becoming conscious.

Our consciousness needs to be developed on all levels: the physical, the mental, the emotional and the spiritual. Of these, the most basic is the physical. Our bodies need nourishment or they will die. Hunger pangs signal to us that something is needed for our body to be sustained and to grow. Sometimes, if we are hungry we can't concentrate – our mental powers are reduced. Our mental capacity became 'fed' by education and training and the benefits in contribution in the workplace were soon recognised. Not only did firms want our bodies to function, they wanted us to think as well. But that wasn't enough. People were not only expected to think – they were needed to relate to each other also. Pretty soon, emotional intelligence appeared as a pre-requisite for successful and effective people.

But yet people are still hungry - but it is not their bodies which are hungry – it is their spirits. The hunger of the spirit is just as real and just as compelling as the hunger of the body. Like the body, the growth of the human spirit towards full maturation is a natural process. When something is needed, we feel it. When it is time for a new phase, it begins to happen. But, unlike the body, the answer is not to feed it by putting something into it but by discovering new dimensions inside ourselves. Feeding the spirit is about providing the opportunity for real and deep contact with ourselves.

So where does the workplace come in? In our drive to achieve ever more but with less time and fewer resources we have entered into an unending cycle of ceaseless activity. We have become 'doing' machines and left no time for 'being' much less 'becoming'. We have lost sight of what is ultimately important and meaningful in our lives because in order to connect with that we need to slow down and listen quietly to our hearts speaking. The natural world is in perfect rhythm of doing and not doing, going through fallow seasons as well as productive ones, periods of stability as well as transition.

This may seem inconvenient for the mechanical world of today's organisations, but what if we could learn to treat ourselves and others more in keeping with the organic laws of growth and creation? What would it be like to trust the natural progress of our maturation? Could it be that so many of us get professionally dried up, void of real vitality and enthusiasm, because we have failed to hear an inner call for some essential nourishment that cannot be had through constant activity? *

There is a growing interest in the concept of spirituality not only in society but in the business world. Spirituality is not an answer to anything – it is the question we ask which will lead individuals to find their own answers.

Spirituality is concerned with an adventure, an enquiry into true self. Spirituality is concerned with a state beyond the physical senses, with living in the mystery. Spirituality is a way of life – it is tuning in to the deepest part of ourselves where our nourishment lies. It is from within that our own spirits will be fed.

Many individuals are now seeking to access that hidden part of themselves from where they sense their true fulfilment will come. They do it in their own time i.e. the time they are not at work. But that time is getting less and less, and when not at work we are tired or we have our family commitments to attend to.

Carol Anderson, as part of her Master's thesis in 1998 on 'The Role of Forgiveness and Healing in Organisational Change' wrote:

Through those (2000) dialogues, I have made several basic observations about human beings and work. The first is that most people, like myself, want to make a positive contribution in the world – to use their unique talents and creativity to contribute to a larger purpose that has substance and worth. Second, they want to be seen for who they are at their core and appreciated for that. Third, they long to make meaningful contact with those around them and to feel they belong to a community doing its part to make the earth a better place and that they matter in this effort.

Organisations who have long been talking about wanting their employees to bring their 'whole self' to work, are realising that in spite of their dependant care support packages, in spite of their work/life initiatives, in spite of their employee assistance programmes – they are not providing the real sustenance that employees need – they are not feeding their spirits. They are also realising that unless they do this, creativity will dry up, stress levels will rise, motivation will decrease, exit levels will remain high and sickness absence will increase.

**The Soul's Hunger by Ken Macher written for Business Spirit Journal Online.*

Some organisations are already addressing this. They are realising that feeding the spirit is about creating an abundant life. It is **not** about achieving our goals, making more money, becoming better managers, finding ways to get others to do what we want, or even becoming happier – although all these might result. Abundant life is about living fully in each moment, paying attention to what is happening in and around us, understanding what our life is about, and seeking to learn how we can make a difference within the larger communities of which we are a part.

The organisation of the future will allow individuals the space to begin their own exploration of the maturation within themselves, to connect with the deepest part of themselves, and to find the sustenance within themselves to feed their spirits. And as they grow – so will their contribution to the business.

