

## **The Price of Conscience and Spirit in Work**

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"Life and livelihood ought not be separated but to flow from the same source, which is Spirit, for both life and livelihood are about Spirit." (Thomas Aquinas).

So you've been asked to make a commitment to the "corporation". That's easy enough if you believe in the corporation's mission. You're a good person and you can be a team player working and contributing as best you can. And once you believe in something, it is incredibly easy to become immersed in activities and tasks which support this belief. You give of yourself entirely and benefit from the rewards of personal satisfaction and high self-esteem which then continue to sustain your drive. You put in extra hours, take on extra tasks and even put your personal life temporarily on hold for that professional reward.

But one day you have an awakening: in light of economic restructuring, the corporation puts its mission on the back-burner and reminds you that it owes you nothing. It owes you no support, no understanding and certainly no thanks. You also realize that putting your personal life on hold is not temporary but has lasted years. The more you do, the more you are requested to do and there just aren't enough hours in the day. And in the words of the thirteenth century German mystic, Meister Eckhart, you realize that you are "worked" instead of working. Eventually, you may start to forget the mission, who you are, what you are doing and the why of your motivation. The reward ceases to exist. The spirit and soul are no longer there. The empty body becomes a soulless "employee" and your "raison d'etre" within the corporation is elusive. The disillusionment of having contributed to an empty cause or entity is heavy and de-motivating and commitment and morale are at their lowest.

So why not do something? Why not rally for the cause, the belief and principles governing our spirits? Why not fight to regain the values in the face of hard times? Why not fight the injustices and take back our conscience?

Well, the fact remains that, unfortunately, only the privileged can afford a conscience. Those with the reality of bill payments and children to raise unselfishly forfeit their conscience, spirit and self for the much needed paycheck. They continue to work diligently and selflessly for fear of being perceived as not having given enough of themselves to the corporation. The system wields fear of job loss in an uncertain economy as a tool of restraint and coercion. This, in fact, is an oppressive tactic not new to our society. It has existed throughout the history of humanity and will probably continue to exist as long as we give in to it. The sad thing is that this is happening everywhere. It is happening to real people all around us, people whom we love and care for. It can be compared to the battered wife who continues to stay in the oppressive/depressive situation because she has nowhere else to go. This continues to feed into the systemic degradation of self (esteem) which in turn feeds the oppressor's power. The result is a society and workforce which have lost their spirit, values and of course, conscience. It's really that simple.

The solution, however, is never simple and in fact is only carried out by the most heroic and visionary among us and those able to afford a conscience. You can leave the situation, regain your self-esteem and drive, take back your spirit and reinvest it in something rewarding and valuable. Or, you can stay and do the same by challenging the status quo. However, this one is really up to the corporation as you may not be permitted to stay. I suppose that in a sense the easiest thing to do would be to stay, not question, be "worked" and forget personal motivation fed by spirit and values. You'd always have the paycheck.

Frankly, no matter how terrifying the road to "who-knows-where" is and no matter how terrifying joblessness is, I think I'd rather look back on my life and see many causes fought for and lost, than to see no causes or values at all. The reclamation of work which feeds the spirit is the crux. All I have to do is decide whether or not I can actually afford a conscience and a spirit.

*Liliete Correia is a pseudonym. Reprinted from Good Work News (March 1996).*