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## Crossing the Frontier to Vocational Awareness: Understanding Business Leadership as a Spiritual Calling

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### Abstract:

**E**ARLIER CHAPTERS OF THIS ANTHOLOGY have focused on the theology of calling and how it might be expressed within organizations. In this section, we turn to pedagogy and how individuals participating in a shared learning experience might be brought into an experiential understanding of vocation.

Over 350 MBAs have participated in a seminar *Spirituality for Organizational Leadership* at Santa Clara, a Jesuit and Catholic University located in Silicon Valley California, during the last four years. These are the next generation leaders of an important globally relevant technology complex. One focus of the seminar is on contemporary business leadership as “calling”. This paper reports on the seminar’s pedagogy (inclusive of meditation and personal journals). By means of participant

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quotations the paper provides exemplification of how spiritual understanding regarding “calling” unfolds.

Silicon Valley has a unique business culture familiar to those who read the global business press. Fast moving, entrepreneurial, innovation driven, wired, hectic and internationally linked, Silicon Valley is a frenzied intersection of engineering, science, business acumen and entrepreneurship. At its worst the Valley can be a destructive stew laced with greed, opportunism and activism; at its best the Valley is a place that unleashes the human spirit through a culture of decentralization, empowerment and creative subsidiarity. When it works well the culture enables co-creation providing important products and services to humankind. Therefore, understanding work within this setting as a spiritual calling matters.<sup>1</sup>

Exactly because of its intensity The Valley can be a dangerous place for the spiritually confused. Without a spiritual compass the unaware will lead a life of increasing stress and quite often join the ranks of “burned-out” refugees fleeing in a state of brokenness<sup>2</sup>. Thus Silicon Valley is a powerful laboratory for testing how a “spirituality of work” can enhance the ability of young leaders to grapple with contemporary business complexity.

Since 2000 I have taught a seminar: *Spirituality for Organizational Leadership*<sup>3</sup>. This paper does not chronicle the entire course experience, but only focuses on the spiritual journey of the participants engaging the first two Modules: Introducing Spirituality and Calling/Vocation.

The literature on “vocation” is replete with exemplification of the initial responses of calling to clerical and religious life, or to deepening the personal inner journey. It is less fulsome in exemplifying calls received by laity to fully engage in transformation of secular institutions. Yet Catholic teaching since the Second Vatican Council has been clear in commissioning the laity to be salt and light to the world<sup>4</sup>. One of the most important secular institutions is the private sector business enterprise.

My experience with working professionals in Silicon Valley is that spirituality is still primarily associated in their minds with personal piety, shared ministry within their religious tradition, or charitable endeavors outside the rhythm of daily work. For most their inner spiritual journey is not integrated with day to day business. This generalization is not new or unique to this business setting<sup>5</sup>.

The purpose of this paper is to describe how the awareness of the need to integrate a sense of spiritual calling with work unfolds within the Seminar on Spirituality of Organizational Leadership.

## Participants

The seminar participants' average age is 32, about equally divided between men and women. The majority are high achieving engineering, scientific and functional business managers working in technology firms, i.e. bio-science, engineering, aerospace, computer, semi-conductor, communications, software, etc. Some are entrepreneur-owners. Typically two or three consultants and one or two CEOs from the community join the seminar as full participants. Most are full-time working professionals. A few are between positions (e.g. have sold their company, been laid off or are seeking a job change). They are hard working, high-achievement knowledge workers in prime mid-career. Their competencies are representative of those who drive the core strategic business units in the Valley.

The seminar is offered within the MBA program of the Leavey School of Business. Initially a group of 9 MBAs and 9 CEOs were invited for an alpha test of the seminar design<sup>6</sup>. Since that time, the seminar has been an elective course. The seminar meets (inconveniently for many) from 8:30 – 2:20 on five Saturdays, so a precious day “for catch-up” and personal matters is sacrificed by highly stressed Valley employees. Yet they fill a classroom each quarter the course is offered, largely through word-of-mouth encouragement from others who have participated in previous seminars.

The participants encompass diverse religious backgrounds. Buddhists, Taoists, Muslims, Jews, a variety of Hindi faiths, Christians, agnostics and a few self-proclaimed atheists are usually represented. While Santa Clara University is a Jesuit, Catholic University, five Catholics in a class of 30 would be typical. The Christian tradition is usually embraced “nominally” by approximately fifty percent of the attendees. As the seminar commences the majority of the participants are not active in Church, Mosque, Synagogue, or Temple. The class mirrors the religious demographics of Silicon Valley.

We can now turn to the seminar content and document the unfolding spiritual journey of participants as they explore the “spiritual calling” of organizational leadership.

### **Module One: An Introduction to Spirituality in the Context of the Contemporary Organization**

The first module of the seminar introduces the topic of spirituality in the setting of the contemporary organization.

**Pre-reading:**

The participants engage pre-reading prior to attending these first two modules of the seminar. This includes readings in multiple religious and wisdom traditions as a prelude to sensitive dialog, readings in contemporary leadership theory, focused on transformational (charismatic) leadership studies so they will see “echoes” of the spiritual in current empiricism and spiritual biography taken from the lives of individuals from varied religious traditions.

Figure 1 summarizes the flow of this first module.

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**Figure 1**

**Module One. Course Introduction**

Introductions and course overview

*Meditation*

Being present to “Now”

Lecture/Discussion

Definitions of spirituality

Norms

Appreciative Inquiry

Confidentiality

*Meditation*

How called to seminar

Sharing Motivations for Participating in the Seminar

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**Meditation:**

After introductions and welcome, the “work” of the module begins with a guided meditation. The meditation focuses on “mindfulness.” Participants are told that spirituality is about

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“experience,” not simply knowledge. Just as they cannot learn to sail a boat simply by reading about boats and oceans, they cannot enter into the spiritual unless they embrace spiritual disciplines and spiritual experience. So right off, participants are guided into meditation.

With music, the professor leads a reflection on the importance of being present to the “*now*.” Asked to return to a place and time when they experienced inner peace, the participants are encouraged to examine the burdens that have accumulated in their minds, hearts and spirit since that time and place, and invited to let go of fears, anxieties and work frustrations, etc. They are invited to experience the freedom of just “BE-ing.” After a five-minute meditation they are asked to gently return to the seminar and to be completely present to the ensuing lecture and shared dialog; to step away from multi-tasking, and concern with their past and their future. The implications of being in the “now,” of being fully present for each subsequent task within their daily work life, are then discussed.

For many, this is already new ground. They readily admit that they are often not fully present in the frenzy of daily work. It is an important lesson they reflect upon in meditation assignments during the two weeks before the seminar meets again. It is also a first step into meditation as a spiritual discipline.

Some quotations from the students’ journals received two weeks later indicate the learning associated with this first meditation that is repeated before the commencement of each subsequent module:

*The meditations in class have set me up for a more personal experience of the material than I had expected. I had envisioned a more lecture-based approach instead of the more active experience and participation that is needed for this class. My initial reaction was “this puts me way out of my comfort zone.” I don’t think I would have been able to jump into the meditation assignments without the “practice” of this spiritual exercise during the lecture.*

*My life is a circle. I run around and around. Each day is the same. Month and years all appear the same. I am in a rut. The first meditation brought something to light inside of me. I discovered life does not begin in the future, but now. I began to think that I can break the circle apart.*

*Multi-tasking is something I feel comfortable with; feel like I am good at. I now see it sometimes is getting in the way of my connections to others. Being present to the moment means to me putting less*

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*priority on my multi-tasking and paying closer attention to the people whom I am really wanting to work with, understand and appreciate.*

*Thomas Merton sums up exactly what I am thinking. I am working on finding my true self, but there are so many distractions at work that I'm not always sure which of my feelings are real. How do you overcome all of the fears, obsessions and addictions to find yourself? Part of the answer has to be to be "present" so you can listen to God in the "now."*

*My workdays were more productive because I had focused my thoughts and tasks for the day toward the light at the very beginning of the work day. I stopped my rush before entering the office. With focused thoughts and the reduced pace, my days were more productive.*

Clearly this initial meditation (repeated before each subsequent module) is an important source of spiritual learning.

#### **Lecture/Discussion:**

The lecture then focuses on definitions of spirituality. For purposes of the seminar the discussion embraces within the notion of spirituality 1) *A World View*: oriented to deepest values, ultimate concerns and a faith relationship with transcendence, and 2) *A Path*: incorporating a way of life and disciplines that guide one to become most fully the true self, be in union with others and the natural world, be useful and find purpose and meaning, to find love and be loved, to understand and to be understood.<sup>7</sup>

It is stressed that ultimately the spiritual journey is unique to each person. It unfolds in light of each person's DNA, psychology, life history, life circumstances, etc. So in the end each person in the seminar must ask for the grace to find his or her particular spiritual path within the uniqueness of individual life circumstances.

Then, following an introduction to *Appreciative Inquiry* which is adopted as the norm for class dialog<sup>8</sup>, participants share what motivated them to attend the seminar.

Many reasons are given: life changes, the difficulties of contemporary leadership, the absence of any "spiritual" activity in their present life, discomfort with religion but desire for the "spiritual", opportunism (I needed a Saturday class because of business travel), but most prominent is a desire

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to integrate self, to integrate work with self, and to integrate both with spiritual understanding. In this regard, the theme of spiritual integration so powerful in the Mitroff study is echoed among my seminar participants.<sup>9</sup>

This is also a first experience of sharing spiritually intimate conversation in a small circle of trust within their academic program. It sets a tone for respectful “receiving” from the Professor that is a precondition for participants to later be open in their journaling. (Journaling is a critical assigned discipline between class modules). The discussion is also an affirmation that *“Each of us is the holder of our spiritual experience.”* As they listen to the great diversity of spiritual longings, circumstances and individual gifts among diverse class participants, an understanding of the need to be fully open to others during discernment is also learned<sup>10</sup>.

The module closes by noting how the “Spirit at Work” movement has grown in North America. It reviews the current manifest interest in the topic by both by management scholars and business professionals. Evidence includes the fact that more than 80% of organizational leaders feel a spiritual compass is necessary for leadership<sup>11</sup>. It notes the proliferation of books and articles on the subject, the rise of the Management, Spirituality and Religion Interest Group within the Academy of Management, and the “Going Public with Spirituality in Higher Education” dialog<sup>12</sup>.

To summarize, Module 1 focuses on what spirituality is and provides legitimization for the importance of the topic.

### **Module Two: Organizational Leadership as Calling**

#### **A: The Call to “DO”:**

The second module focuses on calling/vocation. Figure Two provides an overview.

Figure 2

## Module Two: Organizational Leadership as Calling

### A. Centrality of Organizations in Society

Lecture

Provider of services/goods

Enabling of talent

Locus of contemporary community

Container of (in)justice

Steward of Resources

Creator of Wealth

*Organizational leadership not a second rate path to holiness*

Meditation

An Examen: Light and Darkness in my Organization

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The first part of the second module emphasizes the importance of the contemporary organization to modern society and why being called to lead these institutions can be an important life calling<sup>13</sup>. Organizational leadership can be a noble way of life both as a means for expressing our freedom and creativity and, because of its capacity to influence others, to principled action that promotes the flourishing of institutions at every level of society and that safeguards the dignity of the human person. We reflect on how the goods and services our neighbors depend on are created within and distributed through organizations. We remind ourselves that religious traditions see meeting the real needs of others (e.g. intellectual, health, housing, nutritional, etc.) as encompassed within the spiritual journey. However, in contemporary life these needs are often met through complex chains of causation enabled by organizations and therefore more remote from individual physical contact than in the past. A mystic's eye is required so that organizational leadership can

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become a form of service to others even where physical presence is absent. Unless we provide an overlay of “meaning” to the long chains of causation associated with the modern organization as “compassionate service”, we find our work hollow.

We reflect on how charism/gift/talent is unleashed or inhibited within organizations, and the centrality of leadership in creating enabling organizational structures and decision processes to tap into and release individual talent.

We reflect on how the contemporary organization is a central “community” replacing former villages or neighborhoods as the primary community for most of the work-week. We remind ourselves of the role of leadership (formal and informal) in creating viable primary group experiences, and of the high cost of pernicious work settings.

Finally we examine issues of justice within the organization (and injustice, i.e., who is marginalized) and the impact of organizations on broader societal well-being. We examine the obligations of stewardship in global business organizations that sometimes control more wealth than smaller nation states. We look at the charism of wealth creation so important in creating motivation and providing dignity to work and also how this gift creates economic surplus that supports governments, the arts, health and social services and education. We examine how societal wealth is distributed through taxes and philanthropy enabled by the contemporary business organization.

The dark side of the contemporary global business organization is also discussed, e.g., the distortions of power, greed, employee exploitation, environmental degradation and negative impacts on indigenous cultures caused by global business practices.

We end reminding ourselves that this dominant societal institution very much needs “salt and light.” We come to an understanding that those called to organizational leadership are not called to a second-rate path of holiness or an unimportant spiritual challenge given the criticality of complex organizations in modern life. We discuss the spiritual writings on the necessity to avoid any false dualism between day to day work within organizations and the spiritual path. We affirm that it is exactly in these day to day leadership challenges that the spiritual journey unfolds if organizational leadership is our calling.

Module 2A ends with a guided meditation, an “Examen” regarding Light and Darkness within the Organizations participants are currently working. (See Appendix 1 for the details of the meditation).

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The message that daily organizational life can be integrated with the spiritual journey is received like fresh rain for spirits parched by a secular sun. The following quotations are again taken from student journals submitted two week following the first seminar gathering.

*It was common when I was growing up to hear people talk about teaching as a vocation, or hear people say about some occupations comments like "that nurse is wonderful, you can see her vocation." I have begun to pray for "my vocation". It never really occurred to me that a vocation is both something that is offered and something that is received. I am beginning to see my vocation calls me to serve others both within my company, and by serving my company clients, and this requires spiritual development. I am very excited to see how this new insight develops in my business life.*

*I have realized my personal relationship with God has been deteriorating as I consumed myself in daily work. I seem to have entirely separated my spiritual life from my work and it has resulted in an unfulfilling path "on the road to success and career progression". I recognized this only after deep, careful thought and meditation following our first seminar gathering. I am coming to realize I must maintain a strong bond with God in everything I do at work. I cannot treat my relationship with God as I do when I turn the water faucet on and off.*

*Starting with the lecture, the idea that really struck me was a note that I wrote down: "If I am going to take that much of myself to work it has to mean something. Is this work worth giving all of myself to?" I give all of myself to my job, creatively and intellectually, but not my heart. The meditations then helped me to start to see that I don't dislike my job as much as I thought. I just haven't been looking at it from the perspective on how I impact on my client's lives. I am starting to see the comfort I provide by helping them with financial needs and estate planning.*

*I never put much thought into seeing God as the one who would personally reach out to us individually, who would ask me to help others through my work. My meditation has revealed to myself the deep realization that I subconsciously have divided my life into a Christian world and a secular world.*

*It is true that time pressures at work are extreme. However, this is a problem with respect to my spiritual growth only because I have compartmentalized the spiritual aspect of life into a separate box that needs its own place and time. I now realize that my spirituality needs to be integrated into everything that I do at*

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*work. This especially includes the one component that is demanding the most of my present time – my career.*

*My reflection is teaching me that the problem has not been with my work, but rather my approach to work. I have been forcing myself to be someone whom I desperately do not want to be at work by leaving my spirituality at the door before I went into the office building everyday. In essence I have been putting on a mask as soon as I walk in.*

*Embracing my spirituality as integral to my organizational work is helping me react more positively to different situations. It is helping me view the situation with the greater good in mind, not just to focus on narrow tasks that center around myself. I am reaffirming my respect for my organization that enables technologies by producing the semiconductors that enrich our daily lives.*

*A topic that resonated with me was the idea: “A vocation is a career that not only provides for our needs, but also provides for the common good.” I have had dreams of a vocation that provides for the common societal good, but felt myself mired in the reality of making a living and trying to find a way to get where I want to go. Now I begin to understand I am sitting on my dream -- my biotechnology, scientific and engineering roots are embedded in the dream I have been seeking. I just didn’t recognize the dream of spiritual fulfillment was hidden within the day to day of my organizational life.*

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### Figure 3

## Module 2. Organizational Leadership as Calling – Cont.

### B) Called by Name

In one’s individuality

The archetypal calling Story

Meditation on personal calling

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The second part of Module 2 focuses on the call to BE (become) that person God intended each person to be from eternity, and how becoming must be integrated with the call to DO. We come to understand that we must DO in our imperfections, and if we act out of love, then the DOing will flow into the BEcoming. The spiritual journey must be inclusive of others, and we see that we grow in holiness (wholeness) as we serve others. The readings carefully attend the distinction between “calling” as vocation and “career.” Spiritual calling implies a movement toward integration with the Transcendent or Mystery, however named in a tradition. Participants begin to grasp that what is at stake at their stage of career may not be so much discernment regarding a career calling but rather a calling to BEcome a different person as an organizational leader. After all, they are MBAs, so they are not debating whether to study music or social work. They begin to see the challenge is to deepen the spiritual journey; to DO things differently as an organizational leader because of increased self-integration.

Module 2B ends again with a guided meditation, this time focusing on reflections regarding my individual gifts, and how I am called to develop and share my gifts within my calling to organizational leadership.

Although Module Three will not be reported on in detail in this brief paper, note that this final module of the first day consists of a guided meditation based on Lakota Sioux spirituality. It asks participants to focus on the voices of elders and future generations as they consider their calling to organizational leadership. In prayer and reflection they are asked to listen to these messages before focusing on the voice of their own ego.

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### Figure 4

#### **Module 3. Listening to Voices of Elders and Future Generations**

Lakota Sioux Living Circle

*Discovering the power of listening to our spiritual elders and the voices of future generations*

*Diminishing the Ego as the First Voice*

*Realizing that we need to ask deeper questions as a precondition to courageous service to others.*

Exemplification from experiences with work place off-sites

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### A Note on Pedagogy

Because meditation and journaling play so central a part in this report, before continuing to describe the unfolding of the spiritual adventure in the words of the seminar participants, attention to pedagogy is called for. This will place the remainder of the report in context. I will do so through a Christian theological lens.

A comment regarding the reading list is required. Participants embrace the “graduate level” character of the readings. The reading assignments are substantive. For example, readings from an interdisciplinary conference “Bridging the Gap,” inclusive of both sophisticated managerial and theological concepts, are required<sup>14</sup>. An essay offering a theological perspective on spirituality that is a classic reference is included<sup>15</sup>. The biographical stories of the spiritual journeys and the readings on different religious traditions have taken participants into inter-religious depths. Participants express appreciation for the rigor of the readings. After all, they have advanced degrees in science and engineering, and are in the process of completing an advanced degree in business. They do not want “popularized” readings on spirituality.

Likewise, the lectures are carefully constructed and content rich. They are presented at a graduate level of abstraction and are well-referenced, and slides are made available to participants. Again this careful attention to depth is appreciated. Both of these pedagogical elements are helpful, appreciated and important to the seminar.

Having said this, readings and lectures are not sufficient. Experience shows that it is the entry into meditation that is the keystone for personal appropriation of the spirituality encompassed by the seminar. The spiritual journey must embrace prayer and meditation as it is the Holy Spirit who must guide the unfolding journey of each participant. Other academic observers of the seminar are surprised at the substantial amount of course time that is devoted to meditation; the beginning and ending of each of the two lecture modules in the morning include meditation. Then an entire third module each Saturday afternoon is entirely devoted to meditation. Thus meditation is a prominent component of the learning design.

Further, the critical element of the “homework” between seminar modules is based on journaling flowing from meditation. Following this first seminar day focused on “calling,” participants are given two meditations (*A Meditation with Two Trees* – Appendix 2, and the *Meditation on Light and Darkness in My Organization* – Appendix 1). They are instructed to alternate between the two meditations from day to day until the next class meeting, and to journal based on the meditation

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experience. (Appendix 3 contains the Assignment Instructions). A content analysis of submitted assignments shows that the *most* frequent reference is to learning growing out of these meditations. The readings, lectures and class dialog are important, but they only lay a groundwork for God to be God. In the journal entries below, the very personal way that the Holy Spirit is acting within the meditation experience will be apparent to the reader.

### **The Unfolding of the Spiritual Journey in Post-Class Meditation and Reflection**

The spiritual journey in the Christian tradition is often described as encompassing stages or cycles. There is variation in the language, but the following descriptors are representative.

Conversion - Answering the Call

Repentance - Admission of our Brokenness

Illumination - Glimpsing the presence of God in Day to Day Life

Deification. – Living continually in the Presence of God

However, thinking of these experiences as stages can be misleading so I prefer the term cycle or rhythm. New awareness associated with a particular stage is often not permanent nor are the cycles perfectly sequential. For example, even the advanced spiritual traveler prior to Deification cannot remain always with the consolation of sensing to be in the presence of God in this life. We also remain sinners subject to our fallen human nature who must always return to repentance throughout our lives. Nonetheless, it is helpful as we conclude our discussion of the experiences of seminar participants to group some quotations around these rhythms within the spiritual journey.

### **Conversion**

Many of the earlier quotations were suggestive of conversion; an initial opening to the “Inner Voice Which Bears a Thousand Names” beckons participants to live in new awareness of transcendent presence. Now we turn our attention to participant reflections that are representative of later cycles of the spiritual journey evident in their journals.

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### Repentance

Progress in the spiritual journey requires one to be in touch with personal sinfulness. We need to acknowledge the mess we have made of our lives when we fail to rely on God. Indeed, a sense of this “mess” and its attendant suffering is often the prelude to a deeper turning to God. Otherwise, we remain in the delusion that we can resolve our quest for happiness through our own efforts focused on the needs of the false self<sup>16</sup>.

Also as we become aware of the suffering in our life, there is a temptation to embrace a false resolution: blaming the problems on the organization and on others. For the most part participants in the seminar are “graced” to avoid this trap. They are able to confront the darkness in self without seeing themselves as victims of others or as victims of the organization.

The “Meditation with Two Trees” seems an important aid (Appendix 2). Given two trees of the same species standing next to each other, 90% of the students seem drawn to the tree that most bears the marks of suffering. I am not sure why this is the case, but most participants choose as “my tree” a tree with broken branches, scars from past injuries, a tree struggling to find light or nourishment in difficult circumstances, etc. They find comfort in the fact that “my tree” “had to struggle” yet “provides shade,” “is a refuge for birds and squirrels,” has a “beauty in its essence despite the broken branches,” etc. They also often choose a tree that they have walked by day after day and never noticed until the meditation assignment, and reflect that in a similar fashion they have “walked by my own essence” in the “busyness” of life.

So the Meditation with Two Trees seems to be an important complement to the “Meditation on Organization Light and Darkness.” Both open participants to confront darkness in themselves. The following quotations provide examples:

*The stories of people finding the rare balance of financial success and social responsibility touched deeply into my conscience. I feel a great sense of guilt for my perceived frailties. It has been a rare thing for me to think of others. My drive toward success has dominated my life. I learned the valuable lesson from my meditation that I could not go on in this manner. I need people in my life, but as a consequence of my self-centeredness I am alone at work. I am in horrible, self-imposed and isolated space, and **I need to change my ways.***

*I must confess that my work ethics have been warped during the Internet boom. Prior to the boom, I had a very pure view of my engineering career. **After my meditation I prayed to God for guidance***

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*to regain the passion and the purity I once possessed for my engineering work because I want to be performing my work in a way that glorifies Him.*

*In my meditation and reflection I felt that I was decaying in my work. I could not see beyond all the immature actions and selfish petty ambitions. As I zoom into the darkest spot within my company, I realize that it is myself that is eating up the light. I have been bitter for the last couple of weeks.... The source of darkness that was me is starting to show a glimmer of light. I realized how awful my attitude was, and how much it harmed me and all the people around me. The idea that we should be spiritual at work starts to ring in my mind. **I no longer want to be dark, but a source of light at work the way I was earlier in my employment.***

*In many occasions I have given in to anger and loss of control. I realize I have to spend time reflecting on the root cause of my behavior. I need to come to understand the pressures of my work life. **I am coming to the realization that “helping others” rather than devoting my career to just satisfying my own self-interests will be an upheaval in my life.** My preoccupations with presenting myself as a shrewd business player who understands the financial aspects of a business has made me disregard the true intent of this organization.*

*In another of my meditations on Light and Darkness at work I saw the difference between working out of ego and working out of freedom. I realized that I bring darkness to my organization when I work from ego. **I need to change and bring light to my organization and everyone I come in contact with. I now realize that this is possible when I work from freedom.***

*Holding back, procrastinating, daydreaming, avoiding involvement – these are ways I protect myself from the pain of failure. **But of course I am also cutting myself off from the joy of putting my heart into my work.***

*I see work as so busy and boring. My work seems almost the same everyday, yet I know there are many challenges I should open up to. Even though I am doing well and my superiors are satisfied with my work, I don't experience any joy in my career.... But now I am beginning to understand I can approach all of this as a relational challenge. **Work can be a place where we can meet friends,***

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*communicate, learn and teach. I myself may be a source of some darkness. I have been complaining with my friends in the company. So my emotion influences others, or may discourage them.*

These quotations show the movement of the grace of repentance. The purpose of the bold type (added for emphasis by the author of this article) in the above quotes is to make clear that repentance is not a matter of being stuck in self-criticism. Rather, it is a purgation that precedes moving forward to change the manner of being present within the workplace.

Of course there are reflections on darkness in the organization as well centered on institutional imbalance rather than individual imbalance. These include references to ethical challenges, ruthlessness, manipulation of information for self-advantage, greed, hurtful politics and other manifestations of the dark under - belly of organizational life is confronted.

*I work for bosses who believe the way to motivate is to degrade and treat employees as servants. I began to absorb that message. To get ahead, these messages imply, you need to disregard your colleagues and make your self-interests the priority. **I now am looking at how to form a partnership with my colleagues to work together to contribute to building our business as a means to serve the needs in society.***

*In the course of working for demanding clients, we “spin” the data distorting the truth. Sometimes we compromise by not taking a stronger advocacy position. **I connected with the idea that we can be co-creators of a better way. I am reflecting on how to integrate higher values and meaning into our work.***

*The meditation assignments have led to a number of changes in my behavior at work. I realize now that I have been a source of darkness in my organization by focusing on what my new job is going to be. I have been neglecting my present colleagues. **I spent some time this week working with someone in my organization who compiles department metrics. Traditionally I have not actively cooperated with this effort.** After doing the light and darkness meditations, I realized the department was marginalizing him. This week I guided him through the records that he needs to compile to construct his metrics. I feel I have given him a better understanding of what needs to get captured. In addition, our working relationship has improved such that he stopped by later in the week with some questions. The growth of the organization had led to reduced communication between*

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*departments. I feel I have a real opportunity to make a positive contribution to the way several departments interact at the organization I work for.*

It is important to note once again that the movement within these quotations does not stop with simply recording, complaining about, or giving into organizational darkness. Rather, the movement (as again indicated by the bold script) has led participants to take action to bring light to the darkness, a “fruit” of Spirit that shows spiritual progress.

#### **Illumination**

Another cycle in the spiritual journey is characterized by “illumination.” This cycle is reflected in two movements of the Spirit:

- the ability to see God at work in creation
- movement away from focus on self toward a focus on serving others

The journals show seminar participants experiencing this cycle within the spiritual journey as well.

*I was seeing the main office in San Francisco from a bird's eye view, at first focused on the immediate organizational setting like we did in class. But then I started seeing the hundreds, thousands of connections to all the people, other organizations, government offices, planning departments, everywhere influenced by everything our work touches. Not only in the present, but I saw these connections in the past as well. I was almost overwhelmed with the magnitude of our mission, the impacts that we have that I have not been conscious of. Now I have a sense that my work touches hundreds, maybe thousands of people every day. This is a wonderful and empowering feeling. I realized I need this image, this awareness of the bigness of my work, to sustain me through the day to day of what I do.*

*Clearing my mind before work has been an absolutely enlightening experience. I enter each work-day when I complete the Light and Darkness meditation with a new sense of purpose. I have changed my outlook on my job. In my heart I am no longer simply a Program Manager, but rather I am an enabler of collaboration and communication. I help others see their place on teams and how valuable they are to the company and how their job helps society as a whole. I have stopped bringing my laptop to meetings and I have tried to attend more meetings in person to let others know I am entirely there. I feel as though*

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*people are appreciating the fact that I am giving them the attention they would like. I have also noticed myself listening to people completely rather than formulating my answer or opinions before they have completed what they have said.*

*With new understanding that work can be spiritual, happiness has settled in my inner self. I could not but reflect that my life is exactly as I need it to be to begin the new “me.” One of our clients recently sent us a letter praising our work. In the past I wouldn’t have thought about the letter. Now, everyday I think about that letter when I come into work. My meditation has given me a purpose, a mission possibly. I am exactly where I should be.*

*I often found myself wondering about the greater purpose of my work. Through the meditation I have begun to understand that on a daily basis a group of 150 people rely on me to provide them with sound financial and business advice regarding a multitude of situations. I now see a bigger purpose from my work. A glimmer of light and greater purpose becomes evident. I have taken to heart the lecture comment that one needs to live the spiritual life fully in the present.*

*I always thought we just made “electronic widgets.” Nothing spiritual about that! Now my meditations help me to see that our product is important to medicine, education – practically every important societal sector. I realize that I need to see that we are engaged in a very important service that helps many people.*

*I now see my value as working with my peers. I am starting to think about how in our company we have many individuals, each with his or her unique strengths and weaknesses. When I meditated with my trees, I remembered how they provided support for their environment, for squirrels and birds. I am beginning to see how I have a responsibility to support the people in my company, neighborhood, society and ultimately the world.*

*I now complete my work without complaint, and in a positive manner. I help my work team to become more of a big family. Life is not always filled with champagne and flowers, but I foresee a future at work with greater warmth.*

Finally, a litmus test of spiritual growth is growth in humility that must underpin progress. One sign of humility is that the less glamorous aspects of one’s work can be embraced as being

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equally meaningful as more notable actions. As Mother Theresa expresses it, these are “small actions done with great love.” This is likewise an aspect of St. Therese of Lisieux’s “little way”<sup>17</sup>. So in closing I offer the following ode to humility written by a participant.

*With regard to hubris, I find myself trying to contain and dissolve occasions of feeling irritated at little things. I did a direct mail campaign and I have chosen to enter my own data in the database. Humbling, I can tell you. I’m learning “garbage in, garbage out” and what that statement really means. Before I thought I understood it, but now I realize that I didn’t have a clue. I’m put to test about this. I find I want to do it right. I also say a silent prayer asking forgiveness for the times in the past, on other jobs, when I was in charge and expressed irritation to the data entry person while asking “why can’t I have this by the end of the day?” Now, with having to put my own “regal” fingers to the keyboard I know why. One colleague of mine who abhorred data entry and who used to say that it was “beneath” him, having seen me doing this work, seems to be taking on a new attitude. One day he said to me, “I’ll put in the data if you will too.” Does my new attitude come under “leadership” per se? I don’t know. At the same time, I’m enjoying my days more – I can tell you that.*

### Summary Perspective

What lessons might we take away from these reflections on seminar modules dealing with calling by working professionals in Silicon Valley? I believe these are points worth pondering and discussing:

#### Relative to Content

There is a deep thirst on the part of these professionals to find affirmation that organizational leadership within technology industries can be a legitimate spiritual path for those called to be “salt and light” in the modern world.

A movement away from dualism requires that organizational leaders listen for the voice of God in their work setting. It is important to help participants discover that the spiritual journey unfolds in the “now” of their organizational leadership challenges. Yes the path is supported by their Sabbath worship and devotional practices. But the spiritual journey is not exclusive to these traditionally “religious” settings. This is Ignatius’s great insight of “finding God in all things,” allowing us to be “contemplatives in action.”

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### Relative to Pedagogy

For educated professionals, a truly graduate level reading list and rigorous instruction is nourishing rather than off-putting. They seek knowledge of spirituality at a level or sophistication equal to their scientific, engineering and business education.

However, the personal appropriation of spirituality also requires reflection, prayer and meditation. Otherwise, there is the danger of settling for “knowing about” rather than “entering into” the spiritual journey.

Through this combination of reading, lecture and meditation the seminar helps these organization leaders begin to grasp that it is the distorted inner distractions of their false self that stand in the way of hearing the voice of God in their daily work life.

As they mute the false self, they begin to see God present within and speaking through their ordinary day to day managerial challenges.

They come to understand that the neighbor they are enjoined to love is often a colleague at work or a client their work place serves. (Later sections of the seminar dealing with challenges of power, and the mystery of suffering also remind participants that the neighbor may be a boss or colleague who is belligerent, manipulative, untrustworthy or unethical. They learn that resoluteness and even anger can be very holy things in the face of injustice).

One final caveat is in order. We have dealt here with early beginnings of the spiritual journey on the part of many participants. Even at the end of our seminar, the journey often remains embryonic. An essential element for sustaining the gift of *metanoia* is continued support recognizing the social character of a spiritual path. Spirituality is both personal and interpersonal. Therefore, participants are encouraged to find and join a religious or meditation community. Fortunately, Northern California is rich in diverse religious and meditation communities in which many do find such support. Some class participants join the *Community of Joseph* devoted to contemplative practice in support of the vocation of organizational leadership hosted by Santa Clara University. This community shares two hours of *Lectio Divina* (readings, meditation, prayer and contemplative practice) each week.

Still, as implied in the introduction to this paper, the business culture in which participants work is filled with rocks and weeds that imperil the spiritual seeds planted in the seminar. When I have the pleasure of greeting seminar participants who return for alumni gatherings, I am grateful to

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learn many have sustained the journey. Others admit that the pressures of organizational life have muted their good intentions.

Of course, only a few individuals even have access to a seminar experience similar to the one we have reported on. Therefore efforts by Churches, Temples, Mosques and Synagogues to support for those who are called to be “salt and light” to modern organizations is much needed.

## Appendix 1

### Daily Reflection on Light and Darkness in the Organization in Which I Work

Andre' L. Delbecq

*Place yourself in the presence of "The Light" that enlightens all people.*

*(The Transcendent Mystery, Spirit, as you understand it.)*

Spend a moment meditating on the revelation of this Light in the day to day of your organization at work. Where do you see the manifestation of Light in your organization?

Let us remind ourselves that without this Light, our organization becomes a cold place, devoid of creative energy, mutual caring and enduring courage, a place unable to maintain a commitment to noble purpose and service to others.

Express gratitude for the presence of this Light in your organization.

*If you have lost the sense of "Light" in your organizational setting, due to darkness in the organization, or darkness in yourself, ask that your sight might be restored. Ask for the blessing to be present to this Light so that at the beginning of each day, each Monday morning, you can enter into your organizational world with a renewed sense of joyful freedom to undertake work that matters within an important contemporary institution.*

Spend a moment reflecting on the wholeness of your organization through this Light. Ask for the sight to see the organization in all its dimensions and to witness the presence of Light in each dimension.

*Examine the nobility of the mission of the organization in which you work and its creative potential to be a force for good in the world.*

*-- its centrality in providing an important product or service which truly serves society*

*--its power over resources: financial, time, energy, decision agendas, human talents*

*--its locus as a place which should call on your fullest expression of individual creativity*

*-- its influence on the presence (or absence) of community that nourishes your spirit and that of others*

Spend a moment examining the presence of Darkness in yourself and in your organization.

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*Are there aspects of the overall organization that you ignore or fail to support because of lack of reflection, fear and anxiety or preoccupation with a narrow, private agenda?*

*Is there darkness within yourself such as undue concern with self-importance, careerism, ambition or activity wherein you anxiously depend entirely on yourself that casts a shadow on your contribution to the organization?*

Turn to examining darkness in the organization

*Is there darkness in your organization which diminishes its potential for goodness and service to society?*

*Have you given undue power to this darkness within yourself?*

*Have you been a source of darkness for others by failing to include, mentor, encourage or respond to my organizational neighbor?*

*Have you given undue power to organizational darkness by failing to witness to Light at decisive decision moments?*

Who are the “poor” and oppressed in your organizational setting? (Not necessarily economically only. Whose gifts are ignored, who cannot be part of the agenda? Who is marginalized in your organizational setting?)

Spend a moment meditating on the call to “holiness” (Wholeness) through and within the busyness of day to day organizational life.

We are told by the spiritual masters we will discover everything we need to know about Light, and have all the experience we need perfect our spiritual journey exactly “where we are today,” in the “eternal now”.

Even in the case where later discernment may suggest that at a future point of time you need to change your organizational setting, it is in today’s organizational experience that you must see the Light of the transcendent.

Ask for greater openness to this Light.

### **Expression of Gratitude**

*Spend several moments in gratitude for all the ways that the Light of insight, truth, wisdom, joy, compassion and courage reveals itself in the organizational setting in which you work -- in the many blessings and opportunities of which you have become aware in your meditation.*

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### **Sharing and Comment on Your Meditation Experience**

For group reflection participants may wish to share insights that emerged in their meditation. Members should listen with a spirit of "appreciative inquiry"—openness to the truth within another's experience.

### **A Daily Practice**

Consider a daily “examen” of the way in which Transcendent Light is present in the organization in which you work, and where the organization is captured by darkness that you can assist to dispel.

## Appendix 2

### A Meditation with Two Trees

ANDRE' L. DELBECQ

#### Introductory Reading:

*Begin your meditation with this reading from Thomas Merton, a reminder that we are created in our individuality, and that our spiritual journey will be unique unto our selves.*

*A tree gives glory to God by being a tree... The more a tree is like itself, the more is it like God.*

*No two things are exactly alike. And their individuality is no imperfection. On the contrary, the perfection of each created thing is not merely in its conformity to an abstract type, but in its own individual identity with itself.*

*Do you imagine that the individually created things in the world are imperfect attempts at reproducing an ideal type, which the Creator never quite succeeded in actualizing on earth? If that is so, they do not give Him glory but proclaim that He is not a perfect Creator.*

*Therefore, each particular being, in its individuality, its concrete nature and entity, with all its own characteristics and its private qualities and its own inviolable identity, gives glory to God by being precisely what He wants it to be here and now, in the circumstances ordained for it by His Love and His infinite Art.*

*For me to be a saint means to be myself. Therefore, the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self.*

*Thomas Merton, New Seeds of Contemplation*

#### Reflection

In Christian spirituality "calling" is always first a calling to *being* and only then a calling to *doing*

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*Being* most fully myself in greater union with God

thereby overcoming my fears, obsessions,  
addictions, brokenness.

*Doing* by discovering a sense of mission

then discerning specific roles of service as a form of expressed  
love and compassion

The Focus of this Meditation is on the First Aspect of Calling: "Being"

In the Judeo-Christian tradition each of us is called in our particular individuality to become our self as God intends. Each of us as a unique person has a unique journey.

Isa 43:1 I have called you by your name, you are mine.

Jer: 1:5 Before forming you in the womb I knew you. Before bringing you to birth, I consecrated you.

Paul: Cor 1:5 He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him.

James Hillman in the Soul's Code, the Jungian Psychologist, expresses this in terms of "acorn psychology". In the seed of our being we are born to be who we will be, unique and different.

*In the final analysis we count for something only because of the essential we embody, and if we do not embody that, life is wasted.*

*C. G. Jung*

### **The Meditation:**

Select two trees of the same species that stand near to each other. Sit in front of the two trees. Gently, as you study the two trees, let one of the trees select itself as "your" tree.

Begin to study "your" tree in detail. Let it tell you its life story. Look how it has been shaped by forces surrounding it; where it has been injured; how it serves and gives glory.

Now see the tree as a metaphor for your own life story. How are the forces that have shaped, injured, nourished your life been similar or different from your tree?

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They turn to the neighbor tree. How is it different from “your tree”? How would its story and being be different from your tree? Reflect on the story and “being” of a close friend noting similarities and differences from your story and your being.

Return to an awareness of your tree. Place yourself with “your” tree in the presence of the creator. Give praise and thanks for a creator who brought both beings, yourself and your tree, into being. Ask for insight into your personal being. Ask for an understanding of your uniqueness, and healing for your injuries.

Rest in silence before the singular “reality” of your tree.

Rest in silence before the singular “reality” of your unique self.

### **The Assignment**

Return to your tree three times for a twenty minute visit, repeating the meditation. At the end of the third day, write in your journal the lessons of both the “being” of “your tree” and insights into your own unique “being”.

### Appendix 3

#### Assignments Due for Second Class Meeting April 12, 2003

##### Reflection One: On Readings and Lecture

This is to be approximately three pages, double-spaced, 12 point in Times Roman type.

Review the pre-readings (Houston Smith or Carmody); the essays on work place spirituality (Bridging the Gap Proceedings; and your personal selections (Coles or Shield or Berry)). Review the lecture notes. Approach the review of the readings and lecture notes as a wine tasting or treasure hunt. Identify one or two messages/themes that particular touched your heart as you connected the readings and lectures to your own spiritual path as an organizational leader.

This is not a “book report” or “summary” of the lectures or readings. Rather, it is a reflection of how the lecture and readings touched your own personal awareness of *your* spiritual calling in the context of *your* organizational life.

*Express the themes clearly and simply using your own words. Indicate why these particular ideas “jump out” at you. What makes them important to you? Tell me why you think the deepening exploration of these themes as we continue to engage the topic of Spirituality for Organizational leadership is personally important.*

*Reflect don't Report*

##### Reflection Two: Meditation Journal

This is to be approximately two pages, double-spaced, 12 point in Times Roman type.

Begin keeping a simple journal in which you make notes following each meditation. Keep this journal for the duration of our seminar. The journal itself is your private record of meditations and will not be handed in. There will be a meditation assignment(s) for each class unit.

*Meditation Assignments:* On Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday engage the *Meditation with Two Trees* for twenty minutes. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday engage *the Meditation on Light and Darkness in your Organization* for twenty minutes before entering your work place. Then reviewing your journal

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notes, write a spontaneous summative reflection (not a copy of your journal notes) following your last meditation.

This should be written as a “flow of consciousness” without undue editing. Reflect on how your perspective regarding your own leadership gifts and their expression in your workplace is being influenced by your meditation. Have no “expectations” about what should or should not occur. Simply spontaneously record your experiences with the meditation exercises and their impact on your behavior at work.

*Staple the approximately five pages together, and bring them to class on the 12<sup>th</sup>*

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- <sup>1</sup> Andre' L. Delbecq, "Innovation as a Silicon Valley Obsession", *Journal of Management Inquiry* 3, no. 3 (1994): 266-275; Andre' L. Delbecq. and Joseph Weiss. "The Business Culture of Silicon Valley: A Turn of the Century Reflection." *Journal of Management Inquiry* . 9 no. 1 (2000): 34-44; James J. McGee and Andre' L. Delbecq . "Vocation as a Critical Factor in a Spirituality for Executive Leadership in Business", in Williams, O. F. ed., *Business, Religion and Spirituality: A New Synthesis*, Notre Dame, IN, University of Notre Dame Press (2003) 94-113
- <sup>2</sup> Andre' L. Delbecq and Frank Friedlander. "Strategies for Personal and Family Renewal" *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 4 no. 3 (1995): 262-269
- <sup>3</sup> A description of the overall seminar is available elsewhere. Andre' L. Delbecq "Spirituality for Business Leadership: Reporting on a Pilot Course for MBAs and CEOs." *Journal of Management Inquiry* 9, no. 2, (2000): 117 – 128
- <sup>4</sup> Pope John Paul II, *The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People*. (Boston Mass, Pauline Books and Media 1988).
- <sup>5</sup>A.L. Delbecq, ed. *Bridging the Gap Between Spirituality and Business*. Proceedings from the Santa Clara Conference (2001) <http://business.scu.edu/ISOL/proceedings.htm>
- <sup>6</sup> Delbecq, 2000
- <sup>7</sup> Delbecq, (Ed. 2001 Ch. 1; Cavanaugh, Gerald, Brad Hanson, Kirk Hanson, and Juan Hinojoso, "Toward a Spirituality for the Contemporary Organization: Implications for Work, Family and Society." In Pava, M.L. and Primeaux, P. eds., *Spiritual Intelligence At Work: Meaning, Metaphor and Morals*.(New York: Elsevier JAI, 2004) 111-138; Sandra M. Schneiders (2000) "Spirituality in the Academy", *Theological Studies*, 50 (1989) 676-697
- <sup>8</sup> Sue Annis Hammond, *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*. (Plano TX, Kodiak Consulting 1996).
- <sup>9</sup> Ian Mitroff, and Elizabeth A Denton, *Spiritual Audit of Corporate America: Multiple Designs for Fostering Spirituality in the Workplace*, San Francisco, Jossey Bass, (1990) Chapter 1-3
- <sup>10</sup> For a full treatment of discernment in the context of business strategic decisions, see Andre' L. Delbecq, Elizabeth Liebert, John Mostyn, Paul Nutt, and Gordan Walter, "Discernment and Strategic Decision Making: Reflections for a Spirituality of Organizational Leadership" in Pava, M.L. and Primeaux, P., eds, *Ibid.*, 139-174
- <sup>11</sup> Ian Mitroff, and Elizabeth A Denton, *Spiritual Audit of Corporate America: Multiple Designs for Fostering Spirituality in the Workplace*, San Francisco, Jossey Bass, (1990) Chapter 1-3
- <sup>12</sup> "Going Public with Spirituality in Higher Education and Business" Conference, University of Mass. Amherst, 2000
- <sup>13</sup> Weiss, Skelley, Haughey and Hall, 2004
- <sup>14</sup> Delbecq, Ed., 2001
- <sup>15</sup>Sandra M. Schneiders, "Religion and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals or partners?"; The Santa Clara Lectures, 6 no. 2 (2002).
- <sup>16</sup> Thomas Keating *The Human Condition*. (Paulist Press, New York, 1999); John Haughey, *Housing Heaven's Fire: The Challenge of Holiness*. (Chicago, Loyola Press 2002), Ch. 1
- <sup>17</sup> Ida Friederike Gorres *The Hidden Face: A Study of St. Therese of Lisieux*. San Francisco, Ignatius Press (1959), Ch. IV