

The Labyrinth:
A Life-giving Tool for Organizations

Judith A. Neal
University of New Haven
300 Orange Avenue
West Haven, CT 06516
203-479-4563
Judi@spiritatwork.org

Joe Miguez
347 Palisade Ave.
Cliffside Park, NJ 07010
201-943-2583
Labyrinthxperi@aol.com

Submitted to Dialogue, Synergy Session and Conference Theme

The Labyrinth:

A Life-giving Tool for Organizations

The labyrinth is an ancient spiritual ritual common to cultures as varied as the Aztecs, Native Americans, and 14th century Catholic monks. It is a form of walking meditation where one walks on a path marked on the floor or the ground, beginning on the outside of a circle and gradually working your way to the center. After some time for reflection in the center, the walker returns the way he or she came, gradually working one's way towards the outside of the labyrinth and to the exit.

Recently, with the unfolding interest in spirituality in the workplace (de Geus, 1997; Barrett, 1998), organizations are beginning to explore ways of nourishing the human spirit (Akst, 1998; Brown, 1998, Oldenburg, 1997). Rodale Press has a kiva room for people to experience quiet and peacefulness when they need it. Aveda Brown Boveri has a meditation room for its employees and customers of the Islamic faith who must pray five times a day. Boeing has brought the poet David Whyte in to read poetry to the executives to inspire them. The World Bank and the University of New Haven have employee discussion groups on spirituality in the workplace.

The labyrinth is a potential tool for nourishing the human spirit in the workplace and for creating a life-giving environment. Because it is a practice utilized by several spiritual traditions, it does not have any particular religious connotations, which is a benefit to non-sectarian workplaces in the United States (Neal, 1997). When presented spiritual practices in the workplace, it is important to make the distinction between religion -- which tends to have structure and dogma -- and spirituality-- which tends to be more open, exploratory, and based on the shared wisdom of all the major religious traditions (Neal, 1997; Hawley, 1993).

Typical ways that people use the labyrinth in an organizational setting are:

1. For problem solving.
2. To generate creative approaches to a business challenge.
3. To relieve stress.

4. As a way to process a difficult interpersonal interaction.

We propose to have the labyrinth available for EAM participants to walk through each evening of the conference. We also propose to have a facilitated dialogue and experiential session where we provide theoretical and historical background on the labyrinth and offer suggestions for ways that people can experience it.

The labyrinth is an opportunity to slow down and stop, breathe, reflect and choose. It helps people to choose to respond rather than to unconsciously react, to become aware of what they see, hear, feel and think. It also helps people to evaluate what to let go of, what to keep, and what to add, in order to place themselves in alignment with their core values and assumptions. We will offer a four stage guided process of reflection that people can use as they walk into and out of the labyrinth as they focus on a particular work-related issue or question.

After participants have gone through the labyrinth, we will process the experience and explore ways that organizations can utilize the labyrinth. We will also discuss what some of the benefits can be.

Why organizations might use the Labyrinth:

1. To create a space to relax and relieve stress during the day.
2. To encourage creativity and deeper thinking about business and professional issues.
3. To bring a sense of beauty and aesthetics to the workplace.
4. To nourish the human spirit in a non-threatening way.
5. To support problem solving.
6. To create a sense of connectedness to a higher purpose in the workplace.

References

- Akst, D. 1998. When business gets religion, New York Sunday Times, October 5, B1.
- Barrett, R. 1998. Liberating the corporate soul, Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Brown, T. 1998. "Corporate soul": Meaning behind the buzzwords, Harvard Management Update, October, pp. 10-11.
- DeGeus, A. 1997 The living company: Habits for survival in a turbulent business environment, Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Hawley, Jack. 1993. Reawakening the spirit at work: The power of dharmic management, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Neal, J. 1997. Spirituality and management education: A guide to resources, *Journal of Management Education*, vol. 21, no. 1: 121-139.

Oldenburg, D. 1997. Spirituality at work: Linking joy, meaning, commitment and the company's bottom line, *Washington Post*, April 15, p. D05.