



## PUT YOUR SPIRITUALITY TO WORK

Conversation Starters for the Workplace

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### 3.19 EVOCATIVE LEADERSHIP

Evocative leadership affirms and draws out the deeper inner spirit of others, and then empowers them to discover and fulfil their spiritual purpose through their work.

**IN 1993**, two young owners of an American software company were tragically killed in a plane crash, and the company fell into disarray under the leadership of an aggressive president. The Board of Directors hired two outside executives to replace the president, to bring the company back into order and reduce the risk of losing key employees. Since the process was going to happen very quickly and the employees had not previously met these executives, they sincerely wanted to have a smooth transition and stabilise the company so it could continue its success.

Debra was asked by the two executives to coach them on how to address the employees for the first time. After gathering details of how they wanted to proceed, she asked one of them to stand up and practice what he planned to say. While he spoke, Debra put herself in the shoes of the employees so she could coach him from that perspective.

He began with a strong sense of confidence about the company's market position and then proceeded to declare that the customers were their most important asset and would be their priority focus. While he certainly spoke with authority and assurance, Debra could feel her energy and enthusiasm diminish – just the opposite of what they wanted! When she asked the executive how he felt after his practice talk, he said that it was too serious and something seemed to be missing.

So Debra asked the two executives to heartfully focus on the employees for a few moments and to feel the value and contribution that the employees had made to the company. Even though these executives were outsiders coming in, they knew how the employees had pulled together during this tragedy. They became quite enthused as they spoke about it. They felt positive that they could count on the dedication and competence of the employees to stabilise the company and take it to even higher success.

Drawing from this, Debra pointed out that without the employees there would be no customers, and she helped them to see the inherent value of both the employees and customers as people, not just as assets to the company. By this, she was helping them to tap into the inner spirit of these employees.

The two executives readily accepted what Debra shared with them, and seemed a bit embarrassed about their oversight. Over the next two hours they designed an introduction that focused on a sincere, authentic appreciation for the employees as well as their own personal sense of commitment to them. They practiced this with faith and confidence, and looked forward to the future event.

What Debra was practicing in her coaching was “evocative leadership” – that type of leadership that affirms the inner spirit of others and empowers them to discover and fulfill their spiritual purpose through their work. According to the Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, the Latin root word of evocative is “evocare”, which means “to call forth.”

Evocative leadership is, in the words of Terry Pearce, author of *Leading Out Loud*, “leadership that recognises and values deeper human needs, where leaders are closer to workers, more communicative, and more vulnerable.” And as Willis Harman, author of *Global Mind Change*, would add, it is leadership that requires a shift “from feeling a need to control to feeling a need to express one’s authentic self, *to be*, with deep trust in the human spirit, and in a spiritual universe.”

When the day arrived for the two executives to meet the employees for the first time, Debra waited outside the auditorium. To her surprise, she heard clapping and laughter coming from the employees. Within 30 minutes, the two executives emerged with radiating smiles on their faces. They shared what a difference it had made for them to focus on expressing their sincere, high regard for the employees and to acknowledge their strengths and inherent value. They felt confident that this had made a decisive difference in their transition as the new, top two leaders in the company.

So, ask yourself: *What would my communication be like if I were to evoke and empower the inner spirit and spiritual purpose of those whom I lead?*

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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](http://www.globaldharma.org)