

BRINGING
your SOUL
TO WORK
An Everyday Practice

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STIRRING OF SOUL IN THE WORKPLACE

An Excerpt From

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An Everyday Practice*

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PREFACE

THIS BOOK began as a small project that turned into its own journey. Berrett-Koehler had asked Alan to prepare a study guide for the soft-cover publication of his first book, *The Stirring of Soul in the Workplace*. At about the same time, Cheryl was rethinking her consulting practice, looking for ways to bring understanding and renewal to those struggling for more meaning in their work. A colleague of Cheryl's turned out to be a friend of Alan's and suggested they meet. Soon, we had agreed to write a study guide together as a first step toward collaboration.

Some months into the project, we realized that we had stumbled onto something much bigger—a guide that would take readers along a personal journey, linking ideas about spirit and soul to the gritty realities of the workplace. What has gotten lost? How do we get work done amidst the demands and tugs on our soul? How do we awaken to our gifts? How do we join with others to make work meaningful? Through stories, reflections, and written applications, the guide would invite readers to take up these questions and apply them to their specific work settings. Knowing that so many are searching for ways to bring soul into their work, our goal became to provide encouragement as well as a pathway for the journey.

To listen to the soul's voice is to be mindful of our own particular path and curious about the patterns that thread our lives together. How do we follow the threads that lead into our own personal story? How can we find the place where the inner world and the outer world meet—find soul, that is, in the points of overlap? As writers, we invite readers to draw on their imagination, their curiosity, their courage, and their belief that “there must be something more.”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A BOOK IS an act of imagination, ideas forming into words on a page. And it is also an invisible community of friends and colleagues who give comfort and support. This book took form out of the many stories, shared experiences, and courageous acts of our clients and friends. We want to thank those of you we have had the privilege to work with, for you have often been our teachers and guides into the inner terrain of work. And we want to particularly express our appreciation for those who read early drafts and offered us guidance and new insights. These include Yvonne Allara, David Bradford, Cathy Chuplis, John Durrett, Sheryl Erickson, Jodi Farrar, Robert Farrar, Susan Harris, Marty Kaplan, Nancy Kezlarian, Mario Leal, Steve Maybury, Susan Pattee, Glenn Tobe, and Peg Umanzio.

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INTRODUCTION

The Collective Cry for Something More

THIS BOOK ADDRESSES what many feel but cannot say out loud, that amidst the frenetic pace and constant urgencies at work, one is often left feeling barren inside. How is it that so much activity can still leave one empty? How can one live more straight from the soul without being made an outcast? And how do we go beyond simply balancing work and personal life to an approach to living that has integrity and beauty? This book suggests a way to engage an inner dialogue about self and work that is grounded in our own experience. We learn not only of an inner wilderness that has pattern and meaning, but also that we are joined with others, and it is through relationship that our souls are shaped and weathered.

Bringing Your Soul to Work: An Everyday Practice links ideas about soul to the realities of the workplace. How do we connect what is true

and natural within ourselves to the demands and sacrifices required of us? How do we face the polarities, tensions, and contradictions in our work and work settings without succumbing to fragmentation or cynicism? How can we join with others to face the challenges that lie ahead? And how can we move from fear to faith? These questions haunt the collective imagination, for they are no longer about individuals alone. We face the new millennium with the twentieth century at our back, with all its contradictions and uncertainties whispering in our ear, "What now?"

Sometimes it is possible to see how contradictions and uncertainties link us to more meaning, not less. And it is sometimes by engaging these gritty realities that we discover the links between our inward, spiritual lives and the world that is outside. Consider these two divergent images. The first is from the cover of *Newsweek* nearly shouting in bold print, "WORK IS HELL." Staring out from the cover is Dilbert, with two vacant white circles for eyes, and a cartoon bubble with the word "Help." Dogbert, the cheerful and ruthless management consultant, lurks in the corner. At the turn of the millennium, the Dilbert cartoons reflect back to us images of work as an exercise in absurdity, pointlessness, and cynicism.

The second image is from a traditional business journal, *Across the Board*. We see the black silhouette of a man walking away from us, carrying a briefcase that is partly a blur. The headline reads, "Soul Searching: Looking for Meaning in the Workplace." The editor's column leaves no doubt about the changes he sees happening in the workplace. Where once employees looked to "the company" for a lifetime career, they now no longer expect job security. Where once employees may have looked for meaning outside work, they now seek it within the workplace. And where once employees looked primarily for promotion and pay increases, now it is about something more elusive and central, the search for soul: that work should resonate with a person's being.

These two images capture a social disquiet and restlessness that has stirred the workplace and beyond. Something does not seem right. Are we to be cogs in the machinery, subject to

moronic bosses and techniques of manipulation? Or are we perched at the precipice of a new awareness, where caring, meaning, and stewardship actually matter? How does one dare yearn for something more, when so many workplaces seem aligned solely with financial survival and profit making? Why is it that the soul now matters? What no longer seems right?

Against these tensions, there is a popular movement gaining momentum, to bring spirituality into the workplace. The inclination for community, the need for recognition, and the longing to glimpse how life is interconnected—these forces continue to pull on us. Yet many of the approaches to spirit at work feel prescriptive, shallow, or generic. Thus despite the many books available, readers are often left to themselves to figure out what to do differently.

Bringing Your Soul to Work: An Everyday Practice encourages readers to examine the particular circumstances of their work lives and to construct meaning from their own experience. Organized around stories, reflective questions, and specific applications, it grounds readers in both imagination and practice. In this way, the book serves as a guide for bringing one's spiritual values to bear on the dilemmas of work life and for creating something new and lasting.

Bringing Your Soul to Work: An Everyday Practice is for those looking to increase their effectiveness at work and bring more feeling, imagination, and heart into their efforts with others. It is for managers who find themselves caught in the midst of turbulence, for leaders and consultants looking for new ways to foster personal and organizational renewal, and for anyone who has done significant personal reflection and is looking for more specific application to work settings. For those who have read *The Stirring of Soul in the Workplace* and other books that touch on matters of spirituality, leadership, relationship, and improving work settings, the book serves as an extension of these ideas into a personal practice. For those unfamiliar but intrigued with the subject of spirituality at work, the book offers a place to begin their exploration. Finally, it is for those wishing to dialogue about movement forward, toward a next generation of workplaces.

As authors, we have tried to be as free of jargon as possible and to present sometimes abstract, even mystical ideas in as straightforward a manner as possible. We join with readers, sharing our own personal experience in an occasional story by Alan or Cheryl.

How the Book Is Organized

Bringing Your Soul to Work: An Everyday Practice bridges the interior world of the individual with the uncertainties and demands of work. Early on, this means gaining increasing comfort with varieties of introspective activities, then using these skills to consider questions of purpose and effectiveness. As we gain comfort with our own inner wildness, the greater our capacity is to navigate the wilderness of work. The journey is meant to be transformative, offering new ways to look inward and outward, and to see more clearly how we are joined with others.

In the first chapter, we explore the mystery of soul and its historical association with the vitality of life and inward complexity, and we introduce a major premise of our book—that there are many selves, many voices within each of us, and that awareness of how they conflict and harmonize can lead to wholeness. This brings us to the book's first section, "Mapping the Territory," highlighting our interior life as a means for effectively navigating the world of work.

In "Mapping the Territory," chapter 2 shows how our capacities to think metaphorically, reflect on our experience, and use our innate imagination can lead to greater understanding in the workplace. Chapter 3 explores how we can move into a more powerful way of being by identifying the many discrete voices within us and drawing on them for specific situations. In chapters 4 through 6, we take the reader on a foray into the darker, less understood aspects of one's own personality and their implications for the work setting. We're seeking to understand what parts of ourselves we hide or reject as well as what treasures are waiting to be uncovered. In considering *shadow* as part of the whole person, we reconsider how we have judged ourselves and

others. Honoring both fear and compassion in this dynamic, we invite the reader to consider alternatives to hiding from their shadow.

If we can appreciate the vastness and richness of our interior world, we are better prepared to deal with the complexity of workplace issues. In this way, the first section serves as a foundation for the second, “The Expedition.”

In “The Expedition,” chapter 7 bridges what matters within to what brings us satisfaction and purpose at work. Purpose allows for renewal, bringing us the energy to shape and reshape what we do. In chapter 8, we explore how to step into a new work role and pay attention to both our own internal signals and those from the organization. Chapter 9 presents practices for being focused and effective in our role. Chapter 10 captures the dynamic energy of group life and how the difficulties and rewards of being in groups forges who we are. In our final chapter, we suggest that these reflections and practices open up our hearts and allow us to shape and endure, with grace, the continuum of experience we encounter in work and life.



Using This Book

Bringing Your Soul to Work: An Everyday Practice is written with pauses for reflection and specific application. Some readers will wish to journal their reflections and work in depth, while others will read the reflections or applications and move on to the next sections. We assume that each person will determine their own best rhythm for working with the material. Both the stories and the questions for reflection have a way of staying in one’s mind and popping up at unusual times. Implicit to our writing is the assumption that the reader will slow down and use the material for reflection. To aid this, we suggest the following:

1. For some of the reflections and applications, it’s important to be in a quiet setting, free of distractions—perhaps somewhere in your home that feels comfortable or where you normally read or meditate, or perhaps in an office with the door closed and the

telephone ringer turned off. For other reflections, an airplane commute might be fine.

2. If a question doesn't seem clear or relevant to you, or if you feel stuck for very long on how to answer it from your own experience, simply move on. You may find its relevance later. Likewise, if an application seems confusing or frustrating, others may flow more easily for you.

3. Keeping a journal will aid your learning. Throughout the book, you will find questions for deeper reflection marked with a magnifying glass——and applications that are best written out marked with a journal page—. When doing the applications especially, writing your responses should help you to anchor into your own experience more concretely, as well as to retain certain concepts. For some people, however, writing is not an effective mode for absorbing material. If you choose not to write your responses, try to take time for adequate reflection.

4. If you find yourself wanting to hurry through the reflections and applications, it might be worthwhile to consider the reasons. Some of the richest insights emerge while patiently sifting through difficult material. Is your wanting to hurry simply because you've done a lot of reflection in your life already? Do you feel impatient or judgmental? Is there something you'd rather avoid? (The answer to this last question is always "yes," by the way.)

5. It's important, when doing the applications, to be open and somewhat playful or imaginative in your approach. Many of the questions are directed at a way of knowing that is different from rational, analytical thinking. Using the emotional and intuitive requires a certain spirit of playfulness and a nonjudgmental attitude.

6. When reading something that especially strikes you but you're not sure why, take time to pause and reflect on what might be going on in your life that is being touched upon.

7. Finally, try to remember that the nature of discovery is an unfolding process, not necessarily called up on demand. Be

gentle with yourself, patient with your answers, alert for insights that might emerge later, and expectant that your understanding will deepen over time and with practice.



1

The Inner Wilderness of Soul

*The journey is difficult, immense, at times impossible,
yet that will not deter some of us from attempting it. . . .
I can at best report only from my own wilderness.
The important thing is that each man possess such
a wilderness and that he consider what marvels are
to be observed there.¹*

—LOREN EISELEY

OUR LIVES ARE MARKED with a series of events, encounters, and turning points that in one way or another stamp our outlook on life and move us in this direction or that. Ultimately, our responses to those events shape us into who we are today. If we can view these circumstances of our lives as aspects of our very own story, our unique pathway through life, then we can make the journey more conscious, and we can open to it. As Loren Eiseley has suggested, the only

vantage point for the journey is “from my own wilderness.” If we imagine our own inner wilderness as a base camp, this book is about the exploration of that personal wilderness and going out into the wilderness of our work lives. It’s about beholding the wonders and dangers, bringing the journey into consciousness. Perhaps we shall also discover something about soul!

If you are unsure of what this word *soul* means and yet find yourself strangely drawn to it—especially with regard to using it in the same sentence as *workplace*—you are not alone. There are about as many meanings for the word *soul* as there are people taking up the question. Rather than that being a deterrent, it actually serves a useful purpose: Without the complications of a technical, rational understanding, the word *soul* can be a metaphor that feeds directly into our longings for meaning and purpose. In this way, it serves as something of a projection screen from which we can each envision our own particular meaning.



Reflection

GETTING STARTED

- WHAT MEANING does soul have for you? How would you describe it?
- WHAT IS currently stirring in your life that draws your attention to a book such as this?

How We Describe Soul

There is a lot of talk these days about soul and spirit, with many different concepts thrown around rather loosely. Teasing out some of the historical meanings behind the words can help us get grounded for the journey ahead. The meaning and context of the words themselves have crossed over into each other in different ways, at different times, and in different cultures. Our interest is not so much in distinguishing the use of one word from another historically as it is to clarify how we are using the word *soul* in this book. Accordingly, the following table highlights distinguishable themes for how the word *soul* has been

Historical Themes of Soul

Theme	Origins	Examples
The underworld, depth, shadowy realities; connection to unconscious facets of ourselves	Early Greek	Homer's <i>Odyssey</i> , the necessity of journey into Hades. Carl Jung wrote, "The dread and resistance which every natural human being experiences, when it comes to delving too deeply into himself is, at bottom, the fear of the journey to Hades." ² Soul as metaphor for our own personal odyssey, the journey into the darkness of our own underworld.
Vitality, source of animation, essence, renewal, transmutation, and metamorphosis	Greek, Hindu, and American Indian stories	Latin root <i>anima</i> (animation) meant <i>breath</i> or <i>soul</i> . Greek word for <i>soul</i> , <i>psyche</i> , also meant <i>butterfly</i> , indicating its gentle nature, ability to take flight, capacity for metamorphosis. Soul as metaphor for what happens if we <i>don't</i> attend to our authentic selves: the deeper parts of our soul no longer animate us; the soul takes flight.
Union of opposites, joining spirit and matter, light and dark aspects of the whole person; the rhythm and driving power in nature	Hebrew, African, Buddhist, and Taoist philosophy	Hebrew words <i>adamah</i> , "dust of the ground"; <i>ruach</i> , "breath of life" and "spirit"; and <i>nephesh</i> , "living soul"; suggestion of living soul created by breathing divinity/spirit into what is fashioned out of the muck of the earth. Hebrew creation story implies the coming together of divinity and humanity, spirit and body. Soul as metaphor for coping with the contradictions and limitations of modern life; holding together the middle between the material and spiritual. Soul as a path to awakening and higher consciousness. Soul as an earthly form of divinity and the rhythm of life.
Spark of the divine, qualities of supreme being, cosmic aspect to consciousness	Gnostic myths, indigenous traditions, Hindu and Christian beliefs	Creation story of light fragments hurtling through the universe and lodging as divine sparks within our souls. Transcendence; mystery of rebirth; reincarnation; patterns of the eternal; knowing beyond the physical. Philosophical source for questions of origin and destiny, the meaning of life. Soul as metaphor for being connected with something larger; a reminder that our lives are not our own.

used in the past, suggesting how, in this book, we might draw upon these meanings.

Notable themes of soul relevant to our work here include the journey into the shadowy nature of our inner world, vitality and renewal, the union of opposites, and elements of transcendence. Though they span several thousand years, these themes remain current. In a time of emphasis upon external impressions, it is appropriate to go inward; in a time of lost authenticity at work, to seek renewal; in a time of linear, absolute thinking, to consider the relationship of opposites; and in a time of constrictions from all of the above, to open to the transcendent.

A popular response to the increasing turbulence at work is to turn to spiritual answers. Though attending to the spiritual has value, it can also have limitations. It may be used to avoid the tough issues at work, or become a new form of rhetoric, or be confused with religious observance, or even pit groups against each other. Sometimes, it seems, a common thread in the popular movement is to take the focus away from actual work—to take time out for poetry, for walks in nature, for opening to the heart's calling regarding "real work," or for praying or meditating with others at work. When the subject is more directly related to work itself, it frequently manifests in the form of achieving one's highest potential, attaining power and wealth, managing stress, and even developing "emotional intelligence." One gets the feeling that to be spiritual at work requires either being away from work entirely (ironic) or doing a significant amount of additional work (equally ironic). The question remains, dangling for us to figure out for ourselves, of how to bridge the painful distance between our spiritual lives and our work lives.

There is a valid place for a spirituality that emphasizes time apart from the ordinary routines of work, including time for rest, reflection, rejuvenation. Certainly the idea of a "Sabbath rest" makes intuitive sense. In the face of today's work demands, a case could be made for spirituality as a complete flight from work and not merely as a Sabbath rest. Such a stance reflects the seeming impossibility of actually bridging the two worlds; we are left instead with having to choose between them. Unfortunately, this

dilemma is all too real for many people today, quite possibly for you personally. Yet it is here, in this dilemma, that we are most vulnerable to a form of spirituality that is a disservice—when focus on the spiritual leads to a flight away from the more difficult realities requiring our attention. How does one embrace the spiritual without simply fleeing from the challenges and difficulties that mark our lives?

Spirit can suggest our highest potential, a place described by the Dalai Lama as a land of high, white peaks. But spirit needs to be joined with the fertile fields and hidden valleys of our own experience. Soul, as a concept distinct from spirit, draws on imagination, passion and reflection to remind us that life is a constant tension among opposite pulls. To approach the soul means to go deeper, on an odyssey of self-discovery that connects us to the world and our duties in life. Soul introduces us to mystery, it leads us to our own darkness, and it reveals new possibilities. In soul, we find the threads that weave together those fundamental questions of life: Where have I been? Where am I going? What truly matters? What do I want?

Soul beckons us straight into the swampy muck where our inner life and our work life intersect. This space is often marked with uncertainty and is sometimes dark, absent of the light clarity brings. Yet soul is the space in which the most fertile materials are found, the space which offers the possibility for renewal and vitality. It is in delving directly into the gritty realities of contradiction and uncertainty at work that one is able to bring spirituality into work life. The swamp is a provocative metaphor. Henry David Thoreau wrote, “When I would recreate myself, I seek the darkest wood, the thickest and most interminable, and to the citizen, most dismal swamp. I enter the swamp as a sacred place—a *sanctum sanctorum*. There is the strength, the marrow of nature.”³

Learning to hold the material and spiritual worlds together in creative tension is an act of courage and a form of love. Embedded in the idea of soul, therefore, is the sacredness of connecting the complexity of our own inner world with the complexity of the outer world. We grapple at the boundary, the overlap between

self and other, the permeable line between what is inside and what is out there in the world. This can be especially difficult in the context of modern work life, with the polarization that has developed between the material and the spiritual, and with the constant shifting of boundaries around our work groups. To approach soul in organizational life is to become mindful of the web of relationships, beginning within and connecting into larger and larger circles of participation.

THE MYSTERY OF OUR MANY SELVES

When we speak of “myself” or “me” or “I,” we usually assume a singular voice. Yet it may be worth considering that there are many voices, many selves, inside each of us. The question “Who am I?” is a surface question that masks a deep and interior territory. Poet and philosopher John O’Donohue wrote: “It is one of the unnoticed achievements of daily life to keep the wild complexity of your real identity so well hidden that most people never suspect the worlds that collide in your heart.”⁴ In literature, Virginia Woolf opened up new literary vistas by introducing to readers the wonder and beauty of characters revealed by their stream of consciousness and capacity for interior dialogue. And in the field of psychology, Carl Jung sought to demonstrate that we achieve wholeness through a personal relationship that develops among the different voices inside ourselves. Indeed, creativity and soul are intimately related to our capacity for this kind of introspection.

When there becomes too great a discrepancy between the life we lead and the worlds that collide in our heart, we can experience life and work as flat and superficial. The pull to conform to a singular self and fit in are powerful forces within the work world. Yet if we silence the varied voices within, can we really wonder why we feel empty? The greater we will ourselves to conform to an outer world, the greater the void grows within.

If we imagine our interior selves as a community of voices, how would they sound? Would we hear an uncomfortable silence, voices fed up and disrespectful of each other or alive with debate and dialogue? The invitation to attend to and learn about our many selves certainly carries a caution—fragmentation, internal civil war, an inability to please everyone. Yet beyond the battles lie the awe and satisfaction in discovering our own interior mystery.

Reflection



CHECKING OUR PULSE

- IS THERE a part of you that wants to take a kind of Sabbath rest from the issues in the workplace? Why?
- IS THERE a part of you that wants to flee entirely from a focus on work and turn your attention toward spiritual development or other matters?
- IS THERE a part of you that is willing to go into the muck, that fertile and creative space that can also be uncomfortable?

The Journey Ahead

This book is about the journey inward and the search for outward, meaningful connection in our work. Inevitably what we find affects us, so that the journey shifts, changes focus, beckons us to new directions. It is not linear. Though surprises can be frightening as well as enlightening, they are often the channels through which we catch glimpses of our deepest wilderness. The challenges of the workplace today provide many opportunities for making the journey real in our lives.

The journey is about ownership—of our inner world and the ways in which our inner world links outward. In those links,

the spiritual and material coexist: Ownership makes possible the coming together of our spiritual lives and our work lives.

In the next chapters of this book, we will be gathering tools for the journey—initiating ourselves into the practice of seeing in new ways and exploring the many aspects of our multiplicity of selves. We do this by learning to approach the soul indirectly, while cultivating the skill of inward awareness. And we do it with an eye toward work—both how we understand ourselves in the context of work challenges and how we might bring more of our inner richness to bear on them.

*There is not as much wilderness
out there as I wish there were.
There is more inside
than you think.⁵*

—DAVID BROWER

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