



PUT YOUR SPIRITUALITY TO WORK

Conversation Starters for the Workplace

1.28 SOLVING THE 84TH PROBLEM

*“As to what happens to us in life, we may have little or no choice. As to how we deal with it, we have total choice.” Steve Hagen, author, *How The World Can Be The Way It Is**

We cannot recall a time when we met a working person who did not have concerns or problems. It seems that so much of our normal workday is spent in solving one problem after another, often leaving us exhausted at the end of the day, wishing it could be different.

As we were pondering on how we might shift the frustrations and stresses that often accompany our work problems, we found this story in Steve Hagen’s book, “How The World Can Be The Way It Is”:

A man came to the Buddha for help. He was unhappy with his life. There was nothing overwhelmingly terrible about it, but it always presented him with an endless succession of little disappointments and complaints.

He was a farmer. And he enjoyed farming. But sometimes it didn’t rain enough, or it rained too much, and his harvests were not the best. He had a wife. And she was a good wife; he even loved her. But sometimes she nagged him too much. And sometimes he got tired of her. And he had kids. And they were good kids. He enjoyed them a lot. But sometimes...

The Buddha listened patiently to the man’s story until finally the man wound down. He looked at the Buddha expectantly, waiting for some word to fix everything. The Buddha said, “I can’t help you.”

The man was startled. He said, “I thought you were a great teacher. I thought you could help me.”

“Everybody’s got problems,” said the Buddha. “In fact, we always have eighty-three problems, each one of us, and there’s nothing we can do about it. If you manage to solve one problem, it’s immediately replaced by another. You’ll always have eighty-three problems. You’re going to die, for example. For you, that’s a problem. And it’s one you’ll not escape. There’s nothing you nor I nor anyone else can do about it. We all have problems like these, and they don’t go away.”

The man became furious. “Then what good is your teaching?”

“Well,” said the Buddha, “it might help you with the eighty-fourth problem.”

“The eighty-fourth problem?” said the man. “What’s the eighty-fourth problem?”

“You don’t want any problems,” said the Buddha.

The author then goes on to point out some very wise advice:

If we can free ourselves from our desire to be free of our difficulty, then what difficulty do we really have? Thus with a clearer mind do we face our real circumstances. As to what happens to us in life, we may have little or no choice. As to how we deal with it, we have total choice.

We were struck by the simplicity and practicality of this story, and its wise advice: that too often we react to our external circumstances at work rather than choose to respond from our spiritual centre. But to exercise that choice, we have to master our minds (how we perceive what is happening) as well as increase our awareness and ability to tap into our inner, spiritual wisdom. But where do we start, especially if we are overwhelmed by our difficulties? The Buddha shed some light on this in the *Dhammapada*:

A trained mind can bring health and happiness. The wise can direct their thoughts, subtle and elusive, wherever they choose. Be your own guide first. Your own self is your master; who else could be? Use your body... your tongue... your mind for good, not for harm. Train your mind in love.

Being our own guide and mastering our mind in love, while focusing our body, tongue and mind on good – what a powerful formula for creating the choice of how we respond to our difficulties at work! A mantra that came to our minds was: “What good can I do right now?”

And, guess what? If we were to practice this simple, spiritual exercise throughout our workday, it would go a long way to helping us solve our 84th problem (“not wanting any problems”), eliminating disappointment and optimising happiness in our life and work.

So, ask yourself: *How would I perceive my work if I stopped wishing I had no difficulties and focused my mind on doing good, based in love?*

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