REFLECTIONS ON MAINTAINING A SPIRITUALITY IN THE GOVERNMENT WORKPLACE: WHAT IT MEANS AND HOW TO DO IT

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ABSTRACT

This article offers ways to be spiritual in the public workplace. First, this article is not about religion but spirituality. Second, this article explains the current American context including the fact that we are a nation of seekers of spirituality. Thirdly, this article presents the elements of spirituality and the attitudes and traits of spiritual people. And finally, this article explains what it means to have spirituality in the public workplace.
Everything gives pleasure to the extent that it is loved. It is natural for people to love their own work... and the reason is that we love to be and to live, and these are made manifest in our action. Secondly, because we all naturally love that in which we see our own good.

Thomas Aquinas

The introduction of Conscience into our public life is welcome... if it has taught a few of us to stand up for human dignity and rights in the face of the heaviest odds... Gandhi

I am giving Thee worship with my whole life,
I am giving Thee assent with my whole power,
I am giving Thee Praise with my whole tongue,
I am giving Thee honour with my whole utterance.

Celtic Prayer

The ancient Celts believed that spirituality is not separate from who one is or what one does. That is the premise of this paper as well. Here we offer a “gentle suggestion” that one can be spiritual at work just as one can be spiritual at home and at worship, because human life is a complex and dynamic fabric of many interwoven and interactive networks. When each of them acts in a coordinated fashion with the others it produces a spiritual harmony that translates into a sense of well-being, wholeness, and, ultimately, joy. Historically, belief systems about the world and humankind's place in it included a spiritual dimension. The modern era has diminished or categorically eliminated inclusion of this dimension. The purpose of this paper is to offer ways to be spiritual by one's attitudes and actions in the service of the public.
There is a yearning today, as there has always been, to integrate one’s life experiences as part of a larger fabric (or plan). This yearning is even more pronounced in today’s largely atomistic (fragmented) affluent western world, where even families living under one roof are often “disconnected” or at the very least, not “bonded” emotionally. In this article we present some thoughts on what persons may do in response to that “gentle guiding force” (Cloud of Unknowing, see below his term gentle loving affection) that some call God, others Allah or Yahweh. Even those who do not acknowledge the presence of a transcendent power seem also to be feeling a gentle guiding toward seeking meaning in their life at work. Seeking and finding that meaning is an integral part of spirituality.

Because we too are endeavoring to respond to that “gentle guiding force,” we are calling for public employees to re-integrate their lives in a way that will bring them into a wholeness that often does not exist in our fragmented society. Wisdom for attaining that wholeness can be found in the world’s spiritual traditions. The next section defines spirituality and the ones following it describe major approaches to being spiritual.

SPIRITUALITY

Much has been made of the word “spirituality” and it has been used by different people to mean different things. In this paper, we follow most of the great religious traditions by describing spirituality as an approach to life which recognizes a transcendent being as the source of personal, interpersonal, social, and even cosmic transformation. Spirituality is not about proselytizing. It is not about control. It is about who one is and how one lives. It is about coming to terms with oneself and asking the very difficult questions: “Who am I, really?” What do I want out of life, really?” What
legacy will I leave behind? These are difficult questions which may never even arise until we are thrust into a life-altering experience: loss of job, death of a loved one, divorce, etc. Only when one can confront oneself and explore these issues in the depths of one’s heart (being), can one claim to have entered upon the one’s “spiritual journey.” Spirituality generates life meaning for it calls one to a journey of co-creation, on-going discovery and purpose.(2) Spirituality is not about achievement nor being successful. Rather, it is a path of wholeness and integration. It is about an awakening of the whole person which spills over into all aspects of that person’s life, including the work place.

Many define spirituality narrowly as a “search for meaning and values.” We define it richly, because we believe that the transcendent God is that which gives life and breath and provides meaning. More than anything, spirituality is an “awareness” a state of consciousness of one’s interconnectivity with the divine, humankind and all creation. It is not something that is “learned”, it must be experienced. In the words of the 14th century English author of the Cloud of Unknowing, a guide for spiritual growth, “And so I urge you: go after experience rather than knowledge. On account of pride, knowledge may often deceive you, but this gentle loving affection will not deceive you. Knowledge tends to breed conceit, but love builds. Knowledge is full of labor, but love, full of rest.”(3) In the words of Meister Eckhart,(4) this experience must begin from the “spring of life” the heart. He says further that “the first outburst of everything God creates is always compassion.” This “compassionate” perspective (com + passio, to “bear with, to “suffer” with) enables us to experience life, creation and other persons from the multi-dimensional point of view, which ever grows, ever expands. It is this perspective that enables the truly spiritual person to continuously grow. The path of true spirituality is what Eckhart calls the “wayless way,” a path available to all. He adds that [the person] “who has found this way, needs no other...” for this pathway is “beautiful and joyful, pleasant and familiar.”(5)
We have talked about spirituality in this section. We hope that it is clear that we are not talking about religiosity. We are not calling for religious workplaces nor suggesting that people bring their religious convictions and practices to work. The next section clarifies the differences between spirituality and religion.

**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY**

People often confuse the terms “spirituality” and “religion.” They are very different, and the difference is important for discussions of spirituality in government work. Religion has been defined as “an explanation of the ultimate meaning of life, and how to live accordingly.” A religion typically includes a “creed” which explains the cognitive aspect of the religion, a “code” of behavior, a “cult” which includes the ritualistic activities, a “community” structure and a sense of the “Transcendent.”(6)

A religion also contains the spiritual insights of a “spiritual prodigy” such as the Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, etc. who makes these insights available to the masses who have been entrusted to his care. Too often the original dynamism of the spiritual insights has become ossified and formalized so that essentials like “love your neighbor” have been supplanted by rigid codes of behavior, where the “letter of the law” smothers the “spirit” or original intent of a well-meaning directive. The great mystics, and spiritual, as opposed to religious leaders, have always called for a constant vigilance and “awareness” to not lose the essential insights of the great spiritual teachers and their collective insights which comprise the canon of the world’s wisdom literature.(7) This is life in the “spirit.” It is dynamic, life enhancing, compassionate and vital.

Although we are Christian, we are not promulgating a point of view that one religion is better than another. Rather we do believe
that many religious traditions have articulated in a language that is particular to (limited by geo-temporal, socio-cultural conditions) a given place and time, a universal message of the experience of a qualitative factor which is at the core of who we are as humans. Furthermore, we believe that American workers and others in our society, are hungering for deeper meaning and eager to find it. We believe that spiritual persons are persons of "good will" from all religions who seek to do right, who seek more out of life, and who have transcended their own ego-centered existence.

Spiritual persons are those who realize that they live in community: at home, at work, and in the broader society. They believe that for some reason (and there are those among them who call this "mystery") that there is a synergistic and/or symbiotic relationship in creation which renders the "whole" greater than the sum of its individual component parts. They may believe in a transcendent good in the universe as do Christians, Jews, and Muslims. They may be non-theist Buddhists or a-theist Marxists. They may see the good emanate from their ancestors as do the Shinto. Even atheists may have a transcendent plausibility structure that will often compel them to deny themselves and work for the greater good. There is no contradiction in this because for the "spiritual" person, working for the "greater good" is really to work for "my good" in some inexplicable way. There is the sense that in building the common good, I ultimately build me.

We recognize that there are dangers when spirituality and religion are discussed and practiced at work. People who think they have found the "truth" may continually bludgeon their co-workers with their own religious ideals. These religious zealots whose desire to convert and control the thinking of others can be deleterious to harmonious working relationships.

However, spiritual (not sanctimonious) persons do not seek to control, but to understand at all levels, intellectual, intuitive, etc., so as to be truly "present" to the person(s) with whom they
communicate. What many seem afraid of, naturally, is that someone will want to control them; but true spirituality does not hold out for people the illusion of “control” any more than it holds out illusions of prosperity or health. There is the realization that what is “true” has many dimensions, and while we may have part of that truth, given our human limitations, it may not be complete. This is not unlike the Jainist anecdote of the blind men and the elephant. Each blind man was correct in his description of the elephant. Each description however was incomplete. True spirituality is a striving for integration and wholeness through a connectivity with all of creation -- what many Christians call the “Communion of Saints.” This connectivity is what brings peace, joy, and deep satisfaction. It does not bring control over life’s events, nor over other people. It is a striving to let go of control and take on openness and compassion. Thus religion and spirituality, while related, and frequently integrated, are not the same. Furthermore, connectivity is achieved (or worked towards) through open and honest dialogue. This dialogue must occur at all levels of human experience, not just in words. One must, as the indigenous Americans said, “walk in another’s moccasins...”

Thus far we have discussed our deep beliefs that spirituality is not separate from who one is or what one does. We have defined spirituality and explained the difference between spirituality and religion. We turn now to the American context which provides the setting for our work places and the biases and conditions which impact us all.

CONTEXT: WHAT AMERICANS REALLY WANT

Ours is a capitalistic, consumerism society based on what Americans believe to be their inalienable rights: the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. All very elusive ideals, especially “happiness.” What is “true happiness?” Is not “happiness” synonymous with “comfort” for many? Americans live in a celebrity oriented society which encourages us to live vicariously through the
lives of others. Vicarious living is neat and clean. You can pull out whenever you want. You don't have to become committed, nor concerned, nor involved. American society is also consumer oriented and vicarious living seems to be a part of our consumer society, as well. We are continuously bombarded with the ideas that if we just look young enough, slim enough, and sporty enough, drink the right beer, eat the best pizza, and drive the fastest or fanciest car, we'll be happy. The Roman statesman, dramatist and philosopher Seneca (+ AD 65) said that to be happy one needs to add to what one has, but to be truly happy one must subtract from what one needs. We Americans may have something to learn from this sage advice.

It's as though Americans are coerced into wanting things we do not need, and left little time for meeting our own deep soul needs. We become unfree to move into the search for meaning and wholeness. Our lives become antiseptic, parasitic, and vicarious. We begin to experience life as spectators, rather than actors in our own life drama. Losing spirituality in this environment is all too easy.

Many, however, do not believe that the loss of spirituality is a bad thing. Indeed, some seem to fear how lived spirituality might affect the work place. Others resist it and denigrate it. The authors of this paper, however, see spirituality as a way of life worth living. We believe that spirituality is a good and positive element that can and should be a part of who we are and what we do.

Certainly, a resurgence of interest in spiritual and religious issues is currently emerging within America. This has led to a growing recognition that the work place is an area where the spiritual traditions of many cultures come together. It has also led to an interest in spirituality within the corporate world and, with that interest, a return to a search for meaning and values as a part of one's work. This search is a dimension of spirituality.

As people employed in business search for their own sense of purpose, they are being invited to connect their spiritual quest with
their work place and their world. Persons in the private sector are beginning to ask themselves the tough questions, "Where has self-interest taken us?" "Is that where we want to be?" "Is there another way?"

Public servants are surely asking the same questions. Those employed in government, however, cannot so readily express or espouse spirituality. Government is typically viewed as a contractual-instrumental work place, where employees are, above all, fiduciaries of public money and property, not caretakers of persons. They are often discouraged from living their spiritual traditions and encouraged to be technocrats who know, obey, and enforce the law in a value-neutral, dehumanized work place.

This situation creates tension for spiritual persons -- and there are many spiritual persons. A recent Gallup Poll found that 95 percent of Americans believe in some form of higher power, and more than ever are feeling the need for spiritual help. From a March, 1997 web search, Shafer concludes that human beings yearn for some sort of relationship with whatever it is they consider "transcendent," that neither God nor religion is dead, and that the term spirituality is so general as to have very little concrete meaning unless it is further defined.

Like people everywhere, Americans seek meaningful lives. None of us wants to have lived in vain. Although we experience a deep hunger for encounter and involvement with transcendence, some of us seem to look in all the wrong places. Others seem to look in so many places in their efforts to find happiness and meaning that their search seems superficial and bewildering.

Ours is a fragmented society, with an assortment of religious and spiritual traditions. America is a mosaic of seekers and our search manifests itself in a variety of ways. Yet, we seem to hold similar economic and political values rooted in our consumerist society and in our often inflated opinions of our own mortality and
abilities to judge right from wrong. In the next section we discuss how Americans typically seek to fulfill their deep hunger for God.

**AMERICAN SEEKERS**

American seekers approach their search for God from their own cultural milieu, as well as from their own religious heritage. Traditional spiritual wisdom offers a metaphor of journey or path along which seekers find their way to the Source. American culture has produced other ways for seekers to search for meaning. We briefly describe common elements in spirituality, then distinguish between traditional and contemporary approaches in the next subsections. We do not attempt to evaluate them, for each has meaning for some and not for others. Ours is a pluralist society, and

One of the profound insights that more and more humans have been gaining in recent decades is that all knowledge, all “truth,” that is, all perceptions of and statements about reality, are necessarily limited, for all my “statements about reality” are always answers to my questions, posed in my thought categories and language, built on my prior assumptions, etc.\(^{(11)}\)

**TRADITIONAL PATHS TO SPIRITUALITY**

Traditional paths to spirituality come from the great world religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Islam, and Judaism. They include all the dimensions identified above and have a common theme: “Through spirituality human beings have the capacity to make sense of the world, view themselves within larger contexts, and develop appropriate ways of life.”\(^{(12)}\) Spiritual traditions teach that humankind are co-creators with one another and with God.\(^{(13)}\) They teach a sense of call and response, a feeling of awe and wonder, an awareness of giftedness, and an expectation that the gifts will be used
on behalf of all God's creatures with a recognition of their dignity and worth and a sense of inter-connectedness with them.

UNIQUELY AMERICAN PATHS TO SPIRITUALITY

Americans who are not comfortable with the spirituality or dogma taught by traditional religions have searched for meaning in the following approaches to spirituality: secular humanism, new age philosophy, religious right activities, cults, and evangelical movements. Although there are other approaches to spirituality, we believe those we describe are most representative and illustrate contemporary trends of approaching this topic.

Secular Humanists. Secular Humanists seek answers and explanation in their own experience and intellect rather than from transcendence. Their approach comes out of the 18th century British Enlightenment, which took various twists and turns through the French éclaircissement and the German Aufklärung. Whereas the philosophers and scientists of the eighteenth century appealed to "reason" or to "experience" or both, their thinking evolved into twentieth century empirical "scientism," [or the inductive "scientific method"] which still predominates contemporary intellectual discourse. Secular humanists may believe in Spirit as an entity that can be controlled, rather than a seeker of humankind. They interpret their experiences intellectually, and empirically rather than mystically. They may be agnostics or atheists. They often believe they have a responsibility to make the world better -- if they don't, after all, who will? Certainly not the illusory un-involved god of their world-view.

New Agers. New Agers seek meaning outside of organized religion. Unlike the Secular Humanists, they believe in transcendence, immanence, and all elements of the super-natural. They may practice the ancient traditions of paganism, pantheism, and goddess worship,
as well as Native American shammanism and vision quests. They are open to all manifestations of Spirit but wary of organized religion. They flock to conferences by spiritual gurus and embrace the work of faith. They focus on self-development and self-fulfillment and believe that encounters with the transcendent are up to them, rather than a “gift of God” (Ephesians 2: 8-9).

Religious Right. The Religious Right are those Christians who seek to live a strict, literal New Testament version of Jesus' teachings without regard to the biblical hermeneutics or critical exegesis that main line Christian denominations embrace. They emphasize the priesthood of every believer, a trinitarian God, inerrancy of the Christian Bible, and justification by faith, not by works. Because of their absolute trust in an Almighty Presence their world view is very different than that of the Secular Humanists and New Agers. Their focus is on obedience and acceptance of Divine Will and God's action in their lives. They typically believe that whatever is happening in the world or their lives must be accepted as the gift of a loving father and are not as apt to be involved with social causes as other religious groups. While Secular Humanists and New Agers are open to new people in their midst, they usually do not recruit them. The Religious Right, however, works actively and consistently to convert others to their way of thinking, in the belief they have a responsibility to “save” (change) those whose beliefs are different than their own.

Cults. Cult members follow unquestioningly someone who claims to have answers to their deep questions and food for their deep thoughts. They are not like Secular Humanists or New Agers because they do not trust their own ability to find answers or to develop explanations or to seek or be found by God. Although they are devout and sincere, they do not trust themselves nor the tenets of either Religious Right or mainstream religions. Rather they put their trust in a leader who brings them into a controlled living environment and encourages their dependence.
Evangelical Movements. Some Americans are pursuing spirituality in evangelical movements such as “Promise Keepers,” “the Million Man” and the “Million Women” marches. The movements are efforts at mutual inspiration and bonding that promise to lead participants into a deeper way to live the tenets of the churches from which they come. They offer revival-like concerts and preaching and encourage re-commitments to previously made promises to family and churches. Participants may also be members of mainline or religious right organizations.

This section has discussed the way very many Americans approach spirituality. It has not attempted to discuss every spiritual movement that exists. It has merely attempted to show the diversity inherent in the spirituality of Americans. The next section will talk about elements common to most approaches to spirituality.

ELEMENTS OF SPIRITUALITY

Elements that appear in all approaches to spirituality include: 1) interconnectedness, 2) integrity, 3) love, and a 4) search for meaning. Most also include a sense of the transcendent. Illustrative written works are provided.

Interconnectedness within the Christian tradition can be seen in Jesus' words, “I am the vine. You are the branches” (John 15:5) and in a Zen teaching parable which admonishes: It’s arrogant not to claim connection with the source. Everything is connected.\(^{(14)}\) Spiritual persons, regardless of their background, believe in interdependence with all humankind and with the planet which we share with all living things. The spiritual person believes that if the most vulnerable in society suffer, all the members of society suffer with them.
Integrity is illustrated by Jewish tradition and Buddhism. Proverbs 19:1 counsels: "Better a poor man who walks in his integrity than he who is crooked in his ways and rich." (Proverbs 19:1). The Dhammapada (217) advises that "He who possesses character and discrimination, who is just, speaks the truth, and does what is his own business, him the world will hold dear."

Love, as philio (brotherly love) or agape (charity), is the greatest commandment in both Christian and Jewish traditions. First, "Love God." Second, You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22: 37-40. The same wisdom appears in Islam: No one of you is a believer until you desire for another that which you desire for yourself (The Sunnah); and Confucianism: Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself. (The Analects, 15:23).

The search for meaning frees creativity "which is the link between our inner work and our outer work" as well as the way one's own work becomes a part of the Great Work of the universe. Spirituality refers to the way each individual and groups inwardly understand the meaning of life and then outwardly give it expression....As persons mature they enter into a kind of Deep Dialogue within themselves, thereby giving shape to their personal understanding of the meaning of life -- their spirituality."

A Sense of the Transcendent is at the heart of most traditional spirituality. This mystical sense draws us into a life-long search for values and purpose with the knowledge that God, however named, calls us to work toward "personal, interpersonal, social, and even cosmic transformation." Many sacred texts speak to the pervasiveness of the transcendent in all our lives. From the Tao Te Ching, we learn: The Tao is the Great Mother; empty yet inexhaustible. The Hebrew book of Job presents God as the "Almighty" (Job 40:2) and the Christian scriptures describe God as both immanent and transcendent: "Your body, you know, is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you since you have received him from God" (I Corinthians 6:19).
Living one’s spirituality, properly perceived, is an integrating force that consciously with intention and with awareness, tries to embody the purposes of human work (i.e., to use our talents to the maximum to provide quality goods and services to others). Spirituality is a belief system which manifests itself in a series of identifiable actions and traits.

The truly spiritual person recognizes that it is not enough to say that one is a spiritual person. The goal of the spiritual person is not "spirituality” any more than the goal of zen is zen. The goal of the spiritual person is to attain full integration of his/her potential and to live a meaning-filled life. The next section describes the attitudes of spiritual people.

**ATTITUDES OF SPIRITUAL PEOPLE**

Spiritual persons find meaning in the performance of their tasks and to their life situation. For example, Viktor Frankl writes of his life in the Nazi concentration camps:

Everything can be taken away from a man [sic] but one thing, the last of the last of the human freedoms - to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s way....The way in which a man accepts his fate, and all the suffering it entails....gives him ample opportunity - even in the most difficult circumstances - to add a deeper meaning to his [sic] life.(19)

Spiritual persons see their work as a personal calling or vocation. Spiritual persons however, are as human as everyone else. They are not perfect. Good and bad things happen to them as they do to everyone else. They may have come to the edge of despair, they have known fear, they have known anxiety. Their spirituality, however, helps them find meaning and give them courage in difficult times. Like Frankl, by their attitudes, they transform troublesome
times into a personally life-changing experiences that can be as edifying for their co-workers as for them. And, ironically, as spiritual persons encounter difficulty after difficulty, they not only do not crack, they become stronger. Perhaps, that is because spirituality arises from an internal well spring of joy. It is not a perspective that arises from anger, compulsion, frustration, competitiveness, fear and control. In the words of the Psalmist, who recognized true spirituality when he saw it:

“Blessed are those who going through the vale of misery, use it for a well; and the pools are filled with water. They will go from strength to strength and unto the God of Gods appeareth everyone of them in Zion.” (Psalms 84: 7-8 Book of Common Prayer)

The traits exhibited by spiritual persons are described in the next section.

**TRAITS OF SPIRITUAL PEOPLE**

Spiritual persons are recognized through certain traits and characteristics which they bring not just to the work place, but wherever they go. They are more often than not patient and kind. They try not to be jealous. They are authentic and often can see “through” superficialities in others. They try not to be rude or self seeking. Their anger is more often directed at injustice than at others and they do not brood long over injuries nor seek vengeance. Spiritual persons rejoice when the truth prevails (however painful that may be). They show tolerance and mercy and are usually willing to give others the “benefit of the doubt.” They are trusting and hopeful, for they recognize that this present life is but a fleeting (albeit significant) moment in the life of the cosmos.

Spiritual persons realize that all human perception is incomplete and see life as a journey into awareness. They celebrate new discoveries, accept life’s complexities, and believe that of all the
things in the world that have ever been or will ever be there is one constant: love. The spiritual person believes that the greatest force in the world is love.

Traits of spiritual persons were listed by Paul of Tarsus, who calls them “fruits” of the Holy Spirit, (listed here in ascending order...) self-control, gentleness, faithfulness, goodness, kindness, patience, peace, joy, and love (Galatians 5:16-23). When these traits are present, that is an indicator that one’s spirituality is true and active, whether or not one claims to be a spiritual person.

Pseudo spirituality, on the other hand, may be present in those who describe themselves as spiritual. Pseudo spirituality can be observed when people flaunt their belief system or throw pious plaudits into co-workers faces. “Do this” or “Do that” to be saved, “Repent, etc.” The proselytizers are typically resented, even feared, and their recruitment activities can be detrimental to productivity and work place morale.

How spiritual persons act at work is the subject of the next section.

SPIRITUALITY IN PUBLIC SECTOR WORK

In *Artful Work*, Richards(20) argues that all work is spiritual work for as we consistently and consciously invest our selves in work, we both create and are created. Spirituality in work generates awareness of who we are and what we are called to be. Through awareness (which Eastern philosophies liken to spirituality), we are able to transform work into a calling or vocation. We can find joy at work, because we’ve integrated “who” we are with “what” we do. Thus we help transform the work place, even as it transforms us, as we seek to give and to find joy and peace. Who could quibble with the wisdom of that?
As we think about what being spiritual at work means, questions worth pondering include:

1. Do I care about the work itself?
2. Can I express myself through the work?
3. Am I committed to the meaning of the work?
4. Am I tenacious enough.\(^{(21)}\)

As public administrators, it seems that we should care about our work, should find a way to express our own self as a part of that work, and be committed to the meaning of public service. In other words we should meet the challenge to come alive at work.

Coming alive for the authors means to bring spirituality into our work. Spirituality is multi-layered. In the Christian parable of the rich young man, Jesus loved him because he was really a good person, really wanted to do the right, good and noble thing. When the young man said, "Gee, I'm doing all you say...what more can I do?" there was only one thing more and Jesus responded, "Come, follow me."

Not everyone is called to the "more." Everyone who is called does not respond. The rich young man could not let go of his possessions and status, so he walked away. Perhaps this article will stir some hearts to seek the "more." But, the "more" will not guarantee success. It will probably bring discomfort as one enters the path to wholeness.

Three purposes of human work have been identified as:

1. Provide necessary and useful goods and services
2. Enable every one of us to use and thereby perfect our gifts like stewards
3. Do service to and in cooperation with others so as to liberate ourselves from our inborn ego-centricity.\(^{(22)}\)
These purposes make work so central to human life that it is truly impossible to conceive of life at the human level without work. With few exceptions, work is part and parcel of the life of virtually every man, woman and child in the world. Most of us have to work for a living, but even those persons who are independently wealthy have a need to bring structure, form, function and "regularity" to life. Those who do not "work" for a living might take up the issue of integrating their activity (or "work") with their inner need for creativity and their desire. It is our premise that one can be creative and fulfilled in one's life's work: our work can animate us as we animate our work. Spirituality, which is a form of "meta-perspective" gives us a vantage point from which to assess the role of work in our life's journey.

Lived spirituality is recognizable, not in self proclamations of one's spirituality, but in the day to day living of one's life, personally and in relation to others, in a "spirit-filled" way. Spiritual actions in the work place are: creativity, enthusiasm, cooperation in getting the job done with and for others, "caring" to produce a quality product or service, and attentiveness to the clients and constituents, simply because one cares. Even those members of the human community who seem less important are viewed to be indispensable and treated with even greater care because of their vulnerability.

Difficult situations at work occur whether or not one is spiritual. Spiritual persons try to deal with them from their own belief system. They look for shared values, celebrate the diversity and interconnectedness of the people involved and honor their differing world views. They treat persons with whom they are in dialogue with the same openness, understanding and charity (even "love") that they hope for themselves. They try to find meaning out of difficulties by asking such questions as "What can I learn from this?" "How can I help?" "Who else can help?" Spiritual persons remain true to their own deeply held convictions, so that others can look at them and say,
“you always know where she/he will stand”, but, they will add, “she/he is open to another point of view...is respectful, understanding...” etc.

Spiritual persons attempt to reframe difficult issues. They may ask, “What is God (however they see transcendent/divine) trying to teach me?” “How can I use what I'm learning here to prevent or solve this same difficulty in the future?” Spiritual persons are more likely to deal with one another out of love (brotherly love/charity/agape not eros). They are more likely to be patient, respectful and empowering.

Spiritual persons are also realists. The world has long been a place where cruelty, injustice and the abuse of power occurs. The government work place is often inhospitable and unkind to workers as well as clients. Spiritual persons are dedicated to struggling within this often de-humanizing system to bring about good. Judaeo-Christian spirituality challenges one to find where God will best be served and where people will best be helped then go and work there. Certainly the public sector is one place where God and God’s people can be served.

Spiritual persons in the work place attempt in and through their lives to make it more human, humane and liberating, using their sense of the spiritual as a gentle inspiring force for harmony, peace and joy. Being spiritual, however, does not mean being complacent or never making waves. It requires living one’s own inmost beliefs tempered by a respect and openness towards others. It also mandates that one have the courage to speak from one’s own deeply held values while listening to and respecting those of others. Spirituality does not encourage conflict, it does inspire dialogue.

In the public sector where separation of facts from values is often deemed important, spiritual persons recognize that “facts” are tempered by perceptions, biases, and world-view.
Spiritual persons must have the courage of their convictions. They must stand up and be counted in the face of adversity, systemic exploitation of workers, sexism, racism, and other workplace injustices. They must protect those who cannot protect themselves and they must have the courage to refuse assignments that are morally wrong in their judgement. This does not mean to act in anger or disrespect. It does mean to follow the examples of such moral exemplars as Jesus, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King.

Spirituality will not solve all the problems we encounter at the workplace. It will not end the criticism of public employees nor the stress of having to do more with less. It can, however, change the way problems are perceived and the way they are dealt with. As importantly, it can change the way that we deal with one another.

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