

Dear Editor :

A(nother) Response to John Shibley

In the January issue of Fieldnotes, John Shibley (“Whispering Around the G-Word”) chides Peter Senge and his ilk for “doing a careful, delicate dance” around the use of the word “G.....o.....d” (his punctuation) in discussions about spirituality in the workplace. Judy Brown, also in the January issue (“A Response to John Shibley”) responds:

“I think the lack of the word in organizational life is not because it is an undiscussable, but rather because it is a concept that is limiting, and excluding of a broad understanding of spirit and the spiritual.” I agree with Brown.

Further, I maintain that there *is* a dance, but it is rather more of a dialogue than a series of unworkable contortions, as Shibley implies.

The answer to Shibley’s question, “What happens to the conversation about spirituality when you can’t talk about God?” is obvious. You talk about spirituality. The questions that Senge offers as examples to start spiritual conversations in the workplace, “Why are we doing what we do? Are we doing it the way we want to do it?” may not read literally as spiritual questions, but they are intended to *start* a conversation, not *be* the conversation. As a practitioner of management and organizational consulting, having worked for decades in a variety of public and private sector organizations, I can easily see those questions leading to a dialogue about spiritual values, ideas and implications. In fact, Shipley’s contrasting example of a question that *doesn’t* get asked because it actually *is* spiritual, “How are we creating suffering?” is one that I could see adding to Senge’s list of conversation-starters, especially in certain organizations (like social services agencies and nonprofits). I think Shibley’s advice to update one’s resume upon asking it is alarmist and a bit premature.

Shibley asserts that “Spirituality is about being in relationship with, ah, you know, the G-word, with the God of your understanding. Always has been, always will be.” Later, he confidently declares that “Spiritual disciplines find and choose us, not the other way around.” I am reminded of a saying about country music star Bill Monroe: “I wish I was as sure about one thing as he is about everything.”

Why *not* find ways to talk about spiritual issues and questions that are as free of limitations as possible? If we skip the Lord’s Prayer, is that a reason to give up and go home? Even if, as Shibley claims, “God will wait” until we get it perfect? How should we go about “doing it perfectly” if we don’t do it at all?

In the final analysis, Shibley does not propose either a credible or a reasonable argument to forestall productive, interesting, and relationship-building dialogue about our work and its many meanings, among them spiritual.

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