

Spirituality in Business

An Ethical Way to Improve Customer Service

(by Christine Orth, Global Office FZ-LLC, Dubai, Mob. +971-50-8462421, email: co@globaloffice24.biz)

**"We are not here merely to make a living. We are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with finer spirit of hope and achievement. We are here to enrich the world. We impoverish ourselves if we forget our errand."
(Woodrow Wilson)**

Is Dubai and the rest of the world ready to embrace more spirituality in the workplace?

In the past Dubai has set the pace for unprecedented growth with all its positive and negative outcomes we see today. Yet Dubai is only a mirror image of the rest of world. The unhealthy quantum growth levels seen here or the toxic financial products and strategies designed by shrewd finance professionals in the West were purely based on the business principle of maximizing profits (aka "greed") by all means and assuming that the good times will role endlessly, even if you only sell "hot air" CDOs (Collateralized Debt Obligations which turned out to be collateralized damage obligations). Now, we know that didn't last! The current world order however, presents us with a new opportunity to take a closer look at how (ethically) we do business and what it takes to reach the next healthier level of more responsible global and local interaction.

What is spirituality in business?

"Spirituality is the highest form of personal, political and social consciousness. It is important to use spirituality wisely and well in the 21st century - which will be a time of bridging ancient wisdom into the creative tapestry of contemporary times." (author unknown)

A lot of people believe that spirituality is tied to religion. But there is a lot more to it than just following religious rules and believes and aiming to be "a good person". Others would say that it's simply embodying their personal values of honesty, integrity, and good quality work. Again others would say it's treating their co-workers and employees in a responsible, caring way. For some, it means participating in spiritual study groups or using prayer, meditation, or intuitive guidance at work. And for some it's making their business socially responsible in how it impacts the environment, serves the community or helps create a better world.

Quite a few business people these days are comfortable using the word "spirituality" in the work environment, as it's more generic and inclusive than "religion." Instead of emphasizing belief as religion, the word spirituality emphasizes how values are applied and embodied. Other people however, aren't comfortable with the word spiritual and prefer to talk more about values and ethics when describing the same things that others would call spiritual.

Having observed what effects greed can have on the world economy bringing financial systems and whole countries down to their knees, it is time for businesses to awaken to the fact that superficiality and the distortion of spiritual practices to serve *greed* are no longer viable principles for successful businesses (in fact never were but nobody paid attention!).

Key spiritual values embraced in a business context *include integrity, honesty, accountability, quality, cooperation, service, intuition, trustworthiness, respect, justice, and service*. How about the concept that companies tell their workers they are “morally obligated to help customers solve problems” – they’re not just to sell people products.

Though here in the UAE the sales practices applied are still largely to “dump” a sales pitch on the potential (victim) client without studying his/her needs and basically talking “at” people not engaging them in a meaningful sales discussion. Frequent (annoying) cold calls and flooding of SPAM SMS and unsolicited emails sent out without profiling the target clientele. Such antediluvian (outdated) practices do not only negatively impact a company’s reputation but also create resentment in the potential client not to buy this company’s products and services.

Research on spirituality and the bottom line

Are spirituality and profitability mutually exclusive? Bringing ethics and spiritual values into the workplace can lead to increased productivity and profitability as well as employee retention, customer loyalty, and brand reputation according to a growing body of research. Especially important since Dubai has spared no effort to position itself as a global brand, rather than a location. If more employers are encouraging spirituality this in turn would boost loyalty and enhance morale.

A study conducted a few years ago at the University of Chicago by Prof. Curtis Verschoor found that companies with a defined corporate commitment to ethical principles do better financially than companies that don’t make ethics a key management component. In the UAE companies are largely applying a “copy and paste” mentality of what sounds good (“we value our customers” and the like) and put this out as a company’s mission and vision without full heartedly *living up* those glorious principles. Ultimately this is counterproductive and leads to loss of trust and faith.

Recent research studies in Australia found productivity improves and staff turnover is greatly reduced when companies engage in programs that use spiritual techniques for their employees.

In researching companies for his book, *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America*, business professor Ian I. Mitroff found that **“Spirituality could be the ultimate competitive advantage.”**

A study reported in MIT’s Sloan Management Review concluded that, “People are hungry for ways in which to practice their spirituality in the workplace without offending their co-workers or causing acrimony.” The word “spirituality” is used generically and seems to emphasize how one’s beliefs are applied day to day, rather than “religion”, which can invoke fears of dogmatism, exclusivity and proselytizing in the workplace.

A Growing Movement

A plethora of new book titles reflects a growing desire to bring spiritual values into the work environment, examples are: *The Soul of Business*, *Liberating the Corporate Soul*, *Working from the Heart*, *The Stirring of Soul in the Workplace*, *What Would the Buddha Do At Work?*, *Spirit at Work*, *Redefining the Corporate Soul*, *The Corporate Mystic*, *Leading with Soul*, *The Monk who sold his Ferrari*, etc. Some books on this theme, such as Stephen Covey's pioneering "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People", have sold millions of copies.

When employees are encouraged to express their creativity they feel more valued and connected to the company. In this part of the world employee creativity is in many cases stifled or restricted by superiors. Staff is requested to follow very strict and many times incoherent rules (whether they make sense or not seems not to be questioned by those who devise such rules) and negative or critical customer feedback hardly seems to make it to the decision and policy making ranks of private or government companies or if it does it is largely ignored probably based on the assumption customers will buy nevertheless.

In the Middle East there is a governing belief that workforce is transient anyway, so why invest in people, just give them orders and halas. The commonly practiced concept of maximizing corporate profits by often paying ridiculously low salaries to people in front line customer service jobs and not training them enough (or not at all) is in the end at the expense of the customer who is subsequently at the receiving end of poor customer service.

As a general rule happy people work harder and are more likely to stay at their jobs. We need to see higher levels of employee retention implemented such as for example internal employee suggestion systems as successfully implemented in the West to improve organizational effectiveness tapping into employee creativity and rewarding staff members if their proposals lead to increased sales or cost reduction.

Why Spirituality Is Popular?

Why all the sudden interest in spirituality at work? Researchers point to several key factors. Corporate downsizing and greater demands on remaining workforce has left many managers too tired and stressed to be creative, but at the same time globalization of markets requires more resourcefulness from both employees and managers. To survive in the 21st Century, organizations must offer a greater sense of meaning and purpose for the people working for them.

In today's highly competitive environment, the best talent seeks out organizations that reflect their inner values and provide opportunities for personal development and community service, not always just bigger salaries. Unlike the marketplace economy of 20 years ago, today's information and services-dominated economy requires instantaneous decision-making and building better relationships with customers and employees. More than ever people are looking for guidance in their work and personal lives in a world of conflicting or lack of morals and mass advertisement based on false promises and beyond saturation points.

People Are the Most Important Resource

Increasing numbers of business people find that the key area for applying spirituality is in how employees are treated. Here in the Middle East, especially in a dynamic workplace like Dubai, companies unfortunately still often treat their employees as a resource that can be fired and replaced any time. As a result Dubai probably has the most transient workforce in the world. Companies put out “fancy” visions and missions but realistically 99% of them are more lip than customer service.

Coming of age companies must not only focus on profitability issues but start treating employees well, because they in turn will treat customers well. In addition internal workflow processes need to be documented, streamlined and optimized for better performance.

How many companies including government organizations really know how much potential business is lost due the fact that the receptionist has no clue how to effectively and professionally represent the company, where to direct an incoming call for further action or even take a message to be passed on to the person in charge or department concerned so the enquirer will receive a call back?

The spirituality in business movement is maybe still a challenging idea for small and even large companies in the UAE or the Middle East as whole but hopefully business will eventually awaken to this potential and start transforming from within. We all need to develop a new attitude towards the community and workplace as a place to fulfill one’s deeper purpose. The old way of thinking and handling matters has brought the world to where it stands now.

As the poet and writer Kahlil Gibran reminds us in The Prophet, **“Work is love made visible.”**

If high-performance and productivity levels are goals to be achieved within the business structure, then it is incumbent upon Senior Managers and Executives to ensure that all levels of the organization (including themselves) are working harmoniously together within a culturally diverse situation.

And last but not least – find and use humor, yes even in the workplace - for humor is an important binding that ties people together.

The more people start cultivating and living Gandhi’s famous words “Be the Change you wish to see in the World!” the sooner we will see a shift of consciousness towards more ethical ways of living and dealing with each other.

Author Profile:

Global Office FZ-LLC (**GO**) was founded by German native and entrepreneurial spirit Christine Orth. **GO** has advised a diverse international clientele in many areas of doing business in the Middle East and set up a multitude of companies (service, trading, industrial) throughout the UAE since 2003. For various clients **GO** handles the complete start-up management in the region including trustee services such as managing clients' bank accounts and real estate portfolios. Holding a Bachelor of Science degree in business, an Associate Arts degree in languages (German, English, French) and diplomas in HR, marketing, management controlling, law firm administration and 23+ years of international business experience working with and for multinationals as well as SMEs, Christine can offer a wealth of experience from the business world. Over the years her company **GO** has established an extensive network of carefully selected international partners and provides a **One-Stop-Shop-Solution** for businesses wishing to set up new operations or expand their scope.

Christine is an American Board (ABNLP) certified NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) Master Practitioner and has coached many aspiring new business owners. She takes a spiritual and holistic approach to coaching and consulting. Christine's well-rounded business background contributes to create great results for her clients. She specializes in working with CEOs & Entrepreneurs who want to make more sense of "money, energy, and time".

Our coachings are delivered 101 through personal meetings, phone, email – onsite or at our premises.

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