



PUT YOUR SPIRITUALITY TO WORK

Conversation Starters for the Workplace

3.6 DISCIPLINING AND REPRIMANDING

Spiritual-based leaders naturally consider the ultimate good of people even in disciplinary matters. They know that allowing a person to “get away with” a wrongful act will not serve anyone.

IT IS INEVITABLE that spiritual-based leaders will have to face and correct employees, contractors, suppliers, clients and even peers who have not acted as they had promised. Or sometimes the correction is needed because the person acted immorally, unethically or in a way that could have harmed themselves or others.

There is a misconception in the minds of many people who think that if you are spiritual you must be soft and lenient when dealing with situations such as these. We have found just the opposite to be the case. Sathya Sai Baba, a spiritual teacher in India, sets the example for us:

Generally, I speak sweetly, but on this matter of discipline, I will not grant any concessions... I shall not reduce the rigour to suit your level, for that will only ruin you – I pay attention to your ultimate good.

Spiritual-based leaders naturally consider the ultimate good of people, even in disciplinary matters. They know that allowing a person to “get away with” a wrongful act will not serve anyone. Yet the discipline is aimed to give the person the opportunity to learn and grow from the experience even as they face consequences. And the consequences are given only so long as they are needed to stimulate the improvement in the person.

In this regard, G. Narayana, Chairman Emeritus for Excel Industries, Ltd., describes his philosophy for reprimanding employees:

Build the people for success and appreciate them. When you want to reprimand, do it like a dose of medicine. Appreciation is like food: morning breakfast, afternoon lunch, evening dinner. But, discrimination and punishment you do like a medicine: required dose, required time, doctor is present. If you give continuous medicine and no food, man will die. If there is only food and no medicine, there is no correction and improvement. Regular food and required medicine ensures health and strength. Integrate recognition and correction appropriately and optimally.

While enforcing consequences, spiritual-based leaders make a clear distinction between disapproval of the actions versus disapproval of the person. For example, S. K. Welling,

former Executive Director of Corporate Planning and Policies for HMT Limited describes his approach to discipline:

When it comes to disciplining a person, I don't like to use the stick too much. When someone needs correction, I always tell the person, "Look Mr X., I am not against you. Please don't mistake me. I love you. I am not against you. What I am against is the act of yours that you did. And that is what I'm correcting."

But what if firing a person seems to be the only answer? Even here, a spiritual-based leader takes a broader view of the situation. Ashoke Maitra, former Director of Human Resources for the Times of India, speaks of this by saying:

Suppose an employee director comes to me and tells me an employee needs to be sacked, as he is not performing. I think of the consequences of this to the employee: what will happen to his family, to his children, how will he get reformed? If there is something wrong, I ask what are some alternative ways he could improve, without terminating him.

My philosophy is that when this employee was recruited he was perfect; otherwise why would he be recruited? So if he needs to be terminated today, then surely the organisation has to take some responsibility – otherwise why did I recruit him? So I cannot absolve my responsibility so fast.

Whether there is a need to discipline, reprimand or let a person go, we can bring together the wise experience of all three spiritual-based leaders here: use discipline as medicine, only to the degree needed; be against the action, not the person; see what responsibility you need to take for the other person's "failure" and how you can help them reform. Then, whatever action you take can be done in a way that gives the person the best chance of gaining a difficult-yet-positive lesson for his or her future. Even then, as a spiritual-based leader you can be paying attention to the person's "ultimate good."

So, ask yourself: *From my spiritual basis, what is my philosophy for disciplining and reprimanding a person, as I pay attention to his/her ultimate good?*

This article is an excerpt from the book, *Put Your Spirituality to Work: Spiritual-Based Leaders*. 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