

Managers Letter

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Developing the Corporate Soul *A New Millennium Pathway Toward Corporate Health*

by Diane H. Anselmo

In *The Healthy Company*, Robert Rosen points out that companies with a people-oriented culture experienced a 64-percent higher annualized sales growth over a five-year period than companies without this culture. That statistic provides a clear challenge for corporate leaders — find a way to engage people and leverage the personal power they bring to an organization. Changing corporate paradigms in this way can strengthen bottom-line results.

In their quest for so-called “professionalism,” many employees let go of their personal spirit the moment the work day begins. They check their buoyancy, energy and creativity at the workplace door; they submerge their liveliness, soul and search for meaning during work hours. In response, astute corporate leaders are seeking ways to bring that “soul food” through the front doors and stop separating people from what makes them whole and creative. By doing so, they hope to generate a workforce empowered to give its personal best on the job every day.

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Once considered the “soft stuff” that was dispensable when managing tight profit margins, adjustments to align personal and corporate values are seen today as essential to gaining a feeling of purpose, maintaining corporate health and increasing corporate power and profitability.

Finding Personal Balance in the Workplace

The modern workplace leaves many feeling constantly rushed, overexposed and drained. In addition, corporate restructuring, downsizing and mergers have created feelings of betrayal and frustration among many employee ranks. Says John P. Kotter, author of *Leading Change*, “The rate of

change is not going to slow down anytime soon. If anything, competition in most industries will probably speed up even more in the next few decades.” So finding a way to balance personal beliefs with business events, including organizational change, is essential.

What can we do to encourage that balance? First, we can make efforts to understand the workforce. While many leaders easily accept change as a necessary component in a dynamic economy, they sometimes focus so closely on the bottom line that they lose touch with the individual concerns of the workforce — concerns that reflect personal beliefs about the company. Unaddressed, these concerns can transform a community of wholeness to one that is fractured and exposed. When change is not managed carefully, productivity and creativity can suffer and the company soul may become incompatible with the desired culture.

Integrating the strengths associated with personal values, spirit and soul offers corporations a new millennium pathway toward balance and nurturing of a corporate soul. By empowering employees in a way that allows creativity and sense of purpose, we can enable an environment in which employees and managers can evaluate business events in terms of their personal values and reflect on what they must adjust to regain/maintain their sense of purpose. This leads to finding a “balance point” for adapting to change. And good leadership can facilitate that.

A Successful Leadership Paradigm

In *Flight of the Buffalo*, James A. Belasco and Ralph C. Strayer suggest that the modern leadership paradigm should resemble a flock of geese, where everyone can be a leader, follower or scout as needed. When the lead goose tires and feels overwhelmed, it rotates back into the formation and another goose flies to the point position. Similarly, when business tasks change, the whole team should be responsible for changing the structure and everyone should pitch in to help. Whether we are leaders, followers or scouts, we must inspire and motivate each other to nourish our souls in a way that helps us successfully manage change.

Robert Rosen sums it up in *The Healthy Company* as the spirit of partnership: “Together, responsible employees and empowering managers form a special team — an entrepreneurial partnership of adults dedicated to mobilizing each other’s talents and producing results. This group is

not a so-called collection of 'Indians and one chief,' but a collaboration of equals, with individuals stepping forward to take the lead when they have more experience, specialized knowledge or unique creative talents in a given area. This partnership motto is 'Everyone is a Leader, Everyone is a Follower.'

Pathways to Developing the Corporate Soul

As leaders for the new millennium, we must learn to collaborate with our associates by leveraging and nourishing personal values and talents. We must learn to nourish our workmates and allow them ways to shape their personal and corporate souls. We must seek ways to incorporate the personal values so important to daily existence and thereby raise the corporate standard.

As leaders, we also must stimulate and empower employees to attain a balance of personal and professional values that nurtures the pathway toward corporate health. This means looking for those "soft-touch" adjustments that can help our employees and companies regain/maintain a feeling of purpose and a healthy corporate soul. This may require re-tuning our corporate vision, bolstering our internal communications, committing to community service or implementing employee help and/or jointly developed performance management programs. In addition, we can use the simple techniques suggested below to help people reach their "balance point" during the workday, transform attitudes and build a more creative and productive workforce:

- Keep a collection of inspirational quotes in your office to reflect on during the day. Many calendars provide daily inspirational quotes, which are a wonderful way to begin the day. Share quotes with co-workers and friends. It may change their entire outlook on the day's events. Send quotes via e-mail or post them within corporate Intranet communications.
- Close the door for short periods; take deep breaths and practice yoga or quiet meditation for relaxation. Bring a small tape player and use relaxation tapes when highly stressed. A few minutes spent relaxing allow us to clear our minds, gain fresh perspective and approach work tasks with renewed vigor.
- Take a quiet walk in an effort to call to the surface issues that plague us as individuals within a company. Consider solutions as you tune into nature for a source of soothing balance for the psyche.

Raising personal awareness is also crucial. It's important to realize we are not defined by our job, our next promotion or whether we have finally moved into the big corner office with the fantastic view. Our sense of who we are is first defined from within and can engender feelings of peace and fulfillment as well as the drive to excel. We can cultivate such positive feelings on the job by encouraging personal awareness of our roles in the workplace. We can release a very powerful tool to challenge the *status quo* by empowering people with skills that help them make effective

decisions and perform in accordance with management needs. Learning to feel empowered from within is just as important as learning time management or conflict resolution. Since empowerment is feeling-centered and helps us gain contentment with who we are and where we are going, encouraging empowerment cultivates better employees, who are kinder to one another and who feel renewed. Empowerment also allows our best resources, the people who define our company, to integrate personal values in a way that leverages their abilities to perform their daily routine.

Recognizing that change is a constant, we can prepare ourselves to view it through a new lens that focuses on employee well being and revitalization of the human spirit. When the personal journey aligns with corporate values, higher productivity and profitability are more likely. For organizations that see the value of empowering their employees and nourishing their souls, this means making decisions as an organizational community about what values to live by and what practices provide a pathway to linking personal and organizational values. Persistence, perseverance and courage will always be key to creating organizational wholeness. The journey is clear: to move forward, we must empower employees and organizations to partner in leading the way and find ways to make work meaningful and rewarding on personal as well as professional planes.

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