



PUT YOUR SPIRITUALITY TO WORK

Conversation Starters for the Workplace

1.26 SEEING OTHERS IN A NEW LIGHT

When we perceive human values in our colleagues, even if they seem to be covered up at times, it helps us to see them in a new light, and gives us a way to connect even when there are differences.

We were recently in Arusha, Tanzania, near the base of Kilimanjaro conducting a programme on “Human Values and Ethics in the Workplace” for 3 dozen top educators from 12 African countries. They were brought together by UN-Habitat for an intensive 2-week workshop on integrating human values with classroom and community education on water, sanitation, and hygiene. The entire effort is on behalf of helping to meet the UN Millennium Development Goals for bringing safe water and sanitation to the more than 1.5 billion people on this planet who don’t yet have it.

What is the role of human values in this effort, especially for working people? Human values are the positive qualities that represent humanity at its fullest – such as truth, righteousness, peace, love, and non-violence. Since these values are found across all cultures, nationalities, and spiritual traditions, and are inherent in all human beings, they evoke new levels of shared meaning and inner motivation to solve such enormous problems.

An important skill we have found to bringing human values alive in the workplace is to actively recognise them in the people we work with day-to-day. This can be easier said than done, since so many of us have been trained to look for what’s not working, rather than seeing what’s positive and affirming.

One way to practice this skill is to examine the lives of well-known people who have worked in accord with human values in clear, obvious ways. By seeing human values in their lives, we can then sharpen our capacity to see, affirm, and elicit them in those we work with.

While conducting this type of exercise in our Arusha workshop, we were reminded of Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa. Let’s look at his story to see what human values we can discover:

Early in his career, Desmond Tutu was a high school teacher; then, at the age of 30 he became a Christian priest. Over the next 10 years, he taught at a seminary, was a university lecturer, and worked for the World Council of Churches. By the time he was 45, social injustice in South Africa had gotten worse and peaceful means of change had failed, so anger and violence broke out in protests and riots. Around that same time, he

became General Secretary for his nation's council of Christian churches. Under his leadership, he made the council a strong voice for the ideals and aspirations of millions of African Christians... and a provider of assistance to the victims of racial injustice.

Combining the spiritual with the political, he spoke out without holding back: "I am opposed to all forms of violence – that of those who wish to uphold the vicious and unjust and totally immoral and evil system of apartheid, and of those who want to overthrow the system." He also saw the ultimate solution: "If we recognize our own self-worth, we will respect the worth of others and have reverence for life." His unrelenting efforts to affect a peaceful, non-violent dissolution of his country's apartheid system earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984.

In 1995, when apartheid was finally overturned, President Nelson Mandela asked him to head up a commission to probe into the gross human rights violations of the past. He knew his mission: the healing of the spirit of his country. He deeply trusted that "the truth shall set you free", plus the capacity of people to forgive once the truth was known.

We ourselves see the life of Bishop Desmond Tutu as an example of human values such as persistence, respect, forgiveness, trust, non-violence, and honesty. Many people around us also practice these types of human values at work, making a positive difference that we may not always be aware of. When we perceive human values in our colleagues, even if they seem to be covered up at times, it helps us to see them in a new light, and gives us a way to connect even when there are differences.

So, ask yourself: *How can I be more aware of human values in the people I work with? Who do I know at work who practices any one of these human values: persistence, respect, forgiveness, trust, non-violence, or honesty?*

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