

Across the Board

The Last Piece

How corporate mystics are putting it all together

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Corporations are full of mystics. If you want to find a genuine mystic, you are more likely to find one in a boardroom than a monastery or a cathedral. Surprised by this notion? We were too. But over the past 25 years we have been in many boardrooms and many cathedrals, and we have discovered that the very best kind of mystics—those who practice what they preach—can be found in the business world. We are now convinced that the qualities of these remarkable people, and the principles they live by, will be the guiding force for the 21st-century enterprise.

From working with 800 executives over the past 25 years, we make a prediction: Successful corporate leaders of the 21st century will be spiritual leaders. They will be comfortable with their own spirituality, and they will know how to nurture spiritual development in others. The most successful leaders of today have already learned this secret. Corporate mystics know that an organization is a collective embodiment of spirit, the sum total of the spirits of the individuals who work there. Those who think spirituality has no place in business are selling themselves and those around them short.

A corporate mystic we interviewed shared a story with us: "In my late 30s I felt like I was dying. I had been working in the corporate world for 10 years, and though I had experienced quite a bit of success, I somehow knew I would never go all the way to the top. My office was on the 10th floor, halfway to the top. As I looked out the window I asked myself why this was true. After all, I worked hard and seemed as smart as everybody else. Then it hit me: I was split in half. Outside of work I was one way but at work I was trying to be another person entirely. Outside work I was fascinated with human behavior and spent hours browsing in the psychology sections of bookstores. At

work, though, I pretended to be this hard-driving fire engine of a person who was single-mindedly focused on numbers and productivity. I had the thought, "the split is over; the way I am is the way I am, wherever I am." I actually felt something shift in my body, like I was coming back together again. Looking back, I think what I was doing was accepting both halves of myself and making a bigger container for me to be all of myself. Now, as CEO, I try to emphasize a message of being your full, undivided self whenever I talk to the younger people in the company." This is an example of a spiritual awakening that had profound implications for this person's life and career.

When we talk about spirituality in business, we are talking about experiences, not religious beliefs. Religion usually refers to the organized aspects of spirituality: the rules, beliefs and traditions that shape how spirituality shows up in the world. The corporate mystic is primarily interested in the benefits of spirituality, not in beliefs about it.

Corporate mystics move easily between the spiritual world and the world of commerce. Corporate mystics are visionaries with their feet on the ground. They celebrate the oneness of everything, yet at the same time they are able to focus on details. They look at a mountain peak and a spreadsheet with the same eyes. They treat the janitor and their biggest client with the same attitude.

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