

# **Spirituality and Leadership—The Essential Elements for Creating Culturally Compatible Living Environments**

**Rochester MN Chamber of Commerce**

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Good morning ladies and gentlemen and all in attendance to honor the life and work of a fallen American hero, Dr. Martin Luther King. I believe the phrase that appropriately fits is “gone, but not forgotten.”

The first question I would like to address is “what is spirituality?” And secondly, “what is its relationship to leadership?”

I tend to view spirituality as that which comes from within; beyond what we’ve been taught to believe or value. It is the source that inspires us to do what is ethical and right, regardless of the consequences.

On December 1, 1955, a woman named Rosa Parks decided that she would not give up her seat on a segregated bus. I doubt that she had reasoned that this spontaneous act would trigger the Civil Rights Movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as the basis of her actions.

Shortly thereafter, a young preacher attended a meeting in Montgomery, Alabama to learn what the Black city leaders were planning to do about the segregated system Black people were

experiencing in that city. By simply expressing his opinion, the Civil Rights Movement was thrust upon his shoulders. I doubt he went to that meeting with the thought of leading such a movement.

And more recently, a man jumped onto the subway tracks in Harlem to save the life of a disoriented individual, at his own peril.

The point is that quite often our experience of spirituality is a spontaneous one that life presents unexpectedly. And leadership is simply behaving consistent with that inner prompting that is transcendent to mental processing.

Therefore, spiritual leadership is simply the ability or, more precisely, the willingness to influence others to live consistent with their highest ethical and moral values. Particularly, in support of the health, happiness, and success of others. This definition does not require status, position, or title. It does not require someone to “lead” us in the sense of action being triggered by a person. This type of leadership comes from within each of us in our day-to-day interactions when we contribute our time, effort, and assistance to others like those impacted by Hurricane Katrina.

I am speaking here of the vanguard of those who serve in behalf of others; the school teacher who teaches us responsibility in addition to material content; the physician and nurse who not only nurture and cure our physical ailments, but also provide loving support for our mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being; those in public service

who provide our basic necessities and conveniences of life that we take for granted; our parents who still influence most the core values we live by, even as adults; and everyone too numerous to mention who contribute to our spiritual well-being.

Spiritual leadership is not a new system of leadership characteristics redefined – such as integrity, courage, vision, or risk-taking. It is simply the ability to influence the transformation of others in being more sensitive and understanding, and correspondingly accepting others who are different; who think differently, and who do things differently than ourselves.

In other words, spiritual leadership is the key to creating “culturally compatible environments of human existence.” This is the essence of the word “inclusion.”

I define inclusion as simply an environment where we all feel *wanted*, *appreciated*, and *valued*.

1. *Wanted* for our diverse membership as part of the group or community.
2. *Appreciated* for the unique contribution we make in shaping the consciousness of the group.
3. *Valued* for the unique perspective we bring in terms of creativity, innovation, and performance.

I believe the greatest challenge we face today is learning how to get along in a world of differences. Some of the most prominent differences include ideology, culture, values and ethics, religion, and worldviews. When confronted with differences in these areas, we tend to view them as mutually exclusive, rather than equally valid ways of designing our experience of living compatibly.

For example, in broad terms, the Western part of the world tends to view the individual as the cultural quantum of society. Whereas the Eastern part of the world tends to view the individual as an inseparable part of the group. One world view tends to view collaboration as crucial to the success of any individual effort, whereas the dominant Western view tends to be individualistic, entrepreneurial, and competitive. When the two views are compatibly harnessed as ends of a spectrum, we create for ourselves innumerable ways of addressing any challenge or project we face; integrating both individualism and group.

Or-

Several months ago I saw a television special on ABC entitled "The State of the Union." The essence of the presentation that I came away with is that we were not only a divided nation in terms of critical issues, but that we were also polarized.

I am not sure whether or not we have begun to find our way back together as a nation of one, but I am convinced that such unification will be dependent on each of us here from an individual perspective. And the fundamental challenge we will be faced with is compatibly resolving differences in beliefs, values, and worldviews. In order to do so will require each of us to become more open, receptive, and accepting of others who have fundamentally different values, beliefs, and worldviews.

This is the essence of inclusion – creating compatibility out of worldviews which appear to be mutually exclusive.

For example, the Duke University Hospital System began a concerted effort more than 10 years ago to not only create inclusive environments within their System, but to also significantly influence inclusion within the community through outreach programs. This effort is being led by Dr. Bill Fulkerson, CEO of the System, and Senior Operating Officer Kerry Watson.

At Duke they have carefully focused on both measurements and inclusion to create an integrated system of operation consistent with their community and workplace compositions. The point is that Fulkerson and Watson – The Dynamic Duo – have prevailed in spite of predictable resistance and challenges to cultural transformation. This commitment is something more powerful than a business case. It is an “inner commitment,” which is spiritual in origin.

Several years ago we did comprehensive diversity trainings for the Kellogg Company. The former chairman and CEO, Arnold Langbo, published this statement:

*Kellogg's commitment to diversity is based upon something much deeper and profound than a business case. We believe the most compelling case for diversity stems from a respect for the dignity of every member of the human family and by virtue of our humanity, deserves the opportunity to participate fully.*

So, the natural question for each of us here is “How do we have spiritual leadership become a part of our day-to-day living – whether at work or in our personal lives?” From my travels and living in other parts of the world, I have learned three nuggets of wisdom I use whenever I encounter differences with respect to others. They are

1. *Be humble rather than arrogant* – humility goes a long way in establishing a relationship of authenticity.
2. *Be willing to learn rather than teach* – Bill Fulkerson often mentions how much he has learned from the diversity of patients he has treated over the years.

3. *Be willing to change* as a result of what is learned –

Jan Carlzon, former CEO of Scandinavian Airlines describes such encounters as “moments of truth.” Those day-to-day occurrences which provide the opportunity for “new learning experiences.” Those small, but irreversible steps that lead to greater human understanding and compatibility.

This three step process is something we can all integrate into our lives with awareness and intention.

- Humility
- Learning by Experience
- Change

So, in conclusion, I'd like to suggest that we again find ourselves at a critical point in history. One where we are challenged more than ever – both domestically and globally – to find ways of living compatibly with each other.

The most profound solution to this challenge is one which is within each of us – beyond our own ethnocentric beliefs and values. One which requires us to connect with that place that I define as spiritual.

It is only from this level of introspection and committed action will we be able to create the kind of life we all desire for ourselves, our families, and our country.