

The Soul at Work—Give Me a Break!

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A Skeptic's View of the Feminization of Capitalism

What's behind the explosive growth of the coaching profession? What's fueling the rush toward spirituality in the workplace? Are people really fed up with excessive busyness—or are they simply paying lip service to the popular concept of “balance.” Has Soul truly entered the workplace, replacing “swim with the sharks” and the “one-minute manager” mentality, or does it just seem like it has?

Today's corporate leaders are up against enormous pressures. With earnings slowing and employee loyalty at an all time low, business leaders are desperately seeking effective strategies to re-engage their people. Workers are asked to do far too much with far too little, and the only thing holding them is the almighty dollar! Twelve-hour days and information overload are facts of life. The current economic downturn reminds workers of their ultimate expendability. Employees are asking, “What value is there in what I do?”

A 36-year-old rants, “I just got the promotion I've been dreaming of—a substantial raise, a new title, and a great bonus to come. Am I happy? No

way! Instead of a 60-hour week, now I'll have an 80-hour workweek! I don't have a life!"

Just as top management is scrambling to find a new panacea, in walks the Spirituality in the Workplace movement.

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Spirituality in the Workplace

Over the last 30 years, the feminist movement swept record numbers of women into the heart of corporate America, male bastions of status, money, and power. They had “arrived,” yet their deep inner sense of Self remained fragile. Searching for a deeper identity, women uncovered the revered divine feminine deity and began to revalue their innate nature.

The Jungian personality model proposes that men and women contain both feminine and masculine aspects. The masculine aspect—symbolic of Spirit—emanates from the mind or the intellect, and the feminine springs forth from our musculature, the body, where Soul resides. Feminine intuition, instinct, relational thinking, contemplation, and collaboration naturally counterbalance the more analytical, highly focused, goal-oriented, power-hungry masculine traits. In both Eastern and Western religions and cultures, a major life task is to develop an inner balance

between the masculine and feminine aspects of Self, moving toward Wholeness. This coming together, or union, is what Jungians refer to as the Inner Sacred Marriage.

In the early days, many women entered corporate America to make their mark. We aspired to do well doing good. Seeing a problem and attacking it straight on, caring about people first and believing profits would follow, we crossed boundaries and broke rules we never knew existed. As a result, we never truly belonged in the inner circle. Always on the outside, we were categorized as “witch-bitches” if we made it into positions of power, or it was assumed that we had slept our way to the top.

Yet our numbers increased. With more and more women proudly earning MBAs and PhDs, it seemed the glass ceiling would shatter. With highly honed masculine aspects, these new entries were far better equipped to make inroads. Once inside, the lure of corner offices, big dollars, and power eradicated any remnant of “femininity.” We fell prey to the very systemic values we wanted to change. Although we didn’t really ever become one of the guys, we became just like them—and it didn’t fit! Realizing that beyond the glass ceiling is a

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brick wall, many powerhouse women are taking a one-way ticket out. “Every 12 seconds another woman leaves corporate America to start her own business.” Men are moving out at only half this speed.

A recent study noted, “44% of women business owners with prior private sector experience cite ‘glass ceiling’ issues as key reasons for their move to entrepreneurship. They felt their contributions were not recognized or valued. Over half (58%) say nothing would attract them back to the corporate world.”

We Need a New Solution

Desperate for a way to stem the loss of these veteran women and eager to inspire their withering employee base, leadership is looking for another quick fix. In the '70s it was touchy-feely encounter groups, in the '80s it was quality circles, and in the '90s we shifted from “management by objectives” to searching for excellence. As we move into the new millennium, we are taking on social responsibility and personal transformation. Current business guru Charles Handy tells us, “We need the chance, in our work, not just in our leisure, to discover some truth about ourselves.” The truth we need to face is that no matter the remedy, unless the change is from the top down, it just won't work.

I remember being one of the new breed of officers listening to my president speak on leading us into a new corporate culture. His words of promise—“The rules of the road have changed”—brought the house down! Finding me in the crowd, he said, “This is your chance to create your ‘win-win’ fast-growth business model. I’m counting on you to bring ‘intrapreneurship’ to the forefront!”

With his blessing, a synergistic organization was created. Since results

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follow the energy, we were a great success. Our lean and ardent team worked together to co-create an entity that was far greater than the sum of its parts. We were committed to quality and passionate about creating a new business model. We had fun. We had no employee turnover. We broke all previous industry records.

But we were destined to fail. The old way of managing wasn’t working. Ours was. Everything we stood for clashed with the covert rules. Cancerlike, the larger system’s values devoured anything that didn’t resemble itself. The experiment was over. The operation was a success, but the patient died.

I'd like to believe that today's corporate powerhouses are making radical changes—putting people and social responsibility before short-term profit taking. But it takes gutsy leadership to bring a sputtering outmoded system into balance. Instead of just using spiritually correct phraseology, leaders must demonstrate a personal commitment to a new set of rules. Those in power must establish an intrinsic purpose for themselves and then for their businesses—they must “walk their talk”—and this new philosophy must be woven into the very fabric of the organization, or it will become just another fad.

95% of all problems and failures in business are system failures; it has nothing to do with the individual manager or worker. Only the leader can change the system.

Dr. W. Edwards Deming

Perhaps this time will be different. It is the time to reevaluate where we are and where we're headed. Most of our aging global citizenry, from Baby Boomer CEOs and self-made entrepreneurs to media execs, artists,

and aspiring Generation Xers, are entering a time of deep feminization—turning inward, reconnecting to nature, and living by fundamental values as old as the Ten Commandments. They all crave the opportunity to Make a Difference, to express their Soul-felt visions for the future, to integrate adding value with material success.

Shifting our behemoth organizations from win-lose to a “we are in this together” mindset will take time, a lot of time. Rather than waiting for them to move from “emergency to emergence,” we need to find new models to facilitate the process. Who best to lead the way but the movers and shakers who have left the fold to co-create a new way of doing business?

Coaches and organizational consultants have an opportunity to accelerate this global change, using their highly developed feminine traits of communication, collaboration, and “people first” thinking. Our successful survival depends on how well we elevate the feminine. Creating sacred inner marriages within ourselves and within our living systems will catapult us into the next evolutionary level of existence.

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