



PUT YOUR SPIRITUALITY TO WORK

Conversation Starters for the Workplace

2.16 TURN YOUR CHALLENGES INTO A CREATIVE JOURNEY

It's often the plunge from confidence to darkness that grabs our attention the most, and requires us to search our souls to find the courage, as well as the creative solutions, to meet the challenges we face.

OUR SPIRITUAL TEACHER often reminds us to be thankful for our challenges and difficulties, and to consider them as good for us. We initially resisted this wise guidance, since our natural tendency is to shy away from those things that we don't have a ready answer for, especially if the outcome seems risky. And yet, over the years we have found that it's often the plunge from confidence to darkness that grabs our attention the most, and requires us to search our souls for creative ideas and solutions.

As a creativity consultant in the early 1980's, William pondered this relationship between challenges, creativity and spirituality and realised that most creative problem solving methods focused only on the mental side of creativity, such as goal-setting, analysis, idea-generation, and decision-making. But he knew from his own experience that creative work takes more than good left-brains and right-brains! It also requires us to call upon our deepest spiritual values where we can tap into the empowerment we need to carry us through the *entire* process of meeting our work challenges.

A breakthrough in William's understanding of the spiritual side of the creative process occurred in 1982, after he read *The Way to Shambhala* by Edwin Bernbaum. He realised that virtually all the stories about spiritual quests across all cultures – from the Tibetans' spiritual quest for Shambhala to the mythical quest of Odysseus – have a typical "plot line" with four stages:

Stage 1: You're on a quest, and you come to an impassable river (or some other risky obstacle), guarded by a demon.

Stage 2: The instructions are clear: Withdraw to gather your strength and power – identify with a Divine Power so its energies merge in you; then call forth the demon to see exactly what you have to deal with.

Stage 3: Do battle until you are victorious in defeating, befriending, or taming the demon.

Stage 4: Engage the subdued/tamed demon as an ally to get you across the impassable river; on the other side, take an account, with gratitude, of what you've learned to assist you on the next stage of your journey.

In a very real sense, this is a “creative journey” in four stages. It’s a journey where we face our “impassable rivers” and “demons” – those circumstances that can make our work challenges seem insurmountable. We have to find courage as well as creativity from deep within ourselves in order to tame the demon. Once tamed, the demon then becomes our ally to help us cross the impassable river.

While you might not be fully aware of it, your own work experiences are the best examples of how you’ve already reached deep within yourself to bring forth new and creative solutions. And, they can be the greatest inspiration to empower you as you face new challenges in the future.

Think back to a challenge you’ve faced at work that you didn’t know how to solve. By answering the following questions, discover for yourself how you’ve turned a work challenge into a creative journey:

1. *What was your quest – your initial goal?*
2. *What were the risks and obstacles that made it a difficult challenge?*
3. *How did you tap into an inner strength – your spiritual values, integrity, and character – to give you confidence that you could meet your challenge?*
4. *How did you “call forth the demon” – i.e., define the most important issues that you would have to address?*
5. *What were the creative options you considered as you did “battle” with the issues?*
6. *Which options did you chose to “win the battle”?*
7. *How did you get across the “impassable river” of implementation?*
8. *What did you achieve and learn, with gratitude, to carry into your future?*

Take some moments to reflect upon your answers and how you tapped into that deeper part of yourself to bring forth a creative solution to your challenge. In the next article we’ll share more about how you can use this creative journey in your work, and how Edgar Mitchell, an American astronaut who walked on the moon, turned his challenges into creative opportunities.

In the meantime, ask yourself: *How have my work challenges and difficulties brought forth my courage and creativity?*



❀ THE BASICS ❀

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