



Business and the Feminine Spirit

Introduction

Love in business. A novel concept. Most of us are probably used to a traditional culture at work where 'proper' reserved behavior is expected. People keep their distance and approach work and relationships with a sense of formality.

What if that paradigm were to shift towards a more compassionate and spiritual model?

In the past, traditionally male behaviors such as tough-minded decision-making and competitive aggression were the standard. At job interviews and when assessing performance and potential, leaders would assess whether the employee had 'fire in his belly' or was a fist-pounding-on-the-table kind of guy or gal. There was little tolerance of sensitivity, never mind tears. Now however a sea-change is occurring that recognizes the value in management and leadership of feminine traits such as warmth, affection, nurturing and intuition.

Some would identify this move as introducing love into the workplace.

In fact, love flows naturally when you create a space for it. People are naturally inclined to good. It's the business world that makes us resistant and skeptical.

If you are open and accepting, people can feel comfortable around you. People feel better when they are allowed and encouraged to connect on a deeper level with others, especially with managers and superiors. Fear and anxiety is no help in organizations. Connecting openly dispels anxiety and makes for harmonious relationships.

An increased sense of humanity and trust positively impacts the bottom line, because people - and entire organizations - work far better when folk are happy.

Here are some pointers for creating a humane and productive business environment, for anyone who seeks to make a positive difference in their work:

1. Establish a collaborative mindset

Your peers can be an excellent support system. View your colleagues as potential allies rather than threats - especially people in 'warring' departments. Ask for their opinions and listen to what they have to say. Incorporate their input into your decision making. Work on inclusion and resist exclusion.

Business processes often encourage unhealthy competition, exclusion, alienation, lack of consultation and non-collaborative behaviors, so look out for these negative situations, and use collaboration and cooperation to remove tensions.

Look out especially for policies and systems that discourage (unintentionally or intentionally) collective working and team-work, especially between departments.

In the belief that it raises overall performance standards, certain leaders encourage unhealthy competition and 'free-market' methods which are designed to see only the best performers survive, leaving less experienced or less capable people to struggle. Of course this can raise performance at the top level, but it's not a recipe for building strengths in depth, nor for organic growth and self-sufficiency throughout the organization.

In such environments traditionally female strengths such as relationship building, empathy and listening skills are suppressed if you allow them to be, so instead consciously use these capabilities.

The ability to work in partnership and collaborate with others is a behavior that should be encouraged, rewarded and leveraged.

Foster collaboration ahead of competition.

2. Reach out to others

Find ways to connect personally with others on an honest human level. Ask sensitive questions and identify common areas of interest. Proactively look for opportunities to help team members in a meaningful way.

Do something outrageously kind for a co-worker with no expectation of anything in return. Maybe unexpectedly treat the colleague ahead of you in the cafeteria line to lunch. Just for the heck of it. Throw surprise parties for people, or baby showers for soon-to-be moms and dads.

When engaging with anyone - managing, co-working, collaborating, networking, directing, following, whatever - focus on what you can do to benefit the other person, not vice versa. Your positive, genuine efforts will have a lasting impact.

Some people use the word 'Karma' in referring to this sort of concept, and while Karma has other deeper and complex meanings in Buddhist and Hindu ideology, one of the central principles is quite irresistible when you get the habit: namely that people who do

good things generally find that they experience good things as a result. The universe - or whatever life force is out there - does seem to keep checks and balances.

3. Use your intuition

There's much truth to the concept of 'female intuition'. Intuition is invaluable especially in dealings with people. This skill isn't limited to the female gender. Men have it too if they simply tune into it, rather than denying its existence or relevance as can be the tendency.

Take note of your physical and emotional feelings associated with intuition. Your hunches are often correct and are based on information that may not be readily apparent to your consciousness. We all know deep down whether something is right and good.

You develop your intuitive abilities by first of all accepting that you have them, and then by practicing paying attention to your feelings. Trusting your intuition is a wonderful way to enhance your decision-making skills. Listen to your instincts and afterwards, debrief with a trusted colleague or mentor. What decisions did you make? What were the repercussions of these? Do you notice any patterns? Does your intuition play a larger role in certain areas, (people, processes, teams, aims, tactics, problem-solving, etc) so that you might transfer the intuitive approach to other aspects of your decision-making?

Note the outcomes of your intuitive decision-making and capture them in writing. You don't need to write a book - just jottings or little diary notes suffice for many people. This way you'll remember things and be able to refer back to them, which means you are more likely to spot the connections between your intuitive feelings and actual results, which helps develop intuitive ability. It's in all of us, or the human race would not have survived. Did you ever see a caveman with a spreadsheet or a psychometric test? Of course not - they used their instincts and intuition to succeed and survive. Or a big stick of course, but we don't want to go back to that.

4. Meditate daily

First we need to debunk a few myths about meditation. For example meditation is not just for hippies and Buddhists, and you don't need to adopt that funny cross-legged pose and fill the place with patchouli smoke to do it.

Meditation, like love and spirituality, is an option that's available to us all. Anyone can do it. It's essentially a deeper state of thought and relaxation than we normally achieve, because simply we normally don't bother. If you put your mind to it, literally, you can do it and get better at it, and maybe one day even try the cross-legged thing too. And there are plenty of other fragrances if patchouli doesn't suit you.

Incidentally the reason why darkened rooms, fragranced candles or incense and soft music or other soothing sounds are used in meditation, is similar to why we bathe toddlers and read them a story before bed - it all helps condition and trigger the mental response towards the intended feeling and behavior. Logically if you want to relax, it

helps if the body is encouraged to do so through as many senses and sensations as possible - your brain is part of your body remember - if your body is being distracted and kept ready for action because of lots of stimulation, then relaxation and meditation is a bit trickier to achieve. Instead, do things to relax your body, and your brain will relax too. And don't get the children all excited before bedtime or they won't go to sleep..

Meditation, aside from being good for health, healing, de-stressing, and general relaxation, is an extremely powerful way to heighten your connection to your intuition, and is also remarkably good for bringing forth your 'feminine' aspects (for men and women alike).

When you meditate you help your mind and body to be 'centered' again - to restore your natural balance. In this way helps awaken and enhance 'feminine' strengths that we all possess to one degree or another.

Meditating is bit like running a 'full system restore' on a personal computer - it's cleansing and helps get us back closer to our 'factory settings'.

Start by meditating once a day for ten minutes. A quiet darkened room helps, but really you can do it anywhere - even in the car, although best not while driving. It's even possible after a little practice to sneak a quick two minutes of meditative re-charge or relaxation at your desk in front of the PC any time you feel the need. Obviously the environment has an effect on the ease and depth of experience you can achieve, hence why a darkened room is a good idea for beginners or serious sessions.

If you'd like, lighting a scented candle or playing some soothing sounds can help. The crackle of an open fire is good for some people. The sound of water and waves also help. Whatever, it's a matter of what makes you feel comfortable.

Focus on your breathing and if thoughts come to mind, don't fight them, just accept them, and then let them go.

View your mind as a chalkboard (or wipeboard if you prefer a modern slant) and mentally erase all thoughts from the space. As a beginner, if you are able to hold your mind clear of thoughts for one to two minutes, you are doing great.

Our 'monkey minds' are constantly jumping around and it takes a bit of discipline and practice to slow or eliminate our thoughts. With practice and repeating the sensory ideas that work for you, you will soon be meditating like a Buddha.

Build up to meditating twice a day for ten minutes, and any other time you feel the need to re-charge or relax. You'll find yourself grounded and attuned more closely to your feelings. And the incense will make you smell great.

5. Build your confidence

Appreciate what you have to offer and encourage open dialogue with those who may share different strengths. Professionals who are truly comfortable in their own skin are

often the most competent and humble. By valuing your inner worth, it will be much easier to rid yourself of jealousy and competitive thoughts.

Rise above petty conversations at work. Refrain from initiating or contributing to gossip. Judge no-one. If you need to assess situations and performance focus objectively on behavior and causes rather than subjective personal criticism.

Feel comfortable wearing clothes that express your personality. Go ahead and don a soft blouse, flouncy skirt and sandals that set off freshly painted toenails. Women can do this too...

It's a question of celebrating your personal style - even if the dress code for your situation is a bit restrictive - find ways to be yourself.

Relaxing and lightening up is more helpful for confidence than taking yourself seriously. Remember the laid-back teachers at school who were always calm, and who never seemed to lose their temper at anything? The ones who always had that air of confidence? Being relaxed and calm about things - 'counting to ten' instead of blowing up - is a way to build confidence, as much as it is a sign of confidence. You can be the same.

In addition, a little self-deprecating fun can lighten any situation. Someone who can break the ice - or the tension of a difficult moment - is regarded as a mature and calming influence. People who cannot take a joke might be stern, but they are almost always regarded as lacking in self-assurance too. If you have the strength to enjoy a laugh at your own expense you automatically exude confidence.

6. Put yourself out there

Take a risk. When it comes to connecting with others, challenge yourself outside your comfort zone. Although this may go against the grain in traditional corporations, initiate emotional engagement with other people, and maybe even a bit of physical contact - within acceptable boundaries of course. It's safest with someone of the same gender, unless you know the other person well.

Physical contact is an immensely powerful thing. Many people really enjoy a good hug - in fact sometimes it's the only cure when people are upset or angry. Physical contact does however carry certain risks in the workplace because of the risk of misinterpreting signals, so if in doubt don't use it. Nevertheless there are times when you can trust your instincts and reach out to people in this way, even if it's a gentle touch on the arm, or a pat on the back.

Being friendly though is perfectly safe. Go out of your way to greet a colleague you haven't seen in a while. Be the first to say hello. Never ignore someone because you think they ignored you first - they probably never even noticed you because they were still thinking about the big game last night, or whether they left the oven on.

The world is full of people who wait for the other person to initiate contact. No wonder people don't generally communicate well - they are all too busy thinking they've been ignored, when in fact nothing can be further from the truth. Everyone longs for the other person to initiate contact and give them a big friendly smile.

And that's the way it starts - then you do begin to do it more often, and then other people try it too because they see it's safe and nobody dies, and before long everyone in your division is happy to make the first move, then it spreads to the whole building. Because everyone realizes it's okay to be open and friendly.

Individuals at all levels of an organization welcome being treated as a full person, not just a co-worker or a phone extension, or an email address.

So put yourself out there: approach people as people - in a genuinely friendly way - be affectionate and caring - through hugs and pats when it's okay, or simply through a big warm smile.

7. Do the right thing because it's the right thing to do

Demonstrate integrity and stand up to unethical comments or decisions. Move past your own discomfort when it comes to doing the right thing, even (and especially) when no one is watching.

Challenge that inappropriate joke or derogatory remark. If it's wrong don't laugh because everyone else does and it's difficult not to. It's not always necessary to challenge things vocally - sometimes staying silent is challenge enough.

Stand up for people who are not represented in the conversation. You'll be recognized as a leader for enhancing the conscience of the group or organization.

Sometimes it's very difficult indeed to do the right thing, especially if the whole organization and all the people around you are advocating and accepting something that's wrong. But often all it takes is one brave soul to ask a sensible question, "Do we all really believe that this is the right thing to do? - I mean is this really ethical and good?" Or to say, "I'm really sorry but actually I can't go along with that because to me it's not right."

And then lots more people will feel strong enough to say they don't agree either, and then you have a real basis for building something good and ethical. Sometimes all it takes is one brave soul, and that can be anyone. It can be you.

Use your deepest instincts to decide what is right, to feeling centered and confident, and to connect with and value other people. These are the behaviors which enable organizations to respond successfully to the challenges of the modern world.

It's not about table-thumping or shouting, and it's not about costs and profit. It's about fundamental spiritual things like love, caring for and respecting people (including

yourself); the quieter gentler 'feminine' strengths and skills that all of us possess - men and women - and which we all must now be able to use.

Organizational culture-shifts happen not because someone at the top makes a pronouncement - a culture-shift happens when the attitudes and behaviors of their people change.

At the root of any successful change you will increasingly find the qualities of love and trust, which together create the freedom for us to make the right decisions, to connect with others, to challenge and to innovate.

A trusting organization that values and encourages the softer 'feminine' traits among all of its people is one that leverages diversity and harmony. And that, in anyone's book, makes good business sense.