

Can spirituality and business coexist?

Is it possible to be spiritual and yet be successful in business? If the sale of business books on spirituality and the number of courses on this subject in top business schools are an indication, a deeper process of inquiry has certainly begun

By William C Miller

A vision of cohabitation of business and spirituality naturally invokes skepticism, in this case, of two kinds. Some people are positive about business, but skeptical about spirituality. They would say things like, "Business and spirituality just don't mix." Some people are positive about spirituality and skeptical about business. They say things like, "You can't really be spiritual if you are involved in business."

But this skepticism, from a spiritual perspective, is welcome and it only invites a deeper inquiry into the relationship between the two. For some people, it seems impossible to bring these two worlds together. I am reminded of a wonderful passage from *Alice in Wonderland*. Alice says, "One can't believe impossible things." The queen says, "I dare say you haven't had much practice. When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why sometimes I believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

Is it really impossible to be spiritual and be successful in business? Janiece Webb, senior vice president with Motorola, certainly doesn't believe so, for she recently told me: I do believe strongly in leading in a spiritual way. It keeps you from doing many short-term tactical actions that are often wrong for the business and the people. It also gives you

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immense courage to stand tall against politics. Being a spiritual leader can sometimes be lonely, but you feel happy and grounded inside. You also embrace your own humanness and imperfection. And, it keeps you humble as a leader and yet still strong.

In the past decade, three questions have emerged in an ever-widening dialogue about spirituality and business. The first is, "How can we bring spiritual values into business?" This holds business as the context with the attempt to fit spiritual values into it. The second question is, "How can we integrate spirituality and business?" This has spirituality and business as equal playing fields with an attempt to bring a balance or overlap between them. The third is, "How can we unfold business from a spiritual context?" This has spirituality as the

context, or the framework, in which we will look at how a business can then grow and unfold.

I find the third question to be most expansive, in mind, heart and soul. It brings about the widest and deepest creative answers. It also includes the two other questions in its scope. These questions in this ever-widening dialogue are most timely today because we live in a world in which our life goals are seriously out of balance. We find ourselves pursuing wealth without harmony with creation, creating a condition of global hyper-competition and global greed.

And, we are pursuing our desires, but without spiritual fulfillment, creating a condition of global consumerism and global stress.

There's also a spiritual awakening in business. Consulting firms such as McKinsey are rolling out spiritually-based training programs and finding that they have a significant, positive effect on productivity, employee retention and even market share.

Business books on spirituality in business are the fastest growing segment of the business book industry. And the stories about CEO's, show that the revolution has started even at the very top.

Ricardo Levy, CEO of Catalytics, Inc., has recently written that executive corporate leadership is a vocation that has equal dignity and equal critical societal impact to that of a priest or teacher. Spirituality has a very important role in the professional life of a business leader. And spirituality goes far beyond the time set aside for religious practice. That spirituality is inside of me, that spirituality is the compass in everything I do.

Is it a bold thing to say that executive corporate leadership is a vocation with equal dignity to that of a priest or a teacher? Perhaps. But consider that the average working adult easily spends 40 - 50% of their waking life at work. And that doesn't even figure in the average commute. What a shame if that time is spent in spiritual sleep. The invitation to each of us is to be spiritually awake at work, which quite naturally invites others to awaken to their own spiritual nature. ●

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Extracts from the Art of Spiritual Leadership CD

William was formerly head of Innovation Management at the Stanford Research Institute International.

