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Spirit of the law

The trend toward spirituality has come into the light



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Until recently, few lawyers spoke openly about how they consciously weave more integrity, purpose and joy into whatever tasks are required to meet their next deadline. Now, spirit of law is well out of hiding in the legal field. Some examples:

- Attorneys, judges and law students practice various forms of meditation drawn from Christian, Buddhist and modern-day psychological practices alone or in groups;
- Divorce and traditionally adversarial lawyers collaborate to benefit all parties;
- Law school professors promote the inclusion of spiritual values and practices in a drive to humanize legal education;
- Lawyers and judges are shaping restorative justice and many other creative, values-based approaches to law.¹

According to Kim Wright, founder of Renaissance Lawyer Society – which promotes the increase of spiritual and other values to create a legal system that works

for everyone – these and other trends are exploding everywhere. “Things people considered freakish only a few years ago,” she says, “are now mainstream.”

Kim’s original motive for researching visionary legal practices over 15 years ago included her own determination not to become another unhappy lawyer. She soon found enough kindred spirits and creative approaches to fill a Web site (www.renaissancelawyer.com). “In 2001, humanizing legal education was just one section topic at the annual convention of the American Association of Law Schools,” she says. “A recent conference on the topic drew 1,500 people and representatives from 50 law schools. At Harvard, I’ve meditated with over 150 lawyers and judges from all over the world. Restorative justice² is moving into juvenile courts,³ and the last four Rehnquist Awards from the National State Courts Associations went to restorative justice and similar programs.”

This trend towards spirituality and law are part of a much larger movement

that first was reported in journals for management, organizational development and training professionals in 1990s. It has been favorably reported by such mainstream media as Industry Week, Forbes, and Fortune. Many conferences have been held, and there are hundreds of books on the topic.

Steven Keeva’s outstanding book, *Transforming Practices: Finding Joy and Satisfaction in the Legal Life*, was sponsored by the ABA Journal and launched at the 1998 ABA convention. Legal education drains spirit, wrote Keeva, which contributes to the profession’s current high rate of dissatisfaction and substance abuse. He reported how lawyers were transforming their work through practices including prayer, yoga, Buddhist mindfulness, and Christian monastic teachings.

One of Keeva’s chapters focused on how clients like Judi Neal are instigating change by insisting, “We don’t want to nail the other guy to the wall. We want closure with integrity.” Neal found that in



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*Practice Management newsletter; the San Francisco Chronicle and other media. She was invited to write the book *Work with Meaning, Work with Joy: Bringing Your Spirit to Any Job* (Sheed & Ward 2003) while attending a Future Search for the ABA's Practice Management Section. She can be reached at www.workwithmeaningandjoy.com.*

Endnotes

¹ This movement comes by many names: holistic law, transformative law, integral law. For an overview of the movement and its various manifestations (e.g., collaborative law, restorative justice, contemplative law), see <http://www.renaissancelawyer.com/Vectors/TransformationalLaw.htm>.

² Rather than punish wrongdoers, restorative justice brings together the victim, offender, family members and others to create a mutually satisfactory solution to create wholeness for all. The movement, which began actively over thirty years, has been promoted for over thirty years by religious, government and community groups. A related movement is the peace and reconciliation movement, where previously warring sides together build peace. Its best known proponents are Nelson R. Mandela and Frederik Willem de Klerk, prime members of the victim and oppressor groups in South African apartheid, who shared the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize.

³ See, e.g., <http://www.scservice.org/juvdel/juvdelresources.htm>.

⁴ Though this book is currently out of print, it will return soon. Copies can be found at amazon.com and in many libraries.

⁵ Disclosure: The author was the only non-lawyer to serve as the initial planning team of this non-profit organization. She has never earned a penny for this work and welcomes any other sources of information that are relevant to the topic of spirit and law.

order to deal with the rigors of a lawsuit, she had to deepen her spiritual practice. This helped her to work better with her attorneys and do her best on the witness stand. Neal's settlement helped her found the International Association for Spirit and Work, which promotes information and insights on how people in any job can effectively enhance their ability to serve others and have a satisfied life by bringing spirit respectfully to work.

How can you bring spirit to work without causing disruption? Common sense typically works well: don't push any viewpoint. Feel free to talk about spirit and work outside work in special interest groups, but at work, be discreet.

At Ford Motor Company, which invites people of various religions to use conference rooms and other company space on non-work hours, employees are welcome to meet with people of their faith if they join an interfaith group that helps people of other faiths discuss theirs. This leads to increased understanding and respect for different faiths. Further, employees feel more appreciated. As the CBS News Early show on April 19, 2007, reported about Ford and the faith at work movement in general, "Companies that have some recognition of the spiritual side of life say that they tend to have employees who have greater loyalty, lower absenteeism, and higher creativity."

How might spiritual values and practices help you create work-life excellence? Here are some suggestions:

- Remember why you went to law school and whose legal work inspires you. Bring a memento that reminds you of your purpose and allow it to inspire you through the day.
- Read and heed *Transforming Practices: Finding Joy and Satisfaction in the Legal Life* by Steven Keeva.⁴ Read articles by Keeva in the ABA Journal and the

Law Practice Management magazine. Practice what works for you.

- Check out the various vectors on www.renaissancelawyer.com.⁵ Even if you don't immediately find kindred spirits, let the possibilities reported here initiate your own research.
- Begin talking about spirit and law with others you trust. Use your research to find hospitable language that puts you and others at ease. Words like *purpose, meaning, values, vision, integrity*, etc. all work with anyone who is uncomfortable with the "s-word."
- Find your own best practices for reflection that honors your trained logical mind while also bringing in creative, intuitive and other gifts that law school may have trained out of you. A great place to start is by Googling "contemplative law" and finding groups of other lawyers and judges with whom you can practice these methods.
- Look to your own and others' belief systems for guidance. For example, Hindus talk of *work* as one of the yogas or pathways to God. Christians speak of *vocation* as a call to service that best uses your talents. Muslims know how to be *true* to their faith any time, any place.
- Let music, art, dancing or other pleasures be your pathway to the spirit. One of the most compassionate, ethical attorneys I know is a dedicated atheist. Five minutes of country music takes him out of the stress zone and into an open heart and clear mind.

Just do it, simply and authentically. Commit at the beginning of the day to serve best yourself and others. Spend another moment at the end of the day to release your work and prepare for your personal and family life. Throughout your day, work from your most authentic self, so every moment of your day can be filled with less stress, more meaning, joy and effectiveness.

