



## PUT YOUR SPIRITUALITY TO WORK

Conversation Starters for the Workplace

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### 2.6 SPIRITUAL CHARACTER PART 4: REDUCING EGO DESIRES

Our spiritual character goes up as we reduce our ego desires; but if we increase our ego desires our spiritual character approaches zero. Spiritual character is true power – the power that will be honoured by others who see their own, pure selves reflected in you.

**HAVE YOU EVER** known someone at work who always focused on “me, me, me” – preoccupied with enhancing their reputation or career, even at the expense of other people? You might have thought, “This person has such a big ego.” The desires that spring from such an ego greatly diminish spiritual character.

What exactly are “ego desires”? The word “ego” is the Latin language word for “I” and means “the self, especially as contrasted with another self or the world.” An ego desire originates from a feeling of separateness; its motivation is to satisfy individual wants and needs for our own self-centred, even selfish, benefit.

In our article on spiritual character (“The Power of Spiritual Character”), we shared with you the following equation that we use to define and develop spiritual character:

$$\text{Spiritual Character} = \frac{\text{Spiritual Context} + \text{Spiritual Purpose} + \text{Spiritual Values}}{\text{Ego Desires}}$$

We love how this equation clearly demonstrates the relationship between spiritual character and ego desires. In a way, ego desires are the singularly most influential aspect of the equation. Our spiritual character goes up as we reduce our ego desires; but if we increase our ego desires, our spiritual character approaches zero.

What kind of ego desires do we have at work? We might be concerned about:

- What do others think of me? (status, reputation, “image,” getting attention...)
- What do I think of myself? (self-image, self-importance...)
- What self-gratifying experiences can I have? (achieving goals, being recognised...)
- What things can I have? (office/work environment, latest technology...)
- What power can I have? (job authority, control...)
- What money can I have? (salary, other compensation...)

Are these ego desires natural to have? Yes -- from the feeling of separateness. But from a spiritual view, they are limiting and even harmful. The mind is a desire-fulfilling mechanism. If an ego desire is fulfilled, the mind looks for another one to fulfil; it's a never-ending process, infinitely expanding our ego desires. Thus, for everyone, in any job, the downside of having many ego desires can be a heavily burdened mind, with physical/emotional/spiritual burnout.

If the mind with its unlimited ego desires is the master and we are its servant, then we act in ways that are self-centred, egotistical, indulgent, and greedy. Thus, we diminish our spiritual character. If instead we are motivated to act by the promptings from our spiritual context, purpose and values, we are more likely to focus on:

- Looking for ways to meaningfully serve others, rather than to achieve personal gain
- Telling the truth even if it's temporarily embarrassing
- Collaborating rather than arguing a point
- Taking responsibility for mistakes or for hurting someone by sincerely apologising
- Genuinely considering in advance the impact of our thoughts, words and deeds on others
- Acting ethically rather than corruptly

So how do we actually reduce our ego desires at work? We suggest these beginning steps:

1. Become aware within yourself of the difference between your ego desires and promptings from your spiritual character. Make a list of the ego desires that arise for you at work.
2. One by one, take each ego desire and replace it with a spiritual prompting by asking the question: "From my spiritual context, purpose and values, what am I prompted to think, say and do in this situation?"
3. Day by day continue to build your awareness and strength to shift from your ego desires to your spiritual promptings at work.

You will notice that when you follow your spiritual promptings, you will more and more have the feeling of not being the "doer." You will no longer need to be the primary beneficiary of what you do, and yet your sense of deep inner fulfilment will increase. Your recognition and appreciation of the simple things in life will also naturally increase. All this occurs because you are exercising your deeper, spiritual nature at work.

Some say knowledge is power. Instead, we say that spiritual character is true power – the power that will be honoured by others who see their own, pure selves reflected in you.

So, ask yourself: *What are examples of my ego desires at work? What spiritual promptings might replace them in what I think, say, and do?*

This article is an excerpt from the book, *Put Your Spirituality to Work: Book 2 – Work as a Spiritual Practice*. 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](http://www.globaldharma.org)