



PUT YOUR SPIRITUALITY TO WORK

Conversation Starters for the Workplace

1.16 IS YOUR CAREER ALSO YOUR VOCATION?

We often end up choosing a career based on the money, promotions and status it might give us. But a “calling” focuses more on what we can give than what we can get – on serving and contributing to others.

WHEN WILLIAM was attending a Catholic secondary school, his teachers would ask the students if they had a “vocation”, which meant a calling from God to enter a religious order, as a priest or monk. Only later as an adult did he understand the broader notion of “vocation” as a “calling” (vocation is from the Latin “*vocare*”, “to call”). A “calling” is any “strong inner impulse towards a course of action, especially when accompanied by a conviction of Divine influence.”

Therefore, from a spiritual point of view, a vocation is a calling from the Divine to serve a particular purpose in life. In India, that calling is also known as a person’s “dharma”, the practical application of our innate nature through our work. Thus, ANY work could be a calling, as Ricardo Levy, CEO of Catalytica Inc., the inventor of a revolutionary new process for removing pollutants from engine emissions, reminded us:

Spirituality has a very important role in the professional life of a business leader. Executive corporate leadership is a vocation that has equal dignity and equal societal impact to that of a priest or teacher.

But is a career the same as a calling? The dictionary defines career as the “pursuit of progressive achievement, especially in public, professional, or business life.” So, on the surface they both pertain to how we choose our work. But when we look more closely, we see that we often approach our careers based on “Where do I best fit in the job market?” We choose based on what jobs are available where we can apply our talents and interests – and often our ultimate choice is based on the money, promotions and status we might get.

A calling has a different feeling. It focuses on bringing out our natural talents and what we can *give* much more than what we can *get*. It focuses on serving and contributing, even amidst hardships. The satisfaction from a calling is an inner peace and pleasure for doing what feels right, rather than the attainment of extrinsic “rewards”.

In our interviews with spiritual-based business leaders, we’ve found that they typically do not strive for promotions; instead, they follow their inner calling and allow their careers to unfold. Here’s what some of them have told us:

Right through my career, I never asked anybody for a transfer or for a promotion. I always think that whatever comes is an opportunity given by God and I try to make the best use of it.

I was never so ambitious that I had to advance my career no matter what the cost. I clearly did not want to do anything to harm my spiritual development.

My purpose was always to be a leader; I knew that I would reach the top, but not by causing harm to anyone.

We've also found that our calling may already be reflected in our current work, or we may need to make some shifts in our career to have our work be aligned with our calling.

For example, William once led a group of managers through an exercise to identify their sincere purpose in life. One woman saw that her purpose was to raise her children to become all that they could be, but was uncertain how this related to her career. Upon reflection, she saw that her "calling" included a wider perspective: it was to assist *anyone* to fulfil his or her potential. She realised that she was already following her calling in her current position, and that she could enlarge its span through a variety of different jobs.

On the other hand, once Debra began to follow her inner calling, she left her executive management position and began her own professional coaching practice with other executives. She was surprised to discover that from her first day as a professional coach, she felt such immense satisfaction from following her calling that she could not believe she was getting paid for her work. She also found that her work continually invited her to learn and grow in the same way that she was coaching her clients to learn and grow.

So, ask yourself: *Am I aware of my calling in life, a deeper sense of what my career is about? If so, what might that calling be? What are the implications of my calling on the next steps for my career?*

This article is an excerpt from the book, *Put Your Spirituality to Work: The Basics*. To download the full book of articles, as well as additional book chapters, articles, workbooks, and research on the subject of "spirituality and human values for leadership and work", visit our website: www.globaldharma.org