

SPIRITUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE
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It is a special honor to be recognized by The Church of the Holy Spirit, during the Second Annual Dean Gibbs Benefit Gala. Since this church is under the leadership of Rev. Williams, who is also a Trustee for the University, this honor is even more meaningful. Trustee Wesley Williams was very instrumental in persuading me to come to UVI, and supporting me through the process.

It is also very meaningful that this honor is focused on the work I have done in regards to the creation of the Center for the Study of Spirituality and Professionalism. This work is dear to my heart and I'm glad that it has been recognized by this church and this community. Before coming to UVI, I had recently written a book entitled *The Spiritual Revitalization of the Legal Profession: A Search for Sacred Rivers*. This book examined the interconnection between spirituality and the practice of law.

When I began to entertain opportunities to become president of a university, I was concerned that taking such a position would prevent me from continuing this important and meaningful work. One of the special aspects of accepting the position at UVI is that I realized that I could "have my cake and eat it too". In addition to the position of President, I was also appointed as a Distinguished Professor of Spirituality and Professionalism.

This has allowed me, working with others, to expand upon the work I was doing in regards to the legal profession and incorporate other disciplines, such as nursing, psychology, business and even mathematics. This has been a special part of my work at UVI, and it has greatly influenced how we try to guide this unique University towards a place of greatness. For this I am humbly grateful.

I want to speak to you today about "Spirituality in the Workplace." There are those who believe that there must be a clear separation between religion and the workplace and especially between the church and government funded institutions.

There are those, on the other hand, who feel that this separation has hurt us as a society and they are strong proponents for putting prayer back into public schools, and placing the nativity scene on every public building.

You might think that I am in this last group who strongly advocates for breaking down the barriers between religion and public schools or religion and the workplace. To the contrary, I think there is still a danger in any multi-religious nation for the government to choose one religion over another, even if the one chosen is the one I embrace. Likewise, I think

it is important for us to be sensitive to how religious beliefs and practices are promoted in the workplace.

However, I don't believe that there should be any limitations to how we live out our religious beliefs in schools or the workplace. That, to me, is the difference between religion and spirituality. Religion is the organized structure of our beliefs and rituals. But spirituality is the manner in which we express our connection to God. Religion is the concept, spirituality is the action. Spirituality is the manner in which we embody the highest principles of our religious beliefs as we interact with the world. Our religion may suggest that we must love our neighbor as ourselves. Our spirituality is when we actually demonstrate love for our neighbors. Our religion teaches us forgiveness, but when people seriously mistreat us and we are able to rise above it and forgive them, then that is spirituality in action. Our religion is the vessel in which our souls dwell, but our spirituality is what the world sees when we pour out the contents of the vessel upon others.

Therefore, I have no problem with spirituality in the workplace. To the contrary, I think it is essential for us to embrace and cultivate spirituality in the workplace in order to ensure that the people and the institution achieve their full potential. We cannot expect people to leave their values and spirit at the workplace's doorstep. The goal of the enlightened employer is to create a workplace where values are embraced and where people's spirits may flourish.

When I arrived at the University of the Virgin Islands, I offered to the community Seven Management Values in regards to how we should operate in order to achieve the goals of the University. Those values ranged from becoming a high performance institution and being service oriented, to being fiscally responsible and making informed decisions. But it is the 7th management value that has created the greatest challenge many of us. The 7th value says that *we must nurture the emotional and spiritual health of our employees.*

Therefore I require all of my Cabinet members to create goals in regards to all of the management values, including #7. I did this because I deeply believe that if we do not first proclaim that spirituality as a value of the institution, then we will not get people to focus on it, and we will not give them a license to take better care of themselves and those around them. When I see people spending too many late nights at the office, I have a stronger platform to say to them that they may be promoting one value, of being a high performer, but they may be violating another, which is nurturing their emotional and spiritual health.

But the fundamental question is, *How does spirituality manifest itself in the workplace?* Some scholars argue that "spirituality in the workplace is about individuals and organisations seeing work as a spiritual path, as an opportunity to grow and to contribute to society in a meaningful way. It is about care, compassion and support of others; about integrity and

people being true to them and others. It means individuals and organisations attempting to live their values more fully in the work they do.” www.spiritatwork.org/docs/ISAW_APPLICATION-2008.doc

Research has shown that people work harder, and give more of themselves to an organization when they feel valued, respected and embraced. They stay with an organization longer when they feel connected to its purpose and mission, and when they feel that the work is connected to their individual purpose. When work is a calling and not just a job, productivity and quality increase. Some might argue that all of these things I just mentioned are management issues. Thus, if you compensate people and provide bonuses for them, then all of these goals will be addressed.

I argue that all of the values I just mentioned are not just intellectual, but are, by their nature, spiritual. You can't buy someone's true commitment. We all like to be paid well, but respect comes from a deeper well than the bank account of the company or organization.

There is another aspect to spirituality in the workplace that is often overlooked. When we create spiritually centered organizations, then we unleash people's creativity. Spirituality by its nature is boundless. It is not something that can be contained in a formula or roadmap that is easily followed. Spirituality is the power to transcend the known and embrace the unknown. When we give people the license to be their authentic selves, we are also saying to them that we are giving them the license to dream, to tap into their creative wells in order to solve the challenging problems that we face. The well of creativity is replenished by a source that exceeds our intellectual capacities. Creativity is watered by the teardrops of the divine. It is an endless well for those courageous enough to live outside of the box of tradition and fear.

The word *vision* is often used to describe a management process that many organizations embrace as they develop a new strategic plan. But creating a true vision for an organization is not a management task but a spiritual exercise. To have a vision is to be able to see things that don't exist and believe in that which might feel impossible to some. If we do it right then we have to tap into the soul of the organization and not just its intellectual processes.

A good manager can determine the next steps an organization should take. But it takes a spiritually inspired, visionary leader to ask an organization to go where there are no steps. When we ask people to embrace a bold vision for their organization, we are asking them to have faith in themselves and in something greater than themselves. At its core, this is a spiritual request, rooted in faith. We are humbly asking them to tap into a divine energy that exists in us all so that something grand can be created, first in our hearts, and then with our hands.

Spirituality in the workplace also means that we are enhancing our communication skills and abilities. Communication is the key to the operation and growth of any organization. When spiritual values are nurtured in the workplace, we are no longer talking at people, we are talking to them; we are attempting to see them through our spiritual eyes; and listening to them; listening not only to their words, but to their yearnings, their desires and even their pain; and having the courage to touch it; to place it in our hands so we may be instruments of their healing. It is the values underneath the words that convey the real person, who needs something from their relationship with us that we may not be providing.

Spirituality in the workplace also means that the organization and its people must be concerned about more than just the profit they are making or the number of students they are enrolling. We have to also be concerned with whether we are serving those in the communities around us. Social responsibility is a direct link to our spiritual and religious beliefs. We put our religious beliefs into practice when we serve others, especially those in need. This is our highest calling as human beings. The Church of the Holy Spirit certainly understands this principle. You have been very clear that the building you are constructing is not intended to be a “museum for the saints; but a magnet to attract and serve others”.

There has been strong opposition to spirituality in the workplace because some interpret it as an indication that managers and supervisor are being asked to become weak and not hold people accountable for their actions. Some believe that it will lower the standards and that individuals will not work as hard because they can use this spiritual value as an excuse for their shortcomings and failings.

However, spirituality does not suggest that we ask less of people who work for us or with us; it means that we ask even more from them. We are asking them to have high standards, but to also impose those standards in a manner that respects the dignity of the people who must live up to those standards. It does not create a weakness in the organization; to the contrary, it can make the entire organization stronger.

I have had to terminate individuals, and I have certainly had to inform them that they are not performing at the level I require. But I must also do that in a way that manifests the values of respect and dignity for the persons, and sensitivity to their future, even if they do not convey these same values toward me.

So the fear is not that we will give people an excuse if we embrace spirituality in the workplace. The real fear is that we may give them a license to dream again, and thus push the organization in ways that it is not ready to be pushed. But that fear is not a fear of spirituality but a fear of growth and progress. That is the fear of those leading the organization and not those who are called to the mantel of excellence and service.

If we invite true love, creativity, respect and compassion into our workplaces, we are inviting light into dark places, and rain into parched deserts. If we keep these blessings out, then we are only creating dark deserts where nothing of true meaning will grow. For winning the whole world may cost us our souls.

Thus, the Center for the Study of Spirituality and Professionalism is in the business of researching these connections about which I have just spoken. This is an emerging field that requires more scholarship, study and investigation. Yet the Center is also committed to providing opportunities for individuals to be exposed to the knowledge that already exist.

We have so far convened one major conference and two training sessions at the University. The Center held all day training on ethics in the workplace. In addition, individuals from UVI and other governmental agencies were trained so that they can conduct trainings within the VI on this critical topic. Some of the major challenges we face locally and nationally are not a product of our intellectual limitations, but an outgrowth of our ethical deficiencies.

The Center also sponsored a seminar on spirituality and business. The presenter was Dr. Ted Malloch, a Yale professor, who wrote the leading book on this topic called, *Doing Virtuous Business*, which focuses on the concept of spiritual capital. During the seminar, Malloch demonstrated why it is essential for business to operate from a spiritual foundation. Those that do are not only able to achieve spiritually, but financially.

Our goal is to build on these efforts and expand even more in the future. One of the things I'm most proud of in regards to the Center is that we have been able to create an Advisory Board, comprising of a diverse group of religious and non religious leaders in this community and the world. We have every major religion represented as well as numerous denominations. We are honored that Bishop Gumbs accepted our invitation and is an important member of this Board. Their collective advice has been invaluable to us.

In conclusion, spirituality in the workplace is more than a nice slogan. It is a movement to reclaim that which is rightfully ours. The religious beliefs we nurture on our holy days were not intended to be confined to our holy temples. We are empowered to live lives that manifest the things we believe. God's Holy Spirit is not intended to be a temporary interaction that we have on Sunday. It should dwell in us at all times, and it should guide us in all interactions.

If people cannot see God in us and in our actions, then they are justified in claiming that God is dead. For if those who worship God don't manifest spiritually divine values, then how will others ever know God? Jesus was able to say, "Thou hast seen me, and thus thou hast seen the father." Can we say that? Can people see God in us?

If conversion is our aim, then we convert people more by our actions than by our words. They must see and feel the love that we say we possess. They must hear the truth in our actions and not just in our evangelising.

Spirituality in the workplace means that we have a laboratory in which to demonstrate that God is real and that we are too. We do that, not just in good times, but more importantly, in bad times. Dr. Martin Luther King once said, and I will paraphrase him, “the ultimate measure of a man (and woman) is not where (they) stand in moments of comfort and convenience, but where (they) stand in times of challenge and controversy.” So the true measure of our religious beliefs is not what we say on Sunday when we are all on one accord, but what we do throughout the week, when we are with those who adamantly disagree with us and have no love for us.

For those of us who are Christian, that is the ultimate test of whether we are Christ-like. Jesus did not die surrounded by supporters and loved ones. He bore his greatest pain, in the midst of enemies and doubters. Yet he manifested love and sought forgiveness for them.

If we could do that in our workplaces, then we would not only bring spirituality to the workplace, but we would transform this world.