



PUT YOUR SPIRITUALITY TO WORK

Conversation Starters for the Workplace

3.12 THE WHOLENESS OF MEANINGFUL CONVERSATION

Through the art of dialogue with each other, we can bring forth the inner shared meaning that resides in each of us and naturally tap into the spirit of oneness.

HAVE YOU ever had a heart-to-heart conversation with a colleague, or small group at work, that left you feeling inspired and motivated? Have you ever wished that your organisation could be filled with these types of conversations, rather than the more typical “superficial” conversations?

In recent articles, we’ve emphasised the importance of leaders engaging in meaningful conversations that touch the deeper dimensions of those they work with. Amber Chand, co-founder of Eziba, a company that markets the products of artisans from around the world, spoke to us about her vision of incorporating this most important element in the culture of her organisation:

I feel that in order for the company to succeed, we have to create the space for conversation. To me this is the most connecting, intimate way of creating happy people.

How can business leaders intentionally inspire a culture of on-going conversations that naturally focus on their most meaningful goals and provide the energy and motivation to achieve them? We’ve found three resources that have been a wealth of wisdom for us as we have explored and practised this most important art.

The first practice is *dialogue*. In his book, *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*, Joseph Jaworski speaks at length about the nature and power of dialogue. He explains that the word “dialogue” comes from two Greek roots, *dia* and *logos*, which relate to “the flow of meaning”:

Dialogue does not require people to agree with each other. Instead, it encourages people to participate in a pool of shared meaning that leads to aligned action.

Joseph learned the practice of dialogue through the late physicist David Bohm¹, who pioneered this concept. Bohm believed that ordinary thought in society today was “incoherent, going in all sorts of directions, cancelling each other out.” He believed that if

¹ To learn more about Bohm’s research and writings on dialogue, you can visit the website: http://www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/bohm_dialogue.htm

people were to think together in a coherent way, it would have tremendous power. Bohm compared dialogue to superconductivity:

In superconductivity, electrons cooled to a very low temperature act more like a coherent whole than as separate parts. At higher temperatures, they begin to act like separate parts, scattering into a random movement and losing momentum.

The major concept underlying the practice of dialogue is quite spiritual – that beneath all of the diversity we see in our physical reality is a “wholeness,” a “oneness” that precedes and pervades all that exists. G. Narayana, Chairman Emeritus for Excel Industries, Ltd., has an explicit way of speaking about the value of conversation as it relates to spirituality in our work:

When I join together with another person, then God is there and I move from “I” to “we.” Then we begin to discuss hope, and Divinity is there. So if you search inside another human being, you will find God.

As we engage in dialogue with each other and bring forth the inner shared meaning that resides in each of us, we naturally tap into this wholeness, this oneness. As Peter Senge, Jaworski’s colleague, describes:

A flow of meaning begins to operate around us, as if we were part of a larger conversation.

Debra once worked with a group of three partners in a financial firm. Each of the partners was distinctly different in their personalities and goals, and they often found it difficult to resolve their work issues together. Then Debra began to foster the practice of dialogue among them.

To begin each of their meetings, she had them sit in silence for 5 minutes, to help “cool down” their mental thoughts. Next, she helped each of them speak sincerely about areas of their work that were most meaningful to them, while encouraging the other two partners to listen with open minds and hearts, without judging what was being said.

Before long, all three of the partners naturally became more transparent, open, honest and spontaneous. Through the art of dialogue, their communication improved dramatically, and they began to experience a deeper level of harmony in their work.

In our next articles we will share more about the other two practices of conversation: the “world café” and “appreciative inquiry.” For now... ask yourself: *How would I describe what is deeply meaningful to me in my life and work? How can I begin to engage in the practice of dialogue with those I work with?*

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