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Spirituality and Ethical Leadership

Moral Persons and Moral Managers

CRAIG E. JOHNSON, PhD

This chapter outlines strategies for promoting Ethical Leadership through individual and collective spiritual development. Spirituality equips leaders to act as both moral persons and as moral managers through providing a sense of mission and meaning; focusing attention on the needs of others; fostering humility, integrity, and justice; highlighting universal moral principles; and generating feelings of hope and joy. Leaders nurture their personal spiritual development by discovering their vocations at the same time they engage in self-reflective practices and serve others. Organizations encourage the development of spiritually sensitive, Ethical Leaders by creating a compelling vision, fostering intrinsic motivation, promoting shared spiritual values, and making space for the spirit.

“Spiritual leaders are moral leaders.”

—Gilbert Fairholm

DUAL COMPONENTS OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

Providing Ethical Leadership is one of a leader's most important responsibilities. Those who fail to carry out this task put their organizations, as well as their careers, at risk. Corporate scandals at Quest, Hewlett Packard, WorldCom, AIG Insurance, Enron, Brocade

Communications, Sallie Mae, and Fannie Mae demonstrate the widespread damage done by Unethical Leaders. Conversely, leaders who fulfill their ethical duties prevent costly scandals and lay the foundation for long-term success. Members of ethical organizations are more collaborative and trusting, generating higher levels of satisfaction, commitment, and performance.¹ Corporations that act as responsible citizens build positive reputations and often increase market share.²

Researchers report that there are dual components of Ethical Leadership.³ Ethical Leaders act as *moral persons*, behaving ethically as they carry out their leadership roles. They treat employees fairly and express care and concern for followers. They live up to the values they espouse and are perceived as open and honest. At the same time, Ethical Leaders act as *moral managers* who actively promote ethical conduct in followers. They serve as role models who focus the organization's attention on ethics. Ethical Leaders communicate frequently about the importance of ethics, outline clear standards, and use rewards and discipline to hold followers accountable for their moral conduct.

This chapter is based on the premise that spiritual development equips leaders to function as both moral persons and moral managers. The first section of the chapter describes the personal and shared nature of organizational spirituality and outlines how spiritual values and practices equip individuals to practice Ethical Leadership. The second section highlights strategies for promoting Ethical Leadership through individual and collective spiritual development.

ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality in the organizational setting operates simultaneously at two levels: individual and collective. Individual spirituality derives from the values, feelings, and practices of each person in the organization. Spiritually oriented individuals engage in behaviors designed to nurture their inner lives. They strive to get in touch with their deep desires and feelings, seek a sense of purpose, and want to establish deep connections with others and with a power greater than themselves.⁴ Collective spirituality consists of organizational culture

and climate that fosters shared meaning and connection. According to management experts Dennis Duchon and Donde Asmos Plowman, workplace spirituality is “a particular kind of psychological climate in which people view themselves as having an inner life that is nourished by meaningful work and takes place in the context of a community.”⁵ Spirit-friendly organizations nurture the entire person—emotions, self-worth, aspirations, and desire for purpose—while cultivating a sense of membership.

Individual and collective spirituality are interrelated. Spiritually oriented employees help create spiritual climates; spiritual climates reinforce the efforts of individuals to nurture their inner lives and to build relationships with others. Spirituality and religion, while they overlap, are not identical. Religious traditions and institutions encourage and structure spiritual experiences, but spiritual values and encounters often occur outside of religious channels.⁶

Both personal and workplace spirituality equip leaders for the task of Ethical Leadership by:

- Providing a sense of mission and meaning
- Focusing attention on the needs of others
- Fostering humility, integrity, and justice
- Highlighting universal moral principles
- Generating feelings of hope and joy

Mission and Meaning

Spiritual individuals and organizations are motivated by a sense of mission and meaning. Members believe that work is a calling, not just a job. The organization wants to serve worthy purposes, such as supplying needed products and services, meeting human needs, and improving the environment. This sense of calling and desire for meaningful work encourages leaders to make ethics a top personal and organizational priority. Ethical behavior is essential to the accomplishment of worthy objectives; unethical behavior devalues work and puts the mission of the organization at risk.

Other-Centeredness

Compassion, kindness, generosity, love, care, and concern all describe an orientation that puts others ahead of the self. Other-centeredness, or altruism, is encouraged by nearly every major spiritual tradition.

Love and compassion are two of the positive frames of mind in Buddhism, for instance, and charity is one of the Five Pillars of Islam.⁷ Many humanitarian efforts, such as hospitals, colleges, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and children's clubs, have their origins in religious and spiritual movements.

Spirituality can motivate leaders to put others above the self and to channel their energies into serving others. This other-centeredness, in turn, is key to Ethical Leadership. Ethical Leaders are marked by the care and concern they show to followers at the same time they foster altruistic behavior in others.⁸ In contrast, Unethical Leaders put their own needs first and manipulate followers for their own ends. Spirituality also fosters altruistic behavior through its emphasis on connection and community. Connections cannot be developed or sustained unless members consider the well-being of others and treat fellow employees with compassion and respect.

Integrity, Humility, and Justice

Spirituality motivates individuals to behave in a consistently ethical manner, maintain humility, and treat others fairly. When these practices are repeated, they become the following positive character traits (or virtues).

Integrity refers to wholeness or completeness, to living up to espoused values and dealing honestly with others.⁹ Such integration is a marker of spiritual progress, signaling that there is no distinction between the inner life and outward behavior. Integrity is also a sign of Ethical Leadership, contributing to the perception of the leader as both a moral person and a moral role model. Lack of integrity, on the other hand, quickly undermines a leader's moral authority. Followers watch the behavior of leaders closely, and one untrustworthy act can undo months and years of consistent behavior. Common "trust busters" include dishonesty, blaming others, secrecy, unfair rewards, and inconsistent rules.¹⁰ For example, former American Airlines CEO Don Carty broke the trust of employees after word leaked out that he and other senior executives were receiving large bonuses at the same time they were asking workers to take significant pay and benefit cuts. Carty apologized and then resigned.¹¹

Humility consists of three components.¹² The first is self-awareness or objective assessment of personal strengths and limita-

tions. The second is openness, which is welcoming new ideas and knowledge based on an understanding of personal weaknesses. The third component is transcendence—acknowledgment of a power greater than the self. All three components are fostered by spiritual values and practices. Spiritual individuals engage in self-reflection that often reveals personal weaknesses. They recognize a power greater themselves.

The best-selling book *Good to Great* renewed interest in humility as an important leadership virtue.¹³ Author Jim Collins and his team found that the leaders of the most successful companies in their sample were also the most humble. These “Level-5 leaders” downplayed their role in their company’s success, gave the credit to others, were uncomfortable talking about personal achievements, and lived modestly. Humility has also been linked to Ethical Leadership.¹⁴ Humility is a strong brake on immoral behavior. Humble leaders have a realistic view of their own contributions and demonstrate appreciation for others. They serve others, build supportive relationships, and are open to input from followers.

Justice involves both a sense of obligation to the common good and an obligation to treat others equally and fairly.¹⁵ Like compassion, justice is promoted in most major religious traditions. Treating others fairly is also an element of Ethical Leadership. Just leaders feel a sense of duty and strive to do their part. They believe in providing the same rights to all of their followers, even when subordinates have differing abilities. Moral leaders recognize that equitable treatment communicates respect, compassion, and integrity. In contrast, unjust leaders ignore their responsibilities and the needs of the larger community. They deny the rights of followers and make biased decisions that favor some groups and individuals over others.

Universal Principles

Spiritually motivated individuals and organizations strive to live by universal principles such as love, truthfulness, and respect for human rights and dignity. Leaders who follow such principles are more likely to act as moral persons. They do not fall victim as often to greed and ego, destructive motivations that undermined the careers of former Enron CEO Jeffrey Skilling, former Tyco CEO Dennis Kozlowski, and

former WorldCom CEO Bernie Ebbers. Instead, they seek to live up to spiritual ideals. Evidence of the motivational power of universal principles can be found in the lives of moral role models. Psychologists Ann Colby and William Damon studied the lives of twenty-three extraordinary moral leaders, including Virginia Foster Durr, who spent over thirty years fighting for civil rights in the South, and Susie Valadez, who fed, clothed, and provided medical care to poor Mexicans living near the Ciudad Juarez garbage dump.¹⁶ Colby and Damon found that these ethical heroes lived by ideals or principles (honesty, equality, concern for others) that were often rooted in religious faith. These moral principles then became part of their core identities, tying together every aspect of their lives. The researchers concluded:

Many of our exemplars drew on religious faith for such a unifying belief. In fact, this was the case for a far larger number of our exemplars than we originally expected. But even those who had no formal religion often looked to a transcendent ideal of a personal sort: a faith in the forces of good, a sustaining hope in a power greater than oneself, a larger meaning for one's life than personal achievement or gain.¹⁷

In addition to motivating ethical action, overarching principles also help leaders make better ethical choices. There is a positive correlation between spirituality and moral judgment.¹⁸ Those who aspire to universal standards are more likely to recognize that ethical problems exist and engage in the most advanced form of moral judgment: principled reasoning.¹⁹ Principled decision makers base their decisions on widely held ethical guidelines such as treating others with respect and seeking the common good. Less advanced thinkers focus on their own needs or look to others for guidance.

Hope and Joy

Positive emotions such as hope and joy are important products of personal and workplace spirituality.²⁰ It is easier to be optimistic about the future when engaged in a calling and meaningful labor. Setbacks such as low sales and stock downturns are less discouraging when they are part of a larger plan and purpose. Joy comes from living in harmony with personal values, serving others, and feelings of connection and transcendence. These positive emotions promote ethical behavior. Leaders and followers who are joyful and happy are more likely to follow through on their moral choices.²¹

PROMOTING ETHICAL LEADERSHIP THROUGH SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Because spiritual values and practices equip leaders for Ethical Leadership, encouraging the spiritual development of both individuals and organizations takes on added importance. In this section, we will examine strategies that leaders can use to foster their personal spiritual development. Then we will look at tactics that build spirit-friendly organizations that promote the spiritual development of leaders.

Enhancing Personal Spiritual Development

DISCOVERING VOCATION: Discovering vocation is key to developing a sense of mission and meaning that is at the heart of spirituality. In popular usage, the term *vocation* is generally limited to job or occupation. However, the original meaning of the term extended well beyond work. The English word has its origins in the Latin *vocare*, which means “to call” or “calling.”²² Discovering our calling encompasses every aspect of life—relationships, job, volunteer activities, leisure, and participation in spiritual communities. Leaders who have a clear sense of their individual purpose are more likely to join organizations that match their objectives and values. They are more satisfied and committed as members, focus on meaningful tasks that match their abilities, and are better equipped to serve others. Shell Oil, for example, is an organization that has incorporated a focus on discovering individual purpose into its leadership development programs.²³

Discovering vocation is a three-step process.²⁴ First, leaders determine their unique gifts or skills by looking at past experiences and trying out a variety of jobs and volunteer experiences. Second, they identify their concern for others as well as their personal interests. Leaders’ concern for others may take the form of solving educational problems, meeting environmental challenges, or providing technology to businesses. Interests, such as music, mathematics, or the outdoors, then motivate them to develop skills and knowledge that can later be used in service to others. Third, leaders find the right job fit, one that puts their gifts, concerns, and interests to the best use.

ENGAGING IN SELF-REFLECTIVE PRACTICES: Self-reflective practices put leaders in touch with their inner lives. These rituals involve self-examination and communication with God or a greater power. Such practices have practical as well as spiritual benefits for leaders, promoting mental and physical health, reducing stress and burnout, and helping them deal with crises.²⁵ Richard Foster, director of the Renovare spiritual renewal movement, suggests four inward disciplines that promote spiritual growth:²⁶

- *The discipline of meditation.* Meditation is quiet contemplation, which can provide practical answers to problems, reenergize leaders, or point leaders in a new direction. Meditation can involve reflecting upon sacred texts, becoming still and embracing silence, thinking about creation, and reflecting upon the meaning of current events.
- *The discipline of prayer.* Prayer is not so much a means of getting something from a higher spiritual power, but rather the doorway to a new perspective. Through prayer, leaders may begin to see the larger meaning behind events, become more patient, and develop more compassion for enemies.
- *The discipline of fasting.* Fasting means going without food for spiritual purposes. Leaders may fast to focus their minds on spiritual issues, to reflect their commitment to God, or to draw closer to their spiritual center.
- *The discipline of study.* Study is an analytical discipline designed to change thinking. Effective study takes repeated effort over time, concentration, reflection on insights gained, and a learning attitude. A great many leaders and followers focus their study on the primary texts of the world's faiths and philosophies (the Qur'an, the Analects of Confucius, the Tao Te Ching, the Torah, the Bible) and spiritual classics. Leaders can also gain important insights from studying nature, relationships, themselves, institutions, and cultures.

SEEKING TO SERVE: Because other-centeredness is essential to spirituality, it is not surprising that the spiritual development of leaders depends in large part on their willingness to serve. Executive management consultant Krista Kurth notes that those who contribute to spiri-

tually inspired service at work do so with no concern for personal gain.²⁷ Connection with a greater power sparks gratitude and love that encourages contribution to the good of the group. In serving a higher purpose, members set aside their personal agendas. Kurth suggests several practices that can build individual commitment to service, including:

- Practicing self-reflection and self-inquiry by stepping back, reflecting, listening to the inner voice, and paying close attention to what is going on
- Being attentive to underlying motivations and attitudes
- Maintaining a positive, accepting perspective on life
- Learning from life, particularly from challenging situations
- Keeping reminders of spiritual principles of service (pictures, quotes)

Enhancing Workplace Spirituality

An organization's level of spiritual development will have a significant impact on the spiritual development of its leaders. The greater the spiritual progress of the organization, the more likely it is to produce spiritually sensitive, Ethical Leaders. Steps for promoting collective spiritual development include creating a compelling vision, fostering intrinsic motivation, promoting spiritual values, and making space for the spirit.

CREATING A COMPELLING VISION: Spiritually friendly organizations craft inspirational visions that create a sense of mission and meaning and encourage members to live out their vocations.²⁸ Compelling visions speak to the emotions of individual members, sparking excitement and generating organizational commitment. These visions transcend the bottom line (few lower-level employees get excited about increasing stakeholder return on investment, for example) and reflect the core values of the group. Consider the mission/vision statements of these organizations that have been identified as spirit friendly:

"To honor God in all we do."

—*Service Master*

"To contribute to human welfare by application of biomedical engineering in the research, design, manufacture, and

sale of instruments or appliances that alleviate pain, restore health, and extend life.” —*Medtronic*

“We are committed to providing outstanding career opportunities by exceeding our customers’ expectations through continuous aggressive improvement.” —*TD Industries*

“Tom’s of Maine will become the trusted partner in natural care among consumers with whom we share common values.” —*Tom’s of Maine*

“The mission of Southwest Airlines is dedication to the highest quality of customer service delivered with a sense of warmth, friendliness, individual pride, and company spirit. We are committed to provide our employees a stable work environment with equal opportunity for learning and personal growth.”

—*Southwest Airlines*

FOSTERING INTRINSIC MOTIVATION: Traditional organizations try to motivate through such extrinsic means as financial rewards, punishments, and regulations. Spiritual organizations, on the other hand, tap into motivational forces within workers. Intrinsically motivated employees put forth sustained effort because they find the organization’s mission and their labor to be meaningful. Work becomes an enjoyable activity that requires no external reward. Intrinsic motivation can be enhanced by emphasizing the group’s shared goals, training workers so that they develop competence to master their tasks, providing autonomy so individuals have control over their work, and creating a warm, caring work environment.²⁹

PROMOTING SHARED SPIRITUAL VALUES: Spiritually developed organizations operate under a framework of shared spiritual values. Promoting these values can make organizations more productive, and leaders who adhere to these standards are more sensitive to ethical issues. Carole Jurkiewicz and Robert Giacalone, professors, researchers, and authors on workplace spirituality and organizational performance issues, offer a description of what one such values framework might look like:³⁰

Benevolence: kindness; promoting the happiness and prosperity of employees

Generativity: long-term focus; leaving something behind for those who follow

Humanism: asserting the dignity and worth of each employee; providing opportunities for personal growth

Integrity: adherence to a code of conduct; sincerity, honesty, candor

Justice: even-handed treatment of employees; impartiality in assigning rewards and punishments

Mutuality: recognizing interconnection and interdependence; contributing together

Receptivity: open-mindedness; flexible thinking; risk taking; creativity

Respect: regarding employees with esteem and value; expressing appreciation and consideration for others

Responsibility: following through independently to achieve goals; concern for doing what is right

Trust: confidence in the character and truth of the organization and its representatives

MAKING SPACE FOR THE SPIRIT: Spiritual organizations are intentional about nurturing the inner life of members. They may set aside space (chapels, meditation gardens) for reflection, meditation, and prayer, as well as time for such activities. For example, employees of DJ Jensen Construction in Portland, Oregon, are allowed to take paid time during the day to meditate.³¹ Some spirit-friendly organizations incorporate moments of silence into meetings and other gatherings. Others invite spiritual speakers, study spiritual materials, sponsor spiritual discussion groups, send employees to workplace spirituality conferences and prayer breakfasts, and schedule collective service projects such as Habitat for Humanity work days, breast cancer relay teams, and neighborhood clean-up projects.

SPIRITUAL DIVIDENDS

The purpose of this chapter has been to demonstrate that spiritual leaders are moral leaders, and then to outline ways to promote Ethical

Leadership through individual and collective spiritual development. Spirituality equips leaders to function as moral persons and moral managers through mission and meaning; other-centeredness; integrity, humility and justice; and hope and joy. Leaders promote their personal spiritual development when they seek to determine their vocation; engage in self-reflective practices such as meditation, prayer, fasting, and study; and seek to serve others. Organizations can do their part to foster the spiritual development of leaders by creating a compelling vision, fostering intrinsic motivation, promoting shared spiritual values, and making space for the spirit.

Promoting Ethical Leadership through spiritual development pays significant dividends. Spiritual leaders are better equipped to avoid scandal, to create the conditions for long-term organizational success, and to provide meaningful, fulfilling environments for themselves and their followers.

