

I like Bertrand. He is a great guy and a very talented journalist. But working with him can be a gigantic challenge for a producer who wants to excel in his work and still maintain his spiritual values. Bertrand knew how to push me to my limits but an unexpected encounter would change forever my capacity to love the unlovable and make spirituality meaningful at work.

Bertrand and his volcanic character were driving his bosses mad in Montreal when, as a last resort, it was decided to send him out west to work with “the Buddhist producer in Edmonton.” That was me. I wasn’t Buddhist at all, but others saw me as a very Zen person, and the feeling was that if a Buddhist fellow cannot work with such a volatile person, then no one can – and that would be it.

The arrangement may have meant the last chance for Bertrand, but it also was a very stressful situation for me. Bertrand was the first journalist I would work with as a national producer and if I were not successful, it could be viewed as my own professional and spiritual failure. It would be a test of my belief that we have the capacity to use greater forces within us to shape our daily work situations, that we can tap our individual spirituality to embrace even a colleague’s flamboyant nature.

To a certain extent, we are expected to tolerate fellow workers but are not asked to love them. We are expected to respect our colleagues but not to uplift them. There is a line between our professional values and our spiritual or religious values that we are not expected to cross. Yet, many times I have encountered workers with troubled attitudes or employees who have failed to perform their duties only to discover later how some problems at home or other stressful issues were to blame for difficulties at work. I believe all of us have human values and would feel empathy if faced with similar situations. I am no therapist, but as a colleague and

supervisor, I find that being aware of someone's personal situation would be helpful in dealing with people and letting spiritual values come into play would add something in importance. I can feel real love for people I work with, and I know that can impact the quality of their work. Feeling loved makes us feel better. And although it is not easy to convey that love — while also respecting a person's privacy in the workplace — simply expressing sympathy or showing professional courtesy can be limiting.

Which brings me to Bertrand.

The two of us were still at the office one night trying to structure a story. It was nearly midnight, and he was really driving me crazy. We couldn't agree on anything, and it finally came to the point where I stopped the session and told him: "OK, either I really push your head through the wall – and I feel better – or we call it quits and that's it. I will tell your bosses in Montreal that it's a failure. The Buddhist cannot take it anymore!" Bertrand knew I wasn't joking and that he had pushed me beyond my limits. It was very silent when we went back to our desks. We felt that something bad had happened between us, and I kept waiting for something to turn this around. Professionally speaking I had all the arguments to justify my decision. I wanted to end our arrangement, and from a professional point of view, I was right. But from a spiritual point of view, I knew I was wrong. My spiritual values asked more from me, and I needed to find the wisdom to reverse the situation.

That's when it happened. Bertrand and I had our coats on and were ready to turn off the lights when I suddenly walked straight at him and told him to drop his briefcase. He did, bracing himself for a fight. Instead, I wrapped my arms around him in a hug. A long, loving hug. And he cried. We both cried. When the elevator door inexplicably opened – perhaps after the

VOICES & VALUES OF JOURNALISM

THE VALUE OF SPIRITUALITY

by Eric Le Reste

janitor had pushed the buttons – Bertrand and I merely stood there. Then we started laughing at the sight of two guys near midnight in front of an elevator crying in the arms of each other.

After that, we became very good friends. We found ways to confront our differences at work with humor, and we started to trust each other more. The two documentaries we produced together won awards and I found myself being asked how I managed to work with Bertrand. It was hard to tell skeptics that the secret was to “simply love him.” After all, we are not asked to love people at work. But for some people, you may need to embrace who they are before you can work effectively with them. And you may need to embrace who you are and tap your own spiritual sense.

Today, I still find that there are moments in which our spiritual values can intervene constructively at work. I see others in a meeting not simply as company colleagues but as human beings with whom I share this world. There are times I try to bring some joy or hope or peace to fellow workers mired in their work. And there are moments when I feel that my role is not merely to work but to serve.

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