

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP: A GUIDE TO A LEADERSHIP STYLE THAT EMBRACES MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to examine the characteristics of Spiritual Leadership and compare and contrast this style to 5 other well-known leadership styles including Transformational Leadership, Servant Leadership, Situational Leadership, Authoritarian Leadership, and Moral Leadership. Although each of these styles had some very positive characteristics, it was found that Spiritual Leadership allowed for various leadership approaches to be applied as needed and these approaches were designed to motivate and inspire followers to promote positive results. Examples of effective spiritual leaders were provided.

Specific skills needed for someone to become a spiritual leader were provided. These skills include self-awareness, self-esteem, effective communication, decision-making acumen, and the ability to promote and engage in healthy conflict. Each of these skills was examined and explained.

“Apollo stood on a high cliff. ‘Come to the edge,’ he said. ‘It’s too high,’ they said. ‘Come to the edge,’ he said. ‘We’ll fall,’ they said. ‘Come to the edge,’ he said. And they did. And he pushed them. And they flew” (Unknown).

Many leadership styles have been developed and studied over the years. Each style has advantages and disadvantages. What do you think of Apollo’s style in this parable and how did he come to use that style? We know that one style is not always better than another, for if it were, then every leader would be using it. This is not the case. Leaders come in all sizes and shapes as do the people they lead. What may work for a leader for one person may very well fail for another. If a leader has only one style she/he espouses, what happens when it doesn’t work? We live in an ever-changing world but any prediction today about leadership in the next 35 years or so is likely to be inaccurate as well as incomplete (Sowcik, 2015).

As we move into an uncertain and unpredictable future, leaders need to be prepared to lead and to produce positive and humane results. The authors of this article would argue that a leader can utilize multiple approaches to leadership. These approaches coupled with inspiration and motivation has the best opportunity to be successful and survive the many challenges of the workplace.

One style of leadership that allows leaders to utilize a variety of approaches to influence others for positive and humane results is spiritual leadership. There are characteristics and qualities of Spiritual Leadership that differentiate it from other styles that may also use multiple approaches. Spiritual leadership involves intrinsically motivating and inspiring workers through hope/faith in a vision of service to key stakeholders and a corporate culture based on the values of altruistic love to produce a highly motivated, committed and productive workforce (International Institute for Spiritual

Leadership, 2013, para 1).

The purpose of this article is to examine the characteristics of spiritual leadership and compare and contrast it to 5 other well-known and often used styles of leadership, including Transformational, Servant, Situational, Authoritarian, and Moral. Skills, attitudes, behaviors, and tools necessary to apply Spiritual leadership efficiently are also examined. Spiritual leadership allows for multiple leadership approaches designed to motivate and inspire followers to promote positive results. Examples of spiritual leadership in action are provided to support its effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Spiritual leadership is intrinsic. Spiritual leaders are motivating and inspire workers through a strong vision. The purpose of a spiritual leader is to fulfill both fundamental needs as well as moral needs of their followers. Spiritual leadership is founded upon a clear vision, an empowered team, individual well-being, and commitment (International Institute for Spiritual Leadership, 2013, para 1).

Spiritual leaders might also be associated with transformational leaders since they promote intrinsic motivation, but also empower their teams to modify actions and the environment to reflect the transfer of knowledge (What is Spiritual Leadership, 2015).

The biblical spiritual leader typically represents a leadership style of servanthood (Grahn, 2011). The spiritual leader leads by example, as Jesus did, who said He came to serve others, not to be served by them (Matthew 20:25–28). The spiritual leader recognizes that he is first and foremost a servant. Jesus modeled the true servant style of leadership, when He, the Lord incarnate, bent down and washed the feet of His disciples, teaching them that the true measure of a leader is his willingness to first serve others (John 13:12–17).

Spiritual leadership should not be confused with religious leadership, which is essential, but also different from spiritual leadership as the latter is more diffuse and less tied to an official capacity. While a religious leader can manifest spiritual leadership, a spiritual leader may not necessarily have religious leadership in any official capacity. Spiritual leadership, on the other hand, may receive authentication through more charismatic and

visionary forms of leadership and followership. Spiritual leadership is authenticated more from followers (Covrig, Ledesma & Gifford, 2013).

The definition and application of spiritual leadership include six behaviors that promote spiritual practices in the workplace:

- Respect for others' values
- Fair treatment
- Expressing care and concern
- Listening actively and responsively
- Showing appreciation for others' contributions
- Reflexive practices, which include managing emotions. (Reave, 2005)

A Person's Spirit

An individual's spirit is viewed as a connection between one's soul and one's values.

"A person's spirit is the vital principle or animating force traditionally believed to be the intangible, life-affirming force within all human beings. It is a state of intimate relationship with the inner self of higher values and morality as well as recognition of the truth of the inner nature of others" (International Institute for Spiritual Leadership, 2013, para 1).

Workspace Spirituality

Workplace Spirituality can manifest itself in many forms. For this paper, we look at spirituality through the lens of valuing ethics and morals in the workplace. Crucial spiritual values included in a business framework include integrity, honesty, accountability, quality, cooperation, service, intuition, trustworthiness, respect, justice, and service (McLaughlin, 2009). Many organizations view the importance of the employee as highly as the value of profits. They see the two as critical items that work hand in hand with the success of the company.

Spirituality in a company is often revealed in the mission or vision statements. The Container Store has founding principles that place the employee as their number one asset. Principle one states, "One great person is equal to three good people in terms of business productivity" (Container Store, 2017, Para 5). The seven principles weave together the values of the company, all tied to their core belief in valuing the employee as much as the customer. Marketing Professor at SMU Ed Fox stated, "The employee focus is a big part of its competitive

advantage,” and the secret to the company’s success.

Southwest airlines include the value of the employee in the mission statement. It states, “We are committed to provide our Employees a stable work environment with equal opportunity for learning and personal growth” (Southwest, 2017, Para 2). The expectation at the airline is that employees who are cared for will provide the same care to passengers. This expectation has proven to be a successful plan because Southwest has rated high in the J.D. Power airline study, won multiple awards, including USA Today best airline award, and ranked as one of the top places to work in 2015 by Forbes magazine.

CEO Jim Goodnight of SAS said, “Treat employees like they make a difference and they will” (SAS, 2017, Para. #1). The company has a no lay off policy and generous benefit that support employees spiritual, emotional and physical health. As reported recently in 60 minutes, the software company has low absenteeism and only 3% turnover, which saves them \$80 million each year in training and recruitment (McLaughlin, 2009). The CEO’s attribute the company success directly to the value of the employee and the firm commitment they build in the company culture.

As recognized in the previous examples, spiritual leadership includes “the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community” (Ashmos & Duncan, 2000, p. 137).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the gap in published data related to spiritual leadership, we conducted a literature review to see the popularity of spiritual leadership. The topic of spirituality is a growing trend. There were 72 books published on spirituality in the workplace in the last 20 years, and 50% of those books were published between 2007 and 2012 (Johnson, 2012, p. 137). There were 1,598 articles published in social science journals between 1991 and 2008, but only 232 of those articles focused explicitly on spirituality in the workplace (Johnson, 2012, p. 135). Around 80% of those published articles were published after the year 2000 (Johnson, 2012, p. 135). As posited by Johnson (2012), “Religion and spirituality overlap but are not identical” (p. 136).

Many theories of leadership can contribute to the concept of spiritual leadership. Theories such as transactional, transformational, ethical, servant, moral, situational, collaborative, authentic, authoritarian, democratic, charismatic trait, and leadership grid. For the sake of this research, the following theories will be focused on: Moral leadership, transformational leadership, situational leadership, authoritarian leadership, servant leadership.

Moral Leadership

Moral leadership was founded by Plato’s question that continues to challenge leaders today: “whether people the world over share common wants and needs” (as cited in Burns, 1978, p. 29). The structure of moral leadership responds to the needs and aspirations of culture (Burns 1978). “Leadership is a process of morality to the degree that leaders engage with followers on the basis of shared motives and values and goals-on the basis, that is, of the followers’ “true” needs as well as those of leaders” (Burns, 1978, p. 36). Thus, moral leadership develops a shared value system that is based on a purpose and is shared as a covenant (Sergiovanni, as cited in Cawelti, 1990).

Burns (1978) supported the need for moral leadership because “values can be the source of vital change” (p. 41). First, moral leadership guides ethical principles and appeals to followers with deeply held values such as justice. Leaders influence visions of change by gaining the support of followers with such cultural connections like justice and brotherhood. According to Sergiovanni (2004) covenantal relationships are the foundational pillars of collaborative cultures. These relationships contain one’s spirit since they are based on loyalty, purpose, commitment, and sentiment and include a mutual obligation between individuals (Sergiovanni, 2004). And, unlike legal documents or formal agreements, covenants are the bindings of the spirit (Sergiovanni, 2004, p. 20).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership was defined by Burns (1978) as a mutual process of empowerment between leaders and followers. Leaders and followers are empowered through values, self-awareness, charismatic actions, and motivation (Burns, 1978). Burns stated the focus of transformational leadership is on “end-values, such

as liberty, justice, equality” (p.426).

According to Covey (2004), the goal of transformational leadership is for individuals and organizations to make synergizing and everlasting changes in the areas of mind, heart, vision, insights, understanding, purpose, beliefs, principles, and values. Transformational leadership operates under a shared value system that is grounded on purpose and is agreed upon by the team (Cawelti, 1990). In transformational leadership, every individual is “... valued for his or her intrinsic worth” (Pai & Adler, 2001, p. 61).

In the transformational leadership style, there are three actions between leaders and followers: 1) increase followers’ awareness of values 2) increase focus on the organization and its vision 3) improve the ability to recognize higher order needs related to the purpose (www.transformationalleadership.net, 2007). “Transforming leaders “raise” their followers up through levels of morality” (Burns, 1978, p. 426).

Bernard Bass was a supporter of Burns’ ideas related to transformational leadership. Bass and Riggio (2006) stated,

Transformational leaders motivate others to do more than they originally intended and often even more than they thought possible. They set more challenging expectations and typically achieve higher performances. Transformational leaders also tend to have more committed and satisfied followers. Moreover, transformational leaders empower followers and pay attention to their individual needs and personal development, helping followers to develop their own leadership potential. (p. 4)

Transformational leaders propose a clear vision and can establish and prioritize well-defined values within their organization (Cawelti, 1990). Burns (1978) stated that there is a need for values because “values can be the source of vital change” (p. 41). A transformational leader can improve the vision and purpose of culture through the application of shared values (Burns, 1978). Additionally, trust is critical to transformational leadership because followers must be willing to accept the vision (Evans, 2005).

Situational Leadership

Hersey and Blanchard established situational

leadership in 1969. The style began as the life-cycle behavioral model and was later well known as situational leadership (1996). Initially, the theory started looking at parenting styles and how they were altered based on the developmental level of children. Then the theory was applied to the workplace and how leaders changed their style based on the developmental levels of employees. Hersey, Blanchard, and Natemeyer (1979) realized the value of a leader’s ability to determine the needs of an employee and to adjust leadership styles accordingly.

A leader’s style is reliant on the level of competence and commitment of a worker and the difficulty of the task being carried out. According to Blanchard (2008) the developmental level of the worker and the complexity of the job, a leader would use one of the following leadership styles: 1) coaching, 2) directing, 3) delegating, and 4) supporting (Blanchard, 2008). “Adapt your style to their developmental level” (Blanchard, 2008, p. 19).

Blanchard, Zigarmi, and Zigarmi (2013) stated that there are three critical skills needed to become a situational leader. A situational leader creates clear goals using the SMART (specific, motivating, attainable, relevant, and trackable) method. A situational leader analyses the developmental levels of workers and matches his/her leadership style with the needs of the employee. Blanchard (2008) created four definitions of the leadership styles and developmental levels of employees. The definitions are: 1) Coaching: high-directive/high supportive leader behavior, 2) Directing: high-directive/low-supportive leader behavior, 3) Delegating: low-supportive/low-directive leader behavior, and 4) Supporting: high-supportive/low-directive behavior (p. 19).

Authoritarian Leadership

Kurt Lewin (1939) defined authoritarian leadership as a style in which a leader maintains maximum control over the environment. An authoritative leader exhibits an autocratic style and uses strict rules, guidelines, and negative consequences to keep control (Smith, 2016). In an autocratic leadership style, the focus is on the performance rather than on people (Fiaz, Su, & Ikram, 2017). Authoritarian leaders do not consult others when making decisions (Smith, 2016).

According to Northouse (2015), authoritarian

leaders believe that followers need direction. Fiaz, Su, and Ikram surmise that in an organization with an autocratic leadership style, there are rules and procedures in place to ensure that the job gets done. There are also transparent procedures for applying punishment and motivating with external rewards.

An autocratic style is often used in situations where there is a lack of knowledge and experience (Sandling, 2014). While authoritarian leadership can be “efficient and productive,” it can also encourage “dependence, submissiveness, and loss of individuality” (p. 90). There may be situations in which authoritarian leadership is more effective than others. For example, authoritarian leadership is often used in the military. Authoritarian leadership may also be necessary for emergency situations when individuals are not able to make clear decisions on their own.

Servant Leadership

Robert Greenleaf first conceptualized servant leadership in 1977. Servant leadership includes the practice of a leader taking the on the role as a servant first, and leading by example (Greenleaf, 2004). “At its core, servant-leadership is a long-term, transformational approach to life and work – in essence, a way of being – that as the potential for creating positive change throughout our society” (Spears, 2004, p. 12).

A leader who exhibits a servant leadership presents a paradigm shift from other leadership models since servant leaders focus on supporting the development of employees rather than a more authoritarian approach, which includes maintaining significant control and giving orders. “Serving well creates a chain reaction. A leader serves the employees; then they increase their commitment and quality of the job so that they can serve customers well, customers enjoy the service and value the company, so both the reputation and profits of the company soar” (Vinod & Sudhakar, 2011, p.463). Vinod and Sudhakar (2011) concluded that components such as trust, motivation, and achievement were all positive outcomes of a servant leadership style.

Spears (2004) proposed that there are ten characteristics of a servant-leader. 1) listening, 2) empathy, 3) healing, 4) awareness, 5) persuasion, 6) conceptualization, 7) foresight, 8) stewardship, 9) commitment to the growth of people, and 10)

building community (p. 13-16). Listening, although often a forgotten skill, is an essential characteristic of a servant leader because listening is necessary to cultivate the other skills (DeGraaf, Tilley, & Neal, 2004). DeGraaf, Tilley, and Neal proposed that the characteristics of a servant-leader be viewed as a “weaving, with each strand supporting and shaping the others” (p. 162). A servant-leader is most effective when he can combine all ten characteristics (DeGraaf, Tilley, & Neal).

Comparison of Styles

“Both non-denominational spiritual practices and world religions all are fundamentally based on hope/faith in a vision of love and service of others” (International Institute for Spiritual Leadership, 2013, para 5). Upon the review of moral leadership, transformational leadership, situational leadership, authoritarian leadership, servant leadership, it is apparent that there are components between these styles that contribute to the concept of spiritual leadership. For example, when looking at each of these leadership styles, each leader exhibiting these styles promote honest actions, compassionate reflection, and value amongst the individuals within their environment. Every individual is “valued for his or her intrinsic worth” (Pai & Adler, 2001, p. 61). As Royeen (2012) noted, “When acting from this reference, one operates not by rules and regulations as much as by character traits, including honesty, fairness, compassion, and generosity” (para 8). Individuals displaying one, or all of these leadership styles, recognize that there is a universal standard of good that is tied to the general well-being of their environment (Beckner, 2004).

BECOMING A SPIRITUAL LEADER

To become a spiritual leader, one must develop and enhance some skills. These skills include self-awareness, self-esteem, communication, decision making, and promoting healthy conflict.

Self-Awareness requires one to examine how we see ourselves. We need to know how if we are coming across to others the way we think we are. As evidenced in the literature review from this article, self-awareness is a common thread among leadership styles. One can develop self-awareness in some ways.

Intrapersonal Inspection

Intrapersonal Inspection means that we should

pay attention to our feelings. It is essential to know, for example, when we feel happy, sad, bored, angry, or depressed. If one has self-awareness, then they can be aware of what she/he is feeling and communicating to others nonverbally. We may try to mask these feelings but may fail to do so. Others may pick up on the nonverbal leakage from our facial expression, body movement, or paralanguage. Nonverbal leakage occurs when we try to hide our true feelings but fail to do so. (Brashen, 1985). Since spiritual leaders rely on charisma and vision (Covrig, Ledesma, & Gifford, 2013), it is crucial for the leader to be congruent with verbal and nonverbal communication so that the receiver of the message is not confused. Failure to be congruent may result in a mixed signal or contradictory message.

Watching Others

We can learn much about how we come across to others by looking at others and how they respond to our messages. For example, if one is angry and attempts to hide it, she/he may greet someone with positive words, but the nonverbal behaviors on the part of the sender would likely communicate anger. The receiver of the message may pick up on the anger expressed nonverbally and respond with less enthusiasm than the sender of the message would expect. If the message sender is aware of feeling anger, she/he might attempt to share their true feelings or at the very least to let the other person know that she/he is having a challenging day.

One of our authors had the experience of attending a communication conference. He had missed a crucial session he had eagerly anticipated and was very frustrated. While walking through the lobby, he encountered a woman with a very big scowl on her face and looking down while walking. This author at first glance thought to avoid this woman but then decided to approach her in a friendly way and ask her how she liked the conference. He was able to put his negativity aside and was able not to personalize her negativity. Instead, he smiled and walked up to her and asked her how she was enjoying the conference. She looked up and smiled back and confessed that she had misplaced her program and was very unhappy. This author shared his program with the woman and a lively and very positive conversation about the conference followed. This example shows

how self-awareness can enable one to adjust their message so that it is received in the way that it is intended. Spiritual leaders can be aware of how they come across to others (<http://iispiritualleadership.com/spiritual-leadership/>, 2015).

Feedback

We can ask for feedback from others about how they see us coming across. Personal coaches, trusted colleagues, and friends are likely sources. It is best to ask several people for feedback to get a more composite picture. Feedback allows us to build a profile of our communication skills and from this profile, we can then make adjustments in both attitude and behavior as needed.

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment tests are designed to encourage the one being assessed to objectively look at herself/himself and build a profile of their awareness. If we are willing to answer assessment questions as accurately as possible, we are then able to gain more insight into how we are coming across to others.

Communication

Effective communication is a necessary component of spiritual leadership since leaders must clearly and concisely link visions, ideas, goals, and objectives. Effective communication starts with a foundation of trust (Tardanico, 2012). Effective communicators also understand how to inspire a shared vision, challenge processes, enable others to act, and encourage the heart (Avolio et al., 1999; Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 73). Spiritual leaders are effective communicators since they must actively listen, clearly deliver ideas, and motivate others to fulfill the organizational goals and values within the culture (<http://iispiritualleadership.com/spiritual-leadership/>, 2015).

Decision Making

Making decisions as a spiritual leader requires a different approach than traditional leadership styles. A spiritual leadership contemplates the outcomes of decisions on the employees as a team, individuals, and the impact on the business. The approach is a balancing act to ensure human resources and needs are addressed while still meeting the needs of the business. "Spiritual leaders aim to foster efforts by underlining the conviction, trust, and the importance of a task for business performance,

while traditional motivation policies rely more on the stimulation of intelligence, rationality, and problem-solving” (Boorum, 2009, p. 54). The spiritual leader takes an integrative approach when making decisions to ensure there is balance in the organization.

When spiritual leaders make decisions based on the importance of the task for the business performance they still must utilize effective communication skills so that their message is heard and understood by their team. The decisions made are not always going to be popular, but the spiritual leader makes the best decision she/he can for the organization while listening and factoring in feedback from others. The spiritual leader has the self-esteem to make a decision that might not resonate for all. Utilizing their ability to build trust, the spiritual leader can promote a decision and at the same time be sensitive to the impact it has on others. President John F. Kennedy demonstrated spiritual leadership during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. He absented himself from a critical meeting to identify strategies to face the crisis reasoning that his presence might unduly influence his team. He wanted their input so that he could balance that with his preference. He also assigned the role of “critical evaluator” to each team member so that they could explore both the advantages and disadvantages of any plan (Janis, 1971).

Sometimes decisions must be made quickly. If you were a soccer goalie and a penalty kick have been awarded to the other team; you wouldn't have time to do a thorough analysis of the tendency of the striker and the percentages of times the kick was high, low, to the left, or to the right. You would have to rely on your experience and intuition at the moment. In the same way that we can teach ourselves to think in a logical and organized manner, we can also teach ourselves to make better snap judgments (Gladwell, 2005). Taking first impressions seriously requires the self-awareness and self-esteem to accept the fact that sometimes we know more about someone or something instantaneously than we do after an extended period of study (Gladwell, 2005). Even thinkers that rely heavily on logic make quick, intuitive decisions in navigating through life (Reynolds, 2014).

The spiritual leader uses both logic and intuition in making decisions and is not limited to a particular decision-making style. Whether there is

ample time to make a decision or a quick decision is required, flexibility is built into decision making. As a result, the spiritual leader has an extensive toolkit as a resource for making the best choices.

Promoting Healthy Conflict

Conflict is both natural and inevitable. The manner in which we handle conflict determines the quality of relationships we have with people. Spiritual leaders must master conflict because no workplace is without it. Self-awareness is paramount to managing conflict. Self-awareness leads to self-understanding which in turn promotes self-acceptance and potential change (Brashen, 1985). The spiritual leader is driven by her/his vision and is bounded by a strong moral compass. The spiritual leader uses their self-awareness and self-acceptance to take feedback and depersonalize it. The spiritual leader is not afraid to stay the course in any decision, but at the same time is aware and confident enough to consider new information and perhaps alter the decision.

Three qualities are necessary for the spiritual leader to handle conflict efficiently. These include openness, listening, and resilience (Meinert, 2017). Often it is not what is said as much as how it is said. Self-awareness allows the spiritual leader to have insight into messages sent to followers. The openness is characterized by sharing information and feelings honestly and respectfully. Listening builds trust since others feel heard. The spiritual leader hears the message of others, processes it, let's the sender of the message know she/he has heard them, and then and only then responds (Brashen, 1983). Resilience is important as it allows the spiritual leader to stay the course when a decision has been made and input considered.

In 1966, Muhammed Ali demonstrated spiritual leadership by remaining resilient in his beliefs when he refused induction into the U.S. Army during the height of the Vietnam war for moral and religious reasons. He had been one of the most charismatic figures in boxing and was followed by many. His decision at the time demonstrated openness and resilience at a huge cost to himself. He lost 3 ½ years of his prime boxing career and potential jail time sticking to his beliefs (Calamur, 2016).

Another key to spiritual leadership is flexibility. The spiritual leader can use different styles during a conflict. The Thomas/Kilman conflict assessment

is a tool that helps the participant understand which style they use most and what is the most appropriate style to use in any given situation (Thomas, 1992).

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

A leader with the ability to use numerous approaches to leadership united with inspiration and motivation has the best chance to be effective and endure the many challenges the workplace may face. One style of leadership that lets leaders employ a variety of approaches to influence others for positive and humane outcomes is spiritual leadership. There are aspects and skills of spiritual leadership that discriminate it from other styles. Spiritual leadership encompasses motivating and inspiring workers through hope/faith in a vision of service to key employees and a corporate culture based on the values of altruistic love to produce a highly motivated, committed and productive workforce (International Institute for Spiritual Leadership, 2013, para 1).

We have compared and contrasted various leadership styles and discussed how spiritual leadership consists of key elements drawn from other styles. Examples of popular world leaders were offered as a benchmark for achievement. A guide to becoming a spiritual leader was presented along with a review of key skills that one must develop. These skills include self-awareness, self-esteem, communication, decision making, and promoting healthy conflict.

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