

TRENDS & Ideas

SPIRITUALITY

Mixing Business and Prayer

"Vision quests" for engineers at Xerox Corp. Prayer groups for financial analysts at Deloitte & Touche. Chaplains for fast-food workers at Taco Bell and Pizza Hut. Spirituality is fashionable these days in U.S. corporations, writes Michelle Conlin in *Business Week*.

Growing spirituality in the workplace probably reflects four broader social trends:

- People spend much more time working at the office than they did 10 years ago. As a result, they are conducting more nonwork activities—eating, exercising, dating, praying—there too.



- The tight job market of the late 1990s has made bosses more generous with perks and amenities. At the same time, employees are seeking more personal fulfillment from their work.

- The computer-based "new economy" has kindled an interest in systems thinking, chaos theory, and intuitive (rather than linear)

approaches to problem solving—all of which have some common ground with religion.

- Evidence indicates that, by soothing employees' psy-

ches, spiritual programs in the workplace help increase productivity and reduce turnover. They also help workers improve relationships with colleagues and partners.

"Spirituality could be the ultimate competitive advantage," says Ian I. Mitroff, coauthor of *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America*, an empirical study of the phenomenon. The study concluded that people who work for organizations they see as spiritual tend to be less fearful, less likely to compromise their values, and more likely to throw themselves into their work.

NURSING

A Coming RN Shortage?

As the baby boom generation ages, a corresponding increase in the patient population is expected to follow. But finding nurses to care for the patients may be a challenge. Nurses are getting older, too, and some healthcare experts are predicting a coming professional crisis, according to *Nurse Week*.

The average nurse in the United States is now more than 44 years old, and the number of nurses entering the profession is not keeping pace with the number who are retiring from bedside nursing. "It's a disaster waiting to happen," says Peter Buerhaus, director of the Harvard University Nursing Research Institute, Cambridge, MA. "The nurse workforce is going to be aging itself out [of the workplace], and given the trends in demographics, it doesn't look to me that there is a hope to attract an adequate level of nurses for the future."

According to Nancy Ackley, nursing director of the Texas Nurses Foundation, many older nurses opt for retirement or a nonacute nursing job because of the personal risks and physical demands of the job. Long workdays, forced overtime, and 12-hour shifts take their toll, as do constant bending and lifting.

While some hospitals have instituted 24-hour, on-call lifting teams, or are experimenting with flexible scheduling, most haven't planned for a staff of nurses who will soon be more than 50 years old. "There need to be ways to use older nurses, ways to keep them engaged in the workforce," says Buerhaus. "You need economic incentives." When the crunch comes, experts anticipate a push to make the workplace more desirable to older nurses and to increase staff retention.

BUSINESS

Easing into E-Commerce

While some companies have plunged into doing business, or e-commerce, on the Internet in a big way, others have hung back, reluctant to get their feet wet. But there is no doubt that e-commerce is the wave of the future, and more and more so-called bricks-and-mortar businesses are exploring ways to become "clicks-and-mortar" enterprises as well, reports *Fortune* magazine.

Approaches to blending old and new ways of doing business vary, as companies experiment with strategies to find those which will work best for them. Some companies put marketers or corporate strategists in charge of Internet business development, whereas others depend on an already-in-place IT staff. Companies may create new Internet departments, or form e-commerce committees with members from a wide range of company departments. Some companies keep their Internet business in-house, while others spin Internet enterprises



off into new companies.

Sears is an example of a company that prefers to keep its e-commerce close to home. It brought in strategically focused "e-executives" to create a new division and sell appliances, tools, and parts on its site. Whirlpool, on the other hand, has invested in a start-up in Manhattan's Silicon Alley, far from company headquarters in Benton Harbor, MI. This site, directed at consumers who are shopping for

appliances, is designed to collect consumer data valuable to appliance manufacturers.

Very large, complex systems, such as those which now make up the Amazon.com family of e-businesses, may take a greater hold in the future. They can help consumers with a wide range of Internet tasks, from ordering groceries to finding the products and services they want online.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Racial Intermarriage Is on the Rise

Intermarriage between members of different races and ethnic groups is increasing dramatically, according to *American Demographics*. William H. Frey, a demographer who analyzed 1998 Census Bureau data for the magazine, calls this increase "the beginning of a blending of the races."

The trend's main cause is the recent arrival in this country of large numbers of Asians and Latin Americans, the first such great immigration wave to be composed primarily of nonwhite people. These 17 million immigrants are the fastest-growing segment of the population.

Two-thirds of Hispanics

with some college education now cross group lines when they marry. A fifth of all married Asian women have husbands from another race or ethnic group. In California, nearly one of every 12 non-Hispanic whites who marries chooses an Asian or Hispanic. There are nearly 3 million mixed U.S. marriages today—about 5 percent of the total, compared with 3 percent 20 years ago.

Intermarriage is especially pronounced among young people. Nearly a third of married Asians between the ages of 15 and 24 found their spouses in another group. Among Hispanics under 35, about a third

married people from other racial or ethnic groups. Even among blacks, where intermarriage is more rare, about 11 percent of people between 15 and 24 chose spouses outside the group.

This data will interest marketing professionals, including those in healthcare. But they should handle it with care. "A lot of firms have become reliant on niche marketing that divides up the world very simply into Anglos, Asians, Hispanics, and African-Americans," says Shelley Yamane, an advertising executive in Los Angeles. But increasing intermarriage means that audiences don't necessarily fit into those niches anymore.

