

# Introduction

**W**HILE WORKING IN AFRICA, an archeologist heard of a site that might contain a tomb never before opened. Gathering native bearers to carry his equipment, he drove them hard to reach the site before anyone else could reach it. One morning he found all the bearers sitting on the ground. He told them to get up and get started, as they were only one day from the site. He ordered them, he bribed them with the offer of higher wages, but they didn't move. Finally he asked them why. They told him they were waiting for their souls to catch up.

## **Just imagine!**

If you knew you were making a difference!

If you were not bored at board meetings!

If you laughed and learned important things at board meetings!

If open debate were encouraged at your board meetings!

And imagine if it all added up to a challenging, stimulating board experience for you, great board governance for your organization, and a great organization for your community?

It's all possible and yes, you can be part of making it happen!

Many corporations now are transforming the way in which they do business by bringing soul and spirit into the workplace and into the boardroom — a way of “catching up.”

## *Governing with Soul*

From U2 to Southwest Airlines, Interface, Starbucks, and The Body Shop, the culture and practices of these successful corporations are rooted in compassion and caring. These companies seek not only to make a profit, but also to benefit the world and weave spirituality into relationships both inside and outside the office. This corporate model has released creativity and productivity and contributed to the success of these companies.

With the realization that a strong surge of spirituality is transforming the way in which the corporate sector is doing business, and having spent many years on many boards of charities, I was curious how this trend is affecting the governance of nonprofits.

We talk of soul food, soul music, the corporate soul, the soul of the computer. What about governing with soul?

Lynne Twist, a global activist, speaker and author, who has fundraised hundreds of millions of dollars, describes how it feels to operate from soul. “When we are in the domain of soul, we act with integrity. We are thoughtful and generous, allowing, courageous, and committed. We recognize the value of love and friendship ... We experience moments of awe in the presence of nature and its unrefined beauty. We are open, vulnerable, and heartfelt. We have the capacity to be moved, and generosity is natural. We are trustworthy and trusting of others, and our self-expression flourishes. We feel at peace within ourselves and confident that we are an integral part of a larger, more universal experience, something greater than ourselves.”<sup>2</sup>

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***Using Lynne Twist's points, would you say your board "operates from soul?"***

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## **The quest for spirit is catching on**

The desire to find meaning and purpose in both our work and our personal lives is driving the spirituality in the workplace movement. As Dr. Jean Houston, internationally renowned scholar, philosopher, author, and one of the founders and leaders of the human potential movement puts it, "We yearn for meaning and deal with trivia."<sup>3</sup>

In *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America*, Ian Mitroff and Elizabeth Denton interviewed 200 corporations, some of which were nonprofit. "In the plainest terms, unless organizations not only acknowledge the soul but also attempt to deal directly with spiritual concerns in the workplace, they will not meet the challenges of the [new] millennium." They went on to say, "We refuse to accept that whole organizations cannot learn ways to foster soul and spirituality in the workplace. We believe not only that they can but that they must."<sup>4</sup>

Patricia Aburdene, author of *Megatrends 2010* states, "The quest for spirituality is the greatest megatrend of our era ... [and] is shapeshifting human activities, priorities, leisure pursuits and spending patterns."<sup>5</sup>

## **Spiritual integrity = Good governance**

Board members of charitable organizations need to pay attention to how well our organizations meet this very human yearning for spirit, whether it's in the conduct of our boards, the treatment of our employees, or the overall work of our organizations. Making this a priority will support not only the sustainability of the organization but also its overall mission, vision, and values.

Why focus on governance? Because the fate of charities, their successes or failures, depends on the board — all directors and trustees. The behaviour, sensitivity, and awareness of the individual board members and the collective consciousness of the board as a living and breathing “organism” will positively affect the rest of the organization. Those associated with the organization will feel not only served but respected by it, and the organization will be able to attract the kinds of people needed to sustain change.

Governing and managing not-for-profits is a challenging job, fraught with extra difficulties in the present economic environment. The number of not-for-profits is growing exponentially while resources to maintain charities dwindle. The competition for this support is ferocious. The need for financial soundness, coupled with accountability and performance measurements, only adds to the pressures on CEO's and boards to force charities into a business/corporate mode to survive. But is this mode applicable or desirable? Is it even effective?

While grappling with these challenges, charities may stray from their true nature and purpose. And while accountability, performance

measurement, and other management tools are important, without a value and management system that reflects the organization's true nature and purpose, the soul of the organization will flee. Staff will be left with the feeling that nobody really cares "at the top," and so will the organization's clients/beneficiaries and funders.

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***How does your organization keep its spirit alive?***

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**False prophets = False profits**

For years charities have been told by the corporate sector to operate like businesses, ignoring the fact that the primary objectives of charities and of businesses are different, as are the challenges each faces.

*I came from the for-profit sector thinking not-for-profit was about granola eating folks who didn't have business savvy. I couldn't have been more wrong. You're required to be even more innovative because you're doing five times the work with fewer resources and greater accountability.*

**NEIL HETHERINGTON, CEO,**  
HABITAT FOR HUMANITY TORONTO

Spurred on by business advice from their funders, not-for-profits have adopted accountability, transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness frameworks while trying to fit the for-profit mould. Recent scandals in

the business sector, however, have dampened this eagerness to mimic corporations' examples.

In *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, Jim Collins says, "Modeling your charity after business is not the way to greatness... We must reject the idea — well-intentioned, but dead wrong — that the primary path to greatness in the social sector is to become 'more like a business.'"<sup>6</sup>

The high number of bankruptcies of for-profit enterprises reinforces this comment. While some business people complain about the lack of discipline in nonprofits, they could equally complain about the lack of "disciplined planning, disciplined people, disciplined governance, disciplined allocation of resources" in the for-profit world. According to Collins, "Most businesses ... fall somewhere between mediocre and good. Few are great. So, then, why would we want to import the practices of mediocrity into the social sectors? ... A culture of discipline is not a principle of business; it is a principle of greatness."<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly, however, there are also corporations that focus on the "triple bottom line" — the financial, social and environmental implications of their decisions. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) doesn't have to be an expensive venture — in fact, it can positively affect a company's financial stability. Moreover, when a company undertakes CSR activities, it may generate support and goodwill among employees and customers, alike. All of these can contribute to profitable and soulful connections for all involved.

## Don't check your spirit at the door!



*Spirit is quite dominant in the sort of work [we do] and how the work of our organization is described in our literature. It's outlined in our strategic plan, in our practices, in our days of reflection, our retreat days ... My experience is that people grow very quickly into enjoying it, and seeing what it has to offer. It's what drives our mission ... seeds and nurtures our passion for social justice ... It calls us to social change. It's an extraordinary organization. Our strong feeling is that we are standing on the shoulders of giants.*

**LIZ WATERS, CEO, AN COSÁN**

In "What Is Our Work?" Margaret Wheatley discusses how we live our lives ignoring the fact that people take their spiritual quests and

their need for love and acknowledgment to work. She also notes that employers pretend employees don't have worries and concerns about families or health, and that, above all, they don't have emotions.<sup>8</sup>

Anyone participating in a board meeting wants to feel involved as a whole person. You do not want to leave your soul at the door. A not-for-profit will be richer for the inclusion of your soul, and your own commitment and satisfaction will be nurtured.

*What's always missing for me in [other] boards is that I need to feel connection and commitment ... non-profits have something that for-profits don't always have, and that's love. And I wish there was more of it, more space given to it, and more purpose allocated to it. A lot of conversations would be very different. If not-for-profits go back to their strategic intent, they'll remember that it was designed to eliminate some lack and propagate more love. This was passionately couched in the founders' desire to express their expertise. If more people were present to this every day, non-profits would be more successful.*

**JATIN DESAI,**  
CEO, CO-FOUNDER, THE DESAI GROUP  
(FORMER CHAIR, THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER  
FOR SPIRIT AT WORK)

I hope this book helps you in your own journey to carve out some space for the soul in our charities' boardrooms.



 **Walk The Talk** 

*Founded in 1915, the Rescue Mission of Trenton has a long history of serving the needy citizens of Trenton, N.J. Today, the Mission provides a safe, clean and warm refuge for the homeless, the hungry, the transient and the addicted. The Mission also provides services and counseling that encourage individuals to reach their greatest potential.*

*Throughout its work, the Rescue Mission of Trenton helps not only the city's less fortunate, but also the environment. To that end, the Mission derives approximately 30% of its annual operating revenue from the salvage and resale of clothing, furniture, and household items donated by the public – items that might otherwise have ended up in landfill.*

*In addition, Mission residents who are physically and mentally capable are required to participate in the organization's work therapy/life skills program. This industrial salvage operation teaches residents on-the-job skills, as they gain training as truck drivers/helpers and store associates, and handle shipping/receiving, online sales, merchandising and inventory control in the Mission's thrift store.*