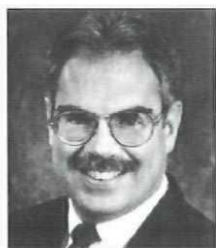


THE POWER OF THE SOUL

Business Expertise Is Not Enough; Executives in Catholic Health Care Must Be Spiritual Leaders, Too

BY ROBERT PORTER



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After more than 20 years in health care, including at least a decade in leadership, this day was perhaps my darkest on the job. Since becoming chief operating officer of this Catholic hospital, I, with the help of my management team, had struggled to find answers to apparently overwhelming financial and operational challenges.

I had been forced to make tough decisions in the pursuit of financial stability. In round-the-clock meetings, my team and I (with the assistance of a consulting firm whose specialty was turnarounds) had dissected every aspect of the operation. I had compared the performance of the hospital to industry benchmarks, never wanting to be unfair in expecting more from my staff than others had accomplished. In fact, in every decision I made I tried to be fair, weighing the different interests at stake before choosing a course of action—all the while knowing that, no matter what, I would make someone angry.

Those around me, instead of recognizing my

efforts to be fair, seemed to feel they had been betrayed. The whole organization was dispirited. My medical staff support was eroding as physicians refocused their practices at other facilities not faced with the challenges I had to address. Local leaders roundly criticized me for what they saw as abandoning the community's needs in the interest of serving the hospital and its bottom line.

Then came the most hurtful news of all. My employees had filed a petition for representation by a union. It was not that I had a problem with organized labor. But how could an organization that I led have come to a place where the staff felt so abandoned by my leadership that they needed someone else to represent and protect their interest? Hadn't I tried hard to educate the staff about the changes in health care reimbursement? Hadn't I told them that the very existence of the hospital was at stake? Didn't they see how hard I worked, how much I cared? What was I to do now?

Some part of this story, I suspect, will resonate with anyone in Catholic health care today, especially anyone in leadership. We leaders are confronted daily with an endless list of new challenges, each of which is underscored by a basic tension between our commitment to serve those who are most vulnerable and our need to secure the financial stability of our organizations. We do our best to make tough decisions in the knowledge that, if we don't make them, we might put the very existence of our organization's mission in jeopardy.

Many leaders of faith-based organizations, particularly in tough times, think they must separate those activities relating to the business of the organization from those that relate to the pursuit of the mission. Such leaders try to neatly segment

elements of their work as organizations, on one hand, and their life as individuals, on the other, on the premise that these segments are fundamentally different in nature and therefore require distinct approaches. They apportion responsibility for mission effectiveness to someone from the sponsoring congregation or to pastoral care—to function as a sort of "organizational conscience"—while keeping for themselves the managing of financial performance and quality. Such leaders leave their personal spirituality in church on Sunday, considering such matters too "personal" for the workplace.

However, a growing body of evidence suggests that this segmented approach to work and life is healthy and effective neither for organizations nor for the individuals who work in them. More and

more organizations are finding that spirituality in the workplace is an essential component of sustained success. Why? As Ian I. Mitroff and Elizabeth A. Denton say in their recent book, *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America*: "Unless organizations become more spiritual, they cannot reap the benefits of *the full and deep engagement of their employees*, their so-called most valuable resource" (italics added).¹

The premise at work here is that the solutions to problems facing any organization lie not in its administrative offices or boardrooms but throughout the organization—in the creativity and imagination of every person who works for it. But unlocking that creativity demands a new model of leadership, with spirituality at its core.

This article will attempt to provide a working definition of spirituality for consideration as the foundation of this new model of leadership. It will also sketch a model for spiritual leadership and discuss the role of the CEO in implementing that model.

SPIRITUALITY: A WORKING DEFINITION

Although we have an extensive body of literature on the topic of spirituality in the workplace, we still lack a clear consensus on the definition of the term "spirituality." However, some key concepts seem to be present in most efforts to define the term:

- Spirituality is based on a belief in a supreme power (or being or force) that created and governs the entire universe, giving all things purpose and making all things sacred.
- Spirituality is a sense of being connected to one another and to the universe.
- Spirituality is the desire of each of us to do good and to find meaning in our lives and in our unique connection to the universe of which we are a part.
- Spirituality involves a sense of personal integrity, of acting in a manner that is consistent with a set of values that cross cultural and religious traditions, and endure across time; spirituality is not the same as religion—it is more universal and inclusive.

Solutions to problems lie throughout the organization.

• Spirituality involves a sense of faith and hope about the future.

It is easy to see why, if we use these elements as a working definition, the notion of spirituality in the workplace is getting so much attention and why it offers such promise as the foundation of a model of leadership. When we attempt to separate work life from spirituality, we work against the essential human search for

meaning, connectedness, and integrity. We risk creating a workforce that is, at best, cynical and detached, composed of people who hope merely to get through the workday so that—once it is over—they can continue their search for the life they were meant to live. If, on the other hand, our organizations provide the setting in which individuals can more fully realize their personal spiritual journeys, we will capture the power of their entire being, their very soul.

In his classic book, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Robert M. Pirsig contrasts a passionate motorcycle enthusiast with an indifferent technician as both deal with the matter of maintaining their machines.² For the first person, the enthusiast, a motorcycle is an object of affection, an expression of freedom and exploration. His or her connection to it is quite personal, and the effort and care that he or she puts into maintenance reflects the depth of that bond. The work is done not merely to complete a task, but to achieve a level of performance that represents the best of what the motorcycle can do. The technician, on the other hand, has no personal attachment to the subject at hand and is seeking only to follow instructions, to perform the necessary steps and achieve minimum performance specifications. The difference between these two types of people is *spiritual*: Unlike the technician, the enthusiast sees and connects with the deeper meaning of the task.

Imagine the power an organization would have if it could engage every employee, at a personal level, not just to do his or her best but to find ways to achieve levels of performance not yet contemplated. Imagine the ideas that are out there just waiting for a compelling reason to be shared.

Most of the people who work in health care will tell you that they were drawn to their careers by the desire to be of service to others. Imagine how much stronger our organizations would be if we were to support them in their pursuit of that personal, spiritual journey.

Assuming that the definition of spirituality offered above makes sense, I want to suggest a possible model for spiritual leadership (see **Box** below). In this model, a leader's role is to create the conditions in which individuals can live out their personal spiritual journey in support of the common goal of fulfilling the organization's mission and vision. "Creating the conditions" is a complex and endless process that involves defining, communicating, and reinforcing the elements essential to the spirit-driven organization.

A CONSISTENT ADHERENCE TO CORE VALUES

At the heart of this model is consistent adherence to core values. To engage others passionately in the pursuit of the organization's mission, the organization must first ensure that its decisions and actions are at all times consistent with a set of universal and enduring moral principles. It is also essential that people associated with the organization feel that what they are called upon to do in their particular jobs is consistent with those same principles. Leaders should nurture in employees that dimension of spirituality we call *integrity*—first, integrity between one's own values and those of the organization of which one is a part, and, second, the integrity of one's actions with one's own beliefs.

Certain core values—respect, justice, compassion, quality, excellence, stewardship, fairness in pay and benefits—are found in the foundational documents of human resource policies of most

organizations. But are they consistently lived at an organizational and individual level? Such a question might sound easy, but it is not. Tension often exists between certain values—between the values of stewardship and quality, for example. Organizations faced with financial distress have been known to cut corners on quality issues to achieve (usually short-lived) financial improvement. But imagine the dilemma this poses for an individual staff member called upon to be part of such a decision. How does such a person maintain a sense of personal integrity when asked to act in a manner inconsistent with what he or she believes to be right? Such decisions are the beginning of cynicism, the alienation of the soul.

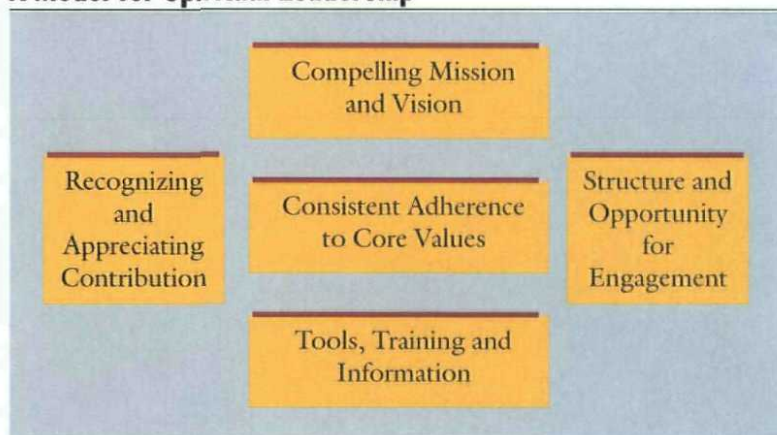
A spiritual leader recognizes that there must be *no* choices among core values. They must live in harmony with one another if the organization is to act with integrity and create conditions for staff to do the same. The spiritual leader searches for integrative solutions, not solutions that compromise or "balance" core values. The good news is that the spiritual leader can, by creating an environment of integrity, transform problems into opportunities by involving employees in the search for solutions.

How does the spiritual leader go about building this element of the model? First, he or she must lead the process of discovering and making explicit the organization's core values, and then fostering understanding, through examples, of the way these values can be *lived* in harmony with each another. It is critical to connect each person to the meaning of these values as lived through the work of their hands.

Second, the spiritual leader must ensure that each organizational decision and action is actively, explicitly examined for its adherence to the core values taken as a whole. This is not a job reserved for the Mission Services specialist. It is the job of anyone who seeks to be a spiritual leader.

Third, the spiritual leader must help explain complex decisions that are apparently not in harmony with the core values. For example, one might reasonably ask how an organization can claim to live the core value of "respect" while, at the same time, downsizing its work force. In fact, leaders will be both respectful and good stewards if, when forced to downsize, they do what they can to help affected employees find new jobs. If the spiritual leader is to promote a deep understanding of how the core values are lived, he or she must take time to communicate, especially when the explanation is not readily apparent. Otherwise, confusion, distrust, and alienation can occur.

A Model for Spiritual Leadership



A COMPELLING MISSION AND VISION

The next step in the model is defining and communicating a compelling mission and vision for the organization. If the spiritual leader is to be successful in engaging the souls of the organization's employees, he or she must first lead them through a process to discover and define both the transcendent meaning of their work and the connection of each person to that meaning. The mission must inspire and ignite passion. It should form the common purpose around which everyone in the organization can collaborate, setting aside their individual differences in favor of their shared quest to achieve a common, compelling goal. The organization's vision should paint an explicit picture of the organization's future state, demonstrating how its achievement will serve the mission.

The most compelling mission statements go beyond business goals such as "return on investment," "market share," and "net income." They address the organization's enduring legacy in the lives of individuals and the community at large. In speaking to its employees, Southwest Airlines, for example, talks about bringing air travel within the reach of everyone through efficient, low cost, service—and making it fun for everyone involved, especially those who do the work. The airline's leaders believe that, in keeping the organization's collective eye on creating enduring value, they will reap positive business results as well. In contrast, other leaders have discovered that, by making business results their No. 1 goal, they may fail to inspire the passionate staff engagement that any organization needs to be successful across time.

In this component of the model of spiritual leadership, Catholic health care organizations begin with a significant advantage. The transcendent meaning of our work is there, in front of us, every day. It is work that is rooted in the ministry of Jesus set forth in the Gospels: to relieve suffering and be God's loving, healing presence to others. Most of our staffs will speak of choosing their career in health care as a result of their desire to be of service, to help others. We who work in the Catholic health ministry don't have to struggle to create a compelling mission and vision. It is there for us to discover.

The spiritual leader must lead this process of discovery, bringing together those involved in the ministry to give expression to the organization's shared purpose and envisioned future. The spiritual leader must communicate and reinforce the mission and vision repeatedly, giving it form and definition and keeping it at the forefront of the organization's collective consciousness. Finally, he or she must connect the organization's plans,

decisions, and actions to the mission and vision. The spiritual leader should not rely on others to make the connection on their own, but should assist them in understanding how the organization is living out its transcendent purpose.

Although the teachings of the Catholic Church and the tradition of Catholic health care provide us with a rich foundation for this spiritual journey, it is important that the spiritual leader be able to connect individuals from other religious backgrounds (or none at all) with the organization's mission and values. The yearning for spirituality at the center of work appears to be universal; in the church's core values are teachings that have a similar universal appeal. The spiritual leader in health care must take care not to become a "religious" leader or to let the organization's values become a source of division among people of different faith traditions. At the same time, it is essential that the leader remain true to the organization's mission and values, born out of church teachings. It is a line that can, and must, be walked.

A STRUCTURE AND OPPORTUNITY FOR ENGAGEMENT AND CONNECTEDNESS

Having ignited passion, the spiritual leader must now define a mechanism through which people's ideas and talents can be brought to bear on the organization's pursuit of mission and vision. When I defined "spirituality," I said that connectedness was a critical component of it. The organization must provide a structured means through which individuals can be connected to the work and to others engaged in the same pursuit. Passion without connection will only create a sense of frustration.

Meaningful engagement also requires a level of trust that enables individuals participating in the process to look beyond their own interests and serve the common good. Leaders often hedge their bets here, reserving the right to disapprove or modify the work done by teams. But in doing so, they run the risk of extinguishing the passion of their employees, who, as a result of such disapproval and modification, begin to suspect that their ideas are only wanted to the extent they are consistent with the leaders'.

The spiritual leader, on the other hand, is willing to take the risk of delegating authority because he or she believes in the fundamental goodness of people and in their capacity to look beyond their selfish needs. The spiritual leader does not do this irresponsibly. In engaging others, he or she makes it clear that acceptable solutions are those that serve the legitimate interests of everyone who has a stake in the process,

including the stake of the organization itself. (The spiritual leader recognizes that solutions that fail to meet this test are flawed from the beginning.) He or she ensures that those leading the process are effective at integrative thinking and capable of guiding the group along the path to creative solutions.

The spiritual leader must explicitly consider this issue of engagement in the design of the organization. Doing so might sound simple, but engagement is difficult in an organization as inherently complex as a hospital. Our work occurs in processes involving the interaction of multiple functional departments, and this interaction must meet the specific needs of each patient. Given the process nature of the work, it is not compatible with the functional "silos" found in traditional organizational structure because those silos often act as barriers to meaningful engagement. If there is to be connectedness in the work processes, the organization must be able to create interdisciplinary teams that reflect those processes. It is also essential for the organization to be nimble enough to form and re-form in response to the changing nature of the work and the specific improvement initiatives undertaken.

TOOLS, TRAINING, AND INFORMATION

For engagement to be effective, people must be equipped for it. To truly participate, they need the tools, training, and information. Real problem solving and process improvement begins by tapping the fundamental knowledge of the people closest to the work. However, these people are not necessarily equipped with the information or analytical skills needed to evaluate a problem in its full complexity; nor do they necessarily possess the process skills needed to interact effectively with others as part of a team. The spiritual leader must be willing to invest time and energy in preparing employees to participate and must be willing to share information with them openly, honestly, and completely. He or she must also be willing to provide support for the creative process and to train leaders capable of provoking the creativity that resides in their coworkers. Failing to

To be fully engaged, employees must have access to information.

make these investments will result in process without performance, which is wasteful as well as frustrating to those employees who genuinely want to do creative work.

Although most leaders know they should be open, honest, and complete in communicating with employees, some hesitate to share information they feel may be especially sensitive, too complex, or inflammatory. But the

spiritual leader does not hesitate to share it. He or she recognizes that, to be fully engaged, employees must have access to all the information necessary to that engagement. The spiritual leader has faith in the mature ability of people to handle sensitive information sensitively. He or she knows that there is risk in doing so, but it is a risk he or she is willing to take in order to have the benefit of an organization full of people passionately taking part.

RECOGNIZING AND APPRECIATING INDIVIDUAL AND TEAM CONTRIBUTIONS

This is the final step of the connectedness mentioned in the definition of spirituality. Recognizing contributions is essential in closing the loop, connecting individuals to the contributions they have made through their participation. Such a conclusion might seem obvious. But, because most organizations are very complex, the connections are often indirect and distant. This component of the model reinforces desired behavior and helps educate and inspire other employees by celebrating "heroes" who have "made a difference." If this step is to be effective, however, the recognition and appreciation must be genuine and personal. Many organizations establish recognition programs with the best of intentions, but in their formality they lose the sincerity so essential to meaningful impact.

The spiritual leader manages the inherent tension between the organization's need for a formal, systematic recognition of heroes, on one hand, and the human need for such recognition to be genuine and personal, on the other. He or she commits the time and energy for personal expressions of her appreciation. He or she aug-

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8. Anna Glasier, "Drug Therapy: Emergency Postcoital Contraception," *New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 337, October 9, 1997, p. 1060. See also Horacio B. Croxatto, Luigi Devoto, Marta Durand, et al, "Mechanism of Action of Hormonal Preparations Used for Emergency Contraception: A Review of the Literature," *Contraception*, vol. 63, 2001, p. 117, and Melissa Sanders Wanner and Rachel L. Couchenour, "Hormonal Emergency Contraception," *Pharmacotherapy*, vol. 22, 2002, p. 44.
9. See, for instance, Walter L. Larimore and Joseph B. Sanford, "Post-Fertilization Effects of Oral Contraceptives and Their Relationship to Informed Consent," *Archives of Family Medicine*, vol. 9, February 2000, pp. 126-133.
10. Anna Glasier, "Emergency Contraception," *British Medical Bulletin*, vol. 56, 2000, pp. 733-734. Emphasis added.
11. See Roberto Rivera, Irene Yacobson, and David Grimes, "The Mechanism of Action of Hormonal Contraceptives and Intrauterine Contraceptive Devices," *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, vol. 181, November 1999, p. 1267. See also Peter J. Cataldo and Albert Moraczewski, who note that "the chance of an abortifacient effect in a sexual assault survivor should be 1.2% or less (even less under the restrictions of the St. Francis Medical Center Protocol)," in "A Moral Analysis of Pregnancy Prevention after Sexual Assault," *Catholic Health Care Ethics: A Manual for Ethics Committees*, Peter J. Cataldo and Albert S. Moraczewski, editors, National Catholic Bioethics Center, Boston, 2001, p. 11/14.
12. Rivera, Yacobson, and Grimes, p. 1266.
13. Croxatto, p. 117
14. Cataldo and Moraczewski, p. 11/16.

The authors of this article and the editorial staff of *Health Progress* invite readers to continue this important discussion of emergency contraception in the case of sexual assault. We welcome response to this moral analysis in the form of Letters to the Editor. Send them to hpeditor@chausa.org or:

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ments the formal programs with informal, face-to-face interaction with individual employees and teams. The spiritual leader takes every possible opportunity to retell the stories of these heroes, and through each story shapes and fashions the organization's cultural norms.

A PERSONAL JOURNEY

The formation of a spiritual leader is a continuing, personal journey. It begins with the leader's own spiritual transformation as he or she seeks to understand the values that inform and inspire his or her personal ministry, the call to be a leader in Catholic health care.

My journey began in earnest eight years ago. Having exhausted my tool kit of traditional leadership skills, I began searching for the means to reunite my organization and community around our shared mission and to engage them as collaborators in defining our future. I learned, in the most painful of ways, that I cannot do it alone, and that I cannot make choices as to which of the organization's values or stakeholders will be served while others are left behind. I have come to understand that if my organization is to truly succeed, I must be able to ignite the passion of all those who collaborate with me in that pursuit. My job, then, is to create the connectedness of people to each other and to the meaning of their work, to create the conditions within which the spirit of the organization can flourish. I invite you to join me in that journey as we create the future of Catholic health care. □

NOTES

1. Ian I. Mitroff and Elizabeth A. Denton, *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1999.
2. Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, William Morrow, New York City, 1974.

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how the facility wants to act toward its customers—for example, with dignity, excellence, and justice—employees tend to apply the values to themselves as well. They judge the extent to which *they* are being treated with dignity and justice when they answer survey questions about values. Feeling valued as an employee is our indicator of job satisfaction, and research has shown that feeling valued (and being satisfied with one's job) results in high employee retention and workers stating that they are proud to work for their organization.

VALUES ARE KEY

Again, the data show that all these items—feeling valued, willingness to stay in a job, and organizational values—are linked with one another. The most highly performing organizations reveal a dynamic interplay of all these factors. Employees believe they are valued because they are treated in ways that are congruent with stated organizational core values. They see values in action every day in relationships to customers and to themselves. Thus, they feel more satisfied at work, and ultimately, they judge the organization to be effective.

Values are anything but "fluffy" and soft in organizations. Our research supports the conclusion that values are central to efficient functioning of organizations at all levels. In every instance values are good for business. Consequently, values should be essential to any strategic plan and have a central place in every management meeting and organizational initiative. The vision and mission statement point a hospital in the direction it wants to go; values determine how it will get there. Without the principles inherent in values, the ship is rudderless. With values, employees feel grounded and more eager to commit to a common goal. □