

## Spirituality in The Workplace

**By understanding the advantages of spirituality, leaders will not only lead better, but also better engage with their followers.**

*“The ultimate ignorance is the rejection of something you know nothing about and refuse to investigate.”* -- Dr. Wayne Dyer

As leaders, before judging another person’s religion, we need to understand that there are a variety of spiritual experiences. In his 1902 book, *A Variety of Religious Experiences: A Study in Human Nature*, psychologist and philosopher William James stated, “Religious happiness is happiness. Religious trance is trance.”<sup>1</sup> And as fanatical or eccentric as some religions may appear to an uninvolved outsider, we cannot discount the psychotherapeutic effect religion has on its followers. “Religion,” says William James, “cannot stand for any single principle or essence, but rather is a collective name. The theorising mind tends always to the oversimplification of its materials. This is the root of all that absolutism and one sided dogmatism by which both philosophy and religion have been infested.”

William James also differentiates between organised religion and private religion, as someone who does not go to church may still be deeply ‘religious’ in a privately spiritual way. Spiritual people are noticeably happier than half-baked religious people, who may not have any true spirituality whatsoever. Truly spiritual people have a comforting sense — a knowing — that the creator of the universe goes where they go.

Well-adjusted people have a healthy balance of relying on both an internal and external locus of control. When challenges pose themselves, beliefs and certain healthy superstitions offer support. In the Tour de France, a sport where ounces of weight can make *the* difference, note how many of the riders have necklaces with good luck charms, rings, and St Christopher’s tangled up with their neck chains. Once the gruelling preparation for the Tour is over, this external locus of control can make the difference between a hell of a climb or a sublime climb on a bicycle.

Let’s look at the *mounting scientific evidence* of the benefits of being spiritual. You cannot deny a member of your team this opportunity to improve their chances of success. And as a leader, the below eleven points offer you deeper insights into how the mind works and why many of your followers may just need to be spiritual.

1. Exactly how spirituality works doesn’t matter; it is the outcome, the results, which matter most. Faith, or belief in a loving God, can improve health, self-worth and wellbeing. Having faith in something puts our inquiring minds and emotions in equilibrium. It gives the believer clarity and certainty. Faith can answer our intellectual “whys” and quench an emotional yearning for love and security. Those who do *not* have their intellectual and emotional ‘vacuum’ filled will unconsciously waste huge amounts of energy pursuing ‘ambitious’ external material cravings. In other words, if a human is at war inside

himself, this emotional wrestling wastes energy. But for those who do feel fulfilled on the inside, those who feel more emotionally and psychologically balanced, energy is conserved for unselfish use. And because that force is always on-tap and stays awake even while our bodies rest, consulting the God of our understanding allows us to “let go and let God.” After we’ve done our best, we can detach from a man-made outcome and get a good night’s sleep, we can surrender the rest – and then peacefully rest. It’s about connecting – not just religion.

2. Some folk, wracked by guilt, find relief in God forgiving them. Talking to a spiritual ‘therapist’, daily, helps them process their problems. This “talking therapy” leads to improved self-awareness. Daniel Kahneman and Alan B Krueger cite in their 2006 white paper, “Developments in the Measurement of Subjective Well-Being,” that active religious involvement correlates with “high life satisfaction and happiness”<sup>2</sup> In 2012 a global study of 15,000 people in 83 countries cited praying, worshipping and meditating the 5<sup>th</sup> most important thing that made people happy.<sup>3</sup> And remember, Shawn Achor, from Good Think Incorporated, and author of *The Happiness Advantage*, (2012) said, “The single greatest advantage in the modern economy is a happy and engaged workforce.” Shawn says that dopamine, released when we are happy, turns on all the learning centres of our brain. (A great reason for allowing followers to be religious)
3. An emotionally healthy soul is a healthy body. Religion should be regarded as an alternative, though *not* a complete substitute, to many medicines. With the synergistic effect of both an active medicinal cure and a spiritual antidote, we are granted an advantage over those who do not believe in combined remedies. Again, the placebo effect always has been, and always will be, a mainstay in recovering from an illness or any number of life’s psychological challenges. Many doctors know this but out of sensitivity to their patients’ reactions, they are reluctant to push these ‘religious’ or esoteric beliefs. However, reluctance to share this powerful aspect of the healing process is actually insensitive, as it is a lost opportunity for a patient to recover faster. In fact, imagine how many people have died prematurely because they only relied on an active pharmacological remedy.
4. Being spiritual gives us a quiet knowledge that we are not alone during our recovery or our challenges. This may likely help us recuperate more quickly after an illness. When we are happier, we have less stress and thus lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol.<sup>4</sup> This enables us to better fight off disease and lowers our blood pressure. Most oncologists know which patients recover fastest – those with the most spiritual ballast who *believe* they will be healed. It’s important that we must *want* to get well again.
5. Feeling connected in society is a basic need, and organised churchgoers have a guaranteed social network of people who generally care about each other’s wellbeing. That may or may not be attractive right at the moment, but we never know when we will need that support system.
6. Spiritual people live longer.
7. Being spiritual gives us a basic vision, purpose, goals and a set of values, which not everyone can establish on their own. Life gains more significance, which is one of the keys to a happy and deeply meaningful life.

8. Prayer is conscious communication with the creator of the universe. Prayer (talking to God) and meditation (listening to God) encourage us to become conscious and centred, emotional vitamin tablets which impact both our physical and mental health. Prayer, observed (on a brain scanner) as activity in our brain's parietal lobe, not only develops our mind but scientists are now correlating the link between health, longevity, and happiness with the spirituality of prayer. The consciousness of prayer and meditation assists with answering the vital existential questions — Who am I? Why am I here? Where do I want to go? — which are necessary reflections for kick-starting our journey to deeper life. In prayer, we often remember to count our blessings; in fact, it is much more therapeutic to be grateful than to always ask for things. Prayer is one of the most cost effective, elegant, and attractive energy forces we can wield; so why would anyone not want to pray wherever they go? It is for these beneficial reasons that the need to pray cuts across all cultures and will remain with us forever. So regardless of whether or not our prayers are even answered, there are significant personal benefits to prayer. And in hindsight, it is also comforting to know that we did everything we could in any given situation.
9. If you don't believe in something, try the opposite — doubt. Doubting your abilities, your ideals, and your ideas breeds hesitation in your actions. Even if your beliefs change over time, you have got to believe in something. You must know what you believe in or you will keep drifting neurotically. In the beginning, blind faith may be required, but through life experience and insight, less reasoning and justification is necessary, until faith finally becomes effortless. Major Kira Nerys further elucidates this by saying, "That's the thing about faith. If you don't have it you can't understand it. And if you do, no explanation is necessary." Without faith in a higher power and faith in yourself, clearly you will be missing out on a more enriched life.
10. Tested over the millennia, commandments and guidelines of various religious faiths are designed to shield and build our own integrity. Help others without the expectation of acknowledgement – it is nearly always the giver who receives a bigger thrill than the receiver.
11. Looking at the above advantages, spiritual people are happier and less depressed.

When a leader is aware of the above advantages, they begin to appreciate productivity injection it may have on their followers.

*Know thyself, believe in God, and dare to dream.*

-- John Salley (1964 -) American professional basketball player

If anyone ought to comment here, it should be neuroscientist Dr. Andrew Newberg. He has authored *How God Changes Your Brain* and co-authored *Born to Believe* and *Why God Won't Go Away*. As professor of psychology, radiology and religious studies at the University of Pennsylvania, he believes our brains are hardwired to enmesh with spirituality and religion – which is why religion won't go away. Dr. Andrew Newberg, with therapist Mark Robert Waldman and their research team, have discovered that spiritual belief improves the functioning of our brain. "What's more, actual faith isn't always necessary: atheists who meditate on positive imagery can obtain similar neurological benefits." Dr. Newberg has found that intense meditation

and prayer permanently change numerous structures and functions in the brain, altering our values and the way we perceive reality. Spiritual people, discovered Newberg, have a better developed thalamus and frontal lobes, which for instance, improves memory.<sup>5</sup>

It seems like we are hardwired to turn to our traditional beliefs when times are tough. Not everyone is in dire need of therapy, but neuro-psychiatrist Dr Carl Jung found that almost every patient who was emotionally sick was in need of some form of spiritual sustenance. Jung's experience with patients is quite compelling:

“Among all my patients in the second half of life – that is to say, over thirty-five – there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age have given to their followers, and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook. This of course has nothing whatever to do with a particular creed or membership of a church... It seems to me that, side by side with the decline of religious life, the neuroses grow noticeably more frequent... Freud has unfortunately overlooked the fact that man has never yet been able single-handed to hold his own against the powers of darkness – that is of the unconscious. ... The opening up of the unconscious always means the outbreak of intense spiritual suffering...”<sup>6</sup>

Notice how Jung suggests you don't need to belong to a particular creed or membership of a church. This is important because there are hundreds of different denominations and thousands of different variations of mainstream religions. These different schisms have sprung up because church leaders have promoted their own beliefs above that of the original scriptures. We also appreciate the way Jung has warned us that the unpacked unconscious may reveal such baggage, that using flesh alone, we may not easily endure uprooting it ourselves.

Jung also observed that after midlife the yearning for spiritual balance becomes more definite. Having observed thousands of his patients, French surgeon and Nobel Prize winner, Dr Alexis Carrel, felt this about prayer: “Prayer is the force as real as terrestrial gravity. As a physician, I have seen men, after all other therapy had failed, lifted out of disease and melancholy by the serene effort of prayer. Only in prayer do we achieve that complete and harmonious assembly of body, mind, and spirit which gives the frail human reed its unshakable strength.”

But be careful not to use pure religious conviction as a universal panacea. If *organised* religion was the only magic-potion then there would be far fewer religious wars. Completely straying from the original scriptures and teachings of the New Testament, the Roman Catholic Inquisition, unabated over hundreds of years, tortured to death tens of millions of completely innocent ‘heretics.’ Today creepy preachers and whisky priests abound. As William James observed, religion alone can easily be a thin veneer on a bigger problem.

Take a friend of mine, Gillian, who was in desperate need of professional therapy but became religious instead. But we know religion is not always a substitute for everything. Unconsciously she was looking for an external locus of control to avoid taking responsibility for her life's troubles. However, her marriage continued to flounder, and what is so common of someone who is in personally need of therapy, she kept insisting that her husband needed the therapy. Eventually

she decided to find a therapist for her husband, but the therapist insisted that she see Gillian first. With a lifetime of psychological baggage revealing itself, within minutes Gillian erupted like a volcano and sobbed her heart out to the therapist.

The point is this: there is space for religion, psychology and psychiatry to coexist, and if both the church and medical fraternity are to thrive, they should appreciate the synergy of working with each other.

### **References:**

1. James, William. (1994). *A Variety of Religious Experiences*. A study in Human Nature. p.28, The Modern Library
2. Kahneman, Daniel and Krueger B. Alan (2006). "Developments in the Measurement of Subjective Well-Being" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* – Volume 20, Number 1, Winter 2006, Pages 3-24
3. Harvard Business Review, Jan 2012. p.89
4. Steptoe, Andrew; Jane Wardle and Michael Marmot. 2005. "Positive Affect and Health-Related Neuroendocrine, Cardiovascular, and Inflammatory Processes." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*. May 3, 102:18, pp. 6508-512
5. Dr. Andrew Newberg website, [www.andrewnewberg.com](http://www.andrewnewberg.com) , accessed Feb 2010
6. Jung, CG: *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. 1932, p. 264, p.266, p.277