

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AS A MODEL FOR STUDENT INNER DEVELOPMENT

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More than fifty years ago, O. A. Ohmann, in his classic *Skyhooks* (1955), argued that people have lost faith in society's basic values and that a spiritual rebirth was needed in our nation's leadership. Never in human history have people ever had so much yet enjoyed so little real satisfaction. He argued that the post-World War II god of production and profits had feet of clay and that a religion based on materialism, science, and humanism is inadequate. Ohmann contends that people are searching for new "skyhooks"—for an abiding faith around which life's experiences can be integrated and given meaning. Asking the questions, "Production for what?" "Do we use people for production or production for people?" and "How can production be justified if it destroys both personality and human values in the process of its manufacture and by its end use?" Ohmann (p. 37) describes the successful leader as one who provides an invisible, fundamental structure of skyhooks into which the experiences of every day are absorbed and given meaning:

- Providing a vision without which the people perish
- Philosophical and character values that help relate one's goals to eternal values
- Setting the climate within which these values become working realities
- Integrating the smaller, selfish goals of individuals into the larger, more social and spiritual objectives of society
- Resolving conflicts by relating the immediate to long-range and more enduring values

Fifty years after Ohmann's call for an emphasis on spirituality, vision, and altruistic values, nothing has

changed. According to the Dalai Lama (1999), in *Ethics for the New Millennium*, at no time in human history has it been more essential that we reach a consensus about what constitutes positive and negative conduct in an increasingly interdependent world, to ultimately answer the great question that confronts us all: "How can I be happy?" This fundamental aspiration is inherent in everything we do, not only as individuals but also at the group and organizational levels of society. The desire or inclination to be happy and avoid pain and suffering knows no boundaries.

Some claim that a major source of this problem is our system of higher education, with its overemphasis on material success and developing students' technical skills through professional programs in science, medicine, technology, and business (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2005). Unfortunately, all this success is at the expense of student's "inner" development—the spiritual realm of purpose and meaning, values and beliefs, emotional and moral development, and self-understanding. Recently, however, there has been a surge in interest in spirituality and inner student development within higher education (Gehrke, 2008). A study by the Spirituality in Higher Education project at UCLA (Higher Education Research Institute, 2004) revealed that today's college students have a very high level of spiritual interest and involvement. And as our society ages with the baby boomers, higher education reaches out more to nontraditional students who have also found a life based on the relentless pursuit of "whoever dies with the most stuff wins" wanting. This exploration for what constitutes "the good life" is becoming ever more intense as

students of all ages search for meaning and purpose in their lives, a sense of membership and belonging in a loving community, and an ongoing inner life practice to help them find a Higher Power or God to draw on for strength and support in an ever-more-chaotic and threatening world.

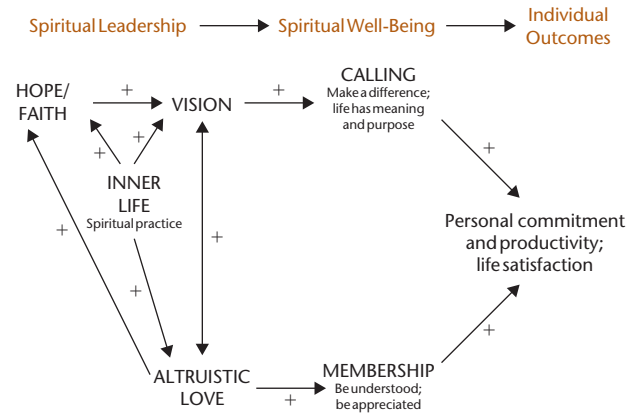
Spiritual Leadership Theory

In addition to spiritual development, the development of a new generation of leaders has long been of importance to higher education (Astin & Astin, 2000; Gehrke, 2008). However, leadership models that incorporate spirituality for use in higher education to address student inner development are lacking. Spiritual leadership theory (SLT) can be viewed as an emerging paradigm that links spirituality and leadership (Fry, 2005a). The purpose of this article is to explore spiritual leadership theory as a model for inner student development.

To date, the theory of spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003, 2005b, 2008) has been studied, tested, and validated in a diverse array of organizations, including secondary schools, a university, military units, city governments, police, and for-profit organizations (Fry, Nisiewicz, Vitucci, & Cedillo, 2007a, 2007b; Fry & Slocum, 2008; Fry, Vitucci, & Cedillo, 2005; Malone & Fry, 2003). Spiritual leadership comprises the values, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to intrinsically motivate oneself and satisfy fundamental needs for spiritual well-being through calling and membership. A general model of personal spiritual leadership is given in Figure 1. Essential to spiritual leadership are the key processes of (1) creating a transcendent vision of service to others whereby one experiences a sense of calling so that life has purpose and meaning and makes a difference and (2) establishing or joining a social/organizational culture based on the values of altruistic love whereby one has a sense of membership, feels understood and appreciated, and has genuine care, concern, and appreciation for *both* self and others.

The source of spiritual leadership is an inner life or spiritual practice that, as a fundamental source of inspiration and insight, positively influences development of (1) hope/faith in a transcendent vision of service to key stakeholders and (2) the values of altruistic love. Inner life is a process of understanding and tapping into

Figure 1. Personal Spiritual Leadership Model



one's own divine power and how to draw on that power to live a more satisfying and full outer life. It speaks to the feeling individuals have about the fundamental meaning of who they are, what they are doing, and the contributions they are making (Vaill, 1998). Inner life includes individual practices (e.g., meditation, prayer, yoga, journaling, and walking in nature) and organizational contexts (such as rooms for inner silence and reflection) to help individuals and groups draw strength from a Higher Power or God and be more self-aware and conscious from moment to moment (Fry & Kriger, in press).

PERSONAL SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

Personal leadership is the self-confident ability to crystallize your thinking and establish an exact direction for your life, commit yourself to moving in that direction, and then take determined action to acquire, accomplish, or become whatever you identify as the ultimate goal for your life (Meyer, 1994). Personal leadership is a process of developing a positive self-image that gives you the courage and self-confidence necessary to consciously choose actions that satisfy your needs, to persevere, and accept responsibility for the outcome.

Personal spiritual leadership is practiced by authentically pursuing a personal vision, based in altruistic values, that creates a sense of calling and membership and produces high personal commitment, productivity, and life satisfaction. It is initiated by focusing on one's inner life and embarking on the spiritual quest for a Higher Power or God from which one can draw strength

and give unreserved commitment and devotion (Fry, 2003, 2008). Personal spiritual leadership then emerges from the interaction of vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love. This requires “doing what it takes” through faith in a clear, transcendent vision of service to others, which produces calling—the part of spiritual well-being that gives one a sense of making a difference and therefore having meaning in one’s life. It also requires developing ethical values based in altruistic love (honesty, integrity, humility, courage, compassion, trust, forgiveness, gratitude, patience, acceptance). These are manifested through one’s attitude and behavior, and they produce membership—the part of spiritual well-being that gives one a sense of being understood and appreciated. The combined experiences of calling and membership are the fundamental components of spiritual well-being, which then fuels personal commitment, productivity, and life satisfaction.

It is especially important to adhere to and practice four key spiritual practices for strong personal spiritual leadership (Kurth, 2003):

1. Know oneself.
2. Respect and honor the beliefs of others.
3. Be as trusting as you can be.
4. Maintain a spiritual practice (e.g., spending time in nature, prayer, meditation, reading inspirational literature, yoga, shamanistic practices, writing in a journal).

These spiritual practices are also necessary for developing the attributes of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff & Singer, 2001).

PERSONAL SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AND STUDENT INNER DEVELOPMENT

We have found the spiritual leadership model to be useful to people in a variety of organizational settings and organizational levels, including day care providers, school teachers, entry-level professionals, and middle managers as well as company presidents (<http://www.iispiritual-leadership.com/>). A brief introductory PowerPoint presentation is all that is needed for them to grasp its underlying logic.

We also initially explain, for those who fear being proselytized, that there is a distinction between spirituality and religion. Religion is concerned with a system of beliefs, ritual prayers, rites, ceremonies, and related formalized practices and ideas. Spirituality, instead, is concerned with qualities of the human spirit. This includes positive psychological concepts such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, personal responsibility, and a sense of harmony with one’s environment. Spirituality is the pursuit of a vision of service to others: through humility, as having the capacity to regard oneself as an individual equal to but not greater in value than other individuals; through charity, or altruistic love; and through veracity, which goes beyond basic truth-telling to engage one’s capacity for seeing things exactly as they are, freed from subjective distortions. From this perspective, spirituality is necessary for religion, but religion is not necessary for spirituality. Consequently, personal spiritual leadership can be inclusive or exclusive of religious theory and practice (Fry, 2003).

As a tool for student inner development, the spiritual leadership model provides guidance and understanding of what the spiritual quest entails, how to go about it, and the rewards or “fruits” of undertaking the effort. Activities for engaging students’ personal spiritual leadership through the model could include conducting spiritual work in the form of a retreat, reflection, community building, volunteerism, creative endeavors, leadership development, teaching, learning, and writing (Sturm, 2007). Whatever method, experience, or process is involved, the ultimate goal is for students to come away more grounded, more self-aware, less self-centered, and more confident of their vision and values as they relate to self, others, community, and the world.

For leaders in higher education, the process for infusing spirituality and leadership through student inner development into college campuses is similar to that for students (Sturm, 2007). If students are to be given the environment to have these experiences, it is important for those who are serving them to be well tuned into their own personal spiritual leadership. Colleges and universities should create a learning environment for students that fosters an understanding of the spiritual quest through this or some other spiritual leadership model. To do so, faculty and broader university community

leaders must embrace spirituality in terms of how to grow from it, how to use it, and how to infuse it into the university community in a way that is welcoming and empowering to students who want to engage in inner development, yet not discriminating against those who are not ready or willing to do so.

The spiritual leadership model can be used as a tool for self-discovery and for understanding and reaching one's potential. It can also assist in creating a deeper understanding of one's place in the world. History has demonstrated that leaders who approach national and global concerns with a heightened sense of humility, non-violence, and spiritual concern can change the world for the betterment of all. In our colleges and universities, future leaders are being trained to offer to the world unique solutions to complex global concerns. It will be those with a strong sense of personal spiritual leadership through vision, hope/faith, and love who will create ideas and solutions that successfully address the global problems and the extraordinary complexities society is facing.

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