

# **Conscientious or Unconscious: The Converging Roles of Management Gurus and Corporate Chaplains**

Bruno Kahne and Brian Chaloner  
AirBusiness Academy

*This paper provides a reflection on whether business managers are conscientiously bringing religious values into the workplace or whether they are doing this unconsciously through consultants who believe that spirituality might be the ultimate tool of motivation.*

## **Introduction**

Erickson (1959) identified 8 stages in the psychosocial development of the human being. These eight stages can be seen to hinge on a central stage, adolescence, that is framed on either side by 4 childhood stages and 3 adulthood stages. For the purposes of this discussion, we will first examine the nature of such a three-tiered model of human development based on childhood, adolescence and adulthood. This model not only reflects Erickson's work, but directly parallels the development of leadership and management. By examining this parallel, we aim to shed light on the appearance of spirituality as a tool for corporate motivation in modern society.

## **A natural development in three phases**

The first phase of emotional growth in human beings occurs in what we have chosen to call the childhood state, which can be seen to regroup the first four of Erickson's psychosocial stages. This is the time when the individual copies his/her direct environment, focusing especially on his/her parents' language and behaviour. In this mirroring phase, the child is vulnerable and dependent, and does not question any of the values he/she integrates. The perception of the world is such that the child is convinced that recognition, in the form of physical and psychological strokes, will only result from the perfect imitation of his/her parents (Berne, 1964).

After childhood, the little person moves into the second phase of development: adolescence. Gradually, a personal set of ideals is developed and the individual starts to assert himself or herself, often basing choices on a partial rejection of the values gained during childhood, in an effort to develop self worth. During this period of self-assertion, the individual experiences a mix of paradoxical feelings, such as passionate love and destructive hate, intense weakness and unlimited power, humble submission and brutal rebellion. In this phase, the typical adolescent enters a state of total self-absorption in which he/she feels the need to reject every part of the parental model in order to find enough room and freedom to create a new, independent existence (Erickson, 1959, 1963, 1968).

The final phase in human development begins as the rollercoaster ride of adolescent joy and pain ends. This is the phase when the individual should mature into an adult; an adult whose thoughts, words and actions are neither a carbon copy of the original parental model, nor an unconscious rejection of this model. Instead, adult choices should be made in a personal, deliberate and conscious way. Such maturity can only be reached if the individual successfully passes through the many stages within the two phases previously described. It would appear likely that, faced with the obstacles of human development, few of us ever reach the level of maturity that we are capable of. More often than not, we find ourselves attracted by the nostalgia of past events, becoming the perfect physical and psychological copies of the previous generation. This tendency is outlined in Berne's (1964) work, which highlights how adults re-enact the behaviours they experienced as children and mirror the behaviours of their parents.

If we now analyse the development of corporate leadership along the same lines, it appears that a similar three phase development process can be identified.

Stage 1: Prior to the Industrial Revolution three closely interwoven entities were shaping the socio-economical environment: the army which was financed by political institutions, that were influenced in turn by the established Church. The influence of this Church could be seen in all the details of everyday life, from the naming of places and people, to the structuring of cities and villages, from regulating dress codes to the selection of working days and the blessing of harvests or businesses by priests. Religion was a reassuring presence in all aspects of human life.

Stage 2: The rapid advances in science and technology brought about by the Industrial Revolution accelerated the massive growth of the urban population and heralded the thrust for companies to build themselves up into large businesses. This change created an urgent need to develop a great number of professional managers. Corporate leadership, now in its adolescent stage, followed the social movement of the time. Faith as a “substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrew 11:11) was replaced by an unquestioning belief in science and rational thought. From now on, everything would have to be tested and proven. It took some time for the religious leaders to accept this rejection. As Hellemans (2001) writes, “From the time of the French Revolution until 1960 [...] the Church condemned modernity for its godlessness”.

This drifting apart had two consequences. First, business and religion would be less likely to cohabit the same spheres. Personal religious beliefs would have to be left in the closet, outside the company walls. Second, corporate leadership would be guided by rational thought, and this would lead to the scientific management theory of Taylor (1911), which showed how scientific methods could improve productivity. This trend also opened the door to the famous Hawthorne experiments by Elton Mayo and his colleagues, which analysed the effect of psychology on efficiency in the workplace (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939) and, later, to quantitative management tools such as Total Quality, Project Management and Reengineering.

Stage 3: After more than two centuries of growth, and as if in longing for the founding models, it seems that thinkers in the business world are currently changing tack once again. Academic research (Hicks, 2003), self-improvement books (Jones, 1996) and journal articles (Darling, Parry & Moore, 2005) are flourishing around a plethora of ideas, models and personalities from the past: Sun Tsu, Machiavelli and Jesus have never been so alive. ‘New’ spiritual approaches to management such as Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1983), Value Based Leadership (Despain & Converse, 2003) and Inspired Leadership (Dourado & Blackburn, 2005) are being hotly debated in leadership and management literature.

Not only do we find this trend in literature, but also in the behaviour of the new generation of managers. Leaders, managers and consultants are referring more and more to values such as respect and humility, and to lifestyle choices such as the quest for self-awareness through retreats and meditation. An interesting throwback to the original foundations of leadership! The question arises, however, as to where the support for this trend should come from.

### **Looking for external support**

As the market gets tougher, companies have sought to integrate the latest tools, technology and processes, such as SAP or Six Sigma, to beat the competition, but since they have all been doing this, what is there to differentiate the companies? This situation leads them to rediscover that what will make a company stand out is the driving force of their teams, the motivation of each individual. The efforts being made today by employers to create a positive work life balance demonstrate the extent to which this principle is understood and how much it is recognised that when workers carry their personal problems to work, sinking morale, low productivity and even chronic absenteeism increase. In these last few years, the authors have observed that companies have invested in two different areas: the development of their employees’ self-awareness to better deal with pressure and stress, and the creation of places and times to allow staff to release emotions, through private dialogues with a trusted external person.

This idea that deeper self knowledge and the opportunity to offload negative feelings allows an individual to be more in control of his/her life and helps him/her to achieve a greater progression, is a common teaching found in many Sacred Texts such as the Bible, the Koran or the Bhagavad-Gita. Each of these texts describes acts of verbalising pain and

difficulty. They are dealt with in topics related to purification, progression, confession and repentance, in verses such as: “Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:16) or “Man should discover his own reality [...] for he has his self as his only friend, or as his only enemy” (Bhagavad Gita 6:5-6).

In their search for external support, companies have tended to call on two categories of specialists of the soul: Management Gurus and, more specifically in the USA, corporate chaplains. It is arguable, however, that the two are in reality only a slightly different expression of the same source.

### **Preaching consultants**

Leadership and management consultants are recruited to provide companies with neatly packaged solutions to managerial problems, including ways to improve productivity by maximizing human capital. Based on the authors' combined experience, working with numerous international consultants each year, it became clear that, despite the variety of consultants, the models, tools and techniques that were being used were basically the same. Nearly all the consultants were clearly inspired by the work of about 50 major management thinkers: the gospel according to Kaplan and Norton's balanced scorecards (1996), Thomas-Kilmann's conflict mode instrument (Thomas, 1974) or Argyris' ladder of inference (Senge, 1990), to list only a few.

When reading the best sellers of these Top Management Gurus, one cannot help but be surprised by the richness of the spiritual, and sometimes even religious vocabulary found on every page. Let's take the example of *In Search of Excellence* by Tom Peters and Robert H. Waterman, former McKinsey consultants, which sold over 6 million copies. A clear lexical thread in the text revolves around words and phrases such as: extra mile, evangelism, commandment, spirit, praise, sacrifice, destinies, Mecca, zealots, catechism, devil, litany, gospel, prophecies, evangelist, preaching, hermit, faith, missionary, dogma, and many more (Peters & Waterman, 1988). The choice of such a lexical thread leaves the reader with the question: Is this the language and advice of a management consultant or the chapter and verse of a preacher?

Similarly, Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002) not only use religious lexical threads, but also metaphor. The authors explain that some companies are ahead of others from a financial and organisational standpoint because their leaders listened to the 'inner voice' and they then exhort the reader to listen to that 'voice within'. But what exactly are they talking about? Is this a reference to a Freudian Superego? Or are they referring to the 'still small voice' of the Holy Ghost, as described in the Old Testament?

Other major thinkers, such as Stephen Covey and Peter Senge, not only use religious wording and comparisons, but they acknowledge the Sacred Texts and their teachings as being at least partly the source of their inspiration. This acknowledgement is, however, sometimes slightly ambiguous. In *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, a book sold at more than 10 million copies, Covey starts with an explanation that, “The principles I am referring to are not [...] ‘religious’ ideas”, then he adds a few lines later, “These principles are a part of most every major enduring religion...” (Covey, 1989). This paragraph reveals a delicate paradox caused by the fact that the major principles of human life are common not only to most religions, but to the entire spectrum of spirituality and even psychology. It may well be that the conflicting reference quoted above is an attempt to mask the possibility of religion as a source of the ideas that Covey then deals with. It seems unlikely, however, that such principles and the millennia of Judaeo-Christian heritage within which Covey is writing, can be easily ignored.

In the same book, Covey regularly uses stories and quotes from the Bible to illustrate secular points with additional strength. To outline the concepts of pro-activity he uses the story of Joseph, son of Jacob (Israel), who was sold as a slave by his brothers, and who, within a few years became the most powerful man in Egypt, second only to pharaoh. To reinforce the message that, for a transformation to be enduring, change must work inside-out and not outside-in, Covey quotes Psalms 84:5: “Search your own heart with all diligence for out of it flow the issues of Life”.

Peter Senge, another major Management Thinker, who has received worldwide recognition for his book *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation*, clearly uses not only a Judeo-Christian filter, but also a distinctively Buddhist one to explore new ways of looking at the corporate world. Amongst all the management gurus, Senge is certainly one of the most prolific in terms of religious and spiritual lingua. As with Peters, Covey and others, his writings contain a strong religious lexical thread with words such as parochial, scapegoats, born-again, heaven, Jesus, meditation, prayer, apocryphal, church, guiding stars, sacrosanct, absolve, spiritual, etc. (Senge, 1990). Elsewhere in his book, Senge makes figurative comparisons to the 'gift of tongues' of the Quakers, the 'pure observation' of the Buddhists, the 'witnessing' of the Hindus and the 'awakening' of the Muslims.

One of the most thought-provoking parts of Senge's book is a whole discussion on how being part of a great team has a lasting impact on people. Senge explains how meaningful this experience is for those who have lived it in their career or their social life, and how this event stands out as a particular highlight in their life. He describes how special it is to feel part of something bigger, to be connected one with one another and altogether to something more. Then, the discussion shifts to a sort of mystical teaching. The most accurate word in Western culture to describe this special feeling, explains Senge, should be used with much caution and only sparingly in public. The tone used reminds us of the same caution given in some religious initiatory rites. But in the very next line, Senge gives this sacrosanct word to... several million readers! The word is: "metanoia", which for the early Christians, such as John the Baptist, meant 'having a direct knowledge of God' (Senge, 1990).

As shown through the above examples, the line between secular and spiritual teaching is at times so blurred that, without a cover page stating clearly that the book is on leadership, readers could be confused. Are we dealing with business or salvation? Is this the message of a management guru or of a spiritual leader? And should we even be surprised at such a mix of metaphors between leadership, management and spirituality? Take, for example the move in the USA to bring chaplaincy into companies.

### **Consulting preachers**

The second type of external support that companies invest in to boost productivity through human performance is the recruitment of corporate chaplains. Corporate chaplaincy grew out of the traditional military model of religious representatives living with a regiment to help soldiers face the horrors of the battlefield such as trauma, bodily injuries, the killing of an enemy, the loss of a friend, and to answer questions related to the purpose of life. One of the first corporate chaplaincy programs started in the 1940s at R.J. Reynolds Tobacco, in North Carolina, but it was only in the 1990s that the chaplaincy business started to explode. In 1992 there were about 25 corporate chaplaincy organizations in the USA. In 2004, more than 1,200 of them were listed, with an estimated total number of 4,000 chaplains. A 160 fold increase in only 12 years! And this phenomenal growth seems to be only just at the beginning of a steep curve. The American population is one of the most religious in the Western world. Two-thirds of Americans declare that religion is very important in their lives. In 1997, George H. Gallup International Institute found that 70% of adults said that it was very important for them to have a doctor who was spiritually attuned to them. Four years later, another Gallup survey showed that 47% of the population wished their doctor would pray with them for their illness, and 93% of those who had experienced this with their doctor believed that the doctor's prayers helped them heal. If this is what is expected from a doctor, what is the weight of expectations faced by a corporate chaplain?

In the business world, corporate chaplains claim that they can not only replace social workers or psychologists, but that they can in addition deal with the employees' need for religion and spirituality. Employees who have personal problems might have trouble focussing on their job and delivering the expected quality of work. Since their managers are trained in the technical field, and not in the art of counselling, these managers often feel inadequate in giving advice on personal or family problems. To tackle this issue, companies are recruiting chaplains who are not only able to deliver training and consulting in traditional topics such as conflict resolution, continuous improvement, leadership, change management, communication, stress management, etc., but who can also counsel employees on work-life balance, dealing with

marriage and family concerns (divorce, loss...), caring for the sick, dealing with financial distress, medical issues, emotional concerns, and all sorts of addiction.

How does it work? There are three possibilities. A company can either recruit a chaplain as a full-time employee, subcontract the job to one of the growing number of chaplaincy companies in North America - such as Corporate Chaplains of America or Marketplace Ministries Inc. - or find a part-time chaplain through a local church. Once contracted, the company will pay an average of \$10 a month per employee to have a chaplain visit offices and shop floors at appointed hours, to build a relationship of trust through informal discussions with an average of 750 employees (which means \$7,500 per month, per chaplain). To avoid offending religious beliefs or breaking religious harassment laws, chaplains are asked to refrain from talking about religion unless they are requested to do so by an employee. For this reason, they don't carry Bibles with them... they only have an electronic version of it on their PDA.

Once the contract is signed, employees and their families have access to a chaplain 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. All they have to do is to call a toll-free number, and a chaplain calls them back within 5 minutes to support them in any physical, emotional, psychological or spiritual need. The contact with the chaplain is of course done on a voluntary basis and the content of the discussion is always confidential.

According to several chaplaincy companies, the result of recruiting one of their representatives is paradise on earth. They promise a reduction in absenteeism, lower turnover rates, fewer conflicts and less stress, as well as an increase in loyalty, productivity, and teamwork. Some organisations actually promise personal growth, permanent, verifiable positive belief changes and greater personal health for their employees!

So, if you have ever dreamed of becoming a corporate chaplain, all you need is a ten-year experience in business to understand the context in which you will work, a seminary degree and an ordination by a local church to ensure that you have the spiritual side covered, and a detailed knowledge of the Bible to apply it to the individual problems and needs of people (the Koran, the Tanakh and the Bhagavad-Gita are not accepted yet). You will then have to pass two psychological tests, a ten-year criminal background check, and be able to prove that you don't have any excessive consumer debt. You will also more likely be recruited if you don't drink, don't smoke, if you are not divorced and if you are an Evangelical Christian. Finally, and most important of all, once in the job you will be blessed with the opportunity to save thousands of souls and to receive a monthly check of about \$50,000 if you are a chaplain, more than \$100,000 if you manage a chaplaincy business.

Even if the framework proposed by the law seems to protect the employee, and even if the majority of the population is in search of greater spirituality, this new trend raises a number of questions that are worth considering: Why are the major chaplain organisations only Evangelical? Are we dealing with businessmen or religious crusaders? Why should one faith be promoted over another one within a company? If a chaplain reflects the Director's beliefs, how coercive is this situation for the employees?

If corporate chaplains are only there to play the role of consultants and social workers, \$10 per employee is a good deal for a company and a worrying trend for the more expensive management consultants and social workers. If, however, their real purpose is to gain access to a sitting duck congregation and to continue the work of converting the masses, then \$10 is outrageously expensive, if not immoral. It comes down to selling salvation, fixing a price on confession and absolution, a practice that was thought to have disappeared in 1562 with the Council of Trent putting an end to the buying and selling of indulgences.

### **A new era**

What then are the prospects for the souls of our corporations? On the one hand there are bible-thumping consultants, recommending deep introspection, meditation and retreats. On the other, business-minded preachers are encouraging employees to share the vision of the CEO for more profits.

The relationship between business and religion has never been an easy one. For years, these two aspects of human existence have looked upon each other with at best some interest, at worst suspicion. Today, questions concerning religion have been catapulted into the world's headlines due to the rise of religious fanaticism, the growth of some churches and the decline of others. And as employees from Western companies climb the different levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1971), the urge to find an answer to the meaning of life, and a more profound motivation in their job, increases. One of the current answers that is gaining favour is to help employees understand that they can find peace and motivation in the dormant spirituality that they have within themselves.

Is there more spirituality in leadership today because of the strong religious beliefs of the major management thinkers or because mankind needs more than ever an answer to fundamental existential questions? Whatever the answer, it seems that the prophecy attributed to the French writer André Malraux is being fulfilled, at least in corporate America, "The 21st century will be spiritual or it will not be".

Key words: Leadership, management, motivation, religion, spirituality, gurus, chaplains

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