



Earlier this year I had the pleasure of participating in a panel discussion offered during the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) Annual Meeting focusing on spirituality in the workplace.*

This session, "The Truth About Our

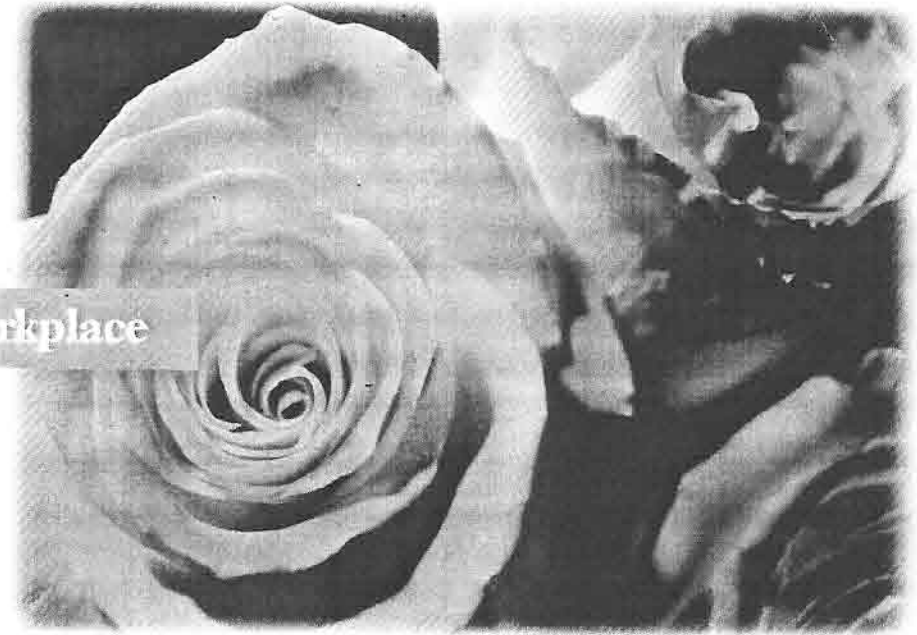
Spirituality in the Workplace

Lives: Spiritual Revelations of Career Women," attracted a large attendance and a great deal of interest. Although the session title targeted women, both the panel and the audience quickly realized that it was equally applicable for men, and in fact, a few brave male souls did attend — and were welcome. The basis for the discussion stemmed from a two-year study that writer and speaker Elizabeth Clist conducted on the spiritual life of career women. She was part of the panel.

In preparing for the session — and in thinking about it since — I have reaffirmed my belief that our professional selves cannot develop to their full potential if we do not give our personal side the opportunity to flourish in the workplace as well.

Those of us in session defined spirituality differently. Some linked it directly to deeply held religious beliefs, while others described it as inner values. For me, spirituality is the search for a sense of inner peace and meaning in the day-to-day routine and the courage to care selflessly about others and live a thankful life. It's also about being open and honest, taking the high road, and focusing on the big picture and meaning in what I do. The human spirit in my mind is the place where hopes, dreams, and aspirations are found.

During the session, I quoted a passage from *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat, a book that has great significance for me. It's an Oprah Winfrey Book



Club selection about life in Haiti. Talking about how a female character was raised, the book reads, "Each finger had a purpose. It was the way she had been taught to prepare her to become a woman. Mothering, boiling, loving, baking, nursing, frying, healing, washing, ironing, and scrubbing. It wasn't her fault. Her 10 fingers had been named for her even before she was born. Sometimes, she even wished she had six fingers on each hand, so she could have two left for herself." I identify with this passage because it is in the two fingers left that, for me, spirituality can be found.

In the session we talked about how organizations view spirituality and whether we as leaders address this dimension of humanity in the workplace. Some thought that the human spirit has long been banished from the workplace, and to a degree, I suppose that is true. We are so goal oriented and rushed for time that this dimension of ourselves is often ignored. But I also believe that there can be no meaning in either work or life when an individual's spirituality is ignored. To be their best, people must be able to express their values, to share their

hopes with colleagues, to tap into their creativity in the workplace. Most of us in this session concluded that a future-focused culture will *have to* make a place for such spiritual expression, which can take many different forms.

The GWSAE strategic plan, "Strategies for Transformation," identifies 11 core competencies that will allow association professionals and business partners to excel. This plan stands at the center of our education and communications efforts. The last of these 11 competencies addresses the need for continuous personal growth and development and emphasizes that we must strive to achieve balance in our lives, feed our intellects, and nurture our souls.

As we develop the curriculum for the new Center for Association Leadership, we will address spirituality in the workplace and help our members address that part of themselves. I believe this is key to releasing the human capacity for creativity and productivity, and key to the future success of associations.

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*Other panelists included Christine Shimasaki, vice president of sales for the San Diego CVB, and Martha Moores of the Florida Academy of Family Physicians.