

# THE "S" WORD: SPIRITUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

BY HEATHER CONN

*A recent HRMA workshop provided clarity, direction and inspiration on how to provide meaningful work with a spiritual bent.*

Religious indoctrination. Enforced prayer sessions. New Age psycho-babble. Many people have strong misconceptions when they hear the term "spirituality in the workplace." They assume that some unwanted belief system will intrude on their daily routine. They fear that their own beliefs, or lack thereof, won't be honored. Perhaps managers will expect them to conform to some cult-like practices.

That hush-hush "s" word in the workplace conjures many misguided visions; none fit the above descriptions. If the recent HRMA-sponsored workshop, *Spirituality in the Workplace*, is any indication, this hot topic is a growing trend that offers multiple uses in today's businesses.

Take a few Fortune 500 companies, for example. Most people wouldn't associate such mainstream corporations with spirituality or a sense of "interconnectedness." Yet spirituality at work has produced higher-performing organizations, says workshop facilitator Joan Deeks, CHRP. Companies such as DuPont, AT&T and Apple Computer have examined the issue: "What is our higher purpose?" Lotus Development has created a "soul committee," while Jensen DJ Construction in Portland, Ore. allows employees 20 minutes a day of paid time to meditate.

Deeks cautioned: "Daily meditation at work can create a perception of favoritism. Some employees don't want to participate. They don't want the label 'spiritual.'"

She defined spirituality based on *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America*

(1999) by Mintzoff & Denton:

- The desire to find an ultimate or higher purpose in life and to live accordingly; and

- The basic feeling of being connected with one's complete self, others, and the entire universe.

Spirituality offers inner peace and contentment with a holistic outlook. In turn, spirituality in the workplace is "recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community."

However, many people confuse spirituality with religion, warned Deeks, so she outlined their differences. Spirituality is an informal, unstructured practice, often a potpourri of many beliefs, whereas religion follows a particular set of beliefs, moral rules and formal, structured traditions. The two can sometimes overlap, since both address ethics, values and personal growth, yet how they manifest determines their differences. Think of religion as a tangible map or guide with an external focus, advised Deeks, while spirituality is internally focused, intangible territory.

When dealing with two subjective topics, both open to every imaginable interpretation, how can anyone possibly define a spiritual workplace? Deeks provided clear guideposts. Her advice? Look for an organization with these characteristics:

- Allows employees to realize their full potential as a person. They're valued and supported;

- Offers a good, ethical atmosphere;
- Provides interesting work;
- Makes money;
- Attracts good colleagues and serves humankind;
- Provides service to future generations; and
- Gives service to the immediate community.

One workshop participant suggested that today's marketers can brand and peddle spirituality as yet another commodity, packaging a deeply personal experience as a quick-fix trip to success. Others shared their own beliefs, which provided heartfelt discussion amongst a non-Christian at a Christian employer, a regional wellness coordinator, a Muslim, and a woman who considered herself "deeply spiritual" but not at all religious. Despite their differences, each participant faced the same challenge: How do you bring spirituality into the workplace?

Deeks, who is doing her PhD on the relationship between spirituality, religion and life satisfaction, offered a variety of suggestions; these combine a sense of service with creativity, daring, finding allies, and introducing beauty into your workplace. To facilitate and sustain on-the-job spirituality, she gave these examples:

- Openness and respect for individuals;
- Wellness programs;
- Daycare facilities;
- Eldercare;
- Training and development;
- Respectful workplace programs;
- A multicultural day; and
- Community events.

A company's mission statement, vision and values are key areas where you can facilitate spirituality at an organizational level while still adhering to HR legislation. A spiritual workplace can provide value-based products or services with a socially responsible focus, such as Ben & Jerry's, the Vermont-based ice cream maker whose business mandate respects the earth, environment and animals. ■

*For more information on spirituality in the workplace, please contact Deeks at [jdeeks@telus.net](mailto:jdeeks@telus.net)*