



Leadership Service: Fostering Spirituality in Modern Organizations

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The notion of service is often attributed to sacrifice and submission or obedience and self-denial, whether it is within an organization or as an individual willing to make a difference by serving another. Yet this notion does not ring more resounding than the Biblical representation of a leader stooping to serve his followers as the example highlighted in the Gospel of John 13: 1-17 where it is evident that Jesus Christ cherishes service and uses this gesture to demonstrate the power of leadership and humility as a basis for fostering honor and service by followers. This exegetical research study sheds light on the power of leaders modeling service to followers as a measure to foster spirituality within organizations. The study focuses on an exegetical general texture methodology approach that leverages the entire passage of John 13 through verse 17 to address the symbolic magnitude of servant leadership and follower loyalty. The perspectives employed highlight essential Biblical tenets that are encouraged in organizational spirituality to foster a more fulfilling and endearing workplace environment. The relationships between service and spirituality within the organization are explored. Research will suggest the benefits of fostering organizational spirituality in the workplace as employees realize their voice and place within the organization's strategic initiatives in order to be more productive and yield best results for the bottom-line and value for the customer.

One is inclined to believe that organizations today tend to focus more and more every day on the methods and strategies to turn profits and rise to the top of the industry 'food-chain' sometimes without proper regard for who and what it will take to get there (Birkinshaw, Foss & Lindenberg, 2014). Yet it goes without rehearsing the old saying that 'people are the organization's most valued assets.' – Why is that? The pericope of John 13:1-17 provides a rather overwhelmingly powerful representation by Jesus Christ, of how and why people are so valued; a time of celebration in Jewish culture, the feast of the Passover (John 13:1) is depicted to suggest the festive spirit of the period when Christ was to be betrayed and sacrificed for all mankind (Routledge, 2002). The paper

continues to highlight the historical persuasions of the time and provides insight to an exegesis of the pericope with specific reference to how Christ's humility symbolizes such requisite conduct in fostering organizational spirituality by forging courage in an unpredictable future through active leadership. The background of Christ's servant leadership in this pericope will serve as a foundation upon which organizational spirituality is built.

Saint John's account of the period discussed in John 13 is highlighted as one of the beginnings of "the book of Glory" where Jesus Christ gives instruction and direction to His disciples and provides an avenue for them to "connect" with His principles (DeSilva, 2004). These are adequately woven into the culture and history of the time; John articulates the cultural connotations of the period with Greco-Roman influences (DeSilva, 2004). DeSilva highlights John's account for the festive period by providing a relational symbolic reference of Christ's preparation for His shed blood at the crucifixion, to that of the deliverance from slavery in Egypt as the atmosphere is filled with festivities. The entire passage of John 13 gives little reference or connotation to the hype and height of the season, but rather provides a serene setting for analysis of a leader surrounded by His subordinates in a forum-like setting to discuss pertinent matters of the "organization," despite what commotion, distractions or unrelated concerns may be going on outside the circles of their influence. To liken this setting that Jesus Christ has with His disciples to a modern organization, it would be a boardroom environment where the climatic setting in that forum is founded upon whatever the best practices of the organization are based upon and the meeting setting only sets the tone to enhance those practices.

It is interesting to note that the cultural preparation for the Feast of the Passover was a practice of utmost care for which several parade into town and make much ado about the feast well before it is to occur, yet in this case Jesus Christ had arrived six days prior, well ahead of the occasion and withdrawn himself with His disciples for a lesson in leadership (Meyers, 1995). The contrast between what was occurring socially and economically was critical to understanding the relationship Jesus was modeling and intended as a lesson. As the Jewish culture demonstrates a tradition that marks a historic time in the history of the children of Israel, it is important to mention also that the city of Jerusalem at this point in its history depended heavily on foreign goods and services, therefore not only was there a time for festive indulgence, but the atmosphere of the setting was hyped with economic prosperity and opportunity for potential money-making schemes in this preindustrial city (Malina, 2001).

The Influence of Christ's Leadership: A General Texture of John 13: 1-17

Jesus Christ was the most remarkable example of leaders modeling spirituality in the workplace (amongst His disciples) and fostering an atmosphere of service with them. We learn quickly that the servant and the master play two distinct roles in the

organization, yet they both have common attributes. These attributes are the ones indicative of whether one can rise to positions of leadership among peers and be counted worthy, or whether a leader can come to the level of understanding among subordinates without being or feeling ostracized by the social status of both states of the organizational hierarchy. Jesus Christ represents the leader who takes time to teach and admonish His disciples on what the true essence of humanity is, where the sacrifice of oneself through humility and service is indicated in a time when everyone's focus is on the festive celebration of redemption from bondage and captivity (Blanchard, 2006). This poise and posture is indicative of a leader who filters through all of the "chaff" and "noise" around to get through the information desired, straight to what a leader deems the most remarkable representation of servant leadership where love for the follower trumps concern for one's personal or social status (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). It is noteworthy to mention that Jesus Christ is the one that went out and called His disciples to follow Him before He began His ministry; they did not look back after that calling well until after His death when Peter returned briefly to fishing until Christ's resurrection and appearance to them at the Sea of Tiberias:

1After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. 2Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. 3Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing (John 21:1-3; ESV)

The passage therefore, goes to reflect the measure of Christ's influence on the disciples who for lack of direction and wavering of faith resorted to what they knew best – their old ways. What is strikingly important to capture in this lesson of leadership is that before this occurrence of "going back to the old ways," known in some circles as "backsliding," Christ shares His heart with the disciples during what was to be His last formal meal with them at what was to be commonly known to Christians as "The Last Supper." The sacred time of sitting around the table with the teacher or Rabbi for the Hebrew Jewish people was a time-honored tradition that facilitated the hearing of the oracles of the Lord; this was something that was about to be manifest in this forum at what became famously known as "Last Supper" to the world of Christians and those that exercised a form of faith or religion to which they can relate a sense of spirituality (Pitre, 2016).

Unfortunately, at this time in the life and historical period of Christ's role in shaping the future and mindset of His disciples, one expectation was that He would enjoy the feast of the Passover just like everyone else had come into town to do (Bray, 2004), yet His influence was powerful enough to keep the rest of the disciples withdrawn into a place without the "hype and pomp" so He could teach the significance and essence of the plight He was about to encounter. One of the unique

qualities of a leader who shows poise is that the leader does not allow the knowledge of dire circumstances or the future of this teaching described in the sacred texts and also discussed in this periscope to overshadow the lesson. Also, this lesson not only transforms the image of Christ as a teacher but also as the epitome of spiritual leadership in a perverse and misdirected world. Therefore, as the pericope is explored throughout this paper, emphasis is laid on the representation of the leader Jesus Christ, presented in John's account of the gospel as He is the architect of peace and love (John 13:1). This expression of candor in the spirit of love shown in the subsequent verses unfold from the first through the seventeenth of the pericope is presented in favor of organizational spirituality and its essence within organizations. The passage shows the teacher, master, servant and Prince of Peace, who fosters the environment to perform actions that create a conundrum for His disciples and an element of mixed conviction among Christian believers as well as to some extent, theological researchers.

Courage and Boldness in an Unknown Future (John 13 Verses 1,2)

¹Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, (ESV)

Jesus Christ expressed tremendous courage and boldness in the midst of an impending knowledge of the plight that was to befall Him, yet with meekness and gladness He stooped to wash the disciples' feet in a symbolic gesture of service and humility, yet we know of Jewish culture that the servant's feet are never washed by the master (Malina, 2001). This attribute is evident in verse 1 (Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end; ESV). This kind of leadership attribute is indicative of a leader who fosters a peaceful and amiable environment for his people (disciples) despite the knowledge of an uncertain future. The objective is to "win" the favor of the people in knowing what the essence of their association with Him really entails. Upon careful review of the text in verse 1, it is evident that Christ's heart was overwhelmed and flowing with compassion and love for the people He was about to leave. We learn of such clarity of concern for one's followers in servant leadership where the focus of concern within the organization is to seek what the interests of the followers or subordinates align with the organization's objectives in order to meet them; this leadership posture enhances their "engagement" or wellbeing (Whorton, 2014). Of note is the connotation or reason why Jesus Christ waited until Supper time after Judas Iscariot had conceived the decision to betray Christ to begin his heartfelt expression of "foot-washing" as indicated in verse 2. For the leader Jesus Christ, it did not matter whether all those present during the gathering were His supporters or not, what mattered was the lesson of the master being the servant or stooping in service of His followers, as it is learned later when He says that "you are not all clean." The general

texture analysis of the passage therefore, reveals a rather vulnerable and clearly transparent time for the leader when not only is His heart heavy, but also desires to spend time teaching and admonishing the essential lesson of service as articulated by the text and the fore-mentioned scholars.

To the organizational leader, the first verse provides an opportunity to relate passion or love with one's organization as Christ is recorded as having a heartfelt love for His people. The leader's passion and expectations within the organization should not only constitute an opportunity to attain the best setting for fostering spirituality, but also nurturing of an environment that is founded on servant leadership and love. On the other hand, verse two brings to light the attention that organizational leaders must have when they may not always have or attain the support and trust of everyone within the organization to promote or champion their desired objectives, just as Judas Iscariot had an unpopular role to play in the ultimate fulfillment of the mission of Jesus Christ.

Active leadership in Service (John 13 Verses 3-6)

3Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.6He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?"

Verse 3 began with a confirmation of who Jesus is and the knowledge of His social status in relation to the action He was about to perform; the fact that Jesus Christ had all the authority and power to change His circumstances and future as God incarnate, but instead, arose, took off His outer garment stated in verse 4 as if to suggest he was taking off His "social status" in preparation for work. Indeed, literature suggests that there are different connotations to outer garments as that of Jesus Christ's which could be likened to the outer garments worn by the High Priest, woven and seamless (Sanders, 2016). Since these garments either represent the social status or social well-being of an individual, suffice it to say that Jesus Christ wanted not only to perform the role of humility, but also not to allow the cumbersome attire to get in the way of the work He was about to perform – A lesson that leaders should not allow their social status to get in the way of their work and acts of humility. As Jesus gets up to fetch water and begins to wash the disciples' feet, Peter questions the intent and considers the action amiss. Yet Christ faithfully explains the enigma that is occurring as the cultural connotation of the act is considered unorthodox in Jewish tradition; the fact that a master was never to wash the feet of his servant (Sanders, 2016). One could argue that Jesus was washing the feet of the disciples to distinguish between those that were with Him and the one that was to betray Him as we later learn in the text that he says

“they are not all clean.” Yet one can surmise that Jesus Christ was indeed concerned about the spiritual implications or lesson in His actions though Jesus as of yet had not revealed unto them who was to betray Him and what was to be the outcome of that betrayal. For Peter, his demand or question of why Jesus washes His feet was one that could have only been answered with a response like Jesus’ in the subsequent verses.

In an organization where the leader is compelled to take action that is intended to enhance the overall wellbeing of the organization, it is not uncommon that actions taken by the leader may be misconstrued or questioned by members of the organization in an attempt to either justify their actions or to vocalize the frustrations encountered with change in any organization. Yet of paramount importance is the need to acknowledge the role the actions or decisions being undertaken will have on the organization so that the sense of ambivalence and anxiety among organizational members may be reduced. Consequently, when developing a forum that believes in and enhances initiatives that promote organizational spirituality, the need to realize the anxiety and lack of clarity that may exist with some members of the organization may present as hostile stakeholders to organizational initiatives; consequently, knowing how to handle or address them just as Christ did with Peter is a critical skill that must be developed (Doh & Quigley, 2014).

Gaining Understanding after Obedient Action (John 13 Verses 7- 11)

⁷Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” ⁸Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” ⁹Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” ¹⁰Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you²are clean, but not every one of you.” ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

When Christ specifically addresses Peter, it appears that the setting of Jesus Christ among His disciples was one of casual openness and submission (by the leader), as the passage highlights from verses 7 through 11 a “teaching moment” that ultimately reveals an opportunity to gain understanding from the seemingly unpopular actions of the leader. Often, followers are caught in a state of trying to understand actions before being obedient to orders or directions, but literature has proven that employee commitment to actions on the job or direction directly impacts their performance or willingness to take action on a task (Dobre, 2013). Therefore, to Peter’s point about why Jesus is washing his feet, He simply explains: “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” There is a lesson in itself about learning to accept the circumstances of change in the mindset and expectations of what may be

deemed a cultural norm. In this case, the change in perspective, reversal of roles, and gesture of humility presents Christ as a change agent of transformational leadership in the history and cultural perspective of the Jewish people as this was later made evident in the 21st chapter of the gospel (McCabe, 2008); here Christ represents the one to bring redemption to the world when He commissions Peter to feed His sheep.

In the 8th verse when Peter strongly protests that Jesus will never wash his feet, it is clear that he does not understand the reasoning or the objective and significance of the actions, so Jesus takes the liberty of making it clearer to him in no uncertain terms, “..if I do not wash you, you have no part of me.” This statement presents with a rather poignant but ambiguous connotation in that one must determine whether the physical washing of the disciples’ feet was a symbolic gesture that is an indication of who was for Him (part of His “team”), or also could imply the distinction between those who share in His glory of selfless humiliation and those who did not embrace the lesson (Ellicott, 2018). The lesson of self-humiliation and self-sacrifice was one that demanded acceptance of the gesture that Jesus was extending to those who were already called into His ministry and administration – the disciples, as was indicated in the rest of the 8th verse.

In the 9th verse it is clear at this juncture that Peter lacked the understanding of the lesson being taught and attempts to spite Christ by asking for his head and hands also to be washed, as if not challenging the action, but rather suggesting an attitude of condescension and non-compliance with what Jesus stands for and the lesson He was teaching. Jesus’ responses to the Apostle Peter in verse 10, though in the physical, had spiritual connotations to it when He states that they are “all” clean, but not “all,” suggesting an implication of cleanliness of heart and conscience, one that Judas Iscariot was not partaker of, and explained further by Christ in verse 11 when Christ says “Not all of you are clean” (Ellicot, 2018).

Christ makes it lucidly clear by the statement in verse 11 of the passage that cleanliness was not just a matter of the physical as symbolized by the gesture of feet washing to make clean, but also one that reflected cleanliness or sincerity of the heart which is void of malice, conspiracy or betrayal of loyalty; in this text, one is though washed in whole, is also to be washed spiritually by Christ (Lopinski, 2001). The lesson taught by Christ in this gesture of foot-washing is critical for the disciples and ultimately for all Christians at this point in time when Christ makes a connection between cleanliness and betrayal. The mention of cleanliness in relation to Judas’ betrayal of Christ is indicative of what symbolizes loyalty. According to verse 11 of the passage, does loyalty reflect an understanding of service of the master towards his servant and vice versa, laying aside any sense of obligation, social status and personal fulfillment? Therefore, the connotation of “cleanliness” in this context though symbolized by the washing of feet as Jesus portrays it in the passage, continues to be argued by some scholars as acceptance and rejection of His ministry, but more

essentially, understood of as an act that has a spiritual connotation of loyalty shown through service regardless of social status (Thompson, 2003).

The symbolic representation of service revealed (John 13 Verses 12 – 17)

12When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? **13**You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. **14**If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. **15**For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. **16**Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. **17**If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them

The scripture is careful to define the role of Christ in this passage highlighted in verse 12 to suggest that Jesus Christ after laboring and showing through example what the leader does, resumes His authoritative position and status by putting His “outer garments” back on and taking “His place” among the disciples. The 12th chapter shows the perspective of an organizational leader who must take off his garments that represent his or her social status, whether it is a suit coat and tie, only to put it back on after work is complete, or just step out of one’s office and down into the trenches where the leader’s subordinates define their roles and perform (Gill, n.d.). Here, one is compelled to consider the impact the leader makes on subordinates by exercising practical leadership between roles (able to perform as “one of them” as well as in a primary leadership role). After careful contemplation of the actions Jesus undertook and positions of service or submission to Christ assumed by the respective disciples, one must consider respective roles within an organization as one that is led by a leader who exercises servant leadership. Jesus takes His authoritative place and status and poses the rhetorical question of whether the disciples understand what He had shown them. Between verses 12 and 13 Jesus begins to ascertain the comprehension and connection He had made with the disciples before revealing the essence of the actions He had just performed. When Jesus asks: “Do you understand what I have done to you?” – the question appears to be rhetorical as He continues to explain the revelation of the act by distinguishing the social status between Him and the disciples when he states in verse 13 and 14: “You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” This statement calls for an explanation of the reason behind his actions. Scholars like Edgington suggest that the performance of foot-washing is an ordinance because of the emphasis and lessons taught in the act (Edgington, 1985). Yet there is more to be learned in relation to the essence of the act both from a spiritual and an organizational leadership and performance perspective. Christ provides insight into His actions after He had practiced what He wanted them to do for one another. However, more importantly, Christ’s admonishment is not only important to

organizational leaders to encourage the servant heart and attitude, but also to provide stability and clarity of purpose and objective in relationship development both up and down the organizational chain as well as across multiple lines of communication.

When Christ begins to explain the enigma of what had occurred, it is noteworthy to mention that He did not ask their opinions, perspectives, thoughts or comprehension of what He was doing until after He had completed the performance and resumed His original position and authority. By suggesting that a master or rabbi was not greater than his pupil nor a servant greater than his Lord, Christ emphasized the need for recognition of equality and service among Christians and essentially all of mankind. It is also argued that Christ was acknowledging His position as a teacher in relation to His pupils or students, and desires to clarify the distinction between their respective roles as the disciples revere Him as Lord (Ellicot, 2018). Christ therefore, takes time to teach and admonish His disciples in the act of service regardless of social status and one's place or position in relation to subordinates. An organization that fosters spirituality in the workplace would also consider its influence not just with the employees but also with those that may come in contact with the organization as clients or customers since the culture created within the organization will be reflected in the conduct of the employees (Milliman, Czaplewski & Ferguson, 2003). When Christ admonished the disciples to wash one another's feet, it not only created an opportunity to break the barriers of social and self-image status, it also provided an opportunity to humble any that may find themselves in a situation that precluded them from serving effectively.

Christ mentions one thing in verse 15 of the passage that is probably one of the most critical characteristics of faithful leadership – the attribute of exemplary leadership. He states in verse 15: “For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you” – a leadership attribute of modeling what the desired outcome or conduct is expected to look like. When the verse is examined, from the perspective of the leader, it shows how a leader can exude confidence and faith in a particular belief or value and teach that to subordinates through the act of modeling the desired outcome. Albert Barnes confidently discusses the notion that some have taken this statement literally and implied that “foot-washing” is a rite that must be performed, though there is no evidence of its performance among the disciples following the act during the last supper event when Christ performed it (Barnes, 2000). Organizational leaders who desire to build upon leadership tenets that encourage spirituality, the need to “lead by example” as the old saying states that the organizational leaders should lead the charge of proclaiming initiatives and efforts to uphold organizational spirituality. Doing so may be attained in a variety of ways, whether through organizational drives, campaigns, leadership recommendations or incentives. All too often, leaders claim interest and buy-in for efforts and programs that are intended to promote organizational development, but fall short of their support and do not “lead” through with what the organization has purposed to do (McCall, 2010).

However, in this case, as Christ admonishes the disciples to do, serve one another, not in the literal sense of the action performed, but in the principle of the lesson taught.

After washing the disciples' feet and Christ assumes His position among them, He states the essence of heeding His teaching and upholding the values that speak to service and leadership among peers and between leaders and their subordinates. Jesus however emphatically stated: "Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him." The statement is not only emphasized using the word "truly", it is also validated by stating ".blessed are you if you do them." When the observers and hearers of His word take action on what they have seen and heard, they attain fulfillment from the action and are "happy," transliterated from the Greek and interpreted as "blessed" (Gill, n.d.).

The leader who desires to foster a workplace that is conducive to spirituality allows members of the organization to exercise their spirituality or faith in a forum that is not only encouraged, but also modeled and facilitated by the leader to motivate employees to reach their highest performance level at best (Miller, 2007). One has heard of the saying "actions speak louder than words," and also that "no one cares how much you know until they know how much you care," so leaders do and will continue to bear the challenge of promoting values that are cherished not only by the organization, but that are shared by all those who make up the organization's wellbeing or reputation. If organizational spirituality initiatives within an institution are to be successful, leaders must care and model such initiatives.

The Attitude of Service in Organizational Spirituality

A general texture review of the pericope highlighted in the text of John 13:1-17 reveals both rhetoric and social connotations of the servant leadership portrayed by Jesus Christ as the scripture makes certain an opportunity to discuss and provide a symbolic representation, what service by a leader means and entails - stooping down to wash His disciples feet as a symbol of service to one another regardless of social status, current or future personal affairs (Robbins, 2002). Though this attitude of service occurred at a time when there was much ado about the Passover Feast and Jerusalem had become the center of festive attraction, Jesus Christ contemplated what destiny was to befall Him; the scriptures record He was in a state of seclusion to a place where He was hid from the people, probably in earnest prayer and preparation for what was to come as they did not believe His sayings: "...When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them" (John 12:36; ESV). One would imagine that the frustration of an absence of belief in the Son of God and an overly religious crowd would compel Jesus to continue proclaiming His purpose to the multitudes. However, subsequent passages discussed in the text of the pericope suggest that Jesus had at this time concluded it was time to retreat to a place where He could create an atmosphere in

which those closest to Him, the eleven disciples were to hear what He had to say and offer in this most festive but unusual time in the history of their cultural and social lives.

For the spiritually organized leader and therefore organization, this lesson sheds light on the impact of spiritual leadership and humility on servant-hood modeling that is intended to moderate a spirituality-based organization (Franklin, 2010). A leader is compelled therefore to exercise the virtue of courageous leadership in the midst of adversity to foster a conducive environment for service or work for his or her people regardless of their social status, structure, personal feelings or sense of self-awareness. Yet all too often, there are times that leaders lose sight of their purpose and role by allowing the external concerns or challenges whether at home, life or play impact the mission for which they have a responsibility to accomplish desired goals (Li, Arvey & Song, 2011).

Hicks (2003) discusses religion in the workplace and its impact on the moderate or conservative employee, by admonishing leadership to be consciously pluralistic in the administration of employee spirituality in their organizations. In fact, he hints that: “..organizations should allow for significant employee expression of various aspects of their identity on an equal basis” (Hicks, 2003). A connotation to the equality that Jesus taught can be addressed and highlighted in this circumstance. Having an attitude of service provides one with the tools or resources to make one’s organization a more productive and lucrative institution.

Though Christ refers to His disciples as friends elsewhere in biblical literature, it is clear that the relationship fostered by the “master” is one of brotherhood and equality intended to bring out the best in their organization of ministers of God’s word. Additionally, it is to foster relationships with one another and to represent why organizational spirituality must be encouraged in institutions for the furtherance of God’s kingdom or the realization of one’s leadership opportunity to excel.

The Synergy between Service and Organizational Spirituality

When there is a positive relationship between the hearts of organizational members who are committed to service of both one another and their customers in an environment that fosters spirituality within the workplace, the evidence of what every organizational leader wants to see begins to emerge - productivity and performance (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2010). Since every organization is unique and must undergo transformation over a period of time to yield desired results, understanding what factors are critical to the overall success of an organization cannot be overstated. One question that comes to mind is what makes one organization spiritual and not another?

Jerry Biberman argues that organizations can be spiritual when they are more inclined to change and willing to employ processes that are characterized by three main

methods, the “purgative,” “illuminative” or “unitive,” none of which bare relevance to the essence of this discussion, but peaks interest because of the diversity in how organizations can evolve (Biberman, 2003; Marques, Dhiman & King, 2009).

The figure below illustrates the relationships between service, humility and productivity and the conditions that must exist within the organization for enhanced synergy among the members of a spiritually sound organization. The core of the organization represents the culture of service, secondly the willingness to sacrifice, and these two are wholly embodied in the creation of opportunities to serve. When these factors are evident within the organization, they provide a forum where the organization realizes a synergy between organizational members, both leaders and subordinates, and the consummate effect on their customers or clients:

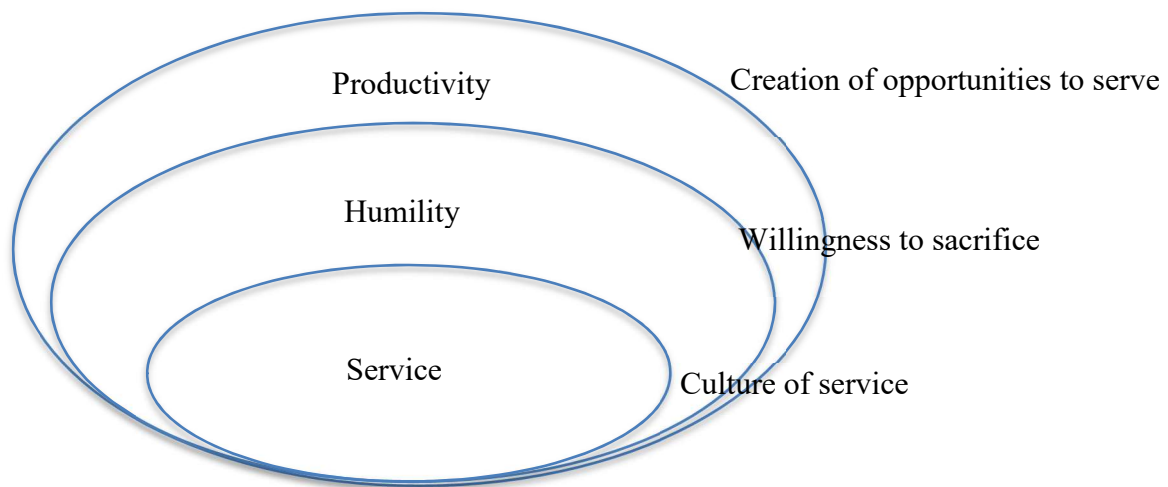


Figure 1: Organizational spirituality in a synergistic organization:

Based on Figure 1, one could argue that fostering organizational spirituality within the workplace is not only a process that requires critical organizational characteristics to accomplish, but also by creating value for both organizational members and clients alike. Thoughts like creation of “brand loyalty,” “retention of talent” and “increase of profits and customer value” are organizational factors that keep leaders awake at night or draw them to build and encourage what is referred to as value-driven organizations (Marques, Dhiman & King, 2009). When organizational leaders meet to conduct strategic initiatives for the organization, factors that include the organization’s spirituality should be neither overlooked nor taken for granted as those constitute the image of what the organization looks like to those external to the organization.

Spirituality in organizations has been rising in recent years, and there is little research to cover the scope and breadth of the trends that have been emerging to

indicate the movement towards a new sense of purpose and spiritual realization. Scholars like Hicks (2003) address important details such as the exercise of religion in a workplace environment and how it tends to create some friction among those who do not practice any particular form of religion. Concerns with the observance of religious practices such as days of fasting, or honoring the periods of prayer tend to compel leaders of organizations to take time to educate or accommodate such religious interests (Hicks, 2003). However, as Hicks points out, these practices have over time become expectations and “normal” practices within organizations and should be considered essential aspects of the organizational development process that promote service to members of the organization.

Until recently, the United States of America for instance, had not been tolerant of observing the observance of adorning religious garments in the workplace if it “violated” organizational dress codes, yet as we begin to learn more about service, humility and acceptance of one another within a diverse world, wearing garments such as the “hijab” for Muslim women has become a natural consequence of equal acceptance in the social realm (Ghumman, Ryan, Barclay & Markel, 2013).

Bringing it all together

Organizational spirituality in the workplace and the attitude of service in the hearts and minds of the organizational members is critical to workplace performance and organizational productivity (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2010). Yet one cannot accomplish these organizational goals without favorable consideration of the lesson taught by Jesus Christ in the pericope of John 13:1-17. The notion that one cannot learn while unwilling to be taught, one cannot serve adequately, if unwilling to do so voluntarily and wholeheartedly, and one cannot be obedient to a master’s call if unyielding to humility is indisputable. Therefore, as Christ taught from the heart through word and deed and admonished His disciples to do likewise, so should the whole of humanity, with Christians leading the charge seek opportunity for love as He loved the people and beheld them. More leaders are expected to lead the charge in defining equality in the workplace and promoting forums that will allow individuals to shape the future of their organizations with a better understanding of what religious connotations they suggest (tolerance for religious diversity) or introduced in the society in which they live. Unfortunately, school systems cannot do the education portion of spirituality in the school system, but somehow, spirituality in the workplace has to be encouraged and emphasized because of the proven results the literature provides.

When leaders in transformational and authentic organizations experience leadership challenges or lead organizations of people who desire to exercise their spirituality, the need to “transform” the organization into a servant-led organization becomes critical. This organization is where tenets of spirituality and opportunities to foster servant leadership become routine and transformational for both members of the

organization and the clients that interact with the organization. Dennis Bakke made a statement that is probably one of the most profound statements that organizations must strive to attain when it comes to finding value within the organization, and that is:

Joy at work gives people the freedom to use their talents and skills for the benefit of society, without being crushed or controlled by autocratic supervisors or staff offices (Bakke, 2010).

As leaders continue to strive to practice what Christ taught in the true essence of the principle of service in humility, organizations can be assured of the level of the performance and productivity that can be experienced by all. Consequently, what this pericope highlighted was the essence of shaping organizations that are founded on sound doctrine and teachings as discussed in the passage. Organizations can be successful by using organizational spirituality tools to help make those organizations both winning teams and ones that can be emulated because of proven results in the implementation of organizational spirituality tenets.

About the Author

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