Servant Leader Workplace Spiritual Intelligence: A Shield of Protection from Workplace Stress

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For the Christian manager, the workplace is where our commitment to becoming more Christ-like is placed to the test. Are we both hearers and doers of the Word? Business researchers are studying in more systematic ways how scriptural leadership attributes are applied in the workplace. Servant leader workplace spiritual intelligence (SLWSI) is the application of Christian scriptural sanctification values, principles, and practices to employment settings. It is a derivative of the larger construct of spiritual intelligence and is a major factor in promoting individual life balance (work, family, and personal time). SLWSI helps managers develop a capacity for transcendence, achieve a higher state of God consciousness, interject the sacred into everyday events, use scriptural principles to solve workplace problems, and engage in ethical and virtuous behavior such as forgiveness, love, transparency, and humility.

Given this premise, an integrated life of faith requires overcoming the traditional barriers that contribute to compartmentalization and the associated negative consequences of "church on Sunday," and living a worldly life Monday through Saturday. Workplace spiritual intelligence consists of: 1) an overall life orientation that is in harmony with the will of God, 2) a love-based, altruistic work motivational system, 3) God-honoring, golden-rule work behaviors, and 4) the employment of scriptural "performance" standards to assess motives, behavior, and outcomes. Workplace spiritual intelligence positively influences a range of desirable employee attitudes and behaviors including servant leadership and followership, organizational citizenship, and positive stress coping and adaptation strategies, among others. SLWSI provides 360-degree benefits for the practicing manager, their subordinate employees, and the customers and clients. This article will discuss the constituent elements of servant leader spiritual intelligence and its benefits to managers as well as organizations.
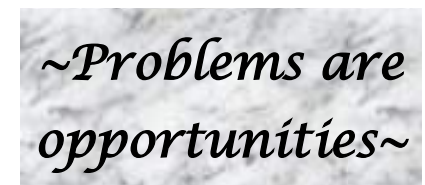

Why Should Managers Be Concerned with Servant Leader Spiritual Intelligence?

Why should managers strive to apply servant leader spiritual intelligence? The first and foremost reason is that it serves as a ministry tool to support the sanctification work of the Holy Spirit. As the scriptures state, "my people perish for a lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6)." From personal experience, there is a huge gap between being a saved, but a wounded Christian, and a Spirit-filled, sanctified believer. These principles are universal gifts of God to the body of Christ validated by scripture and millions of transformed believers throughout the ages. For example, workplace perfectionism is a form of legalism and a spirit of works, a legacy of the law which enslaves with demands for victory in every work assignment or project. It instills employees with a spirit of fear as they feel compelled to be successful at any cost. Yet, this logic has proven to be largely false. Many managers fail to understand their commitment to a cause greater than themselves. In Luke 14:28, Jesus warned his disciples about the cost of success: "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it…" In fact, Jesus' own disciples had left their families, fortunes, and a predictable lifestyle to follow Jesus.

Consequently, the long term result is lower levels of innovation and creativity as the employee stays within the comfort zone to ensure success. Likewise, today's managers must count the cost of any decision. Another key servant leader spiritual intelligence attribute is to resist the spirit of workplace comparison (2 Corinthians 10:12). When employees use other employees as the standard of performance excellence, this creates chronic insecurity given that rarely are the standards used complete, reliable, and accurate. This spirit of judgment generates deceptive emotions such as pride when deemed "superior," envy, insecurity, and fear when we do not "measure" up to others, and

~Problems are opportunities~

misleading sense of complacency when performance is equal. The result is clear diminution of life quality inhibiting a closer communion with the Lord.

Another fundamental spiritual intelligence principle is that workplace problems are learning opportunities based upon scriptural teachings that the Lord transforms evil into good (Genesis 50:20) and that all things work out for the best for those who love God and are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28). Hence, our trials serve a greater good by inculcating elevated levels of faith, self-knowledge, and problem solving ability, thereby equipping us for greater Kingdom service as we enrich subordinates, coworkers and clients/customers as we share the comfort

and knowledge we are given, a knowledge dissemination approach (2 Corinthians 1:4). The ultimate product of servant leader spiritual intelligence is the generation of the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy and peace (Galatians 5:22). Another benefit relates to the Great Commission. Demonstrating to a skeptical world the empirically verifiable benefits of religious belief will serve as an additional evidence to reach the "honest doubter," the person who is searching for truth. However, we must be careful of any spirituality that damages our witness. There is much "buzz" about spirituality in the workplace. Researchers Hanna Ashar and Maureen Lane-Maher maintain that individuals are striving to experience higher levels of meaning and transcendence in the workplace in the desire to receive "more" out of life. In fact, today's trends show that individuals are moving towards a more intentional level of spirituality. Spirituality denotes the need for people to cultivate and connect the sacred aspect of their humanness. Sometimes, Christians display a spirituality that often appears false in the workplace. For example, the sex scandals that rocked the Catholic Church demonstrate how Christians respond to workplace issues can damage their witness. Researchers

Mario Fernando and Michael Gross further argued that the widespread silence and denial by the Catholic Church was due to its organizational structure and culture. In this case, workplace spirituality becomes a testament of hypocrisy. Other researchers maintain postmodernism is the major factor in the upsurge in the interest of workplace spirituality, thereby making this concept another social fad. From a leadership theory approach, spiritual formation becomes as important as a leader's outward success. Christian leaders want to display a level of success in the workplace. However, spirituality for devout Christians cannot be a buzzword. Christians understand that spiritual formation is a foundational personal responsibility in the development of being more Christ-like, therefore fostering a better lifestyle and more effective witness. Consequently, research in the area of spiritual intelligence is in its formative stages. Servant leader spiritual intelligence is associated with a range of positive attitudinal (higher levels of job satisfaction, commitment), behavioral (lower rates of absenteeism, turnover, grievances), performance and employee well-being outcomes (physical and mental health). These beneficial consequences are seen on two levels. At the individual level, spiritual intelligence should be associated with improved rates of mental and physical health and lower levels of dysfunctional work stress. At the work group level, it should enhance organizational citizenship (helping others, working diligently to achieve goals) while enhancing empowerment and workplace forgiveness. Several potential factors can enhance or suppress the beneficial outcomes. They include the organization's culture (a Theory X management motivational system versus Theory Y), organizational policies and practices that support or inhibit the "religious-friendly" workplace, and other relevant person

characteristics (Christian denomination, for example).

Irrespective of the employee's formal organizational position, higher levels of SLWSI are compatible with positive workplace outcomes. From a Christian leadership worldview, we are called to practice servant leadership in all life domains and settings. Seven key attributes of servant leaders are altruistic behavior, empowerment, humility, genuine love, customer service orientation, cultivating trust and an inspired vision. Organizations are becoming less hierarchical, and employers that encourage situational leadership behaviors are in a better position to adapt to changing work conditions. When employees and managers accept responsibility and are committed to the greater good, they are more likely to demonstrate leadership behavior as the situation dictates (focusing on the needs of your subordinates, coworkers and clients, empowering employees, providing support, encouragement and recognition, promoting an open-door policy, accessibility and humility, forgiveness, among others).

SLWSI should be associated with higher levels of servant followership/

organizational citizenship behaviors). There are three global citizenship behavioral dimensions, interpersonal helping, sportsmanship (high motivation irrespective of the work conditions), and civic virtue (active participation in the life of the organization). Example behaviors include taking time to help your coworker even if it is inconvenient and exerting extra effort to accomplish the job irrespective of the personal costs. These workplace behaviors are closely related to altruistic religious values such as the primacy of duty, denial of the self and golden rule conduct.

Strong levels of SLWSI may enhance the employee's work focus by reducing the frequency and intensity of distractions. These values are associated with the Protestant Work ethic and include high levels of work effort and a commitment to excellence (work as if you are working for God), hedonistic pleasure avoidance, independence (adhere to core values irrespective of the external conditions), and asceticism. As such, these behaviors should exert a measurable impact on workplace outcomes.

SLWSI is associated with a variety of stress reducing strategies and behaviors applicable to a diversity of life circumstances and settings that reduce the likelihood of burnout on the job. According to a CareerBuilder.com survey, 68% of workers report feeling burned out at the office, (Lorenz, 2004). Therefore, the ability to manage occupational stress is a key attribute to reducing the prevalence of dysfunctional workplace attitudes and behaviors. In addition, more effective stress coping strategies can increase work productivity by

68% of Employees feel burned out

reducing the incidence of mental and physical illness.

A preliminary analysis of 74 government and private sector managers and personnel officials confirmed the influence of SLWSI. Higher levels of SLWSI were associated with lower stress levels including anxiety, the desire to be alone, being easily annoyed and reduced work effectiveness. Those managers scoring higher on SLWSI reported more desirable organizational attitudes including higher satisfaction with peers, job challenge, higher organizational commitment, increased organizational loyalty, greater motivation to improve performance, and a higher overall performance level. Hence, the results suggest that knowledge and practice of servant leadership spiritual intelligence is associated with more effective coping and adaption strategies to the many internal and external sources of strain associated with the modern workplace. This endows managers with a higher level of servant leader spiritual intelligence with greater resiliency and ability to resist the temptations to adopt dysfunctional coping mechanisms and achieve higher levels of performance. This increases resiliency and will enhance managerial job performance and leadership effectiveness.

Adherence to Biblical standards of leadership and the associated character attributes of accountability, forgiveness, humility, faith, teachability, integrity, empowerment, support and patience endow stress resistance and the ability to channel time and energy productively with more laser-like focus and intensity. When we rest in the Lord and are connected to His Vine, there is a greater degree of resiliency, increased resistance to temptation, and more effective decision making. With lower levels of leadership spiritual intelligence, more time and energy must be invested in coping with dysfunctional stress, thereby impeding internally and externally directed positive thoughts and behaviors.

SLWSI Self-Assessment

The SLWSI scale consists of a 42 item additive scale. The scale should be supported by other sources of information such as independent "360-degree" peer, subordinate, client reviews and direct behavioral observations. The reader can

complete the instrument and total the score for each subscale. As with any survey instrument, the results are for informational purpose only and are not a definitive diagnostic assessment. Response bias is likely to be present with surveys of this type given the sensitivity of the questions, the inherent psychological need to maintain a positive self-

image and the associated external image management issues. This possible rating inflation does not reduce the ability of the measurement process to assess relative strengths and weaknesses if the respondent makes an honest attempt to be accurate.

The instrument divides SLWSI into nine dimensions. Accountability (4 items) is assuming the manager's personal responsibility for performance and relationship problems before assigning responsibility to outside forces (remove the log from our eye). Forgiveness (4 items) is the essential spiritual intelligence attribute and consists of 360 degree forgiveness of self, employees and God for mistakes, sins and problems. Forgiveness in the workplace is essential for empowerment, growth and problem solving. Humility (12 items) is a foundational servant leader virtue. Humility includes such elements as promoting transparency of self and employees, recognizing personal limitations and weaknesses, and promoting the needs of the mission and other employees over self. Faith (1 item) is the character attribute of trusting God's providential intervention to bring good from workplace trials. Teachability (6 items) is the openness to all forms of valid performance and character feedback regardless of the source (younger employees, subordinates, etc.). It reflects an ongoing commitment and understanding that sanctification is a lifelong learning and growth process under the

direction of the Holy Spirit. Integrity (6 items) is another important dimension and entails a consistency between word and deed adherence to Biblical standards of belief and conduct, honoring commitments and

self awareness of motives. Empowerment (5 items) is the commitment to making disciples of others. It entails taking joy in the success of employees, making oneself dispensable, and recognizing self limitations. Support (3 items) is the ability to provide employees with genuine emotional, spiritual and physical work environment encouragement through a variety of work situations. Patience (1 item) is the ability to delay gratification and persevere through trials and tribulations. Respondents use a four point scale to indicate how frequently they engaged in the listed behavior from "always," "most of the time," "sometimes" or "rarely never." The instrument provides directions for scoring and interpretation. It is important to remember that we all are works in progress and require improvement in each area, so it is important not to become either discouraged or complacent

regarding the results. The instrument can be the foundation for a spiritual intelligence development plan with short and long-term goals based upon the identified areas of strength and weakness. The instrument should be supplemented by journaling and 360 degree peer reviews from trusted friends and subordinates. A mentor and accountability partner can provide global feedback and track changes over time.

Conclusion

The central focus of workplace spiritual intelligence research is to document the Holy Spirit's influence in the workplace believer at the individual, group, and organizational levels. The benefits from a physical, mental and spiritual dimension are profound, but pale in comparison to the individual and aggregate Great Commission and Great Commandment benefits. Irrespective of the demonstrated research benefits, the main reason to promote workplace spiritual intelligence is that it helps us to obey the Great Commandment by loving our neighbor as ourselves. Our obedience is pleasing to God and produces a pleasant fruit of righteousness that blesses employees, customers and the community at large. To God be the glory!

Dr. Gary E. Roberts is an associate professor of government at Regent University with almost 20 years of experience in higher education in graduate government and business degree programs. He is currently interim dean of the Robertson School of Government. His primary teaching areas are nonprofit administration, human resource management, and public administration. Current research interests center on workplace spiritual intelligence or how Christians integrate faith into the workplace, servant leader human resource policy and practice, the impact of the religious friendly workplace, and organizational policies to promote employee work-life balance. He has authored 44 plus journal articles, one book and many book chapters on various human resource and public management issues. He is currently working on three books in the area of leadership, servant leader human resource management, and workplace spiritual intelligence. Dr. Roberts serves on the board of several nonprofit organizations and is an active member of Vineyard Community Church.

Leadership Development expert Dr. Daryl D. Green lectures and writes on contemporary issues impacting individuals, businesses, and societies across the nation. With more than 20 years of management experience, Dr. Green has submitted over 200 newspapers and published over 100 articles on the subjects of decision-making and leadership, which have been syndicated to thousands of websites.

As a social advocate, Dr. Green co-founded the Greater East Pasco Achievement Program, a nonprofit tutorial service, which assisted over a hundred students in Washington State. He received the DOE Community Service Award and the Pasco Martin Luther King Jr. Humanitarian Award for this effort.

As an inspiring professor and renowned lecturer, Dr. Green teaches management, marketing, strategic planning, and entrepreneurship at Lincoln Memorial University and Knoxville College.

Dr. Green holds a Doctor of Strategic Leadership from Regent University, an M.A. in Organizational Management from Tusclum College, and a B.S, in Engineering from Southern University.

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Notes

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The 42 item combined additive scale manifested a high degree of reliability at .84 (alpha). The Servant Leadership scale exhibited a satisfactory degree of variance with a range from 101 to 163 with a mean total score of 129, a median of 129, and a modal value of 124. A frequency analysis demonstrated a normal distribution within the designated range. The mean item score was 2.15 on a four point scale, indicating that the most common response for frequency assessment for the behavior or the attitude was at the "sometimes" level which is consistent with a lower level of response bias. However, the scores on the items which demonstrated a high degree of social desirability bias did exhibit greater frequency levels. For example, 73% of the respondents indicated that they always take joy in the success of co-workers. In contrast, the scores on the objective practice items such as journaling were much lower. Only 1 respondent (1.4%) indicated they always employ journaling with 70 percent indicating that they never engage in journaling. This high degree of variance indicates that respondents are making a good faith attempt to provide accurate responses.