



PUT YOUR SPIRITUALITY TO WORK

Conversation Starters for the Workplace

3.16 INCREASING OUR GROSS NATIONAL CHARACTER

Character development is a business leader's greatest contribution to economic development, and business leaders steeped in spiritual values can best help build the Gross National Character (*GNC*) of our nations.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, we met an MBA student named Kapil Jawa who was completing his studies at the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning in India. He shared with us a most fascinating masters thesis he had researched about a values-based approach to measuring economic development. The overall theme of his report was:

Just as economic growth is necessary for human development, human development is critical to economic growth. This two-way link must be at the heart of any enlightened policy action.

One of the most startling things he demonstrated was that the *lack of wealth* was not the barrier to overcoming our world's hunger, poverty and social problems. Using data from the United Nations¹, he showed that in 1997, Europeans and Americans together spent more on cosmetics, perfumes and pet foods than it would have taken to provide reproductive health, basic health and nutrition for all people on the planet. And military spending in that same period was twenty times that. So the resources are not lacking in this world, but the will, the understanding and the compassion are!

In his thesis, Kapil also pointed out the philosophy found in Kautilya's Arthashastra² that inspired a revival of many kingdoms in India for years after his reign. As Kapil stated: the healthiest state of affairs was one in which values higher than worldly possessions received honour and approval; maximum production was not the supreme objective of the economic organisation; commerce or wealth-making was not an end in itself; and merchants and manufacturers carried out their activities in a trust for the society they lived in.

Kapil concluded his findings in this way:

- Gross National Product and per capita income are not holistic indicators to compare the progress and development of nations.
- A developmental philosophy should be framed in terms of achieving the overall welfare of society and not just economic growth.

¹ From the *World Development Report 1998* and *Human Development Report 1998*. United Nations Development Programme. New York: Oxford University Press

² An ancient Indian text meaning "scriptures of wealth"

- Economic development should result in enabling people to achieve the final spiritual goal of human life.
- In addition to the use of economic indicators, we could use indicators of five universal values – truth, righteousness, peace, love, and non-violence – to measure national development.

We concluded from Kapil's inspiring thesis that the real wealth of a nation is the *character* of its people. As Swami Vivekananda once said:

The rise of nations comes with an increase of men of character and of strong ethical and moral fibre.

Therefore, every country in the world that wishes to increase its real wealth must necessarily focus on increasing its Gross National Character (GNC), along with its Gross National Product (GNP)! As Kapil put it so beautifully:

The purpose of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives. This simple but powerful truth is too often forgotten in the pursuit of material and financial wealth.

There are clearly important initiatives that are happening around the world along these lines. Since 1990, the United Nations has been publishing its Human Development Index (HDI); and in 1999, the late Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq developed the "Humane Governance Index" (HGI).

While these initiatives are at a macro level; in our view, business leaders also have the opportunity to make a dramatic difference to the overall welfare of our world, by taking the lead in exercising their own character, inspiring integrity in their colleagues, and transforming the character of their organisations.

How? We've found that character springs most deeply and most directly from our spiritual nature! And therefore, the real call is for transformational leaders who base their leadership on their spiritual roots and values.

Character development is a business leader's greatest contribution to the development of an economy, which comes from the Greek word *oikonomos*, meaning "household management". When we step up to the call to be business leaders steeped in our spiritual values, we will manage our companies and our economies with the same character as we would our own households – and thus build the Gross National Character (GNC) of our nations.

So, ask yourself: *How can I contribute to the strengthening of character in myself, my colleagues, and my organisation? How can I contribute to the Gross National Character of my country?*

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