



Reading at Work and Industrial Christian Fellowship

Does spirituality have a place in business?

Can business have a soul?

with Andy Freeman (Space to Breath),
Church Missionary Society Pioneer &
ICF Fellow.



Introduction

After Andy introduced himself, he introduced the evening by asking whether business can have a soul. And, possibly a related question, where does my faith fit with my work, and with my colleagues, and where does the wider concept of spirituality fit into this dynamic.

Andy started by noting a Sloane Study in 1999 identified much interest in spirituality, but not in religion, in work. For Andy's CMS role, working with the course participants for their pioneer ministry course (also known as "Fresh Expressions"), Andy could see how the language of 'pioneer' can create intrigue, just as much as the notion of spirituality can in the workplace.

Through Space to Breath consulting, Andy had thought about True North as a concept, being like a compass that sets direction and gets it bearing. Applying this to our working lives, how can we match the True North of our faith with True North of work and our workplace? How can we create a common language and dialogue? There has been a lot written since the 1990s on workplace

spirituality, including some examples of how we might see this outworked. For instance the Harvard course on Happier, articles on Leadership and the New Science – seeking to link leadership with the language around us and workers; including spirituality.

This is now forming the corporate business language of the triple bottom line: profits, people and planet. In 2005, Business Week carried an article entitled: Can Spirituality aid the bottom line? We will each have our own views on this, but clearly this question is being asked beyond those of a practicing Christian faith in the workplace.

Andy later unpacked this further. To look at the True North: why might we think that Spirituality (or indeed Christianity) cannot have a bearing. But we know, yes it does of course, even in the workplace, but we need to recalibrate to a mission mind set rather than outright, direct, immediate evangelism. The aim is wider than pure instantaneous conversion.

And secondly, is there more to life, can be seen as a core question to be explored more in the workplace. How we bring out meaning and is there more to business that just profit are key elements of the wider mission agenda for Christians in the workplace.

This wider perspective can be seen in different ways. For instance, one participant on the CMS training course is exploring the theology of the land, and how that might look in the high street.

Our Involvement in the Workplace

When we show up at work we bring our emotions, thoughts and beliefs to the workplace. We do not become detached from our world of Christian faith when we come to our workplace, rather the opposite, we bring our whole selves, including that Christian faith, into that workplace. And let us not forget that more than those in recognised religions pray each week to their God – the environment is more spiritually engaged that we may first expect or even appreciate.

Andy led the seminar in a simple meditation based on recognising our own breathing. What do we need that is not our own on the inhale cycles, and on the exhale cycles, what are we to share with community. This pattern can assist us to consider Rhythm (and not rush) – to establish our spiritual disciplines, to breath in Oxygen of life (and not CO₂). It allows us to recognise that we cannot always accomplish everything we might want quickly – rather we are dependent on the seasons, our age and so forth. Andy concluded by asking the rhetorical question of what keeps us going.

Andy explained he had used the same simple meditation back in 2002 when leading the Reading Boiler Room project as part of the 24-7 Prayer Movement. Those executives found the challenge of listening to their own body, making space, allowed a renewed creativity. The Boiler Room experience was one of three voluntary options for staff involved – the others had been assisting with a school and another a community centre. The session had clearly had a significant impact on those attending – how could this be applied in our own workplaces or for ourselves? Like the book of the same title, perhaps it led to Christianity Rediscovered – identifying what is essential.

A Soul and a Soul Committee

Pope John Paul II said:

“A community needs a soul if it is to become a true home...”

Andy notes the Lotus Development Corporation in the 1990s had created a soul committee. It set out to determine what are their values, how to treat people etc. for the organisation. Andy was currently trying to establish what had happened to that committee.

So, turning to us gathered in Reading, Berkshire, UK in 2014, Andy challenged us with three areas to explore:

- 1. How to nurture your soul where you work? How do you bring the whole of yourself to work?**
- 2. What Values and Rhythms do you bring to work?**
- 3. How you work together. Soul Work. The “why?”**

Andy explained the background to the word ‘soul’ in scripture. Jewish spirituality identified a word-play to seek an understanding of soul. The Hebrew word ‘Nephesh’ denoting soul is the word for ‘neck’. The soul in Jewish eyes connected the head, or the mind, with the body - the thinking aspect of a human being with the practical aspect of working, doing and living. Can the Neck or Soul of a Company provide connectivity in the same way? Connecting boardroom to shop-floor, strategy to application or planning to action?

Practical Examples

What might this look like in practice – three examples were shared:

1. **Nurturing of one's soul:** A group based in Poole offered spiritual direction to senior leaders via retreats, giving them space for their soul.
2. **How do businesses think about their values, and soul** – Andy aids a meditation based on organisational values sent weekly to all staff. (This could be seen as a parallel to the examples of prayer room type spaces for staff to visit and explore meaning of values etc.)
3. **Soul Work** – St. Francis revolutionised the Church's interaction with poor and those suffering from leprosy etc. – whilst the Church had cared from a distance, it was St. Francis who went to live with them. So within this context of Soul Work, where does the power of God play out – how do we live it out, and do we see the triple bottom line?

Andy's ICF research was to explore what models for these three elements were at work already in the UK, and explore how the church relates with this and can take it forward?

Financial Implication for Business

So how does this make any money for business, then? Looking under the three dimensions proposed in this thinking:

1. **How to nurture your soul where you work? How do you bring the whole of yourself to work?** Well, examine employee wellbeing and churn. Data on the web suggests in 2008 the recruitment cost from churn of staff was £14bn, with the predominate reasons for leaving being relational and affected by wellbeing. What is the bigger picture here - keep employees and retain them to reduce costs and improve the bottom line.
2. **What Values and Rhythms do you bring to work? How are the values expressed within the corporate organisation?** Apply the five second test for checking out a website page of capturing key points and interest: why are we here and existing, in this organisation? The organisation needs to establish the why question that quickly. Are Vision and Values the least visited section of a website – is this because there is no evidence of how it is worked out?

- 3. How you work together. Soul Work. The “why?”** See for example LUSH, and its sustainability and cosmetics etc. Spirituality has a way to speak in to organisations and set the direction of behaviour.

Closing Comments before Questions

Andy closed his presentation by asking:

Spirituality: how do faith groups interact with the work?

Do we think as Christians we have something to say into the workplace and its fundamental actions?

In summary, treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you can help people become what they can become.

Questions from the meeting audience

Q. Soul Committee – could Andy expand more? Andy explained they held a monthly meeting of the Soul Committee. How we treat clients and their employees were the most common lenses. Very clear website setting out its work. They connect and resonate with the concept of the whole person. Part of the success of such approaches is to try and not use religious language. So for example Andy does use stories of Jesus, but does not talk of them in religious terms. Experience suggested it was more a matter of planting questions rather than trying to seal the deal of faith with colleagues then and there. A current vogue on ‘Mindfulness’ was an open door given the rich heritage of Christianity in this sphere, although often those offering themselves as experts are from a Buddhist training background. Andy postulated whether Mindfulness can be placed within the Ignation spirituality practice, allowing the adoption of Christian authenticity.

Q. Whilst staff churn or wastage was one element, so was sickness. Andy agreed; and sees spirituality as an element into the stress environment effect on staff. Is it worth examining why certain organisations have come out of the Top 100 Organisations to work for – Andy is seeking to undertake research in this area. Occupational Health may offer another route for understanding what is going on in the area of sickness and spirituality (or the lack of it).

Q. Ethics impact. Andy referred to Virtue Ethics, as a philosophy to have an inner understanding of virtues in our core that allow us to make the right judgements when under pressure (a theme picked up at another Reading at Work seminar given by the Bishop of Reading, Rt. Revd. Andrew Proud).

Q. Christian Ethos Businesses. Andy is exploring how Churches relate to businesses and the world around them. For Christian charities and organisations, there is a balance between Christian charity and professionalism and not being weak but of strong faith.

Q. Examples of ways to do it. Andy referred to a Scandinavian business where prayers were offered before senior leader meetings and big decisions were decided. Andy also knew of examples of organisations with senior leaders who are Christians, where they draw in Christian values into how they work to build in the Christian DNA through their activities and actions.

Q. Cultural change of reducing loyalty to employees, and employees to employers. Andy saw the impact of consultancy leading to results might be beneficial in this area – allowing space for rhythm for relationships. Break of space and time can be important to allow focus – even down to lunch breaks being actually taken, for instance. What do away days mean in practice – but perhaps properly, as retreat opportunity to allow reflection and perspective and desire and loyalty to build.

The above notes are a personal reflection on Andy's talk – any errors are the author's.

Magnus Smyly

Reading at Work