



The Centre for Spirituality's former executive director Vince Brewerton (left) with leadership coach Barry Braun. "There is a real hunger among people to bring their whole person to work," says Brewerton.

workplace spirituality

From workplace to worthplace

The most productive and creative environments
are ones infused with spirit and inclusion

BY DAWN HENWOOD

Workplace spirituality has emerged from the shadows to become a much-desired corporate good. At the office, spirituality no longer means personal beliefs that employees privately guard. Rather, it has become a key element of best practices in cultivating employee well-being.

Over the past decade, researchers have been exploring ways that spiritual workplaces foster creativity and productivity. British management consultant Georgeanne Lamont has documented how companies heighten performance by valuing the inner lives of their employees. Her book *The Spirited Business* shares stories from large and small companies that thrive by being

"soul-friendly." Since 1999 *The Journal of Organizational Change Management* has devoted four issues to the topic of spirituality in organizations.

In tune with this trend, five years ago Saint Mary's University opened its Centre for Spirituality and the Workplace, the first of its kind in Canada. The centre defines spirituality in the workplace as "a process of inquiry." In business, soul-searching equates with sound business ethics, a caring work culture, and environmental sustainability. It brings personal and corporate values into harmony and emphasizes the worth of each employee's contribution.

Vince Brewerton, the former executive director of the Centre for Spirituality and the Workplace, explains how a focus on spirituality satisfies employee needs while enabling organizations to tap into hidden resources. "There is a real hunger among people to be able to bring their whole person to work," he says. "That is to bring the spiritual self to work along with the intellectual and physical selves."

Transformational inquiry

Barry Braun's Introducing ExtraOrdinary workshop for business leaders uses spiritual inquiry to help people bring their whole self to whatever work they do. A leadership coach and the owner of St. Croix, N.S.-based Business Pathways Inc., Braun leads workshops across Canada for executives, senior managers, and entrepreneurs. Participants follow a process that encourages them to confront their past, examine the survival strategies they've developed over the years, and name their unique identity. Admittedly, that's a lot to pack into two days. Brewerton, who attended one of Braun's workshops, found the experience both intense and "transformational."

At an Introducing ExtraOrdinary workshop held last year at Halifax's Saragay Club, armchairs formed a semicircle in front of floor-to-ceiling windows looking out over Halifax's Northwest Arm. Wearing a simple black shirt and pants, Braun greeted participants quietly as they arrived and settled in. The tone was subdued yet intimate. Clearly, this wasn't going to be your standard flipcharts-and-slides training session. Instead, Braun began preparing the audience for their journey along a spiritual path to discover their essential self.

For Braun, the most spiritual question you can ask him is, "Who am I?" To him, spirituality means connecting with other people, with the world around you, and with a higher power, whatever you choose to call it. And the first point of connection, he believes, must be with yourself. "Only by knowing who you truly are can you connect with others in a purposeful, meaningful way," says Braun. "There's a spiritual dimension to everything I do."

Braun developed his spiritual method of self-exploration through years of coaching businesspeople and researching the characteristics of great business leaders. People who create successful lives, he has discovered, tune into their

souls. They cultivate authenticity and humility; their self-knowledge shines through all they do.

So how does one get there? A client of Braun's compares the process to peeling the layers of an onion. Drawing on research from psychology and neuroscience, Braun helps workshop participants dismantle some of the internal "maps" they have constructed to make sense of the world. Gently, he nudges them to revisit transitional moments in their lives and consider their interpretations of these experiences. What's left exposed is the bare, real self.

Take Glenn Stewardson, for example, a senior financial-planning advisor with Assante Wealth Management Ltd., who has learned to see himself as "a rock." That metaphor has helped him clarify his role, reminding him that his job is more about helping people achieve their goals than just doling out financial advice. "I am the rock—the rock they stand on to reach for their dreams," he says. "That's what I'm actually doing, what this really is all about."

A worthplace

As Stewardson and others have discovered, self-realization doesn't require flashy theatrics. In his gentle way, Braun leads his workshop participants through activities that include meditation, drawing, guided visualization, and group sharing. According to Sean Sears, the owner of Ogden Pond, a venture-management firm, those learning elements combine to make "powerful medicine."

In the wake of Enron, *An Inconvenient Truth*, and the implosion of the American financial industry, more and more companies are seeking such medicine. University of Guelph professor Michael Rock, who has been promoting the spiritual healing of the workplace for more than 30 years, says opportunities for dialogue are finally opening up. Businesses are coming to the painful realization that without spiritual awareness, they are like the heap of dry bones the prophet Ezekiel saw in the desert. "You hear 'crunch, crunch, crunch' as you go through the organization," says Rock. "There's no spirit left."

For Rock the cure is to bring spirituality to life throughout an organization, so workers know "there's something other than just slogging away every day." He has coined the term "worthplace" to describe the ideal alternative: an environment that enables each employee to

make a purposeful, respected contribution to an organization.

For many who have taken Braun's workshop, that sense of organizational purpose starts with knowing who you are. Glen Carrigan, the president of EmbroidMe and Plan Ahead Events Canada, finds that he's a more effective executive after attending the workshop: "When you've identified who you are, it helps you identify with other people. You're more focused. The communication is better." Carrigan also says his work with Braun has brought calm and focus to his daily routine and has led to better decision-making. "When you have a clear idea of who you are and what you want, you can identify opportunities. You may not have recognized those opportunities before."

At the Halifax Tax Services Office of the Canada Revenue Agency, director Don Gibson is also a believer in the value of spiritual self-discovery; he's finding creative ways to promote spirituality in his organization. After attending a workshop at the Halifax-based Authentic Leadership in Action Institute (ALIA) a few years ago, he began to engage his man-

agers and staff in discussions about finding the purpose and meaning in life. As a result of those conversations, he has introduced his employees to Viktor Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*.

Gibson has also spent a lot of time and effort supporting diversity and respect in the workplace. For instance, he helped initiate a Ramadan Challenge that gave a Muslim employee a chance to discuss his faith and non-Muslims an opportunity to experience fasting and an Iftar feast. "What was so remarkable about this," says Gibson, "was that the employee felt safe, in a time when many Muslims were being vilified, to openly share his faith and to try to dispel inaccurate stereotypes."

This story illustrates how an organization can create a workplace by acknowledging the value of every individual. Like Braun and Rock, Gibson believes spirituality plays a huge part in people being successful in their lives. "Helping people explore their sense of individual purpose ultimately results in a better workplace, where people are more highly motivated and have greater satisfaction in their lives, both person-

ally and professionally."

Thus, in these troubled economic times, Rock urges business leaders to abandon the tired slogan "do more with less." Instead, he insists, "we need to do more with more"—more with heart, more with imagination, and more with spirit. To thrive in the new normal, companies need to encourage self-awareness and create a true workplace that will attract and nurture creative employees. All signs point to inspiration—an infusion of spirit—as the critical factor that makes the difference between a heap of bones and a vibrant living organization.

Employees today want more than a paycheck from a job. They want to feel that their work has real value, that they're somehow making a difference. Organizations that respect that desire by enabling their staff to explore spirituality at work will also experience a profound difference. "Employees are able to connect their own sense of meaning and purpose with the organization's meaning and purpose," says Vince Brewerton. "That alignment means more energy being devoted by employees to the organization." 🌍

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