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Spirituality,Creativity and Business

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A RESOURCE FOR ENLIGHTENED BUSINESS PRACTICE

THE INNER EDGE

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We yearn to be creative. We say that a lack of time, business demands and family obligations hold us back. But we can break free. The path to creativity begins within. What it takes to manifest creativity—individually, in teams, and in organizations—may surprise you. The transformation it brings to your workplace will astound you.

CREATIVITY: HAD ANY GREAT IDEAS LATELY?

Spirituality, Creativity and Business

by **William C. Miller**

Former U.S. President Calvin Coolidge once bluntly stated, "The business of America is business"—a statement that appears to share little in common with a more spiritual view by Joseph Chilton Pearce, author of *The Bond of Power.*

Pearce wrote, "We are created to develop the ability to create. The creature is designed to mature into the creator, the Son into the Father. The creation is the way by which God the One becomes many and why Eternity is in love with the productions of time."

Although these statements appear antithetical to some people—certainly their focus is different—are they *really?* Business aims to transform ideas into reality through innovation. We, as individuals, aim to transform the deepest longings of the human spirit into reality. I believe the two missions can become one.

Infusing Spirit: The Creative Spark

I once consulted with Du Pont to develop marketing opportunities for its newly created material called Nomex. The first day of our session produced about 300 ideas, but nothing really sparked. There was no flash of brilliance. I drove home puzzled.

The next day I asked the participants to discuss which aspects of "the world situation" concerned them most profoundly. Instantly the room became alive with real-life issues that elicited their passion: hunger, drugs, crime, resource depletion. The next step, I told them, was to form groups combining the people with similar concerns to brainstorm ways in which Nomex could contribute to a solution.

The creative energy in the room rose exponentially. Ultimately more than 1,000 ideas were organized into 50 top "key concepts," 10 of which were later tested for technical and market feasibility. Over the next two years, one of those concepts (only #8 on the initial Top 10 list!) achieved a significant profit and market share. It was using Nomex to protect precious art during shipment from museum to museum. The idea was proposed by a manager whose passion was art and its preservation.

What turned the #8 concept into the #1 business? When the managers anchored their creative energy to something they found personal, compelling and emotionally real, they touched their creative commitment. Thus, they sparked a success for the business by bring in their own deep, personal values, such as caring for others and responsible action.

Fundamental Values

According to India's spiritual leader Sathya Sai Baba, fundamental human values such as concern for well-being, responsibility, love, truth and inner peace provide the foundation to

Schwab and Co. Uses Creativity to Drive Business Success

To Charles Schwab and Co., a financial brokerage service that has grown expontentially in recent years, creativity has become a driver of sustainable business success.

Schwab's vision was to adhere to high ethical principles and to avoid an inherent conflict in the brokerage business: that the employee who is advising the customer on investment decisions also is making a commission from those investment decisions. Schwab decided that his employees would not get paid commissions and they would not give advice. As the company grew, more customers asked Schwab employees for help on investment decisions—advice that Schwab employees could not give. Schwab focused all of its creative energy on new, innovative ways to educate customers, without giving them advice.

On another front, Schwab was creating a breakthrough product called OneSource to offer mutual funds from many fund companies with no fees charged to Schwab customers. Some mutual fund companies wanted to create a special class of funds, with higher management fees, to cover the fees they were required to pay to Schwab. But Schwab insisted that the investment through Schwab had to be the same as if the customer had gone to the mutual fund company directly and it creatively renegotiated contracts to ensured that happened.

every major spiritual tradition. These fundamental human values also directly support established business values, such as how

- concern for well-being fosters great service
- responsibility fosters trust and quality
- caring fosters collaboration and daring
- truthfulness fosters honest relationships
- equanimity fosters creative, wise decisions.

As business leaders, we can learn how to integrate personal and spiritual values into the workplace to stimulate quantum leaps in creativity, process improvement, customer service and other business values (see box below).

Regarding the source of creativity, St. Augustine stated in his *Confessions*, "All the loveliness which passes through men's minds into their skillful hands comes from the supreme loveliness which is above our soul, which my soul sighs for day and night." In Tolstoy's "What is Art?" we read, "Art is a human activity whose purpose is the transmission of the highest and best feelings which men have attained."

Looking at these quotations, together with the opening quotes from Coolidge and Pearce, it becomes clear that business is a form of creative art. The *artistry of business* is the creative right of all people who desire true prosperity, economically and spiritually, as well as personally and globally.

Consummate artists demand from themselves a level of dedication and practice most people cannot imagine applying to themselves and their work. Conductor Andre Previn once said, "If I miss a day of practice, I know it. If I miss two days, my manager knows it. If I miss three days, my audience knows it." Without mastery of whatever God-given talents we each have, we desert a quiet voice within us that wants to be expressed, a "muscle" of creativity that *wants* to be exercised.

Similarly, peak-performing organizations demand a mastery of their own, collective creativity. Yet, somehow, all around this planet, we've lost touch with how our work contribution can be an exercise of our deepest value and a training ground for discovering more of who we are as spiritual/human beings. If we focus primarily on material growth, we miss the very basis of healthy, economic prosperity. That basis is giving our best to enrich our surroundings, our environment, and our planet.

By seeing ourselves first and foremost as spiritual beings, transcending our time on earth in these physical bodies, our spiritual nature becomes the context for everything else. From that point of view, intrinsic motivation to be creative cannot be understood without the context of our spirituality!

I achieved a breakthrough in my understanding of this expanded sense of spirituality and its application to business in 1982 when I read *The Way to Shambhala* by Edwin Bernbaum, which showed me that virtually all spiritual stories across cultures have the following "plot line":

- You're on a quest, and you come to an impassable river (or other obstacle), guarded by a demon.
- The instructions are clear: Withdraw to gather strength—identify with a power (the divine) so its energies merge in you. Then call forth the demon to see exactly what you have to deal with.
- Do battle until you are victorious in defeating, befriending, or taming the demon.
- Engage the subdued or tamed demon as an ally to get you across the impassable river. On the other side, take account, with gratitude, of what you've gained to assist you on your next journey.

Seeking a Creative Solution to a Difficult Challenge

When faced with difficult challenges, we call upon our creativity—perhaps unconsciously—to arrive at a solution, which can take the form of a new product or invention. These quests, the Creative Journey, find success through the answers to the following eight questions.

1. What is your goal?
2. What is at stake? What makes it a difficult challenge?
3. What about you—your values, experience and character—give you confidence as you move ahead?
4. What is the most important issue that requires some creative ideas to resolve?
5. What options can you consider, even if you don't use them?
6. What option(s) did you choose?
7. What did you do to implement those solutions?
8. What were the results, and the satisfaction you gained from them?

The Creative Journey model differs from normal problem-solving processes. Most problem-solving processes limit their focus to only the mental side of innovation, such as setting a goal, performing analysis, eliciting ideas, making a decision, and implementing it. Yet innovation requires a plunge from confidence to darkness that makes us search our souls for the answer, applying our personal values and engaging our souls.

Understanding the Emotional Cycles of the Creative Process

Becoming creative—personally and in our organizations—requires a willingness to feel the fears associated with the risks and uncertainty of the unknown and then to gain the necessary confidence (the word "confidence" comes from the Latin, **con** + *fides*, meaning "with faith") to tap into our character for solutions. By tapping into our character, we find in ourselves the inner source of acting with faith and courage. If we don't, our creative minds shrink and we come up with only the meekest, most ordinary ideas.

STAGE	JOURNEY	STEPS
Challenge	Begin a quest—come to an impassable river and demon	Establish a goal and assess the risk
Focus	Take on inner power and call forth the demon	Tap into character, analyze priority issues
Creative Solution	Do battle and defeat or tame the demon	Generate options. Decide on a solution
Completion	Cross the impassable river and take account of the gains	Implement change and celebrate results

In 1987, Lorna Catford and I adapted these ideas in teaching Michael Ray's course called "Creativity in Business" at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business (see box above). The most powerful insight for me lay in understanding the stage of personal empowerment for facing the river and demon, and its parallel in the innovation process—that this tapping into character, including spiritual values, enables us to put our values to work. Suddenly, the basic "confidence curve" of the innovation process became clear, and I saw the power of including the emotional and spiritual as well as the mental steps in a model of innovation.

The "Love Connection"

The goal of all mystical spiritual traditions is to realize our inherent Oneness with the Creator and then serve others from this experience of Oneness. We are born of creation and share in its creative powers. From Oneness with God, we co-create with God in this world. Work is the opportunity to deepen and express an experience of oneness with all beings through selfless service. While the notion of selfless service flies in the face of our normal desires and beliefs about compensation and benefits programs, it is one way to begin experiencing the true nature of God as one's own nature, purified through more and more selflessness. The intrinsic motivator—our inner nature of love—is the very nature of divinity and the very life principle behind all organisms, including organizations.



Illustration by Tim Foley

Thus, the big question changes from "How can we show that spiritual values can contribute to the bottom line?" to "How can we bring business into an expanded sense of our spirituality?" Business is a learning ground for deepening our spiritual awareness. With this approach, ask yourself: How would we conduct ourselves differently at work? How would rewards and motivation be different? How would we communicate differently? How would we work to meet our commitments to our customers? How would we deal with pollution, recycling, and "green" issues? How would we measure the health of a company (would quarterly earnings still be important)?

The answers to these questions might imply incremental or radical changes in how we operate, depending on who we are and our circumstances. The one thing I feel confident about: the answers would lead us to greater prosperity, both materially and spiritually, rather than less. ●

Books by William Miller

- **Flash of Brilliance** (Perseus Books, 1998)
- **The Creative Edge: Fostering Innovation where You Work** (Perseus Press)