

Spirit at Work:
Inspiring People *and* Improving Companies
Reflections on the Spirit at Work Movement and the
2005 International Spirit at Work Awards Conference
Dar Gillett

Business owners and corporate executives seeking ways to create sustainable growth and profitability would do well to take a look at a movement that is transforming employees, managers – and companies into sustainable high performing winners.

Having just returned from the International Spirit at Work Awards conference in NYC, I saw first hand the power of the Spirit at Work (SAW) movement – including where it's come from, where it is now, and where it might go in the future.

The International Spirit at Work organization is the only global organization dedicated to honoring companies that have implemented explicit spiritual practices, policies and programs inside their organizations. At this year's conference, nine companies were honored. For a list of the winners and the conference brochure, go to http://www.spiritinbusiness.org/new/content/documents/ISAW_ConferenceBrochure_4.pdf

Moving Beyond the “Either Or” of Human Spirit and Profits

The Spirit at Work movement has come a long way since I got involved back in the early 1980's in a NYC-based organization called The Business Initiative. TBI was dedicated to the view put forth decades ago by the late Willis Harmon (who is also the inspiration for the International Spirit at Work Award) that the business community, with its vast resources and capabilities, needs to step forward and provide leadership in making the world a better place.

As it became clear that one of the major problems facing humanity was not just the physical one of material survival, but also a spiritual one, namely people's spiritual health in the workplace, the movement began to take shape around spirit at work.

At that time, the main argument was: a) People are hurting within corporations; b) Company management – and maybe even the very nature of the modern financially driven corporation - too often stifles the spirit of their people. The dilemma was how to get corporations and managers to allow and even encourage spirit at work.

As far as convincing companies that there was something in it for them to care about their employees' spirit, the argument was fairly weak and even confusing. On the one hand some claimed that if you treated people right, then somehow your corporate performance would improve. If you did good things for your people, then (the argument ran) they would likely contribute more to the success of the company.

On the other hand, some in the spirit at work movement balked at that approach, arguing that we should not taint our argument for improved treatment of people (and the environment) with any claim that it would help improve profits. That was a kind of “selling out.”

By this thinking, however, they bought into and contributed to the belief that we could only serve one purpose. It had to be either: serving corporate profits *or* serving the masses of spiritually oppressed people within corporations.

It seemed “common sense” that investing in the spirit of people would be taking away from the shareholder: profits would likely be hurt by the costs of serving the employees. That thinking has continued strong for decades since then. Even just last year, Charlie Derber, a Boston College Sociology professor, wrote a book entitled: “People Before Profit” as if they were separable. As if it was either-or.

A similar belief plagued early efforts to improve the quality of corporate products and services. In the early days of the Quality Movement, proponents had to deal with the traditional assumption that if you “invested” in creating greater quality, then you would naturally be raising costs - and thus reducing profits. It was a simple (but erroneous) perceived trade off between quality and cost.

The quality vs. cost assumption has been proven false: companies who invest in quality have succeeded in actually reducing costs, thus raising their profits because of that very investment. Now, thanks in large part to the International Spirit at Work awards, we are seeing solid evidence that the same thing is true in the spirit at work dimension as in the quality dimension: doing what’s good for people and their souls not only does not hurt the bottom line, it can actually enhance it.

Winners of the International Spirit at Work Award Set New Standard

The winners of the ISAW award are blowing this old “either-or” assumption out of the water. They are not only doing great things for the human spirit of their organizations, but are also directing it toward the purpose of the company in ways that are resulting in improved corporate performance.

The Spirit at Work movement no longer has to argue for improved human spirit solely on the grounds that it’s the “right thing to do” for the people. We now have a growing body of examples showing that when a company does invite Human Spirit into the workplace, it can do amazing things for both people and profits. It’s the “right thing” to do for ALL the companies’ stakeholders. It’s good and right for the employee. It’s also *good* for customers and the company - and its bottom line.

Human spirit wants to serve the highest good. When companies have high purposes, they draw forth spirit in spades. Inviting human spirit to serve the highest good, actually

generates even greater human spirit and focuses it where it can do good - serving the company's customers and the greater society.

This was one of the main principles I had in mind back at the beginning of the decade in establishing the [Institute for Human Economics](#). It's also a main theme of my forthcoming book on the Energized Enterprise and Spiritual Capital, to be published in 2006.

So, it was exciting to attend this year's awards conference to see that, through those awards, the sponsoring organizations, [Association for Spirit At Work](#), [European Baha'i Business Forum](#), [Spirit in Business](#) and the [World Business Academy](#) are acknowledging companies that are actively creating spiritual practices that address the spiritual dimension of work and workers plus at the same time achieve improved business performance – not “in spite” of but in large part *because* of these enlightened practices.

Celebrating the Contributions of the Awards Conference

There was much to celebrate about this year's conference, one that provided solid evidence of the advance and impact of the Spirit at Work movement:

- The shift to a more **holistic view of Spirit at Work** as an integral part of **making companies whole and successful** – as noted above;
- Presenters now at these conferences are **practitioners** primarily, not just outside consultants urging folks within the company to adopt spiritually-based principles;
- With these practitioners showing us **HOW to** do it, not just THAT we should do it, lots of great progress has been made in building Spirit at Work principles into the fabric of companies;
- Senior executives like Michael Stephen (*Spirituality in Business: The Hidden Success Factor*) espousing a spiritual approach to managing corporations;
- Consultants like Sonia Stonanovic doing great things – AND being brought into large traditional consulting firms like [McKinsey](#), who now provide consulting assistance on the kinds of approaches that she used to help ANZ become more human-centered; and;
- Visionary gurus, like [Lance Secretan](#), giving us a larger picture and an inspiring look at the theme of his forthcoming book on *Oneness* - an important reminder that we can thrive once we put away dualism and “either-or” thinking.

I came to the conference to see what was “new and improved” – and I certainly found that, as described above. And that was just the *content* part of the conference. I came also to get (re)connected with great people doing great things.

The conference showed me that despite my spending years in several different industries and decades in the consulting industry, often straddling the traditional and the spiritual realms (my own bout with dualism), that my home is in the world of spiritually-based business practices. As the conference progressed, I felt that sense of “home” more and more. For that, I am also thankful. It was a reminder of my own path and purpose.

Inner Contributions of the Conference:

Besides an enlightening *outer* dimension described above, the conference also had a powerful *inner* dimension, including:

Inspiration: Each award winning company provided its own unique flavor of inspiration to others who want to do the same thing in their company. I can’t imagine anyone walking out of the conference not inspired to go make a difference.

Courage: For many of the champions within the award winning companies, it took a good measure of Courage (to use one of Lance Secretan’s big words) to propose what they did, to venture in many cases into the unknown, and to persevere. Each is a pioneer in his/her own company and industry. It’s thanks in large part to their courage that progress has been achieved.

Goodwill: What struck me about this conference was not the insights and wisdom on How and Why to focus on the spiritual health of a work organization and the people in it, though there was plenty of that. No, what struck me was the genuine good will and positive energy about the meeting and the people in it – presenter and attendee alike.

Quiet Presence: Unlike many conferences, the speakers at this conference did not bound up onto a big platform with flashing lights and “up” music introducing them. Sure that’s spirit too, but the spirit here was quiet and centered. Speakers and attendees were “equal” and conversed easily and often together. Lance was a great example of that with his friendly and immediate presence.

Heart Power: The Heart, one of my favorite corporate energies, and one that is still too often stifled and underutilized, was alive and well at this conference, most likely a reflection of the huge amounts of heart that were unleashed and used positively in the award winning companies.

Interestingly (are there any coincidences?) when I returned to my office after the conference, I found a message from Bill Catucci, a CEO who has revitalized two corporations and about whom I have written both an article and a forthcoming book¹. I

¹ Information about “Bringing a Company Back to Life” (an article in *At Work Journal*) and a forthcoming book with the AT&T Canada story – plus a list of other related publications, are available at <http://www.darwingillett.com/publications.htm>

hadn't talked to Bill since I videotaped an interview² with him several months ago. He wanted me to know that the cover of the latest [American Management Association](#) course brochure is titled "**Bringing the Heart Back into Corporate America**," adding his observation that "your life work is now showing up in the American Management Association program."

I thanked him for his kind words, but pointed out that it is *he* and *his* turnarounds that prove the power of heart. I saw it in all the people I interviewed and their stories from the AT&T Canada turnaround story.

My model of the Energized Enterprise (EE) draws on ALL of human energy, not only the traditional ones (The Head and Hands), but also on what some call the Spiritual ones (the Emotions, Will and particularly Heart)³. In the end, the EE relies primarily on strengthening the Heart and enabling people to access, express and put to good use those powerful heart qualities, including those qualities that Lance spoke of in his presentation: Authenticity, Truth, Love, Courage and Service. The people of AT&T Canada, with Bill's leadership, exhibited all those Heart qualities in spades!

I am in the process with a colleague of creating a program for wellness practitioners and other professional service firms. The conference came at just the right time, inspiring us to forge ahead with the development of the program. [Conscious Business Solutions](#) will teach spiritually-based business principles and practices and provide support to help participants grow and manage their practices.

As we design our program, we are inviting input (through a brief questionnaire on our site) from wellness practitioners, body workers, energy healers and other alternative practitioners who would be willing to tell us about the challenges they face in growing their practices. We're also interested in learning what services, support and/or knowledge would be most helpful to those practitioners who are interested in practice growth.

Freedom & Equality and the Future of the Spirit at Work Movement

The cover of this year's conference brochure shows a small, distant picture of the Statue of Liberty with large billowy clouds in the foreground. All during the conference, I was moved by that cover. First it was just the beauty of the image that struck me, but I kept coming back to that small image of the Statue of Liberty.

Reflecting on its powerful image, I thought of the founding of this country – of the revolutionary notion that we mere citizens are endowed with inalienable rights – to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And I thought of the people of France who gave the Statue to us – and their own revolution under the banner of "Liberte et Egalite."

² The interview with Bill Catucci on "Corporate Revitalization" is also available at this publications site.

³ See our 2000 booklet "Spiritual Capital: Building Vibrant Businesses that Serve Shareholders and Humanity" at our [publications page](#)

I began pondering how that image might relate more deeply to the Spirit at Work movement than merely as a symbol of this year's host city.

Conference attendees came not just from North America, but also from Europe and elsewhere. The conference provided a tour for those visiting the city to Ground Zero, a place that is both:

- **Horrific** on a material level because of the physical violence caused by Islamic terrorists attacking the Twin Towers, which triggered the deaths of thousands of people trapped in them and hundreds of valiant rescue workers trying to reach them, and then in the resulting pain to so many families; and yet it is also...
- **Sacred** on a spiritual level, where one can reflect on the love exhibited by so many people trying to help others, giving the ultimate service to their fellow man, and where we can experience that Oneness that Lance spoke about: we are ONE.

Finally, and I'm sure it's no coincidence, at the conference Peter & Monika Ressler offered their new book [*Spiritual Capitalism: What the FDNY Taught Wall Street about Money*](#) - a generous gift.

The Statue of Liberty and Ground Zero are places to pause and reflect on two foundation values of our country: Freedom and Equality.

In the countries represented by the award winners, Equality is honored and required by law – within society in general. Yet how much we take Freedom for granted, despite that great beacon of freedom, the Statue of Liberty.

Freedom is central to the business world. It is one of the pillars of Western Capitalism and the free market. We see that at a business level – without free markets, the system would not work.

But what about at an individual employee level? How would we even put Freedom and Equality into the typical company values statement?

We can imagine a management and Wall Street revolt:

“Freedom? We can't give everyone freedom to just do anything they want! We'd have chaos. We'd lose our efficiency – and our profits!”

“This is not a Democracy!” is the cry I've often heard as the (supposed) final word on the subject.

And “Equality? What do you mean? We have people at different pay levels, different responsibility? They're not equal! This isn't Socialism!”

I'd love to see an exploration of these values within the Spirit at Work movement. To seed the conversation, I would offer that it is indeed Freedom and Equality (and not just

out in the market place) that actually enable companies to exist and compete. It is their unseen foundation.

Yet, some have pointed out that the one place in the US where daily freedom has been most in jeopardy is the corporation. This makes it even more important to recognize and promote this value.

Perhaps in the past, in industrial companies, management could get away with withholding that freedom and equality (in the belief that top management control is needed). But in today's information age and in an emerging spiritual business age, this does not work. Certainly not for employees who are increasingly professionally trained knowledge workers, but it also does not work for employers. Hence the need to honor employees – and give them the dignity that comes from freedom and equality.

It will be an interesting dialogue, to explore what freedom and equality can and should mean in the workplace.

Equality – I see as akin to respect for others and honoring diversity. In practice, it can mean: everyone's opinion and contribution is valued – no matter who you are, not only in terms of gender, race, etc, but also your position in the company. The most inspiring CEOs I've seen treat people this way.

Freedom – Not necessarily just to DO whatever you feel like doing. Not even as citizens, do we have that freedom. But we do have the freedom to pursue our own happiness, our own purpose. I would expect that in the future, leading companies will honor and facilitate that. It also can mean the freedom to BE whomever we chose, and I include in that the freedom to bring all of ourselves to the workplace – and to offer all of our talents and energy to the service of the company's purpose as well as our own growth. This is all main stream in the Spirit at Work movement; we just don't use the "F" word to describe it.

Bill Catucci, the CEO who has turned around two good-sized corporations, recognized freedom as a crucial ingredient. He observed that people need some structure to guide them, but they also need freedom to operate within that structure – on their own. Without that freedom, people die spiritually, and then perform way beneath their potential.

Regarding equality, countless people I interviewed in AT&T Canada, the first company that Bill and his management team revitalized, spoke of the feeling of being valued equally no matter what level they were at. Even though someone has to make the decision, everyone's input was honored and considered on the basis of its merits, not on the basis of the person's position.

Suggestions for Future ISAW Conferences

The Spirit at Work movement has come a long way as a movement and paradigm promoter. Let's pause and celebrate this progress. Then let's see what's next. There's no time like when you're doing well to stand back and ask: How can we improve our model even further?

In that spirit, here are some suggestions for future ISAW Awards conferences:

1. Include in the criteria for the ISAW awards: the encouragement of **individual freedom and equality** - as part of the spiritual practices considered for selection – or at least some discussion of these values at the conference.
2. In the search for candidates, actively look in **countries that are newly free** – particularly from *Eastern Europe & Russia* and perhaps even *Iraq*. Eighteen of the 31 award winning work organizations in the four years of awards come from North America. Not represented yet are Japan, Eastern Europe, South America and Africa. Finding a company from a Muslim country, like Indonesia or Pakistan, could be both inspiring and instructive to see how a company in one of those countries honors human spirit in the workplace.
3. In the design of the conference itself, consider adding an **optional day of workshops** for participants to bring their top management team to **work on their own plan** for bringing spiritual practices into their organization;
4. Widen access to the conference, perhaps by providing live **telecasts to selected locations world-wide**, most likely through chapters of the sponsoring groups maybe collaborating with other local socially-responsible groups, chambers of commerce or business schools, so that many more people will have the opportunity to hear and be inspired by the presentations.

With gratitude and admiration to Judi Neal and her colleagues for their leadership and dedication to the Spirit at Work movement.

Dar Gillett

Gillett Associates

207-443-4533

dar@darwingillett.com

www.DarwinGillett.com

www.HumanEconomics.org

www.Conscious-Business-Solutions.com

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