Understanding How a Spiritual Retreat Enhances the Search for Meaning and Fulfillment in a Large Corporate Workplace

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Abstract

This study explored the concept of a spiritual retreat for frontline employees of a large corporate call centre. During a 1 day retreat, 4 call centre employees were introduced to various meditation and retreat activities. Following the retreat the participants were asked to incorporate the various meditations and activities into their workplace. The participants kept journals throughout the study in an effort to determine what occurred when these practices were transferred from the retreat setting to the workplace.

This study examined how a working spirituality enhances one’s sense of fulfillment, defined by certain critical elements: relationship, awareness, ritual, internal commitment, and choice. Although the retreat was a successful means of exploring these elements, the degree to which each employee could benefit from them was determined by the extent of their internal commitment not only to themselves, but also to their jobs.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Kneel and Kiss the Ground

I had a dream once that I was walking in a beautiful field. I had no worries. I breathed deeply of the air and sauntered, picking flowers whenever one caught my eye. I was happy. I was content. I was in awe of the beauty of the light on the flowers, of the breeze on my face, of the smell of sweet grass and wild flowers. I was in love with the sound of the birds and the sight of clouds racing across the sky.

In my dream, I was in love with the moment.

Then I woke up. Woke up to a Monday morning and the fact that I had to go to work. As I do every morning, I reached for my copy of a book of poetry by Jelaluddin Rumi (Barks & Moyne, 1984) and flipped it open. No matter what page I turn to in a book of Rumi's poetry, I am bound to be seduced by the power of his vision, of his wisdom. That morning, the book opened and there I read,

Today, like every other day, we wake up empty
And frightened. Do not open the door to the study
And begin reading. Take down a musical instrument.
Let the beauty we love be what we do.
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground. (Barks & Moyne, 1984, p. 7)

How many mornings do I wake up feeling empty and tired? Why do I dread getting up on a workday and yet, on weekends or holidays, do I eagerly to get out of bed and begin my day of freedom and liberation? And why, when I feel empty and frightened, do I frantically try to fill my days with more and to stay busy in order to stave
off fear and dissatisfaction?

Why don't I take down my musical instrument of choice? Why don't I let the beauty I love be a part of what I do every day and not just on those days I get off? Work is a reality for most people. Currently, I work to support my lifestyle. Work pays the bills, it keeps a roof over my head, and it puts food on the table. Like so many others I have spoken with, I am trapped in a vicious cycle in which work dominates – the harder I work, the more money I want and the more money I have, the more I spend. The more I spend, the more things I want. And yet, that which provides me with the means to acquire all those things I supposedly want is the very thing that makes me wake up on a workday feeling empty and frightened.

I currently work as a Learning Consultant in the Learning Solutions division of a large Canadian corporation specializing in retail, credit, and automotive services. At the time of this study however, I worked as an Associate Trainer in the Roadside Assistance division, a 24 hour, 7-day-a-week call centre.

The company as a whole employs approximately 1,500 employees and is one of the largest employers in the Niagara region. It is heavily involved in the community through its charitable donations, its relationships with local schools, and its funding for hospitals and festivals. This company offers an excellent profit sharing plan, a stock purchase option, excellent benefits, educational reimbursement, and group retirement savings plans. In comparison to many corporations, it is a wonderful place to work and I am proud to consider myself an employee. However, in spite of all these benefits and the fact that the company actively promotes a strong cultural spirit through employee appreciation days and gifts, what I see in the office every day worries me.
I see exhaustion.

I sense despair and cynicism.

I sense poor health and high absenteeism.

I sense bitterness and gossip. Pettiness and egotism.

I sense fear, and worst still, I see apathy.

I sense people who cannot even remember one way to kneel and kiss the ground, never mind the hundreds of ways and reasons there are to do so. My sense is that most employees do not let the beauty they love be what they do. Why can't we love what we do? What stops us from seeing the beauty and being in every moment? What makes us want to stay in bed and cling to the remains of dreams when, as Rumi (1984) writes, "The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you, Don't go back to sleep" (Barks & Moyne, p. 7)

What I see worries me because it is happening at a company that does try to foster relationships with a strong value statement, employee benefits, and appreciation events. This makes me wonder what happens at other companies. The division I work for is separate and isolated from the rest of the company in both the natures of its business and the building. Our division deals specifically in roadside assistance and the rest of the company is a retail and finance business. Our building is across the street from the main office. I have often asked myself however, if what I've observed and heard is happening elsewhere.

Through conversations with my co-workers and my own observation in the call centre, I've observed some dangerous signs. For example, when numerous people were fired, many employees became fearful for their own positions. These dismissals were communicated to the group with no explanation and no warning. I actually had one
employee say to me that she was afraid to question these procedures for fear that she would be next. Morale has been low with many employees as fear, speculation, and gossip run rampant. In a meeting, a member of the management team actually referred to an "informant" providing him or her with information concerning employees who were considering leaving the company.

In this study, I would like to develop a program to guide people in the many ways there are for us to feel positive and appreciative within our work environment; in other words to "kneel and kiss the ground." As a trainer, I am in a unique position to carry such a program out. In training people to do their jobs, I have worked on a relationship of trust with them. Since I am not in a management position with power over other employees I believe I am in a good position to run this study.

I believe that work can be more than a means to an end. In the words of Thomas Aquinas "work" means "to live well" or "display a good activity". (cited in Fox, 1994, p. 1) By this, he means that working well, living well, and displaying a good activity is to enjoy and feel pride and satisfaction from the work we do. It means living and working with energy and enthusiasm, in environments that are supportive, vibrant, co-operative, and fulfilling!

I believe that the challenge of finding beauty and to feel joy and awe at work may be because we may often lose the ability to "be" in the moment when we are at work. When we are at work – we can become so task-committed – we may simply not "be" or appreciate ourselves consciously. This quality of being is essentially a spiritual quality that I associate with making the choice to simply exist and enjoy the moment. Currently, the term "spiritual" has become popular. In this study, I use the term *spiritual wisdom* to
mean living mindfully by paying attention to all our senses, respecting life by making good choices and listening to the inner, intuitive voice. At work information, obligations, tasks, and responsibilities often overwhelm many of us, myself included. I feel more like a “spoke” in a large machine that produces a final product rather than a “mirror” that reflects the beauty of breathing, of laughing, and of feeling joy. In this machine, I am hurting.

I believe that a way to shift this outlook may be found in the words written by Master Chuang Tzu, a storyteller and one of the founding fathers of Taoism. He wrote, "Be empty, that is all. The Perfect Man uses his mind like a mirror – going after nothing, welcoming nothing, responding but not storing. Therefore he can win over things and not hurt himself" (cited in Nisker, 1998, p. 49). His use of the term "empty" differs from Rumi's. Rumi is referring to empty in the same context of something that is barren, unfulfilled, and devoid. Tzu on the other hand is referring to the state of emptiness that characterizes a deep state of meditation and heightened awareness that has no attachments.

In order to help others, I must begin with myself. If I am to be an authentic educator and leader, then I must be comfortable in myself and know that what I do, I do mindfully and with compassion. If I am to motivate and guide others down a different path, then I myself should begin by leading by example. I find it difficult to remain detached in a world and a life that appears to be focused on the physical and material trappings of life. I wonder if it is possible to find joy and beauty in all kinds of jobs, or at every moment of the workday. But I must begin somewhere. I believe that in order to learn to be in the moment, I need to learn first to be still, to detach myself from the details
of everyday existence, and to listen carefully for the voice of my soul. What wisdom will that voice whisper to me? Artists, poets, scientists—I believe that they all have heard the voices of their souls and I often stand back in awe of their masterpieces wondering how they ever could have accomplished such miracles? I think it was the voice of their souls that spoke to them, that guided their hands, their minds, and their eyes. As the Buddhists say, we are all born with the Buddha spirit within and we are all capable of greatness if we can learn to listen to the voice of our souls (Niwano, 1991).

It is the voice of my soul that will point out the beauty, the joy, and the awe in the work that I do. So should I not quiet down, take a step back, and listen? This will not be easy, but the choice can be made. In his work on surviving the concentration camps, Victor Frankl (1946) argued that suffering, or being happy, is a decision we make. With this study and retreat, I am making the conscious decision to take the steps necessary to find beauty in my work. I am making the decision to take a journey that may bring me closer to myself and to the satisfaction gained from the time I spend working.

Journeys bring power and love

Back into you. If you can't go somewhere,

Move in the passageways of the self.

They are like shafts of light,

Always changing, and you change

When you explore them. (Rumi, in Barks & Moyne, 1984, p. 10)

I have asked myself—what would happen if I lead a group of corporate frontline employees on a spiritual retreat and provided them with the opportunity to, as Rumi says, "move in the passageways of the self"? Would they begin to see beauty in the way the
light falls across their desk? Would they begin to gain peace in the moments of silence at work? What would happen to them and to their ideas about work or the way in which they face the workday? I don't believe it is necessary to go to the desert like Jesus or the mountains like Moses or to sit under a tree like the Buddha in order to gain some perspective and enlightenment. It does, however, help if you learn to step back and relax.

As Stonehouse, a 4th century Chinese poet and hermit explained:

But who can step back doesn't worry
We blossom and fade like flowers
Gather and part like clouds
Worldly thoughts I forgot long ago
Relaxing all day on a peak. (Nisker, 1998, p. 57)

Perhaps, by retreating into silence, simplicity, and solitude, my participants and I will be able to reconnect with our deepest self and to finally understand that everything we want to have or to understand – we already have. Perhaps, through this journey, we will learn that we are all things and capable of doing anything if we so choose.

We take long trips.
We puzzle over the meaning of a painting or a book,
When what we're wanting to see and understand
In this world, we are that. (Rumi, in Barks & Moyne, 1984, p. 10)

**Unfold your own Myth**

In his poem, "Unfold your own Myth", Rumi (in Barks & Moyne, 1995) writes:

But don't be satisfied with stories, how things
Have gone with others. Unfold
Your own myth, without complicated explanations,

So everyone will understand the passage,

*We have opened you.* (p. 41)

Rumi recognized that ultimately, while we can listen and learn from the experiences of others, we must live our own experiences. That is not to say however that the stories we hear are not a part of our existence. To the contrary, as his last line alludes, there is a strong relationship between the lives and stories we live and our relationship to the lives and stories of those around us. For example, my "work" story is intricately interwoven with my father's. His "work" story flows into mine and has influenced the development of my own.

I grew up in an industrial town. My father worked in one factory after another as they shut down. My childhood memories of my father are mostly ones of dirt and dissatisfaction. The dirt was on his work clothes, under his nails, staining the white porcelain tub in each apartment we lived in. My father expressed his dissatisfaction in a long list of the many dreams he would've accomplished "if only." He was bitter with his lot in life, convinced that while he could dream of better things, he wasn't capable of doing them. He doubted his intelligence, his talents, and his capacities. Instead, he focused on the endless drudgery of going to work in the factory day in and day out. For my father, working in the factory was simply a way of supporting his family. It was the life he'd fallen into out of high school and the life he felt he was destined to live forever.

I remember being a little girl and giving my father drawings I'd made to hang up in his "office" at work. They hung in the lunchroom, and from an early age, I had a reoccurring nightmare of my father sitting in that lunchroom, alone, hunched over his blackened
stainless steel lunchbox, mindlessly devouring a sandwich. In my dream, the ceiling was caving in, falling around him but he didn't move. He simply continued eating his lunch. Some pictures of the foundry that he once brought home augmented my images of his workplace as a lonely and dangerous place. Molten steel pouring from large black cauldrons in crashing waves of sparks and fire. In the background, shadowy figures were still and spectral. Reinforcing this were the several life-threatening accidents he'd had over the years. Over time these experiences created an unshakable belief within me that was echoed by my father: work in the factory was a meaningless, downward spiral that crippled the mind and the body. At the age of 49 my father still works in a factory and his body is broken and tired and he knows he hasn't many working years left in him.

It was my father's dissatisfaction and the belief that he couldn't do anything better that drove me to pursue a higher education. My father was constantly pushing me to study and to avoid the factory. When I was growing up, one of my greatest nightmares was to have to work in a plant like my dad. From the early age of 6 when I was asked what I wanted to do when I "grew up" my response regularly ran along the lines of "I'm going to go to University of ______ and study ____." The biggest schools I'd ever heard of and the career of the month always filled the blanks. The one thing my dreams had in common was that they were all directly related to things I loved. Under no uncertain terms would I ever work in a factory and live my father's life. I would instead live my father's dream - to wear a clean suit to a clean workplace every day.

I do not work in a factory. I go to work in a suit if I choose and my workplace is clean in comparison to a factory. And yet...

How come I am not happier? Why is life not easier?
Let us take a look at the modern office where I work. My workplace itself is a large, sterile gray environment with controlled air, the buzz of computers, and the constant flow of people and information. My classroom is affectionately known as the "WAR ROOM." Wall-to-wall coffee-stained carpeting. Large expanses of smoked glass that keep the smog and air outside and complicated ventilation systems that provide "clean" air. Fluorescent lighting. Plastic plants. Water coolers gurgling. Phones buzzing, fax machines humming, computers glowing, and the sound of fingers hitting the keyboard resound like a discordant symphony. Cubicle walls and clocks ticking. The constant hum of voices. A line of broken chairs tilted against the wall like abandoned toys. Overflowing recycling boxes.

While I have changed divisions and titles, the basic functions of my job remained the same. The only difference is that instead of the focus being with the Roadside division, I now do learning consulting for various departments. My job involves a certain amount of freedom and responsibility. I create and facilitate corporate training programs for new and existing employees. I am constantly interacting with others face-to-face and I have an incredible amount of technology available to me. I receive an average salary and my company provides me with medical coverage and educational expenses. And yet, at the time of this study, I still dreaded going to work every day. My father believes that I am spoiled. To me there is no beauty here, but to a man like my father my job is heaven. I took him on a tour of our new facilities once and he marveled at how clean everything was and how wonderful it must be to work in such a place.

I am beginning to understand the lesson Rumi taught when he warned that we should not be satisfied with the stories of others, but that we had to unfold our own
myths. While my father's story, like his life, has certainly influenced me, I cannot let it dominate me. I must live my own story. Obviously, a clean working environment and a business suit are not the keys to my inner satisfaction and peace. Discovering what the significant keys are for me, and what doors they unlock are crucial to the unfolding of my own myth and the driving force behind this study. Isolating my problems with my work environment will enable me to gain a new perspective and freedom. It will also help me to build a work story and the work life that I can benefit from.

Albert Camus once wrote, "We turn our backs on nature; we are ashamed of beauty. Our wretched tragedies have a smell of the office clinging to them, and the blood that trickles from them is the colour of printer's ink" (italics are mine, as cited in Nisker, 1998, p. 113). I believe that my workplace has turned its back on the natural world and that my work has turned its back on the rhythms of nature. It appears to me that human beings have become increasingly fragmented and separated from the work they do and that which they produce since the machine replaced the scythe. Where once the sun dictated the hours in a workday, and the seasons dictated the work patterns, the clock and business needs are now in control. I believe that it is the production of goods and services that drive my life and even the economy in general. Why am I frantically trying to fill my life with more work and material things? For myself and many of the people I work with, the purpose of work is no longer to sustain the village, but to pay our bills; we no longer know where the bread comes from, we don't know the farmer that sells us our milk. Unwittingly, I've fallen into the same trap as my father: I work to live when all I ever dreamed of was living to work. My purpose now is to be a part of the economy, to have a higher paying job so I can buy things. My purpose, which I feel I've adopted
from my company, is not about understanding my relationship with my self and my fellow co-workers. The focus is on the customer as a commodity and a profit.

His [man's] insistent purposefulness and his extraordinary preoccupation with abstractions are....overdone....[they have] produced a species too cunning and too practical for its own good, and which for this very reason stands in need of a philosophy which, like nature, has no purpose or consequence other than itself.

(Allan Watts as cited in Nisker, 1998, p. 113)

Imagine a workplace where the work theory aligned itself with nature and had no purpose or consequence other than itself. Is it even possible to imagine this? Could it ever be compatible with a profit-oriented company? In a recent memo, the director of my division urged people to think of themselves as managers of the company, in charge of the profits. But try to imagine a different note – one that urged them to be managers of their lives, of their hearts and feelings. For those incapable of seeing how this would contribute to the bottom line, it would not be a very practical way of doing business. At this point in the progression of civilization, perhaps it is too late to go back to a purely natural work rhythm. For, as Allan Watts also wrote, "what we call nature is free from a certain kind of scheming and self importance" (as cited in Nisker, 1998, p. 113). It has occurred to me that in many cases business, economy, and work are full of scheming and self-importance and far from natural.

But the people who work there don't have to be.

I think it is far past time to protect the planet's resources and nourish our own. Many of us have come far from Aquinas's definition of work as living well. These days, I think that many (although not everybody) measure living well not by joy, fulfillment,
beauty, and satisfaction, but by salaries, homes, TVs, cars, computers, and other status symbols. While a large percentage of North Americans may be living well according to this modern definition, if we were to quiet down and ask our souls if we were truly fulfilled, I wonder what kind of answers we would find.

If I were living and working in balance, I believe that I would not be waking up unfilled and frightened on a workday. I might not sense the exhaustion, apathy, and cynicism I feel so often at work. I might see instead, the beauty we love, even there. In his book *Crazy Wisdom*, Nisker (1998) suggests that the reason for all this is because many people are not in their “right” minds. This imbalance may be a result of the emphasis our culture has placed on the “left” brain and its companions – logic, reason, and rationality. Maybe what is needed is a shift to the right; a shift to intuition, imagination, feelings, and relationships. Enough of a shift is required to strike a balance between the mind and the heart. The industrial age gave way to the information age, perhaps it is time for the information age to give way to the age of wisdom and spirit.

If we are to nourish and embrace a *spiritual wisdom* in the workplace, then I believe we need to get busy being, as well as working and becoming and acquiring. It could be simple if, as Jung pointed out, "simplicity were not the most difficult of all things" (as cited in Nisker, 1998, p. 110). But in my opinion the key to nourishing the soul, of returning the beauty and the natural rhythms to the workplace and to our work, is in finding the balance between doing and being, listening to the voice of the soul and the voice of the economy. Spiritual Master Ram Dass promises that the path of the soul leads to this kind of soul nourishment.

What the spiritual path offers is a way to come back into balance, to develop our
intuition and the wisdom of our hearts, so that the intellect is no longer the master, but instead is the servant of our heart...the part of us that brings us into unity with ourselves and all other beings. (as cited in Nisker, 1998, p. 109)

As I look more closely, I begin to realize that my father's story taught me the importance of finding love and passion in my work life, of never being satisfied with just making a paycheque, and of working from the heart. Regardless of how he felt about his job, his workplace or his boss, my father never compromised his own work ethics and always tried to work as hard as he could. For him, perhaps this was his own form of spiritual wisdom and the way in which he coped. I began to wonder if I could share this work ethic, what I've learned, with my colleagues.

**At Ease in Your Own Life**

There is a problem in my workplace, and I would like to do something to improve it. Despite the empowerment workshops, change, and time management classes there has been, as a recent article in the *Harvard Business Review* lamented, "no transformation in the workforce, and there has been no sweeping metamorphosis"(Argyris, 1998, p. 99). There are whispers in the corridors of management that a paradigm shift is coming. As the literature will show, these whispers are calling out for a stirring of the soul in the workplace, for managing from the heart and for the reinvention of work. But I believe that in order for any working spirituality to survive it has to come from within the employees themselves. They have to learn to listen to the voice of their souls. They need to learn techniques that will help them listen and eventually help them become at ease in their own lives and selves. It cannot be a management theory or initiative forced or imposed on them – it has to come from them.
While it is very important for organizations to be supportive of the process and to do everything they can to create an environment that embraces beauty, nature, and spirit, I believe it is time to put the keys of the shop back into the hands of the workers. Not the keys to the company per se, but the keys to their own inner houses and workshops. Let the organization implement policies that reinforce empowerment, commitment, and continuous learning! But in order for these policies to work, I believe that the employees need to be open to them; they have to shift their perception of themselves and their place within the work world.

I want this shift. And if I want it, then how many others do? I believe many of my co-workers need this shift to occur also. Perhaps they are not expressing their need in actual words, but in their actions or lack thereof. My soul is crying out for fulfillment. I want work to mean more to me than a pay cheque, to be the embodiment of living well, of livelihood. I am crying out for work to have meaning and dignity. I don’t believe that I am alone.

How does this cry of the soul manifest itself? In a 1995 *Newsweek* article entitled "Exhaustion", the Annals of Internal Medicine stated that 24% of people surveyed complained of fatigue that lasted more than 2 weeks (Miller, 2000). That same article went on to say that

Fatigue is now among the top five reasons people call the doctor; people are frayed by the inescapable pressure of technology, frazzled by the lack of time for themselves, their families, their PTAs and church groups. They feel caged in by their jobs even as they put in more overtime. (Hancock et al., 1995, p. 58 as quoted in Miller, 2000, p. 41)
Furthermore, this cry for relief from the pressures and exhaustion shows itself in what Diane Fassel calls the “addiction to work” (Miller, 2000, p. 41). She writes that work addiction is killing people through multiple addictions, self-esteem problems, an inability to relax, and obsessiveness. It is resulting in a “spiritual bankruptcy” (Miller, 2000, p. 41). Matthew Fox (1994) adds to the discussions of work addiction by arguing that work without meaning is deadly. He supports his thinking with the following statistics:

In the United States, stress related diseases such as ulcers, high blood pressure, and heart attacks cost the US economy 200 billion dollars per year in absenteeism, compensation claims, and medical expenses. A recent report by the United Nations International Labor Organization labels job stress as "one of the most serious health issues of the twentieth century." Calling job stress "a global phenomenon," the report found that blue collar and women workers especially suffer from job stress. (Fox, 1994, pp. 14-15)

I have experienced what Fassel and Fox are alluding to. I have worked insane hours for money and recognition - not because I wanted to work but because I was scared not to. I have experienced physical ailments that I believe stemmed from too much dissatisfying work - sleepless nights, chronic fatigue, anxiety and panic attacks, mood swings, and abdominal problems. Job stress is a global phenomenon and it's happening right here - it happened with my father and it is happening with me and my co-workers. What can I do to help?

I believe that the work world where we spend the majority of our time is in a crisis situation. It is my opinion that this crisis may be caused by the lack of spiritual
nourishment in the workplace. As Fox said in an interview with the *Dallas Morning News*, "If your body gets injured at work, you get compensation. But if your soul gets wounded – hey, you're on your own" (as quoted in Raineri, 1996, p. V). I believe our souls are wounded and what I propose is that we get on with the healing. The journey towards the inner soul is a personal journey that cannot be manipulated or institutionalized and thus, can only be undertaken by the people themselves.

**To Become Full, Be Hollow**

In the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tsu (1972) writes:

Yield and overcome;
Bend and be straight;
Empty and be full;
Be really whole,
And all things will come to you. (p. 24)

The purpose of this study is twofold. The first goal is to gain a deeper understanding of how various exercises carried out at an off-site retreat might help people reconnect with their authentic selves at work. The second purpose is to examine how this reconnection may alter the way people feel about their work. I will facilitate the off-site retreat for three call centre employees and myself, providing us with various means and methods for listening to our souls and for exploring the potential benefits to being whole and in the moment in our corporate office space.

My own personal journey has led me to wonder if work in a large corporate office can be transformed into a way of being that is meaningful. How would this transformation occur? Is an increased spiritual awareness an essential part of being
fulfilled at work? Can a retreat into silence, simplicity, and solitude provide the necessary impetus for this transformation? Can a retreat help put people back in touch with themselves? And can that new sense of "oneness" give us energy and enthusiasm with regard to our work? Will the introduction of meditation and other retreat practices improve our work practice?

I believe this study is important because, as the report from the United Nations Labour (Fox, 1994) council pointed out, job stress is a serious health issue that is costing companies billions of dollars a year. It is important to me because I need to improve my practice and the quality of my life. I don't simply want to train people to do a job – I want to impact them in positive ways – to help them connect with their work on new and personal levels. We might not know it yet, but I believe our souls are dying at work. It is imperative that we reconnect work with the soul in order to survive. A recent study by Duke University reported that people who were involved in spiritual activities and lives lead physically healthier lives than those who don’t (Wolch, Tapestry, 2001). I want to encourage people to begin living healthy work lives and to begin to integrate body, mind, and soul in the workplace and bring to work the sense of authenticity and dignity that comes from a job well done. For others and myself this could mean greater satisfaction and improved practice. It could mean improved health, better relationships, and a better sense of self. For employers it could mean increased productivity, higher attendance, and increased loyalty. And for people like my father, it might encourage them to explore their "selves" and perhaps discover, even in the worst work environments, a bit of fulfillment and peace.
As Much As the Pen Knows

Rumi once asked, "Do you think I know what I'm doing?" and his answer was, "As much as the pen knows what it's writing" (Barks & Moyne, 1984, p. 21). In that exchange, Rumi defined an aspect of qualitative research. It involves an emerging design that depends upon the reaction of participants to some phenomenon under study. I do not know everything that is going to happen and perhaps Rumi is suggesting that I should not depend or make assumptions about what I think is going to happen. That being said, the remainder of this document can be summarized briefly.

Chapter 2 contains the Literature Review. The literature investigated for this study falls mainly under four separate themes: Working Wisdom, Soul Wisdom, Retreat Wisdom, and Meditation Wisdom. Working Wisdom reviews the literature dealing with the evolution of the workplace and the recent explorations of soul and spirit in the workplace. The Soul Wisdom literature addresses various discussions on the soul and provides a spiritual and theoretical framework for discussions of soul and spirituality. The section on Retreat Wisdom explores the concept of retreating and its methods, types, and benefits. The final section on Meditation Wisdom provides the theoretical and practical background for various meditation techniques and philosophies.

Chapter 3 provides the methodology. The methodology selected for this study is Action Research. This chapter justifies the selection of this model, reviews the selection of the participants, explains methods for collecting and analyzing data, and gives a description of the retreat schedule and activities, and all relevant procedures. The participants were all volunteers and will participate in a pre-retreat interview, the retreat itself, and a post-retreat interview.
Chapter 4 analyzes the findings of the study. Results are based on the interviews, observations during the retreat, and the journals the participants kept.

Chapter 5 explores the conclusions, recommendations, and final comments that have surfaced as a result of this study.

**Obsession With Words**

When I was doing my undergraduate degree and searching for deeper meanings, an English professor who heard me crying out for something introduced me to Rumi. The first poem I read was called "The Name" and in it, Rumi asked, "Do you know a word that doesn't refer to something?" (Barks & Moyne, 1984, p. 73) It reminded me of the Zen Koan that refers to the sound of one hand clapping. How could there be a word that meant nothing? We are obsessed with words and their meanings. In the same poem he wrote, "If you want to be free of your obsession with words and beautiful lettering, make one stroke down" (p. 73).

**Definition of Terms**

Here are several strokes down that attempt to give meaning to words that are, in many ways, beyond any meaning I can ascribe to them.

**Spirituality/spiritual.** Spirituality is differentiated from religion in that it isn't connected to any form of organized thought, belief, doctrine, or body of literature. Spirituality is found in the poetry, art, and music of every culture. It is found walking in a forest, on the beach, in the village or in the park. It is found by looking in the eyes of a child or animal. To live a spiritual life means to live mindfully, to be in each moment and to revere each moment of life. It is what Thoreau (1854/1960) referred to as "sucking deep from the marrow of life." It is about making good choices. It means
giving of oneself and sharing. It means having a strong belief in the impossible, the wonderful, and magical. It means paying attention to all your senses – even those beyond the five! It means listening to your inner, intuitive voice. It means asking the big and small questions of existence. What Blake (1789) asked in his poem *The Lamb*, "Little Lamb, who made thee? Dost thou know who make thee?" (Williams, 1963, p. 28).

**Soul.** Poetry, art, and the spiritual writings of the mystics with a bit of Gary Zukav thrown in influence my definition of the soul. The soul is that part of us that is immortal, it is a powerful force that lies at the centre of our being. It does not occupy a specific space but is immense (Zukav, 1989). It does not sit in the heart, or in the brain, but surrounds us and infuses us with its presence. It is who we are and it has a voice, a sound, a vibration. The soul is where we come from and where we will return – it is everything.

**Higher source.** Zukav (1989) defines the higher source as the authentic power that moves the energy sources of this earth. Call it what you may – God, Goddess, Allah, Buddha, Yahweh, Mother Earth – it is a power that makes things happen, that feeds, nourishes, and also destroys. It is the energy to which we pray, contemplate, draw strength from, and/or worship. The Higher Source may be something outside of us as the Christians believe, or it may be within us as the Buddhist believes. But, remember, when asked what the Buddha was, the Zen Master Umman answered, "A dried dung-stick" (Nisker, 1998, p. 134). It can be everything, and nothing.

**Spiritual wisdom.** Wisdom is a sense of knowing that sees beyond the here and now and beyond conventions and concepts of conventional truth. Thomas Aquinas differentiated it from science in that wisdom looks at things “from a greater height”
Wisdom has nothing to do with knowledge and intellect or with reason. It is a state of being. It is, as Rumi put it, seeing beyond the veils of how things really are.

When you eventually see through the veils to how things really are, you will keep saying again, 

.....and again,

This is certainly not like we thought it was!

(Nisker, 1998, p. 136)

**Retreat.** My definition of a retreat is based on two primary works by Jennifer Louden and David Cooper. A retreat is a separation from the reality of everyday existence to get in touch with your inner being and restore a sense of balance and harmony within the body, mind, and soul (Louden, 1997). It is a means of slowing down, simplifying things, and gaining a new perspective (Cooper, 1999).

**Meditation.** Meditation is a practice which allows the meditator to clear the mind, study the self and become free of mental and emotional conditioning (Nisker, 1998). In the words of the Tao Te Ching, it means to, "Empty yourself of everything. Let the mind become still. The ten thousand things rise and fall while the Self watches their return" (Tsu, 1972, p. 18).

Perhaps the ten thousand things have something in common with the thousand ways to kneel and kiss the ground.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of my study is to gain a greater understanding of how an off-site retreat may potentially contribute to a better and improved work practice for a group of call centre employees.

This literature review will address the research relating to this study and is divided into four sections, all relating to wisdom. Wisdom is a personal capacity to see, live, and understand life on multiple levels and is acquired through thinking and experience (Aubrey, 1995, p. 13). Aquinas said that wisdom involved “gnome”, the capacity to see through things (Hart, 2001). In the workplace, where emphasis and preference is placed on the amount of knowledge and skill one has, I feel it is important to cultivate wisdom as this ability to see through things and actively pursue life in a manner that develops our soul. I felt that all four of my sections – Work, Soul, Retreat, and Meditation could be summarized as potential means for the attainment of wisdom in that they all involve how we see, how we live, how we understand, think, and experience. A literature review itself is about wisdom. If, as Hart (2001) writes, “wisdom seeks and creates questions” then wisdom will come into play as the concepts and themes of the literature are explored and synthesized (p. 5).

The first section, entitled "Working Wisdom," will examine literature related to the evolution of our concept of work and its relationship to spirituality and wisdom. The second section, "Soul Wisdom," defines soul and spirituality. The third section, "Retreat Wisdom," is dedicated to the exploration of the nature and purpose of retreating. And finally, the practice of meditation is explored in a section entitled "Meditation Wisdom."
Working Wisdom: The Evolution of a Working Spirituality

The organization of the workplace as it is today did not happen overnight. Rather it was the result of a long evolutionary process. From the first moment our cave dwelling ancestors gave a choice piece of meat to their neighbour and received a basket of rocks in return, the concept of trade was born. For many, the concept of trade is really the key to work. Goods and services. Modern western civilization is built on this concept of capitalism and consumerism and it sets the tone for the rest of the world. There are numerous historical references backing this point of view.

The first settlers were hunter and gatherer societies dependent on the land (Painter & Tierney, 1992). Their lives revolved around the cycle of the seasons and thus they lived in balance with the natural world. The first signs of farming were found in Greece and the Balkans (Painter & Tierney, 1992). As soon as medieval peasants were able to produce an agricultural surplus, a sophisticated civilization was born on the foundation of trade (Painter & Tierney, 1992). The farmer supplied the baker with flour to make bread, the grain for the ale, and the produce for the market. The meat from his animals went to the butcher where it was then bought by the blacksmith who shod his horses. The wool from his sheep went to the spinners who wove it into fabric for the tailor and dressmakers. The cooper made the barrels that stored everything from ale to flour to wool and the cobbler shod anyone whose feet needed a slap of leather. And over all this ruled the lord who supplied the seed and land, protected the tenants, and was really answerable to the King or God Himself.

Work, whether it was tilling the fields, making shoes, or serving and protecting, was directly tied to the land, to the cycle of nature, and to personal survival. While
incessant labour and a difficult life characterized this period, there were also elements of spirituality. From the earliest times, clay figures found in Balkan sites suggest connections between an earth mother goddess and the land. The carefully placed stones at Stonehenge also suggest a solar cult (Painter & Tierney, 1992). This strong spiritual element was also expressed in the numerous traditional festivals of Western Europe that combined the agricultural work and the holy days. An example of this was Lammas, the last major feast day that traditionally marked the beginning of the corn harvest and in which every person in the village was pressed into service (Painter & Tierney, 1992).

Strong community ties were yet another characteristic of the medieval peasantry. In a time where, as the economic historian Marc Block explained, behind all social life there was a "background of the primitive, of submission to uncontrollable forces, or unrelieved physical contrasts" community ties were necessary to survival (Painter & Tierney, 1992, p. 293). These strong spiritual, familial, and community relationships are still in evidence today in Amish and Mennonite communities. In these communities and during the agrarian period, work was more than just meeting the desires and wants of the personality. It provided the very foundation of the community’s survival.

Towards the end of the medieval period the guild system developed. This was the first organization of specialists: professionals who learned their trades through apprenticeship and were awarded professional status. However, entry into a guild came either through money or family connections. In the 11th century, workers began revolting against the restrictions of the guild system and began travelling from one site to the next looking for work (Aubrey, 1995). They were self-liberated apprentices and entire cultures and networks developed of masons, cathedral builders, and labourers.
Over the next 500 years, a network of secret labour societies developed with their own systems of belief and doctrines that were often at odds with the policies and preaching of the Church (Aubrey, 1995).

In 1790, Oliver Evens received a patent for his invention, a machine that mechanized the milling process (Briskin, 1998). With the invention of the machine, the nature of work changed. Suddenly, it was not the survival interests of the workers that were addressed, but it was the machine that had to be cared for and improved. A machine that could produce 300 bushels of grain an hour was worth far more than one mere mortal who could never hope to produce that much (Briskin, 1998). With one invention, human beings were no longer the producers of goods, but slaves that served the machine; the mass production of goods rather than subsistence production became the driving force of the next two centuries (Briskin, 1998).

In the minds of many at the time, the machine was simply evidence of the natural progress of humankind. This was debated in both the political and literary arenas. In his work, "Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society," Robert Southey blasted the manufacturing system, arguing that it destroyed bodies and degraded minds (Briskin, 1998). He drew vivid comparisons between the housing typical of the pastoral landscape and the cold, utilitarian housing that was found in the manufacturing cities. However, Southey had his critics. Namely, Thomas Babington Macaulay who, in his review of Southey's work, cited the lowered mortality rate in the manufacturing towns and the lowered poor rate —(a 19th century version of unemployment) as proof that the machine and its accompanying effects were progress of the best kind (Briskin, 1998).

As early as 1845, Friedrich Engels was writing about the "disintegration of
society into individuals" and "social conflict" (Briskin, 1998). He went so far as to say that "this isolation of the individual – this narrow-minded egotism – is everywhere the fundamental principle of modern society" (as quoted in Briskin, 1998, p. 97). Even then, at the beginning of the industrial era, there are indications that we may have begun losing our connection to the land, to our sense of community, and to our relationship with the end product. Perhaps we gave ourselves over to the machine as we are now giving ourselves over to modern technology, and forgot the relationships that had once been one of the fundamental principles of society. Prior to 1850, 6 out of 10 families lived on or were employed in agricultural work in North America; however, by the beginning of the 20th century, fewer than 3 in 10 families lived on or were similarly employed (Briskin, 1998). In the factories the cooper and blacksmith were gradually replaced by machines that could do their jobs several times faster and with less expense. In the cities, one man owned the factory and at the end of the day, the workers went home. As Terrance Powderly, a Master Workman with the Knights of Labour said in 1889, "They no longer carried the keys of the workshop, for the workshop, tools and keys belonged not to them, but to their masters" (Briskin, 1998, p. 91). In 1900, the industrial workforce had grown to six million and two of every three Americans were dependent on wages (Briskin, 1998).

It is my opinion that the industrial workplace was about control. It was not about beauty. It was not about creativity. It was about maintaining the machine and producing the final profit. My father's experience in the factories has been a constant struggle, his fate and future at the mercy of the factory owners. My recent experiences in my corporate workplace have also led me to believe that control is a high priority. It is in the
owners' or the managers' best interest to control the machines and the people in any way they can.

When the owner of the factory controlled the workers, he controlled the production. In the beginning of the industrial revolution, the gates opened at dawn and shut down at dusk and during the workday, the factory was run with military precision (Briskin, 1998). These days, many factories and many corporate offices (mine included) run 24 hours a day, subjecting employees to multiple shifts. Originally, the factories were modeled in the image of the Panopticon. Panopticon is Greek for panoptes, which means all-seeing. In the panopticon-run factory, the worker was watched because what was visible could be controlled (Briskin, 1998). Factories, likened to the panopticon, were "mill[s] for grinding rogues honest and idle men industrious" (Bell, 1961, as quoted in Briskin, 1998, p. 78). While the panopticon originally referred to a prison, it is not difficult for Bell to draw the comparisons. For, in the panopticon workplace, the seasons, the art of the craftsmen, and the relationships of the workers no longer guided the work. Rather, according to Bell (1961), work was dictated by a controlled "metric" beat.

The modern factory is fundamentally a place of order in which stimulus and response, the rhythms of work, derive from a mechanically imposed sense of time and space. No wonder then, that Aldous Huxley can assert: "Today every efficient office, every up-to-date factory is a panoptical prison in which the workers suffer...from the consciousness of being inside a machine." (cited in Briskin, 1998, p. 78)

The consciousness of being inside the machine...such an image worries me.

Recently in my workplace the concept of "floor walking" was introduced. A floorwalker
is a senior employee who literally walks the floor, looking over peoples' shoulders, answering their questions, monitoring the time they spend on the phone. This concept is supposed to be about providing support and was not established as a "watchdog" approach. However, many people feel that it implies a lack of trust. I have heard some say that they feel as if they are being watched and another even said that it felt like she was in a prison.

I have to ask myself, how much of the exhaustion and the problems I see in my workplace are a result of this feeling of being watched and controlled. This feeling of not being alive and conscious in our own skin and souls – but being trapped instead in the machine or the computer. At the office of today, like the factory of yesterday, the employee is oftentimes not an individual but a spoke in the machine – a chip in the computer – a statistic that produces results. In my workplace people are assigned colours and desk numbers and these are referred to if they are having a problem and require some sort of assistance. Again, I have to ask myself what essential piece of who I am is lost in this insane effort to conform? Is it my soul? And is even within my power to influence it?

The rules of management, efficiency, and human resources were born in the factory. Frederick Taylor was the father of efficiency theory and its offspring – standardization. Taylor's work with the Bethlehem Steel company in the 1890s was based on several assumptions he had concerning the nature of work and the worker.

- The poor were ennobled by adversity and had to be managed for their own good
- Some individuals, so delegated because of their class or position in life had to be relegated to repetitive tasks, while others of privilege were able to develop their
skills and talents

- Order was maintained by an enlightened elite dedicated to scientific principles
- Each individual had to sacrifice himself or herself for the social good (Briskin, 1998, p. 123)

These principles and Taylor's work influenced the development of management and organizational theories. Nonetheless, the limitations of Taylor's theories were recognized and the next movement in the workplace focused on "humanizing" the workplace by managing and harnessing emotions. In 1920, an Australian named Elton Mayo arrived in America and introduced the concept of what is regarded today as Human Resource Management. While Taylor believed that the outer organization had to be manipulated and controlled in order to control the workers, Mayo argued that in order to control the workers, the inner organizations of their minds and emotions had to be tended to (Briskin, 1998). In my opinion, this shifted the purpose of management from overseeing and controlling bodies, to the moral mission of caring about workers' needs for significance and belonging.

The work environment of the 1920s precipitated this movement. There was a growing awareness at the time concerning the effects of the monotonous work of the assembly line. Many believed that industrial work was taking its toll on people in the form of sickness, injury and deteriorating morale (Briskin, 1998). What Engels (1845) had spoken of 80 and a 100 years before had come to pass: social conflict and the degradation of body and mind. With his Hawthorn Experiment, Mayo suggested that these issues – the sickness, lowered morale, social conflict – were not only the result of the monotonous work, but also a result of the workers' relationships to each other and
their supervisors (Briskin, 1998). Mayo determined that the single most important factor in determining output was the worker's emotional attitude towards his or her work and work mates (Briskin, 1998).

My first reaction to this experiment was – wonderful! Finally someone recognized that employee's emotions were important. However, upon giving it more thought, it would appear that it simply passed the blame for the lack of maximum production to the workers. Yes, workers have emotions and we need to harness them so we can produce more. It is not the fault of the factory and it is not the fault of the work itself, it is because the workers are not encouraged to work co-operatively with each other and with their supervisors. Additionally, this misplaced blame separated the management of feelings and emotions from the management of production and working conditions (Briskin, 1998).

Then there stepped onto the stage an even more powerful character than the machine; its descendant, the computer chip, and with it human civilization was put onto the information highway traveling to – well – we still do not really know. Whenever I think of the last 50 years and the development of the computer and its impact on the workplace, the poem by William Butler Yeats springs to mind.

Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;

..... The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? (Williams, 1963, p. 426)
Sometimes I wonder if the so-called miracles of the information age are what Yeats referred to as the beast whose hour has come. While technology such as the computer and its offspring, the Internet and e-mail, are supposed to make life easier, in my experience they have added to the workload. I find it almost impossible to keep up with the technology. When Engels claimed that the isolation of the individual was the fundamental principle of modern society, it is in my opinion that he just might have been right and way ahead of his time. And yet, as we enter into the 21st century, terms like global village and international communication would suggest that isolation is not the problem! I can communicate with anyone in record time. Faxes, phones, and the Internet make it easy to reach out and touch someone electronically but not physically. But when do I have the time to do it? Even when I do, am I really reaching out and touching anyone? When and how do I get in touch with myself?

This is where the evolution of work has brought me; a cold work environment where I often feel watched, isolated, and out of control in face of the technology at my fingertips. The search for spiritual wisdom in a workplace like this is akin to the quest for the Holy Grail. There are many paths and many theories. Workers in some institutions are forced into roles and told what to do rather than owning their roles and doing what is natural. In some situations, concepts of awareness, autonomy, empowerment, self-knowledge, self-expression, and creativity have been lost. However, there are signs that the modern office is now entering a new phase. As the scythe gave way to the machine and the machine to the computer, the literature suggests that there are signs that the modern workplace is examining its assumptions about the nature of work and workers with respect to relationships and the allocation of control.
Peter Senge's groundbreaking work, *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) and its corresponding handbook, introduced the concept of the new age learning organization. Senge is concerned with the development of organizational effectiveness and addresses the issue of employees' orientation towards work. Senge (1990) asks if work is sacred, something that people aspire to or is it simply a means to achieve the basic needs of gas, food, and lodging? Senge proposes a fundamental shift in organizational theories of learning that focuses on the whole rather than the parts. Rather than a system of organization and management fixated on events and position, he suggests a focus on getting to the heart of learning, of understanding our relationship to the world, on the creative process, and the ability to adapt to change (Senge, 1990). He bases his model on five disciplines: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared visions, and team learning. The five disciplines address the issue of wholeness in that they attempt to cover all aspects of the learning process. Senge's accompanying fieldbook provides activities and success stories to reinforce the validity of his model.

Senge's work introduced the concept of a learning organization and is built on the organizational theories that preceded it. Many of these theories emphasize the importance of human networks, point to the implications of new technologies, and focus on the evaluation of skills (Aubrey, 1995). However, as Aubrey (1995) points out, none of the previous organizational theories did full justice to the experiential wisdom driving the personal relationships that are so essential to the learning experience – the wisdom at the frontline. And, as Argyris (1998) points out, while empowerment sounds great in theory, managers still stick to the tried and trusted command and control model. His article in the *Harvard Business Review* went far in determining why empowerment as a
leadership and motivation theory has failed and he argues it was because there has been a lack of attention paid to the concept of internal commitment. If managers want employees to take more control over their futures, they have to encourage internal commitment which, he points out, comes "largely from within" (Argyris, 1998, p. 100). Actively developing this inner commitment means involving employees in defining and developing work objectives and targets (Argyris, 1998). In his opinion, what doesn't work are employee incentive programs, recognition awards, and higher compensation, because their influence wears thin and encourages external commitment rather than internal commitment.

Argyris (1998) makes some recommendations. He advises management to encourage their employees to actively report inconsistencies, not to undertake contradictory programs, and to understand that empowerment and change programs have limitations. He also warns them of the need to recognize the existence of both internal and external commitments, establish working conditions that increase empowerment, calculate factors such as morale, satisfaction, commitment, and actively help employees to understand the choices they make (Argyris, 1998). However, in trying to create the perfect environment to foster empowerment, he misses some key elements and does not explore what working conditions are needed to increase empowerment.

Aubrey (1995) fills in these gaps by pointing out the need to combine work and learning to promote both personal development and profitable enterprise. The ground needs to be prepared before the seed can be sown. Employees have to be given responsibility to solve problems, they have to be given work processes that vary, they must progress to jobs that are increasingly challenging, they have to work in teams and
learning relationships have to be supported (Aubrey, 1995). He uses the development of the medieval guild and accompaniment systems that focused on these principles to develop his model of working wisdom. He relies heavily on religious traditions, and points out that with the advent of the industrial revolution, work lost all connection to spirituality and became a scientific endeavor (Aubrey, 1995). However, a shift occurred again in the 1980s under the influence of Japanese management styles (Aubrey, 1995). Influenced by Confucianism, Japanese management theory worked from the basis that efficiency was a result of the balance between mind and body (Aubrey, 1995). Healthy minds and healthy bodies work together to produce a higher yield. Summed up in the words of the founder of Matsushita Electric, the workplace needed to learn from the past and tap into the collective wisdom. "At this critical junction in the history of our civilization," Konosuke Matsushita wrote in 1987, "we need to get back our confidence in the essential rightness of human wisdom" (as cited in Aubrey, 1995, p. 19).

The Japanese influence on management styles is addressed in Lance Secretan's (1989) work *The Way of the Tiger*. He uses the metaphor of a zoo and introduces the keys of gentle management: mastery, chemistry, and delivery. His goal was to combine entrepreneurship and beauty. He proposes replacing the pyramid structure of management and the hourglass structure with what he terms the snowman structure. The snowman organization structure is a dispersed service organization with a few managers at the top, a few more middle managers, but the bulk of the organization is the employees—the "implementers"—responsible for services, products, evaluations and appraisals (Secretan, 1989). As in the case of both Aubrey and Senge, the emphasis here is placed on the development of the frontline potential. The Japanese term Kaizen, meaning
"gradual, unending improvement" is key to Secretan's model (Secretan, 1989, p. 12). Practice, when combined with the right equipment, knowledge, and ability results in mastery (Secretan, 1989). His work is decidedly Buddhist in nature, in that it explores the benefits of right practice, mastery, and beginner's mind in relation to the work environment.

While Aubrey (1995) is quick to point out the damaging effects of the scientific revolution in the workplace, Margaret Wheatley (1994) and others discovered that science, like other fields, evolved and a new understanding is transforming the workplace. This transformation is a result of the discovery of quantum physics. Quantum physics presents the picture of a world created and determined by connections, which in turn determine the texture of the whole (Wheatley, 1994). The Newtonian parts mentality on the other hand argues that in order to understand something, it needs to be taken apart (Fox, 1994). This "parts versus the whole" theory places the focus on understanding an object by its parts rather than its relationships (Wheatley, 1994). The theory was exemplified earlier in the chapter with the advent of the machine and the shift of importance from the needs of the employee to the maintenance of the machine. A Newtonian approach to work means that work is a machine and the worker is simply a part of that machine and is treated as such (Fox, 1994). A machine is inanimate and therefore soulless. Newtonian physics argues that all atoms are inert, and when applied to the workplace, this means that work itself is boring – a simple matter of pushing around inert matter (Fox, 1994). Another point Fox (1994) argues is that all forces of the universe are determined and even predetermined. This takes away all surprise, freedom and choice from the workplace by placing people into predetermined roles and tasks.
According to the Newtonian scientific model of work, all knowledge is objective—therefore, distance and separation characterizes the workplace. In keeping with that, mathematical laws imposed on the workplace a rigid, unbending structure (Fox, 1994). This lack of attention to the underlying relationship results in such things as the invention of plastics, without thought to biodegradability, and the innovations in pesticides and pharmaceuticals without consideration for the effects on the agricultural and medical markets (Goodpastor, 1999).

In contrast, the new science of quantum physics provides a holistic paradigm that emphasizes relationships, meaning, community, chaos, and energy. In the new science, relationships—the pattern that connects everything—is the only reality (Wheatley, 1994). This model of organizational theory proposes putting an end to arguing truth and describing tasks and focuses instead on facilitating processes and building relationships (Wheatley, 1994). Instead of being a spoke in the wheel of production, the employee is a mirror that reflects the relationships in the world. To describe this new model, Wheatley uses the metaphor of a web—also used successfully in Sally Helgesen's (1995) study, The Web of Inclusion. Both place the emphasis on the web of relationships that dominate through a level of connectedness that is invisible (Wheatley, 1994). The challenge, for modern organizations, as Wheatley demonstrates, is to step back and look at the entire picture rather than to break it down into parts. The challenge is to work with the movement and flow of events rather than try to control the chaos (Wheatley, 1994). She recommends active participation, self-reference, and the search for meaning (Wheatley, 1994). It is in my experience that spirituality and retreats provide participants with the opportunity to step back, detach themselves from the chaos, and to participate in a search
for self-reference and meaning. This will potentially enable them to perceive new connections between their emotions and their environments and make more positive choices with regard to the challenges facing them in their work.

Quantum physics isn't the only area of science that draws connections with the business world. In his article "Life in the Workplace," John Richardson (2000) adds to this debate and draws parallels between organizational management and complexity science. Complex systems can be traced to biology and in very simplistic terms demonstrate that all essential properties of a living system are part of the whole (Richardson, 2000). He suggests that a biological view of workplace organizations is a more effective model than that of the Newtonian parts model. He proposes that introducing a spirit of connections and relationship to the workplace along with a management system that bases itself on complexity systems would promote mindfulness and build trust (Richardson, 2000).

Wheatley and Richardson give scientific credence to something many organizational consultants and employees appear to be clamoring for: recognition for the importance of nurturing the soul in the workplace by placing the emphasis on the natural flows and rhythms of energy and the awareness of the whole seen and unseen aspects of the world. By nurturing the soul, it means that organizations take a step away from the Newtonian parts mentality that was embraced by downsizing, reengineering, and management by objectives – all methods which sought to understand and lead by breaking things into tasks, parts, and goals at the expense of relationships. The machine model workplace provided the worker with a particular worldview, or "workview." And the worldview we think we live in, is the world we live in (Fox, 1994). Therefore, in such
an environment, we not only think we live in such a state, but we act like it (Fox, 1994). Thus, many of us work within the rigid, boring, predetermined structure, simply going about the job, punching the time clock at the end of the day. Authors such as these support the premise that it is time for the workplace to step away from this mentality and reinvent itself along more soul-nourishing lines.

Works by Matthew Fox (1994), Allan Briskin (1998), Ellen Krupack Raineri (1996), Lewis Richmond (1999), and James Kouzes and Barry Posner (1999) propose a variety of practices and methods for encouraging the heart and nurturing the soul in the workplace. Their models focus mainly on transforming organizations and placing the emphasis on recognizing and addressing the spiritual needs of balance and peace as well as the physical and intellectual needs. Organizations have spent time and money addressing the physical needs in the form of physical environment, ergonomics, pay, and financial rewards. Learning organizations such as those proposed by Senge (1990) and Aubrey (1995) focus on developing the intellectual capacities of employees. However, I believe the time has come to nurture the spiritual aspect of the employees and thus complete an organizational path to management that recognizes the entire individual.

Nurturing spirit in the workplace is not about creating a sense of esprit de corps. It is not about creating mission statements and developing objectives. It is about personal fulfillment, purpose, meaning, passion, and joy. As Thomas Bausch (1999) wrote, "Fulfillment comes through service to a cause...best a purpose with a transcendent character. Each has the right to the dignity that comes from a job with real purpose" (Goodpastor, 1999). While he claims that it is the leader's responsibility to create this purpose, I wonder if the time hasn't come to place this responsibility in the hands of the
worker. As articulated in the article by Oldenburg (1997), spirituality itself is an individual issue and change must come from within the individual. While it is the organization's responsibility to contribute to the community (Goodpastor, 1999), it is the individual's responsibility to explore his or her own spirituality. The role of the organization is to create an environment that encourages this exploration of meaning, fulfillment, joy, and passion. But it is not up to the organization to manipulate or force this exploration on employees in the form of change programs, empowerment workshops, and training. By participating in a retreat, employees will be taking the initiative and responsibility for their own spiritual development.

Goodpastor's paper uses the example of Medtronic to illustrate an organization that focuses on spiritual and social awareness. In keeping with the literature by Wheatley (1994), Fox (1994), Senge (1990), and Aubrey (1995), Goodpastor (1990) also argues for the need of avoiding fixation, rationalization, and social detachment. He presents Medtronic, the world's largest leading medical technology company, as a company that successfully integrates both spiritual and social awareness. The Medtronic mission statement, which has remained relatively unchanged over the last 50 years, encompasses six priorities: contribution to human welfare, focused growth, unsurpassed quality, fair profit, the personal worth of employees, and good citizenship. It puts its mission into practice in several ways, but the two most notable for this study are the fact that Medtronic facilities have meditation rooms where employees can take a moment to clear their minds and study literature from many different religions. Also, twice a year, executives from around the world gather together for a 1-week retreat that focuses on leadership, spiritual reflection, and the meaning of their mission statement. I believe that
their success lies in the fact that they put their mission statement to practice, it is not simply a framed statement on the wall but a living philosophy.

The key in the case of Medtronic would appear, in my belief, to be the fact that the organization institutionalized spiritual and social awareness. However, setting up a meditation room and sending executives off on retreats does not mean that employees will use the meditation room or that the benefits of retreats for executives will filter down. However, the institutionalization of spiritual and social awareness, as successfully demonstrated by Medtronic, may be a positive step in the direction of a more spiritually aware civilization. By exposing their employees to a new worldview its employees work in, Medtronic has encouraged its employees to actively explore their own spirituality.

Kouzes and Posner (1999) add their voice to the discussion of the institutionalization of spirituality in the workplace with their work, Encouraging the Heart. They propose that spirit in the workplace is dependent on the relationship between individuals and their work (Kouzes & Posner, 1999, p. XV). It is the leader's responsibility to actively encourage the pursuit of purpose in one's work. They define leadership as "everyone's business" and not a matter of position – but a matter of attitude and a sense of responsibility for making a difference (Kouzes & Posner, 1999). They base their model on the concepts of hope, recognition, celebration, and goals. They argue that hope spurs achievement (Kouzes & Posner, 1999). When, according to studies, 60% of eligible workers lack the energy to get things done, it is necessary to set the expectations, provide the feedback and encouragement, and truly believe that they can achieve excellence (Kouzes & Posner, 1999). Love and emotions in general are suffocated by the corporate world, therefore, as Kouzes and Posner propose – bring love
back into the workplace by expressing appreciation and encouraging the expression of emotions, feelings, enthusiasm, and vitality (Kouzes & Posner, 1999). They also bring in the elements of story and celebration to the workplace to encourage the spirit. They encourage people in the workplace to share stories of themselves and their successes and failures are celebrated.

Matthew Fox (1994) also explores the concept of ritual and celebration. The concept of ritual has direct spiritual connections and, according to Fox, is the most crucial way of reinventing work (Fox, 1994). Liturgy, which we associate with religious practice, actually means "the work of the people" in Greek. Ritual is thus directly tied to work! Ritual is the means by which people gather and celebrate. It is the means by which people offer praise. It is both communal and individual (Fox, 1994). According to Fox, (1994) authentic ritual places us into contact with our authentic selves and is thus a means of reinventing work. He outlines the principles of healthy ritual, some of which are mentioned here, as they are relevant to the study:

1. Bring the body back
2. Bring play back
3. Make room for silence (Fox, 1994, p.265)

I personally do not find Fox's (1994) examples of ritual practicing to be practical for the workplace. While Cosmic masses and flower tossing may have their place, I think they may be too over-the-top or extravagant for an office environment. However, rituals might also include employee appreciation days and events that celebrate success. Nevertheless, in my recent experience, such events may have an immediate impact but they do not last long. In my workplace, we are going through one of the most difficult
times I've experienced in the 5 years I have worked there. New management, layoffs, terminations, and incredibly busy days have contributed to very low morale. An employee appreciation day was organized and the day itself was successful as the employees appeared to have fun and the enthusiasm levels seemed high. However, management noted in the days and weeks that followed that sustainable change in attitude had not been achieved. I believe this may be due to the fact that the appreciation day appeared to be given to the employees and did not reinforce their own sense of control or purpose in face of the recent changes. It was not perceived as genuine. I believe that meaning and purpose must be developed from within and not controlled or manipulated by management in the form of bribes.

The discussions of soul in the workplace revolve around the creation of meaning with regards to work. As Wheatley (1994) points out and quantum physics demonstrates, we live in a world that is subjective and shaped by our interactions with it. It appears to me that the workplace is an environment flooded with information. With phones, computers, faxes, and the Internet, it sometimes appears as if the stream of information is nonstop. This information overload tends to overshadow the value of the soul. If we are to nourish the soul, we can't ignore it. Nourishing the soul asks that we look through the visible world in order to see what really matters (Briskin, 1998). If we take Aquinas's definition, it means that we live wisely. The question remains, how is this achieved?

Briskin's (1998) work, *The Stirring of the Soul in the Workplace* discusses the bridge between these two worlds – the outer world that pays the bills and the inner world that nourishes the soul. He firmly believes that the solution does not lie in any particular program, technique, or mystical belief system – but lies in a person's ability to listen to
the voice of the soul and to pay more attention to what is happening inside and around us (Briskin, 1998). Listening to the soul requires seeing with the soul and this is done through stillness and attentiveness (Briskin, 1998). It also requires time and place and it must somehow be rewarded — even with only intrinsic rewards. And if we are to connect work with our souls, it is imperative that we learn to listen to our souls and also learn to cope with the information and technology so that it does not overwhelm or consume us.

Fox (1994) claims that work comes from the inside out and is the expression of our inner being and as such, it is creative. What is creative in the words of Eckhart, is that which "flows out but remains within" (cited in Fox, 1994, p. 68). In other words, we are able to connect with that within us that inspires and makes us who we are, and in turn we can express that outwardly through our actions and works. In order to do this, we must learn to reconcile that inner flow of creativity and spirit with the reality of an outer world of information and technology.

Learning to listen to that inner voice is a theme that runs strongly through most of the literature related to wisdom in the workplace. The means of learning to listen to this voice varies from silence, simplicity, and solitude, to thinking and affirmations. In Ellen Krupack Raineri's (1996) allegory, *Wisdom in the Workplace*, Wisdom explains to Wonder (the two characters) what thoughts are, based on an explanation from the philosopher William James. "We are what we are and what we are because of our habitual thinking" (Raineri, 1996, p. 63). Thus, we can choose to nourish our thoughts by thinking positively, or we can starve them by thinking negatively. By creating affirmations and positive thoughts we are creating a link to the divine "I am" part of ourselves (Raineri, 1996). This relationship to the "I am" part of ourselves is what helps
us create meaning. In a recent course, I learned that by dialoguing with this part of myself through story, affirmations, reflection, and visualization, I was able to begin listening to the voice of my soul. That voice helped me to see who I really was, what I was, and how I became this person. Listening to that voice and beginning such a dialogue are the first steps to caring for the soul (Briskin, 1998). However, listening to our inner voice is also one of the most difficult steps. It is difficult to find the silence to listen. In my workplace, there is no silence. There are customers and phones and music and constant interruption. In fact, finding a quiet spot and moment of silence may even be viewed as idleness and counterproductive. That is why it is so important for us to have the ability to find moments of peace and quiet and utilize them wisely.

Briskin (1998) also explores the concept of roles, or as Fox (1994) refers to them, "vocational callings." In management theory, I view a role to be a reengineering catchphrase reminiscent of the Newtonian parts mentality. Each person has a particular role and is tasked accordingly. However, the definition of role depends on its context. Briskin successfully redefines a role as a "psychological stance" and a "mental construct." (Briskin, 1998, pp. 196-197). Finding and taking a role is separate from what we do; it is the thinking that influences what we do. We may have a job to do, however, how we choose to do that job in any given context depends on the role we choose to play and how we view that role. In this instance then, taking a role is giving voice to the soul (Briskin, 1998). Our role is not concrete but fluid. It is not a job description, but how we choose to act in any given situation (Briskin, 1998). The reason he places such importance on role making is because it is driven by purpose and meaning and requires inner reflection and listening to the inner voice (Briskin, 1998).
In addition to listening to the voice of the soul and taking up its role, Briskin (1998) demonstrates that the final important step to stirring the soul in the workplace is viewing the whole. Like Wheatley (1994) and Helgesen (1995), Briskin (1998) places emphasis on the need to recognize that organizational systems are a part of a whole that is made up of roles, tasks, accountabilities, feelings, emotions, information, and intuition all contained within boundaries.

From the amount of literature currently on the bookshelves related to nourishing the soul in the workplace, it would appear that the trends in organizational leadership are leaning towards recognizing the whole person: body, mind, and soul. The literature varies from methods for managers and organizations to lead and encourage the heart and soul in the workplace, to works that simply present the necessity of addressing this need. Works by Fox (1994) and Briskin (1998) outline the need for the average, normal person to bring soul into the workplace. They cite statistics of stress and work-related fatigue illnesses. They point to the dehumanizing workplace, the downside of the machine factory model, and the effects of such corporate management trends as empowerment and reengineering. Most of the works I've already mentioned are geared toward transforming organizations and not the average individual. An exception to this is Lewis Richmond's (1999) book, Work as a Spiritual Practice. He specifies that success lies in helping transform individuals, not organizations. He recognizes that organizations are made up of individuals and if people can be encouraged to change, then ultimately they will change the organization. He bases his model on Buddhist principles, suggesting that Buddhism provides some answers to how to live and organize our spiritual, social, and economic lives (Richmond, 1999). His model is based on the premise that if we can
distinguish between needs and desires, and build our lives not on our worldly desires but on our spiritual aspirations, we can transform the world (Richmond, 1999). In other words, if we can change or overcome the consumer mentality individually, eventually we can change the way we view work as the means of production. Work then becomes an end in itself rather than a means.

He believes that to attain this transformation, we must focus on spiritual practice and turn work into a spiritual practice. By spiritual practice he means to do activities that enable us to confront the spiritual questions of "Who am I? Why am I here? What is my purpose?" (Richmond, 1999, p. 14). As he demonstrates, our spiritual world underlies our entire existence – our family and work worlds – and determines who we are (Richmond, 1999). Doing a good job is more than satisfying the needs and expectations of work, but has to meet the needs of the inner life as well. Work should be personally fulfilling. While he recognizes that the work world, which embodies greed, competition, efficiency, technology, and profit, might seem a far cry from the environment needed for spiritual development, the work world is made up of people who share the same fundamental needs for meaning and purpose (Richmond, 1999). Through activities inspired by Buddhist practices such as meditation and koans (teaching riddles), Richmond provides ways of transforming the way we perceive work and our relationship to it. His activities are largely influenced by Buddhist concepts of interdependence, forgiveness, and compassion.

Richmond's work differs from the others reviewed in that he provides very clear recommendations for individuals. The other works laid the foundations for exploring solutions such as the need for ritual, silence, and simplicity, and the need to recognize
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and give voice to the inner being. Richmond's book demonstrates that there are solutions to be found, beyond corporate programs and trends, but in providing people with different activities and practices to explore themselves and their relationships to work. A retreat can provide employees with such a place and a means.

Many people do not take the time to be, nor is it encouraged or valued. They do not take the time to be mindful and in the moment. They work long hours and on their days off frantically try to get everything done that they were not able to do during their workweek. There may be a solution within the literature, like a diamond in a lump of coal. The solution may be found in something as obvious as silence, solitude, and simplicity. It is then, when we quiet down, that we can listen to the inner voice, to our soul. It will perhaps tell us what needs to be done so that there can be found moments of being in every day.

To summarize, the literature on work suggests that the nature of work has evolved from the importance of people toward the importance of the final product. According to the literature, we are moving forward towards a working wisdom that embraces the whole person, emphasizing several key concepts that need attention. A working spirituality must address the basis of all life—relationships. Nothing grows alone and seeds need nourishment like people need support and guidance. A new working wisdom will differentiate itself from the old in that it will abandon the concepts of Newtonian physics and recognize individuals for their connection and contributions to the whole rather than their individual parts. After reviewing the literature, I am of the opinion that people need to connect with each other, with themselves, and with their work in order to rediscover the meaning, joy, and pride in their work. Work should be an expression of who we are
and not just a job. In order to achieve this, the commitment must come from within. We have to create our own meaning. Work that is controlled, dictated, and policed is not work that creates meaning or fulfillment. It is not work that nourishes the soul. And work should nourish the soul. Work should provide opportunity for spiritual growth. If work provided the opportunity to listen to the inner voice, then connections would be made on numerous levels and the relationships within the workplace would be strengthened.

The literature in this review addresses work as a generic concept and does not specifically address the needs or experiences of employees and workers in specified environments. There is a need for literature to address work in terms of more specified settings, for example, the perceptions of work and work environments for call centres versus hospitals or schools.

**Soul Wisdom: Giving Life its Purpose**

Soul wisdom is derived from living and learning from experiences of the soul. Joy Freeman (2000c), in her article, “Modern Life or the Life of the Soul: Can they Co-exist?” defines living the life of the soul as a life that expresses who you truly are and sharing your gifts with the world at large. However, there are those who do not know who they are or what path to take, and they don't know what their gifts are. She proposes that taking the path of the soul begins with learning ways to reconnect with the essence of our authentic selves.

Soul wisdom begins with the question – who am I? It is the cry for meaning and a purposeful life. As Viktor Frankl (1946) eloquently explored in his work, *Man's Search for Meaning*, the search for meaning is integral to the human condition and is the
foundation of our survival. Nietzsche wrote, "He who has a why to live, can bear with almost any how" (in Frankl, 1946, p. 12). While the conditions in the modern workplace are certainly not comparable to the WWII circumstances Frankl suffered, the search for purpose itself is universal. Keeping one’s sense of purpose alive even in such atrocious conditions offered spiritual freedom and independence of mind (Frankl, 1946, p. 86). As he pointed out, when there was little physical freedom, no choice, and no control over the immediate physical reality, it was the spiritual freedom which could not be taken away that provided meaning and purpose to life (Frankl, 1946, p. 87). His success in finding purpose and meaning in an environment completely lacking in human decency, physical freedom, and control is attributed to a spiritual freedom that he enjoyed. This might suggest that a spiritual freedom could help contribute to a greater sense of purpose and meaning in other environments where people lack control and freedom.

When he wrote his work, 70% of students at Johns Hopkins University said that their primary goal in life was finding a meaningful purpose (Frankl, 1946, p. 122). The rise of popularity in new age literature and practices suggests that in this decade, people may still be searching for purpose and meaning in their lives. The discovery of life’s meaning can occur in three ways: by creating work or doing a deed, experiencing something new and different, or encountering someone, and developing positive attitudes toward unavoidable suffering (Frankl, 1946). In other words, meaning is discovered through living. Frankl was a firm believer in the conscious choice of meaning and existence. "Man does not simply exist, but always decides what his existence will be, what he will become in the next moment" (Frankl, 1946, p. 154). The key is making these choices deliberately and consciously and realizing that these choices are under our
control. The answers then, to the bigger questions of who am I and why am I here, are not only within us, but are also whatever we decide them to be. In order to discover the answers to those questions, we must listen to the voice of our soul. I believe that what Frankl referred to as "spiritual freedom" was the ability and the opportunity to listen to our soul.

Before we can learn how to listen to our soul and thus answer the question of whom and why I am, the nature of the soul must be explored. Briskin and Fox provide definitions of soul and spirit, and these are supported by Gary Zukav's work, *The Seat of the Soul* (1989). When life is lived with reverence, it is infused with purpose and meaning (Zukav, 1989). When we do not live life with reverence, it often results in feelings of violence and despair. However, when we align our feelings, actions, and perceptions to our highest self, then we are tapping into authentic power (Zukav, 1989). To live authentically is to live a soul-filled life. An authentic life is one of compassion and connection. According to Zukav, to know the soul is not to know some physical entity inside you. To know your soul is to recognize that it is immortal, that it is a powerful energy that springs from the centre of your being (Zukav, 1989). To align your soul with your personality is to live an empowered life – a life where you have exercised choice and free will (Zukav, 1989).

According to Jack Miller, the soul is a deep and vital force that provides our lives with direction and meaning (Miller, 2000, p. 9). Miller, like Nisler (1998) and Hillman (1996), provides an overview of the soul in different religious traditions. The concept of the soul can be found in all cultures and religious traditions. Although it may have a different name, its concept remains that of an energy and a state of being and living. The
Greeks called the soul “daimon” and the Romantics believed it rested in the heart (Hillman, 1996). The Buddhist and Taoist refer to the soul as their right practice of living “the Path” or “the Way.” “The Tao” involves complete trust and surrender of self to a higher power – whether that be in regards to the flux of energy or to the laws of nature (Nisker, 1998). In other words, living a life of the soul, or living a life of enlightenment, is simply living life as it is meant for you to live it. The key to Zen is seeing into one's own nature (Nisker, 1998). Everyone is born with the possibility of enlightenment, because we are all Buddhas in the making (Niwano, 1991).

Learning to live a life of soul, learning to hear the voice and follow it is to follow the path towards what Zukav calls “authentic power,” what Nisker calls “crazy wisdom” and what Hillman refers to as “the soul's code.” The Eastern Religions call it the “path to enlightenment” and living a life of soul rests on the awareness and choices we make with regard to suffering, power, reverence, and balance.

I believe that suffering is a natural part of life and as such, a part of existence. To find hope and purpose in suffering is to survive and conquer adversity (Frankl, 1946). All suffering happens for a reason and thus, has meaning (Zukav, 1989). The key is in how we choose to approach the suffering: Do we become a martyr or do we endure and embrace our suffering as a step in the evolution and development of our soul? By enduring and overcoming life's difficulties, we can create results that are unexpected and full of joy (Niwano, 1991). When viewed this way, suffering is a phenomenon that we experience in order to become and improve or perfect who we are meant to be. The job we are doing, the life we are living, these are experiences on the road to becoming a better self. And these are experiences we have choice and control over.
I do sense that there is suffering in my workplace. It seems to me, that when people are unhappy, when they feel out of control, when they feel disrespected or devalued, then they are suffering. If the literature is correct, how we approach our suffering could enable us to create new experiences from it and grow into our better selves. The key then would be in discovering ways to improve the choices we make with regard to our unhappiness, our lack of control, or our perception of value.

Power is another integral part of soul wisdom. Not power in the sense of physical power that resides in physical strength, beauty, or wealth. But spiritual power in developing a better sense of knowing who you are and what you stand for with regard to the intentions of your soul (Zukav, 1989). The way to soul power is through the heart. It is by sharing energy in the form of love, trust, humility, beauty, reverence, and forgiveness (Zukav, 1989).

Reverence is the means by which we honor life (Zukav, 1989). When you revere life, you are capable of looking deeply at it, you see the interconnectedness of everything and you demonstrate a protectiveness and dedication to the preservation of life. Becoming a reverent person helps one to become a spiritual person (Zukav, 1989). It means approaching life and acting towards life in a way that connects us to the energy of our soul and allows us to understand life within and beyond the five physical senses (Zukav, 1989). Finally, approaching life with reverence means seeing and honoring the beauty and joy in living. You appreciate life, you focus on the positive, and you are awe-struck when faced with the wonder of life.

Finally, the key to living the life of the soul is balance. Living a balanced life involves becoming emotionally literate – being able to recognize what you are feeling
and how these feelings manifest themselves in your body (Freeman, 2000c). It means accepting, loving, and trusting your Self—all aspects of your Self (Freeman, 2000c). According to Freeman, living a life of soul is akin to living a life of balance—taking the time to slow down, pay attention, and be. Being balanced contributes to healing and integrating the soul with the personality, resulting in wholeness. (Zukav, 1989) Striving for balance means taking time out without feeling guilty. In the Jewish tradition, there is a liturgical path to healing sometimes referred to as the “moadim” (Zukav, 1989). The word moadim refers to a holy time and a holy place. When in this place, we are removed from our ordinary time and practice spiritual activities and as we travel through these places, we attain balance and thus healing (Zukav, 1989).

The literature on Soul Wisdom provides clarification of what a soul is and how to approach living a soul-filled life. The keys to living a life of the soul are meaning, reverence, authenticity, power, and balance. In order to achieve these elements and foster them throughout all aspect of our lives, we must learn to listen to our inner voice. It is that inner voice that will provide us with meaning, allow us to revere our life and make choices that reflect such reverence. It is our inner voice that will bring us closer to knowledge of our authentic selves and it is in that knowledge that we will find our power. Paying such close attention to our inner voice and striving for a soul-filled life will result in balance. A life spent nourishing and celebrating the soul is a life in which an awareness of balance and harmony are heightened.

For me, this literature clearly states that the integration of soul and spirit into the workplace is necessary, and to do this involves learning to listen to the soul’s voice. In order to hear the voice of the soul, it is necessary to quiet down and be still in community
with others. The workplace should honour this practice and actively encourage it.

Briskin (1998) warns that caring for our soul can not happen in isolation but by entering a dialogue with something outside ourselves. However, the practice of the retreat demonstrates that silence, solitude, and simplicity provide a positive environment for quieting down, listening, and entering a dialogue with ourselves and with a Higher Source. Furthermore, as Kevin Macher (2000) points out in his article, "The Soul's Hunger," businesses need look for no better example than nature herself. The natural world presents a world in perfect rhythm with doing and not doing. As he suggests, perhaps taking the time to achieve that balance between stillness and activity holds the key to achieving quality and effectiveness in all that we do (Macher, 2000).

The literature on Soul Wisdom provided me with the basis for my retreat. Obviously, if my retreat were going to have any impact, it needed to address the key elements of meaning, reverence, authenticity, power, and balance. The retreat had to primarily be geared towards creating a time and space where the participants could find some silence and begin an inner dialogue. Through this dialogue, we needed to be actively encouraged to explore and reflect on the choices we have made regarding our lives, our work, and our suffering, and how these choices have contributed to our sense of meaning and the reverence with which we approach our lives and our work. I believe that it is very important for the retreat to address the needs of sharing energy. Our workplace is a community and if we are going to learn to cope within that community we need to be able to tap into the power that lies in sharing energy in the form of love, forgiveness, and reverence. Finally, the retreat must address the need for balance. This means that we must be able to recognize our emotional needs, we must be able to love
and trust those needs and again, reconcile them with the life we have chosen.

Retreat Wisdom

By definition, a retreat implies removing oneself from everyday existence and imposing rituals revolving around silence, simplicity, and solitude. The literature basically addresses either (1) the purpose of retreats or (2) how to structure a retreat. Both foci will be addressed in this section.

Retreats fall under two categories – secular and spiritual. The secular retreat, which until now has characterized the business world, will not be discussed here because they have more often than not focused on business or executive training. In the corporate world, retreats are reserved for executives and used to create company vision statements, plan strategies, and foster team-building. There was no literature found related to the use of retreats for frontline employees and one can only suppose that the logistics of sending hundreds of employees on retreat as well as designing relevant retreats for them presents challenges. Furthermore, corporate executive retreats have traditionally been expensive, due to either location costs or consultant fees. One quick search on the Internet provides literally thousands of business retreat possibilities, most located at hotels or resorts nestled in natural settings and promising physical and psychological isolation from the work world.

Because of their more self-exploratory nature, spiritual retreats are more relevant to this study. The concept of a retreat is found in most spiritual and religious traditions. In contrast to corporate secular retreats, spiritual retreats traditionally cost very little. Most are conducted by the religious leader and located at the place of worship itself. The purpose and design of them are simple – a spiritual retreat is designed to provide the
retreatant with the silence and solitude necessary to listen to the inner voice and dialogue with a Divine Source. Such a retreat provides an opportunity to reconnect with the self and move forward to a higher awareness (Louden, 1997).

Both the works by Jennifer Louden (1997) and David A. Cooper (1995, 1999) provide excellent models and guidelines for spiritual retreats. However, Cooper's work goes further in linking the concept of retreat to major religious traditions. This literature answers two basic questions: Why do we retreat? How do we retreat?

According to Louden (1997), we retreat because we need to reconnect with our inner purpose. She argues that we are trapped in a cycle of doing, paying little to no attention to reflecting on the whys and wherefores of the doing. Because of this focus on doing and a lack of knowledge about the meaning and reason behind the doing, Louden concludes that our outer and inner worlds lack connection. She feels that retreats create “liminal” time – the betwixt and between world where ordinary life and its relationship to time no longer exist. In this time outside of time, we escape the needs and demands of others and tune into our authentic selves.

Cooper (1995) goes further and explains that the specific purpose of a spiritual retreat is to experience new and different things in order that our perspectives of life may change. He emphasizes that there is a difference between the practice of spiritual retreat and simply relaxing. For him, we purify ourselves by isolating ourselves from our everyday reality. Concentration leads to clarification of our minds and an increase in focus. Effort is the outward expression of our will and mastery is the discipline we need in order to stay the course and succeed (Cooper, 1995). In other words, retreating is hard work. It is not about simply getting away and sitting around reading! A spiritual retreat
is about the conscious effort to connect and dialogue with ourselves and with a Divine Source. Cooper's more traditional take on the spiritual retreat is based on the history and practice of retreating across different religious traditions. As he demonstrates, silence, simplicity, and solitude characterize a spiritual retreat, no matter what the religious background. Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism all have traditions involving silence, simplicity, and solitude. These traditions manifest themselves in many ways — either in the form of meditation, contemplation, prayer, ablutions, devotions, and mantras.

Both Cooper and Louden are clear about intention. The retreat must have clear intentions — intentions that are clear to the retreat leader and the participants. While Louden differentiates between intention and goals, they both maintain that there must be a reason for the retreat. Why is the retreat being done and what is the ultimate purpose of it?

While Cooper warns against a group retreat because he feels that the group intentions and dynamics get in the way of individual needs, Louden demonstrates that while it does have the disadvantages mentioned by Cooper, there are also advantages in sharing and learning with a group. However, she does caution that there must be a level of comfort within the group that comes from choosing the group carefully. Like Cooper, Louden writes that it is not necessary to have a strict schedule but a list of ideas and activities, and to avoid being fixated on the schedule or losing sight of the activities themselves.

Both Louden and Cooper obviously are strong advocates of retreating but for different reasons. Cooper emphasizes the spiritual rewards and Louden stresses the
personal transformation rewards. Retreats provide us with time outs, they introduce us to forms of contemplation, and place us in a position to take the time to do that. They give us a reason and purpose for taking that time out. Louden points out that there are many times during the cycle of our days when we may feel the need to retreat, especially if we are working in a job we dislike or we are under a lot of stress. In these instances, taking a retreat may not be an option. But a 5-minute break can be just as beneficial when practiced with good intention. Sometimes, 5 minutes can be enough to replenish us, which is what a retreat is really for. In her article, “Ten Ways to Achieve Excellence,” Carole Orsborn (2000a) proposes that smart business people need to find a brief getaway at work.

When a person finds himself or herself feeling depressed, dissatisfied, restless, bored, and tired, the answer is not to stay busy – but to stay balanced. And this can be accomplished by taking moments to be with and by ourselves – authentic moments of being (Macher, 2000). I believe that learning how to be and how to grasp those authentic moments at any time we need them is an excellent goal for a retreat. This is a goal that can be difficult for some to achieve in a high-speed world.

Retreats can be powerful tools for self-renewal. They provide us with an opportunity to take time for ourselves, time needed to delve into our thoughts and feelings, and connect with our purpose. The retreat is characterized by four key concepts: purification, concentration, effort, and mastery. Purification addresses the need to separate oneself from the everyday in order to have a more clear and unencumbered view of the goal or intent. Concentration provides the participants with the opportunity to focus on the goal or intent. Effort implies the amount or degree of energy put towards
attaining the goal or intent, and mastery is the ongoing practice towards achieving the goal or intent. A retreat is a process of purification and mastery through ongoing concentration and effort.

A successful retreat will have a clear intention and work towards successfully integrating the intention with the key concepts. Details such as location, schedule, and length of the retreat are secondary. An individual or group can retreat anywhere, for any length of time and as long as they are diligent in their practice, they can be successful.

The literature on work and soul suggests that in order to integrate a working spirituality, an employee needs to connect with their purpose and the meaning in their work. Through purification, a retreat provides the employees with the opportunity to stand back from their everyday reality and gain a different perspective. This helps create a new space and time within which they can practice concentration and effort. Through activities that encourage concentration and effort they can reconnect with their inner voice, listen to their soul and converse with a Divine Source. My retreat will address the key concepts of retreating through its use of activities and rituals and actively encourage the participants to practice mastery in the workplace. Hopefully, as the literature on retreating suggests, this practice can successfully change individuals' perspectives not only of their personal lives, but also of their work lives.

**Meditation Wisdom**

The amount of literature on meditation is staggering! This literature will address: (1) the reasons to meditate and (2) how to meditate.

Generally, meditation literature falls under two categories – secular and spiritual. Secular meditation literature approaches meditation as a practice open and feasible for
anyone to try and whose benefits are physical and intellectual. Spiritual texts on meditation deal with meditation more as a strict, religious practice designed for spiritual benefits in particular. Because it addresses both intellectual and spiritual aspects, meditation is an ideal practice for a retreat. That is also one of the reasons why, while there are certainly many activities that can be facilitated at a retreat, I chose to focus on meditation. It can be done anywhere, at any time, and requires neither talent nor money.

In the simplest of terms, meditation is the quieting-down process characterized by silence, concentration, focus, relaxation, and alertness (Miller, 1993). It is also a varied practice and there are many different forms of meditation. There is the extreme practice of the Zen Buddhists in which the focus is on strict obedience and discipline in posture and breathing. However, there are less zealous, but no less effective methods which employ music, guided imagery, and art. Meditation is really something we have all done in many tiny moments of silence and contemplation without realizing it. It involves the clearing our minds of the chatter, the garbage, the complaints, the ringing of the telephone, the doubts, and the insecurities. It is a personal creative process that can guide us beyond the cerebral business to an understanding of other realities, of other ways of thinking and seeing (Fowler, 1996).

In my opinion, the quintessential text on meditation for the sake of spiritual contemplation and enlightenment is Shunryu Suzuki's (1970) *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. It was his one and only book on informal talks on Zen meditation and practice. It begins with the question — what am I? He describes a way to empty the mind, to free the mind of all thoughts, opinions, and feelings and open the mind to the myriad of possibilities. The goal of meditative practice is to remain in "shoshin," or "beginner's mind" (Suzuki,
...
In such a practice there is no sense of accomplishment, achievement or even of self. The beginner's mind is the mind of compassion and it is boundless. It involves being in the original mind (Suzuki, 1970). With Suzuki, the practice of Zazen—the direct expression of our true nature—form, posture, breathing and control is everything. He suggests that,

[t]he most important point is to own your own physical body. If you slump, you will lose yourself. Your mind will be wandering about somewhere else; you will not be in your body. This is not the way. We must exist right here, right now! This is the key point. You must have your own body and mind. (1970, p. 27)

He also provides many statements around what enlightenment is and what it isn't. What it eventually comes down to is the true expression of who you are and such expression needs to occur in the simplest, most adequate way. The Tao Te Ching claims that while knowing others is wisdom, when you know yourself, then you are enlightened. The key to enlightenment and knowledge of the self is meditative practice. As the Zen saying goes, "The mad mind does not halt. If it halts, it is enlightenment" (Nisker, 1998, p. 118).

Suzuki writes and practices meditation in a way that is best described by Nisker, as "crazy wisdom." Nisker (1998) writes, "the holy fools want to drive us out of minds, knowing that when we get there, the fresh air will do us good" (p. 117). The fresh air embodies enlightenment, the expression of our truest selves. Cooper (1999) also explores self-knowledge and enlightenment in Renewing Your Soul. He refers to the Jewish meditation, hitbonenut, a deep contemplation of the self, aimed at understanding oneself. He also distinguishes between spiritual and secular practices. Practice is approached with
a new, open, beginner's mind. It is done in an open-ended process, never reaching a point of perfection (Cooper, 1999). And what makes it spiritual is the state of mind with which the practice is broached and the quality of the practice itself (Cooper, 1999). The fundamental elements of the meditative practice in Cooper's work are silence, simplicity, solitude, purification, concentration, effort, and mastery. For Cooper, the meditative practice is ultimately a spiritual journey that leads to greater understanding, awareness, and knowledge of the self. It leads to mystical revelations that nurture our efforts to attain truth.

I think that for many people, these mystical notions of meditation and enlightenment only serve to frighten them and dissuade them from even trying it. If on the one hand, one must practice to attain enlightenment, but on the other hand, such practice misses the point, a great deal of confusion is created. I believe that the tendency may be to give up.

Thankfully, there are many texts that focus on meditation in more approachable terms and dispense with the mysticism. While the focus on enlightenment, awareness, and understanding of the self remain, there are additional benefits. In his book, Learning the Dance Inside (1996), George Fowler makes meditation more approachable while still maintaining its spiritual benefits. His book is about the goal of meditation, not meditation itself. Like the other texts, Fowler defines meditation as a means of coming to see and understand the greater and unseen reality in which we live. He approaches meditation differently, deviating from the common practice of quieting the mind to more actively engaging the mind and beating it at its own game. While the mind does eventually get quiet, he proposes replacing the chatter in the mind by addressing it
directly rather than trying to ignore it.

One of the other reasons I chose to focus on meditation was because there are so many benefits. According to Fowler, the practice of meditation as a practical application of spirituality "replace[s] turmoil with peace, change[s] despondency into lightheartedness, put[s] personal pride where there had been only self-rejection and place[s] a sense of meaning and orientation where before there had been only confusion and self-doubt" (1996, p. 17). It also puts us into contact with a Divine Being. As Fowler points out, his connection and subsequent conversations with this Divine Source were all the more amazing because he discovered that this power was within him all along. "God, my Source Being, was present and expressing Itself as me" (Fowler, 1996, p. 26).

The more secular texts on mediation also present many benefits. In her work, *Spinning Inward*, Maureen Murdock (1987) presents a convincing case for the use of guided imagery as a form of meditation in the classroom. Guided imagery uses images, music, and voice to help clear the mind of its cerebral preoccupations and focus. According to Murdock, (1987) meditation improves memory retention, intelligence, and concentration by slowing the brain waves down, which allows ideas to occur more easily and to linger. Furthermore, research has proven a link between meditation and productivity, stamina, and quality in reference to the creative process (Murdock, 1987).

Meditation has also been known to improve our intuitive powers and our listening skills and to increase self-awareness. Because meditation allows an individual to shift from an active mode of thinking and consciousness to a receptive mode, it allows us to learn to approach situations and decision making in a less controlling fashion (Miller,
Thus, we are open to all the possibilities, angles, and scenarios. A whole new world of limitless possibilities opens up to us. Problems that may have seemed insurmountable and unsolvable are suddenly seen in a new perspective. This new perspective is given weight by a new confidence in our instincts and abilities. This is intuition in practice.

Miller's (1993) work with meditation resulted in many participants saying that their listening skills improved. One participant wrote, "I had thought that I was a pretty attentive, active listener; but I have really extended my ability, or my need, to hear what people are saying" (p. 61). Such results are not surprising. A good listener is attentive, focused, open-minded, and alert to nuances and signs, all lessons taught by meditative practice.

Meditation may also increase our abilities to empathize with others. Through concentration and focus, it can lead to a place of contemplation and wisdom. Meditation is an exercise that can lead to the understanding of the knowledge that we are all One. It can be possible to see ourselves as connected rather than fragmented and isolated from one another. This may potentially eliminate the threat of competition that often leads to defensiveness and a shutting down of the capacity to think and act compassionately (Fowler, 1996).

One last, more secular benefit to meditative practice is that of stress management. Stress is a real and expensive problem for corporations. Chronic fatigue, nervous breakdowns, hypertension, and heart attacks are directly related to stressful environments and result in short- and long-term disability leaves, stress leaves, chronic medical problems, high absenteeism, and ultimately in death. Stress is a result of the human
instinct, when faced with conflict, to either fight or fly away. The cardiovascular system absorbs the impact of this trauma – the heart rate increases, the blood pressure rises, breathing, the metabolic rate and blood all speed up (Benson, 1976, as cited in Miller, 1993). Benson advocates a relaxation technique incorporating a quiet environment, a comfortable position, a mental device, and a passive response (Benson, 1976, as cited in Miller, 1993).

Meditation is an art and I believe it can be practiced by anyone. Characterized by tiny moments of silence and contemplation, meditation as a practice has numerous benefits. To summarize briefly, it is the key to attaining a higher knowledge of self, it reinforces the ability to exist in the moment, it brings peace, pride, meaning, and a sense of orientation to one's existence. Meditation also connects us with a Divine Source like prayer does and can, in addition, increase our abilities to empathize with others. In a more scientific vein, meditation has been linked with improvements in memory retention, intelligence, concentration, listening, and managing stress. As Krishnamurti (2000) wrote in his work, Meditations:

Meditation is one of the greatest arts in life....that is the beauty of it. It has no technique and therefore no authority. When you learn about yourself, watch yourself, watch the way you walk, how you eat, what you say...if you are aware of all that in yourself without any choice, that is a part of meditation. So meditation can take place when you are sitting in a bus or walking in the woods full of light and shadows, or listening to the singing of birds or looking at the face of your wife or child (http://yogateacher.com/text/meditation.html)
Summary

If we return for a moment to our earlier definition of wisdom, we can begin to summarize the key points of the literature. Wisdom is an understanding that we gain from experiencing life, from seeing the world, from feeling our emotions, and gaining a deeper understanding and relationship with our authentic selves. The key points in this literature—regardless of whether it is about work, soul, retreat, or meditation reinforce this message.

In work, as in the rest of our lives, I believe that there is a need to focus on the inner experience to enrich our work lives and relationships. More attention needs to be paid to the relationships, both visible and underlying, that influence our workplace: relationships between co-workers, between management and workers, between the workers and their environment, and within the workers themselves. Feelings in the workplace need to be acknowledged, as the literature suggests, that our feelings are one of the ways in which we communicate with our soul, and it is by listening to our soul that we will discover our authentic self. Retreats and meditation, as the literature demonstrates, are powerful tools for creating an environment conducive to listening to our souls.

In my search of the literature some questions were provoked and some obvious gaps in the materials were evident. What physical working conditions are important for nurturing the soul in the workplace? Many workers complain about their physical environment and I wonder, what would have to change in order to allow them to feel more authentic while at work? My second question is how can the power to be authentic and find fulfillment in the workplace be put into the hands of the workers? And if it
could be done successfully, how could management support and participate in it, if at all?

In my opinion, there were two obvious gaps in the literature. I could not locate any practical and concrete examples and information about frontline employees in call centres. Since call centres are such a large business, I found this omission rather startling. Second of all, I was unable to locate any information with regard to corporate retreats for frontline employees. I find the fact that most retreats and retreat facilities cater to management which is rather distressing in light of what I am trying to do. I can only assume that this lack of information is related to the costs and logistics of organizing retreats for large groups. This may be further evidence of the need for this type of initiatives to be in the hands of the individual workers rather than management.

The literature is very clear. Work has evolved into one of the most important aspects of our lives. It is a necessity and for many, a necessary evil that we succumb to in order to support our families and ourselves. With something so important and so time-consuming, it is evident that time and focus needs to be placed on improving our concepts of work. We need to find meaning and purpose in the work that we do. Rather than defining ourselves by what we do for a living, I am suggesting that we learn to define ourselves and then mirror that self in the work that we do. We need to discover who we are, what we feel passionate about, what moves us, challenges us, inspires us, and we need to discover or bring some, if not all of these things to the work that we do. I am suggesting that this working spirituality could increase our sense of purpose, of meaning, of self-awareness, and authenticity and as such increase our abilities to cope on the job. The retreat, used as a means of introducing employees to the practice of meditation would appear to be an invaluable means of attaining this awareness. It
contains all the necessary elements – isolation, concentration, practice and mastery – that lend themselves well to meditation. Together, retreating and meditation may be the keys to attaining, at the most, enlightenment and at the least, a better sense of self.

Going forward, my retreat addresses all the key elements identified by the literature. It provides the participants with the opportunity to step back from their work routine and through meditative practice learn how to listen to their inner voice. The retreat will also encourage them to engage in a dialogue with themselves, as well as their personal Higher Source in an effort to begin to identify the choices they have made and the impact those choices have on their work lives. Because the retreat involves a group of co-workers, there will be the added advantage of being able to share and connect with the others in the group.

It is my hope that the combination of retreating, meditating, and sharing will contribute to an exciting and positive opportunity for spiritual growth and development that will improve the outlook and work experiences of my participants. It is the very nature of this study, the fact that it is focused on improvement and experience, that has determined my choice of Action Research as a research methodology. The following chapter will explore the methodology and processes of this study.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Chapter 1 addressed the rational for my study, outlining why there is a need to explore meaning in the workplace and to discover a means of creating a soul-filled work environment. In chapter 2, I described the key concepts of work, spirituality, retreats, and meditation. Chapter 3 will explore how I organized my study.

This study has evolved out of my own experience and research. I came to the realization that I was disenchanted by my work. I no longer loved what I did. I had no passion, no drive, no meaning, or purpose in my work. I didn’t feel as if it meant anything. I discovered that others were feeling the same way and I started to wonder what could be done to improve our practice. Again I turned to my own experiences for a solution. Retreating and meditation had proved invaluable in the past and I wondered what impacts it would have when applied to the workplace. My study involves exploring exactly that. I led a group of three call centre employees on a retreat and introduced them to various meditation techniques. They were then asked to integrate the meditative practices into their work routine and keep a journal recording their experiences for a month. In this chapter I describe how I undertook this study. I explain the essential elements of this study, its form, and the approach I have chosen and the reasons motivating my choice. I review the selection of the participants, a group of individuals that has changed several times over the past months. The site and field procedures are also described, including any special descriptions, materials, or procedures that are relevant. The data gathering and analysis methods are examined and finally, any assumptions, limitations, and overall final concerns are discussed.
Description of Research Approach

When dealing with questions of the soul, quantitative data would not be adequate. Such questions require subjective data using words, stories, memories, metaphors, and the retelling of experiences. There is a certain narrative aspect of my study, because as Connelly and Clandini wrote in “Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry” (1991), narrative is the study of how we experience the world, and our experiences can be explored through our stories, metaphors, and memories. Qualitative research seeks to understand rather than prove something. Its focus is on words and personal experiences, not on numbers. Its power lies not in the cold hard facts of proven numbers and equations, but in the rich detail of verbal descriptions. In qualitative research the purpose is "to understand the person or phenomenon" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 40).

Within the qualitative research realm, there are many different approaches. I have chosen the Action Research model. Action Research appeared to be the logical methodology because it begins with a problem that arises within the researcher's own context, assumes that the researcher is the expert of his/her own lived experience, and allows for research within his/her own environment (McNiff, 1988). As a learning consultant, I possess a solid knowledge of both my own practice as a learning consultant and of the employees' practice as call centre representatives.

In searching for a methodology for my study I debated over several different approaches, trying to find the one that worked best. It was a story that Jean McNiff told in her book on Action Research that inspired me. When she was writing her own thesis paper she had been advised that her thesis would be a "written version of your experience in working towards a solution, yours and the experience of the other people involved in
your project" (McNiff, 1988, p. XV). This struck me, because it is really my own experience and my own search for meaning in my work that has driven me to take on this study. I have felt despair at going to work. I have felt dissatisfaction with the environment that I practice in and wondered what I could do to improve it. I began to wonder if others have felt the same need and how I could address this problem and improve the situation.

Action Research has been defined as:

[a] form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants...in social situations in order to improve the rationality and practice of (a) their own social or educational practices, (b) their understanding of these practices, and (c) the situations and institutions in which these practices are carried out. (McNiff, 1988, p. 2).

I have applied this definition to my situation, to my institution and my practice. When I feel dissatisfied with my work and with my environment, when I feel physically run down, what can I do to improve my situation, my environment? When I am feeling bored and under-challenged yet I continue to work to pay the bills, is there something I can do to change my attitude? Is there something I can do to find meaning and fulfillment in a job or environment that I have little control over? In times of stress at work, is there a way to lessen it and find moments to reflect? Do those moments improve my practice or my perception of my practice?

Action Research provides me with the theoretical and practical framework from which I can explore these questions. According to McNiff (1998) and Elliot (1991), Action Research provides five guiding steps with which to approach a study. They are:
1. Statement of the problem. "What is my concern?"

2. Imagine a solution to the problem. "What can I do to improve it?"

3. Implementation of a solution. "This is what I am doing to improve it."

4. Evaluation. "What is the outcome of my action?"

5. Reformulate the problem in light of the evaluation. "What, if anything, can I do differently now?"

The essence of Action Research is that Step 5 is really the impetus to begin anew and to continue researching and improving the practice. It does not claim to strive for any truth or final answers, but simply to explore and act on possible solutions to situations as they occur in everyday practice. I have identified problems with my practice: a lack of fulfillment and meaning. I have proposed that meditation and reflection may help improve my situation. I organized a retreat to introduce my participants and myself to different meditative exercises in order to determine what effects this would have on our practice. I used our journals and interviews to evaluate my proposed solution, and finally, my conclusions were built around my own recommendations for going forward and reformulating the situation and its outcomes.

Selection of Participants

For the purpose of my Action Research study I was seeking participants who worked on the front end of a call centre because of the particular nature of that practice and environment. A call centre is a business focused on telephone contact with the general public. An outbound call centre is where the telephone representatives place calls to customers, such as telemarketing. An inbound call centre is where customers call in
with inquiries, service needs, and to file complaints and compliments. My workplace is an inbound call centre. As telephone representatives, these people are dealing with the general public over the phone, calling in requiring emergency roadside assistance. It is a job that requires the use of a substantial amount of technology – computers, different software, and phones – and represents a mode of communication that can be very alienating and isolating. In my experience, the call centre environment can be a cold and sterile place. I have worked in various call centres for the last 10 years and in this environment the employees are normally stationary. They are seated in front of computers and hooked up to telephones for the majority of their shift, minus their breaks. My call centre is a 24-hour, 7-days-a-week operation. At times, the call volumes are extremely high with one call coming in after another without respite. There are also times of extremely low call volumes, with a representative getting one call an hour. It is a very unpredictable environment. During the slow times, the employees are discouraged from personal reading or other activities to occupy themselves.

In the selection of my participants, I had no particular guidelines around age, marital status, educational level, or religious upbringing. I was interested in individuals who worked in the same department and who were self-motivated. Frankl (1946) argued that human beings made conscious choices and decisions when it came to meaning and purpose. I therefore felt it was very important that my participants chose to be involved and that they were interested and motivated from the beginning.

My sample was a result of a combination of volunteer and network sampling (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). It began as a group of five women between the ages of 22 and 45 who had volunteered for the study based on informal conversations with
colleagues and word of mouth that spread through my department. I had openly discussed my interest in developing a study on spiritual wisdom with my co-workers and through these conversations and discussions, five of them volunteered to participate. However, unforeseen circumstances changed the nature of the sample. One woman was diagnosed with diabetes and decided that she was not able to participate in the study. Schedule conflicts resulted in the resignation of two other participants. A fourth woman left the company and is now working in a different field and environment that she finds both professionally and personally satisfying. Of the original sample of five, only one remained. That remaining volunteer recommended two other people and they approached me and volunteered based on that recommendation (network sampling). While I spoke about the study to various people, I did not actively solicit or advertise for participants, and that is why there were not additional volunteers.

My final group of participants ended up being four women who worked full-time in the same call centre: three call centre telephone representatives and myself. At the time of the study we ranged in age from 28 to 50. Three of the participants are married, and one is currently raising a family. Their shifts varied from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and 4 p.m. to midnight. My own shift varies according to business needs. The 3 participants who are call centre representatives share the same basic job functions with some variations that will be addressed in the participant profiles. While there are variables to the practice, we share an understanding of this practice and the environment in which our practice is carried out.
Participant Profiles

The names used in this study are pseudonyms as part of the agreement with my participants.

Gwen

At the time of the study, Gwen was working the afternoon 4 p.m. to midnight shift. She's been with the company approximately 4 years. Her responsibilities at work are extremely diverse. While she spends a third of her time on the phones fronting the average emergency roadside call, the remainder of her shift is spent as a Peer Coach and ISO (International Organization for Standardization) Author. As a Peer Coach she is responsible for monitoring her peers and providing them with feedback on how they handle their calls. Her role is time-consuming and often challenging. She is often placed in the position of having to offer negative feedback in a constructive way. Furthermore, since the representatives she coaches are her peers, she is also placed under their scrutiny when performing her job. As an author, Gwen is responsible for maintaining the ISO standards at all levels of documentation. She revises documents and audits the system looking for improvements. ISO provides the company with a set of guidelines that aim at attaining a high level of standardization and quality.

On a personal level, at the time of this study Gwen was in her early 30s and married with two children. She and her husband are currently running a farm. Originally from Spain, Gwen is extremely interested in holistic remedies and therapies. She was raised as a Catholic and maintains strong ties with the Catholic faith.
Sophie

At the time of the study my second participant, Sophie, was working a full-time day shift, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. She has worked for the company for 6 years. At the time of the retreat she was working as a telephone representative in both the Emergency Roadside and the Customer Service call centres. She has no additional responsibilities or tasks in the office. Sophie was in her late 20s at the time of the study and is a university graduate with a degree in Comparative Development and Native Studies. She has an interest in languages and cultures and has spent many months working and visiting Latin America. Sophie grew up in the area while her partner hails from Latin America. They have no children but are extremely involved with their respective families. While Sophie was raised in the French Catholic faith, she has not maintained ties with the church.

Karen

My third participant is Karen. Karen also works as a telephone representative in the Emergency Roadside department and has been with the company for 10 years. At the time of the study, her shift was 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. She is in her early 50s and is 5 years away from retirement. She is currently working to save money so that she and her partner can travel when they both retire. Karen's children are grown and have moved away. She also has a French Catholic background and while she does not attend church regularly, she maintains a strong Catholic faith. Karen has demonstrated the most nervousness with regard to the study as she feels incapable of keeping a journal and fears that her writing and communication skills will not be good enough.
Jennifer

At the time of the retreat I worked full-time as a trainer in the same call centre the other three participants work in. I was in that role for 5 years. My job involved facilitating new hire training, coaching, and developing training programs. My shift depended on when the training was scheduled. As a result, I could be training morning, noon, and night, often all in the same day. I am in my late 20s and spend most of my free time reading, studying, travelling, and visiting with my family and friends. While raised as a Catholic, I am not an active member of any church and have more interest in exploring alternative faiths and practices. It is my interest in such issues and my experiences with my work that led me to this study.

Following the retreat there was a shift restructuring and all 3 of my participants received new shifts. Gwen was switched from her afternoon shift to a day shift, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. This had a substantial impact on her as it enabled her to spend more quality time with her family. Sophie kept her 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., however, was moved permanently to the Customer Service department and only works one weekend in seven. This enabled her to plan more social time away from work. It also placed her in a different group of peers. Karen moved to an 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. shift with rotating weekends. Again, as in Sophie’s case, the meant that Karen was working with a different group of people. The shift bid had caused a lot of stress to the participants of the study because of the uncertainty it created. Following the announcement of the new shifts, however, all 3 participants were relieved and happy with the results as they all felt it improved their situations by allowing them more flexibility with their planning and activities outside of work. Personally, while I was not affected by the shift-bid, my job was eliminated. The implications of this
will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

The Retreat

As the literature demonstrated, there are clear guidelines for a successful spiritual retreat. A spiritual retreat must have a specific intention in mind, and it must be designed with the purpose of providing the participant with the opportunity to explore silence and solitude as well and initiate an inner dialogue with the self and a Higher Source. Additionally, retreats are characterized by four key elements: purification, concentration, effort, and mastery. The location and activities of my retreat were designed with these elements in mind.

In pre-retreat interviews (described later in this chapter) the participants discussed what their expectations of the retreat were. They were also informed of the intentions of the retreat and the study during that interview and the morning of the retreat. The intent of the retreat was to provide the participants with the opportunity to take a step back from their normal workday and learn various meditative practices. The exercises were chosen so that they could then incorporate them into their workplace. It was made very clear that the retreat was not a one-time solution but the beginning of a dialogue that could potentially reconnect them with themselves and aid them in discovering purpose or meaning in the work.

While retreats can certainly be held in exotic and isolated locales, I wanted to approximate as much as possible a private and domestic setting in order to make the point that retreating can occur anywhere – their own homes and their workplaces. My parents offered to vacate their house for the day and I held the retreat there. I wanted a local area that was convenient for my participants. The retreat site was a well-situated three-
bedroom bungalow. The main activities of the retreat were held in the living room, and the lunch and eating meditation were held in the dining room.

The four key elements of purification, concentration, effort, and mastery were addressed in the selection of activities. These elements will be evident in the descriptions to follow. See Figure 1 for the schedule. A full description of all retreat activities is available in Appendices A and B.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00 am</td>
<td>Arrivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30</td>
<td>Ablutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
<td>Hatha Yoga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Journal Activity – “I am”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:25</td>
<td>Breathing Meditations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Journal Activity – “Affirmations”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lunch – Eating Meditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:15</td>
<td>Walking Meditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:45</td>
<td>Money Meditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:15</td>
<td>Journal Activity – “Money”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30</td>
<td>Guided Visualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00</td>
<td>Journal Activity – “Letter”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:30</td>
<td>Group discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00</td>
<td>Loving Kindness Meditation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1. Retreat schedule*
The retreat opened with introductions and the distribution of the journals. I reminded everyone that what happened and what was said during the retreat and in their journals was confidential and purely for the purpose of the study. Nothing disclosed at the retreat would be discussed beyond the context of the study and the retreat. I reiterated the purpose of the study, which was to explore ways of attaining fulfillment and meaning that could be practiced at work. I also answered any questions they had with regard to their accountabilities and my expectations with respect to the study and the retreat.

We then began the retreat with morning ablutions. The tradition of ablutions involves the practice of cleansing hands and face with water and reciting various positive affirmations to begin the day. Ablutions are one of the oldest spiritual practices of symbolic purification of the body and have traditions in both Christian and Judaic practice. The affirmations we used were directly tied to the various physical parts of the face and hands being cleansed. For example, in the case of the eyes, the affirmation was, “I am cleansing my eyes so that I will be able to see things as they are in order to develop compassion for life” (Cooper, 1995, p. 27). Another that we used for the ears was “to hear the deeper truths of all that I encounter and not be corrupted by gossip and unskillful speech” (Cooper, 1995, p. 27).

This was followed by 60 minutes of Hatha Yoga. Hatha Yoga is a very gentle form of yoga that focuses primarily on holding particular stretches and poses. The focus is on concentration, effort, and mastery in terms of breathing and relaxing. I had chosen a method developed by Hart Lazer, a Canadian teacher of Hatha Yoga which combines the Asuna poses with the letters of the Hebrew aleph-bet. It is taught that each letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet has a unique effect on the soul, the body, the emotions, and the
[Text content not visible]
intellect just as each yoga pose does (Cooper, 1995). For example, the Asuna Supta Padangustasana is linked with the letter Beit that represents a house. While in this pose, the participant imagined a house and contemplated what passed in and out during everyday life and what they could do to protect their house (Cooper, 1995). By combining the two – the Yoga pose and its matching Hebrew aleph-bet meditation – Lazer provided what I believe was a new and deeper way for connecting the body and the soul. Copies of the all the poses and meditations were provided to the participants.

All journal activities mentioned in the following discussion can be found in Appendix A. The participants then engaged in a journal activity that focused on the spiritual questions of Who am I? Why am I here? They were instructed to reflect on these questions and write their observations and thoughts in their journals. This journal activity was followed by a variety of breathing meditations. Full descriptions and texts for all meditations used at the retreat can be located in Appendix B. We then did a journal exercise involving writing personal affirmations. The personal affirmations exercise instructed them to reflect on their negative perceptions and ideas about work and then they were instructed to rewrite their statements in a more positive way. Following the discussion that proceeded from that activity a lunch of soup, mixed green salad, and organic multi-grain bread was provided. During lunch we practiced the Sincere Appreciation eating meditation. After lunch, I instructed them in how to do a walking meditation and we split into different rooms as space permitted to practice. Following the walking meditation they engaged in a money meditation that involved contemplating different denominations of money. I felt the money meditation would be appropriate because in the pre-retreat interviews it was clear in two of the cases that paying the bills
and making money was the primary motivation for working. The purpose of the money meditation and the following journaling activity was to explore exactly how the participants viewed money — both physically and figuratively — and how they felt they were personally influenced by it.

At the end of the afternoon I engaged the participants in a guided visualization where I took them through their workplace and described for them the interdependence that existed between themselves, their workplace, and their co-workers. A final journaling activity involved writing a letter to their Higher Source. The participants were instructed to describe how they viewed their personal higher source, how they felt about Him/Her, what they felt characterized their relationship with their Higher Source. A discussion followed this, detailing various other journaling activities they might be able to use during the month following the retreat. The day finished with a group discussion involving how they could begin to incorporate the meditative practices and activities they had learned into their workday. A final, Loving Kindness meditation concluded the retreat.

Data Collection

John Elliot (1991) described Action Research as "the study of a social situation with a view of improving the quality of action within it" (p. 69). It was important for me that the data collection be a social process. Due to the very personal nature of spirituality, as well as people's perceptions of their practice, I knew that my methods had to build on the existing relationship between my participants and myself and had to encourage their own self-reflection. The data collection occurred in three phases: before the retreat, during the retreat, and after the retreat.
Before the Retreat

Before beginning to collect the data it was important to create a relationship with the people that were being observed. To a certain extent, a relationship existed, as the participants in this study are known to the researcher and to one another as they all work in the same department.

Individual interviews were conducted in a workplace meeting room approximately 1 month prior to the retreat. The pre-retreat interviews were 30 to 45 minutes in length. While the door remained open, the participant could request the door to be closed due to the personal nature of the interview and conversation. A window into the room provided a clear view of the proceedings. The interview questions are included in Appendix C. The first of the two interviews was to determine the participants' outlook on their job and on their work environment in order to determine their expectations and to explore their ideas and feelings about spirituality. The tone was very informal and conversational.

These interviews were recorded onto labeled tapes in order to ensure the exact verbal exchange. The tapes were then locked in a cabinet at my residence. I was the only person with access to these tapes. I was responsible for transcribing the tapes manually. The descriptions and field notes I had taken during the actual interviews were attached to the transcripts and included the details of the interview site, the participant, comments on nonverbal communications, and interview elaboration as well as self-reflections (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). The transcripts were presented to the participants to ensure that the data were accurate and properly representative of their thoughts and feelings.
At the Retreat

Basic data collection involved the field notes I had kept during the retreat itself and the data from the participants' journals. On the day of the retreat I was able to observe and note in my journal how the day progressed and obtain real-time perceptions. These notes also provided me with a detailed account of the site and of the participants' responses to the activities. The notes contained observations on conversations, feelings, responses, comments, actions, and thoughts as well as both nonverbal and verbal communications. An evaluation form following the retreat provided some immediate feedback about the site and the activities, evaluating the retreat itself as a tool (Appendix D).

Personal documents made up the other form of basic data collection. Personal documents are any "first person narrative that describes an individual's actions, experiences, and beliefs" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 455). In the case of this study, these documents included copies of the participants' journals. I provided the participants with spiral bound notebooks and instructed them to keep a journal for 1 month following the retreat. I had prepared the journals myself by printing inspirational quotes and reminders of the various activities they learned during the retreat on labels and sticking them on various pages. The participants were instructed to let themselves be guided by the quotes and activities in the journals and to reflect about them and write about them every day (Appendix E).

From the basic data, I hoped to discern patterns, themes, and concepts about work attitudes and transformation coming together that could then be summarized and analyzed.
After the Retreat

The purpose of the closing data was to verify and qualify any themes, patterns, or concepts that emerged from the data before and after the retreat (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 403). By this point, after reading and studying the journals and my own observations, I had several ideas and interpretations of the study's outcomes. A final interview explored how the participants had continued to observe their practice and if any change or improvement had occurred related to meaningful work attitude as a result of this intervention. The post-retreat interviews were held in the same workplace meeting room as the first interview. Due to scheduling obstacles, two of the participants agreed to be interviewed together.

Following all data collection, the tapes were transcribed and a member check was done. Copies of all transcribed data were returned to the participants for their perusal and approval to ensure accuracy. The participants did not respond with any changes or recommendations with regard to the transcribed interviews.

Data Processing and Analysis

Once the data were collected, it was time to begin processing it and making sense of it all. The goal with Action Research is not to discover any universal truths, but instead to understand what is happening for a few individuals, and how, if at all, I have improved the situation regarding meaningful work attitude. Processing data and analyzing it is a systematic approach towards that understanding (Sagor, 1992). This is in alignment with the basic principle of qualitative analysis which has been described as a "process of interim, discovery analysis" in which coding topics and categories arise from the data or may also be predetermined and are followed by "pattern seeking" for

Analyzing data is a process of sifting, sorting, discarding, and cataloging information in order to answer two questions:

1. What are the important themes in the data?
2. How much data supports each theme? (Sagor, 1992)

The first step then is skimming. Reading the data over in completion, jotting down notes, observations, and repeating words or expressions and keeping these questions in mind. This step also provided me with a general sense of the whole – of the entire scope of the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). When identifying themes, I looked for either items that came up repeatedly or idiosyncratic items that struck me as noteworthy (Sagor, 1992).

Step 2 is what Sagor (1992) refers to as interrogating the data. This is a scientific codification process whereby the individual themes that emerged from the skimming are listed in a matrix as well as their sources (Sagor, 1992). Figure 2 provides an illustration of this matrix.
Data Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Data</th>
<th>Theme 1</th>
<th>Theme 2</th>
<th>Theme 3</th>
<th>Theme 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Retreat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Data matrix.
This method allowed me not only to analyze the data, but also to determine which method of collecting data proved to be the most useful. The matrix was posted on flip chart paper. Once the major themes were identified and entered into the matrix, copies of the data were made on different coloured paper according to the source. For example, the transcripts from the first interviews were on blue paper and the journals were on orange. I then went back through the data, cutting and pasting the data into the appropriate box in the matrix. Each coloured piece of data was initialed with the participant in question. This allowed me to track not only the themes, but each piece of data as experienced by the individual participants. Through this process, the validity of the topics were either confirmed, or new topics emerged as subtopics. Also, other topics emerged as more important. There was also the possibility that the matrix would need to be reworked or refined at any point.

Once I had a visual representation of the data, it was possible to summarize the themes and emerging patterns. At this junction it was important to continue returning to my original problem formulation to confirm or question it.

Chapter 4 begins with a revisit to the original problem formulation: my concern and my proposed solution. It then examines and analyzes the data, the emerging themes, and my observations.

In chapter 5, I evaluate the research and the study and provide some suggestions and reformulation. This will meet the requirements of qualitative research in that it will propose further areas of inquiry and it will continue the inherent spiraling of Action Research in proposing alternative solutions and possibilities for improvement. I also address the future implications of this study and areas of further research.
Assumptions and Limitations

Qualitative research itself is based on the assumption that reality is a "multilayered, interactive, and a shared social experience interpreted by individuals" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 392). I placed individuals in a social setting, introduced them to concepts that were new and strange to them, and then required them to participate, observe, and vocalize their perceptions, feelings, and reactions to said situations. I assumed that they would not only participate in the study, but be capable of verbalizing their reactions to it. Furthermore, I assumed there would be a change of some sort to observe and verbalize. Much of this study was not necessarily a "shared" event – but an individual, contemplative event. Also, it was not an event in which a social interaction was predominant – but the emphasis was more on individual interaction. Participants may not have been secure enough to share their feelings in either the open discussion or in the journals, knowing that I would be reading them.

I also made some basic assumptions about my participants. Primarily, due to the fact that they volunteered, I assumed that they were interested in the topic of spirituality, in improving their work experience, and in taking time for themselves. I also assumed that they were committed to the process for their own personal development, which may not have been the case.

As a result of the volunteer sample, all the participants are female and therefore the results are reflective of the female experience of both the workplace and the retreat. Further studies in all-male or co-ed groups may provide additional research and perhaps different results. The ages of the participants varied from 28 to 51 and therefore provided an excellent cross-section of age-related experiences.
The fact that this study focuses on corporate frontline employees also presents limitations. Because all the participants work for the same company and the same department, they are exposed to the same culture and workplace environment and this may have contributed to any similarity in results. However, they are all telephone representatives – thus making these results particularly relevant for other call centres.

This study is also limited by my own biases. I firmly believe the techniques I imparted to the participants have improved my own reality. The focus on meditation and a selected number of exercises also limit the results.

Additionally, I have a negative attitude towards our work environment. I believe that there is a very negative atmosphere pervading the workplace due to a lack of communication and honesty as well as several initiatives that have forced numerous changes in a very short period of time. My negative attitude towards this work environment may or may not have influenced my perception of the data. However, I am very much aware of my biases and how they can limit this study. I carefully monitored and questioned these biases throughout the data collection and analysis as well as noted any emerging biases in my own journal. Discussion with my thesis advisor helped me understand my own role and feelings during the data collection and analysis. My advisor functioned as a peer debriefer (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). These discussions helped me develop the perception and distance needed to view the study and the data as objectively as possible.

Furthermore, the study was limited by the perception my participants have of me in the workplace. They interact with me in a professional fashion on a regular basis and it was possible that they were influenced by a desire to please me. I have reinforced with
them that neither their participation nor the results of the study will affect their performance review. The performance review is conducted by their supervisors and managers and has a direct influence on their salary. I do not contribute to staff performance evaluations in any capacity.

Credibility and Ethical Considerations

The credibility of the data hinged on several procedures and safeguards I put into place. These are: participant language and verbatim accounts, mechanically recorded data, member checking, and participant review.

By carefully recording and transcribing the participants' exact words during interviews, I was better able to capture their feelings and thoughts. The journals also provided data in their own words and expressions. This also provided data and observations in everyday language that was less abstract. Accounts of conversations, transcripts, direct quotes, and journals are valuable data that represent the participants' observations in their own words rather than the researcher's (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). The integrity of the data from interviews was ensured by being mechanically recorded. Furthermore, the data were reviewed through two member checks. The participants in the study reviewed the data after they had been collected and transcribed as well as after the interpretation and thesis had been written. This was done to ensure that they were transcribed accurately, and that the data were presented in the paper in a way that was consistent and authentic to the participants' opinions, thoughts, and feelings. One participant requested that certain grammatical usage be corrected in the data as it was presented in the final analysis.

Every ethical precaution possible was taken to protect the rights of the
participants. Please see the enclosed ethical proposal for details (Appendix F).
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

My purpose was straightforward. What happened when I facilitated a retreat for three call centre representatives and introduced them to several different meditation exercises? What happened when they were encouraged to practice meditation at work? For example, did an eating meditation performed during a 30 minute lunch provide more balance and relaxation? Did a walking meditation on the way to the bathroom help release tension? Did the morning shower take on new meaning when it was done consciously in the form of a ritual cleansing and purification? This chapter will explore what the participants experienced during this study.

Each of us has our own identity that is unique to us and which results from the lives and stories that we have lived. In his book The Stories we Live by, Dan McAdams (1993) writes that our personal myths provide us with purpose and unity so that we may define our own particular niche in the world. He goes on to say that our personal myths and life stories are characterized by our own distinctive narrative tone. Each of my participants came into this study with their own identity, their own voice, and their own narrative tone. They also came into this study with their own work stories; myths that contribute to the people they are.

As I collected my data, I quickly discovered that the personal stories in the journals had a huge impact on this study as did the relationships I had built with my participants.

Our experiences are unique to us, to our environment, and to our practice. In their article “Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry” (1990), Michael Connelly and Jean Clandini wrote that the study of narrative is really the study of how humans
experience the world. My study explores how my participants experience their work world and how and if that experience could change. They told of their experiences in various ways throughout our interviews and their journals. But each of their narratives was unique because their experiences were unique. Throughout this study, I have been conscious of the need to listen to my participants, to let them voice their issues, concerns, fears, and stories and to share my own experiences in turn. As a result we developed a strong bond based on a sense of connectedness and caring. So, while the following is a representation of the data I collected, it is also a narrative of an experience we shared.

My Story

When I was a child growing up, I lived in a constant state of insecurity. When I was born, my father was 18 years old and worked in the Cotton Mill during the day and drove a taxi at night. During the winter he also refereed hockey in order to help make ends meet. When I was a little older, he began working full-time in a foundry. In the late 70s and early 80s, work in the factories was plentiful and easy to find and my family began to enjoy a certain level of financial security. However, that didn't last and eventually the plant where my father worked shut down, leaving hundreds of men unemployed. My father, who lacked a high school diploma and was physically disabled, joined others in the search for employment. He found other jobs in factories as that was all he knew how to do. One after the other, plants closed down, went bankrupt or moved south of the border. My father still works in a factory. He has known no other work or workplace. His work story has been one of constant struggle against the power of the owners, the threat of strike and shutdowns, layoffs, poverty, and horrible physical conditions that have resulted in serious injury and health concerns. At 49 my father
knows that he has only a few years of factory work left.

His story has contributed directly to my own story. At the time this study was being conducted, I had been in my position as a trainer in the same department for 5 years. However, that didn’t guarantee me security as I thought it had. I went into work one day in January and was told that my job was no longer required. Instead, two of the four members of our training team would have to compete for two positions as Learning Consultants in the company’s Learning Solutions Department. I had suspected that something of this nature was coming and I had spent the month of December frantically searching for other job opportunities.

While I was successful in attaining one of the two positions in the Learning Solutions Department, my success came at the expense of two of my co-workers, women I had worked with very closely for the last 5 years.

These events in my life highlighted the existing insecurity that is inherent in any professional situation and one that I had tried to isolate myself from because of my fear of insecurity. While I hadn’t been completely unprepared for what happened, I had not expected it.

**Gwen’s Story**

Gwen was born in Spain and is of Spanish and Arab descent. Growing up, she was a dancer and learned to live in her body and listen to its own unique language. For the last few years she has suffered from an illness with painful and debilitating symptoms. Nonetheless, Gwen is a person of incredible energy and enthusiasm and tackles both her life and work with fervor. At work I rarely see her sitting still. Stillness sits upon her rather uneasily and I have often thought that she reminded me of a caged
animal - leashed and under control. She is working in the call centre and she is very ambitious and driven by her goals to succeed on her own terms. But the call centre isn’t where Gwen wants to be either. Outside of it, she runs a farm with her husband and their two children. She has an intense interest in natural healing and can always be counted on for the latest information on herbal remedies and vitamins. She dreams of one day being a nutritionist – combining her love of the body with the logistics of food and health. A fanatic for organization, she often appears unorganized and forgetful but I’m fond of telling her its simply all that energy she harbors. In our conversations it was clear that Gwen has a very strong Catholic background reinforced by her upbringing and her marriage. She responded very well to the retreat and the meditation activities. In conversations and in her journals Gwen indicated a strong sense of spirituality and connection to God. During a retreat activity she wrote that she imagined God exuding energy “like a shining star” and referred to God as a “the greatest teacher of right and what is good.” However, she also indicated fear and concern that she wasn’t as “in touch” as she wished. She fears that she will “never experience your (God’s) presence.” She felt that it was the reality of her life that caused this, “the real world pulls me away from the goodness.” All too often Gwen felt that in order to survive she had to adapt and justify the means instead of simply turning her back on the negative aspects in her life.

Sophie’s Story

Sophie is a young woman in her early 30s and has been married for 4 years. She is an extremely cerebral person, very pensive and quiet. Where Gwen has all that barely unleashed energy, Sophie exudes a quiet stillness that brings to mind tranquil summer afternoons lounging on a shady veranda. Sophie appears very comfortable in her own
space, with her own thoughts and feelings. And although she is at ease with small groups, she is nonetheless a very shy person. Coming into the study, Sophie had expressed the most negative feelings towards work and her workplace. During her pre-retreat interview when asked about how she felt about her work she said, "I would say that I am depressed about my work, I have days where I feel very low about it, but generally I just don't particularly like it. It's not what I want to do." She dreams of farming and gardening and working with people, and she often looks at her life and wonders how she got to where she is. In that interview she also spoke of what doing those things gives her. "I think of other parts of my life that are happy and content. Those parts of my life are spiritual..."

Sophie appears to be a person in touch with the earth, with the natural flows of life, however she has been unable to link that flow, that natural instinct so strong within her, to her job.

**Karen's Story:**

Karen is in her early 50s, nearing retirement and currently lives with her husband. Both their children are grown and have moved away. She is an energetic, sociable woman with short dark hair and an infectious grin. Karen can often be found in the cafeteria on her breaks chatting up a storm, telling jokes, and asking about other people's adventures. To really get a sense of Karen's personality, you have to spend time talking with her and listening to her. While she was looking forward to the retreat, she was very nervous about keeping a journal because she felt very insecure about her abilities to write and spell. In the pre-retreat interview, when asked what her expectations were, she said, "I think we're all positive people and we're all going to get something out of it and help
each other. But I'm warning you – I'm going to struggle with the journal thing! I can't spell and I can't write!” Karen is a vibrant, enthusiastic person whose love of life and adventure is sincere and attracts people to her circle. She tries her best to remain true to herself. In her journal she captured this when she wrote, “I follow my heart and my instincts.”

**The Call Centre**

It wasn't until just recently that I realized that the call centre where we all worked at the time of the study is as much a “character” in this story as the participants. It is the physical environment that provides the backdrop to our story. It is the canvas on which our community plays itself out, and it provides the unique frame for what we call our work.

The call centre, and the jobs performed within it are unique in that they are somewhat monotonous, repetitive jobs that are nonetheless stressful in that they require dealing with highly emotional customers and they require instant responses to emergency situations. We provide Emergency Roadside Assistance to customers who are often in life-threatening situations. It is an environment that is carefully structured, has a distinct hierarchy, numerous expectations, and business objectives. The call centre is one element of a profit-making corporation that relies almost exclusively on the abilities and skills of its frontline workers. The main job in a call centre is to support customers on the phones. In our call centre the inbound calls vary. One minute you are dealing with a frantic mother who locked her baby in the car, the next an angry customer calling to complain because the tow truck driver scratched the door when he tried to unlock the customer’s brand new vehicle. It is a fast-paced, ever-changing environment that has
null
placed most of its emphasis on profit and technological advances. Telephone representatives are expected to answer the calls as quickly as they come in and as fast as they can – better service in the least amount of time.

The call centre that served as the testing ground underwent tremendous changes during the course of my study. A shift bid turned everyone's life around by shuffling the department around. A shift bid is a systematic process of redistributing the shifts in the call centre to better meet the business needs. As a result, employees accustomed to working the midnight shift ended up on days, while those used to working days ended up on afternoons. During the planning stages of the shift bid, rumors and gossip created an atmosphere of negativity and gloom. There was a lack of clear communication and the fear of the unknown also contributed to this negative atmosphere. Many people quit without explanation and long-tenured employees went on stress leave. Other employees were fired.

My retreat occurred at this opportune time during which the shift bid and changes were happening. All the participants were caught up in the stress and emotional turmoil in the department at the time. While the other 3 participants' jobs were not threatened, there was the possibility of a substantial change in their work hours that would directly impact their lives outside of work by forcing changes and compromises on themselves and their families. Also, all of us were caught up in the Christmas rush, the busiest season in the call centre, and our emotions, thoughts, frustrations, and joy were captured in our journals. The stress hit one participant extremely hard and aggravated an existing medical condition to the point where she became seriously ill and was forced to take several months off from work. The stress and frantic pace of both the workplace and our
personal lives made the retreat seem even more necessary.

**Participant Expectations**

Going into this study, it was important for me to understand my own, and my participants' expectations with respect to the retreat. I believe that what we expect and what we want from something has a large influence on our responses, and ultimately, our experiences. That is why, during the pre-retreat interview, I asked my participants what they expected from the retreat and the study.

There was a consistency to their responses that was aligned with my own expectations. Karen had never been to a retreat, but was eager and looking forward “to seeing what comes out of it. I think we’re all positive people and we’re all going to be able to get something out of it. I think, really, that it’s going to be good because we’re all there to help each other.” She seemed to be very excited and had a positive attitude towards the entire study. She saw it as something new and different. Gwen was also eager to experience it. She had been on retreats before, however they had all been corporate team-building retreats. This retreat held appeal for her because she hoped that she would have time to analyze “my life. What I do….Some sort of fulfillment that I can achieve. Find out what I like.” She saw it as an opportunity for self-identification. Sophie also saw the retreat as an opportunity to learn new things and alternatives on how to “feel good in a mundane job, a repetitive job.”

My expectations with the retreat involved all these things. I wanted to guide my participants in new ways that could potentially help them achieve a better sense of fulfillment and meaning during their workday. I had hoped they would learn new ways of seeing themselves, their work, and each other. In retrospect however, I realize that my
expectations involved what I wanted for them, for the study, and not for myself. Perhaps if I had clearly identified more concise expectations for myself, if I had gone into the retreat more as a participant and less as a teacher and guide, then I would have benefited even more in the end than I did.

Themes

The literature on work, spirituality, retreating, and meditation highlighted several key themes such as the nature of relationships, meaning, and purpose, the connection between awareness and balance, and the theme of power. The data gathered before and after the retreat support these key elements and can be organized into four main themes: relationships, meaning, balance, and power. Each of these themes will now be explored.

Relationships

There is a Buddhist story of a jeweled net in which each thread of the net connects with the other and in that spot there is a diamond. The diamonds are multifaceted and reflect light in all directions. The beauty of it is that each diamond reflects the other. We are all connected in a way that whichever direction we turn, whatever we decide to do, we mirror everything and everyone around us.

This story leads me to suspect that our relationships are characterized by our sense of connection, with each other and with the world in which we live. In the Buddhist story the threads are as important as the jewels they connect. This metaphor underlies our need for connections, a need that the literature suggests some workplaces have weakened. Additionally, this metaphor expands on the concept that relationships are really about community. Our workplaces are like micro communities where we work, we engage with others, and we participate in a mutual endeavor. Unfortunately, in
some workplaces, some employees have lost the ability to perceive and draw strength from the relationships and sense of community that can exist. As Aubrey (1995), Wheatley (1994), and Helgesen (1995) have pointed out, relationships are the threads in the pattern that connect everything and everyone.

The data collected prior to the retreat would suggest that when those threads are broken, a sense of disconnection and alienation makes it difficult to enjoy one’s work. The day of the retreat and following the guided visualization, Sophie wrote in her journal that she had pictured all her co-workers, some friends, and acquaintances, and she had felt a sadness and shame that there were people she worked with that she had never connected with. In my journal I wrote about the distrust and growing enmity between myself and my co-workers that was threatening any sense of calm and peace I might have found. One day I was informed by my manager that “one of my co-workers had informed him I was looking for outside work” and he advised me that while our jobs were not secure I had a strong chance for advancement. He didn’t specify which co-worker, which caused me to suspect all of them and this ate away at whatever trust we had. Also, by providing me with confidential information he placed me in a position of having to lie to them. Because my co-workers had seen me being pulled into his office they all descended on me to find out what it had been about.

When I began feeling as if I couldn’t trust the people I worked with, this added to an already stressful situation by taking away our ability to share with each other. Because we were competing for the same jobs we were no longer on equal footing, and our success in the company suddenly depended not on how well we worked together, but on how well we could outshine each other.
The other participants in the study also indicated that the climate of mistrust and suspicion seriously damaged their relationships and in turn threatened any sense of enjoyment they found in their work. In the simplest terms, the social interaction at work made work more fun. When those social interactions were gone, work ceased being fun. All the participants agreed at one point or another that their co-workers could contribute to their enjoyment or steal it. In her pre-retreat interview Karen implied that there was a difference “when everyone is sitting together and eating and talking. When everyone is talking and having fun....You know, as long as you are having fun, I'm having fun.” Karen found a direct correlation between how her co-workers felt and her reaction to her job. If her co-workers weren’t feeling positive, if they weren’t enjoying themselves, then she wasn’t. Like the jeweled net, if joy was experienced overall, then it was reflected onto one and all. On the flip side of that, a negative atmosphere was also similarly propagated. Karen went so far as to say that when she arrived at work in the morning, she's always praying that she's sitting next to someone she likes.

In her journal Sophie also commented on the impacts of a negative atmosphere. “The atmosphere is rather gray. People are scared and talk is very negative....It is very difficult to find a balance in this vibe.” In her pre-retreat interview she’d also mentioned the impact her peers had on her job. “It makes it better if you get along with your co-workers and you’re able to vent a little bit about what's going on. If you have a bad call, you’re able to talk about it.” In the pre-retreat interview Gwen talked about how difficult it was when she felt that her relationships were not strong. “When my relationships at work aren’t healthy, then I feel more stressful. If something confrontational has happened, then I leave work feeling sad. And when I’m feeling sad, or stressed or
unappreciated I have to ask myself why do I bother? Why do I work?"

In my experience, change tends to create an atmosphere of negativity when it is not understood. When you have a large department undergoing tremendous structural changes, gossip and rumors run rampant and it makes it difficult to work effectively. Change, when not dealt with or presented effectively, can cause alienation and isolation as everyone suddenly tries to protect themselves and their own interests and consequently lose sight of the greater connective web. In Sophie’s journal entry on November 30th she remarks: “You know, one of the most enjoyable things about my job are my co-workers. However, it has occurred to me that I don’t much enjoy that anymore.” The fear and negativity in the workplace was making it difficult for her to work. Karen also noted several instances where the gossip and complaining made things difficult for her. After practicing the Loving Kindness meditation on December 1, she noted in her journal: “I first thought of a person who I don’t understand. I decided to pay more attention to what she was saying. Tried thinking about positive and kind thoughts.”

While our connection with others in our workplace creates a sense of community, when that community is threatened, the relationships we have can either save us or weaken our sense of connection. And as the data suggest, a weakened sense of connection contributes to a lack of meaning and doubt, while a strong sense of connection and community increases our ability to enjoy work. On December 28th, in her journal Gwen mentioned finding joy in her co-workers. "It’s quiet and I’m taking great advantage of the spirited individuals. I enjoy seeing my peers happy during the holidays. The feeling enriches me and give me the confidence that work can be fun.”

The connections we have in the workplace have a huge impact on our perception of work
and the work environment. The data suggest that if our co-workers aren't happy, we aren't happy. If the jeweled net, as mentioned earlier, is missing pieces or is dull and tarnished, then we are not working together and reflecting each other's beauty. Instead, we are propagating the sense of despair and negativity.

Both Sophie and Karen agreed that being able to support each other, listen, and vent was an important element in making the workplace more bearable. Sophie began practicing the Loving Kindness meditation after work on particularly bad days and she noted in her journal that as she practiced this meditation at the end of the day, she felt that "It was particularly helpful because when I speak to so many people during the day, some very nice, others very rude or cruel, it can take a toll. I think it's very healing to forgive and try to feel love, or rather replace it with loving thoughts....I feel this meditation is a good exercise and way to end a day in a positive note." The meditation provided her with the opportunity to see that web of relationships and in regaining that perspective, she was able to feel a part of the whole once again. It would appear that the meditation allowed her to reconnect with herself and her peers in a positive way.

Did the retreat have any impact on this sense of relationship and connection? Sophie's comments would suggest that the Loving Kindness meditation helped her to forgive both herself and her co-workers and this allowed her to attain a certain peace of mind. Karen pointed out that she was able to listen more closely to others, that she took the time to listen rather than dismiss her peers, however, she did not know whether or not this had an impact on her feelings or attitudes towards her work. In the 2 months following the retreat, both women agreed that the atmosphere at work had changed drastically, but they both contributed this change to the completion of the shift-bidding
process and lowering call volumes. However, their journals do suggest an awareness of their peers and their attitudes towards their work relationships.

Gwen experienced the most obvious benefits when it came to relationships. Throughout the study, Gwen was extremely forthcoming with her family. After the retreat she shared the meditative practices and techniques with her husband and her children, "I shared it with my children," she said in the post-retreat interview, "my daughter has been diagnosed with ADD [and] is now using the breathing meditation to calm herself and it is working!" Gwen felt that sharing it with her family had a positive impact on her ability to use the meditative practices both at work and at home. "I think it's a partnership when it comes to meditation and you are doing all these things with your life. I think it's important to involve your partner. If your partner is not involved then you're not going to be doing them, definitely." Since the retreat, she finds her husband often reminding her to "breathe" when she gets frustrated, nervous, and tense. Gwen's experiences might suggest that in order to be truly effective, the work circle has to be enlarged to include the home circle as well, and as such, when meditations and retreat practices are shared with our families and done outside of work they are more effective. It would stand to reason that our work lives simply fit into the larger picture of our lives in general. Gwen succeeded in making a strong connection not only with her co-workers, but also with her family and shared her experiences with them all. This would prove to be useful when we don’t feel comfortable practicing the meditations and exercises at work. If we can’t make the meditations happen at work, then we can at least do them at home but make work the focus of the meditations and activities.
Our relationships and sense of connection represent a major theme in this study. We feel connected to others. We receive and provide support to one another and this allows us to cope. The data suggest that a positive sense of community and connection increases our ability to enjoy work, deal with the stress, and help pass the time. On the flip side of that however, the community can also contribute to a sense of negativity through gossip and rumor and this can have a detrimental effect on our perception of work and the work environment. The retreat was aimed at providing ways to strengthen our relationships through compassionate understanding and a greater ability to connect. It would appear that the retreat and its activities did bring the bigger picture into focus and enabled the participants to understand the impact and the importance of their relationships in the workplace. It reinforced Sophie’s feelings that her work relationships were important to her, and it encouraged Karen to take the time to listen to her peers rather than dismissing them outright. There were moments when it did help the participants achieve a greater sense of balance, and in Gwen’s case, by bringing her family relationships into the mixture she was given a greater sense of support, and this did help motivate her to continue the practice at work.

A further element to the theme of relationship was how our relationship to our physical environment contributed to our perceptions of work. In her pre-retreat interview Karen complained about the physical environment she had to work in. “I’m really disgusted,” she said, “When I first started here everything was organized and it was cleaner. Now it’s like working in a pigpen. Even looking at somebody else’s garbage makes me sick.” Karen saw a connection between her physical environment and the manner in which she and her co-workers were treated and related to one another. “We
are treated with no respect at all and we’re treated like dirt.” Her comments would suggest that the lack of respect toward both the physical environment and the sense of community among workers was a result of management’s and her peers’ level of commitment to their space. As such, her relationship to her physical environment and in turn to her work community, was weakened.

Gwen also spoke about the draining physical environment. “I find the environment draining,” Gwen said in her interview. “The air is stifling. If I could breathe clean air...then I would have more energy.”

During the retreat, Sophie wrote in her journal how, after the guided visualization, she was able to view her physical work environment in a more positive light.

Once you began allowing me to see other things I ended up in a circle in a forest. I could see the blue sky overhead with puffy white clouds. The green is very striking and the forest is very lush. It would be a great work environment but somehow difficult to picture a call centre there... there were no walls, no stinky carpets or uncomfortable chairs. Just sky, trees, moss and a feeling of well-being.

I am inside of the box and able to be me. (December 1, 2000)

I find it telling that Sophie phrases it as being “allowed” to see her workplace as different than it is. It is as if the retreat gave her permission to see things differently, to change her perception. Her last comment would also suggest that while she recognizes that there are still the limitations of space and job, she is beginning to see the possibilities that there are not limitations to who she is within that space and job. Perhaps she gained a sense of control over her environment. In her post-retreat interview, a statement she made suggested that during the month she was practicing the activities, this new
null
perception was enhanced in positive ways. “When I walked into work this morning, I saw that the building had changes and I could somehow see it more like I’d imagined it during the visualization at the retreat. Especially when I’m not too comfortable going into work, I imagine it as a lush, green building.”

The retreat addressed the concept of relationships as a community encompassing both a human connection and a physical one. The participants indicated that they were conscious of their need for a positive sense of community connection, especially during difficult times when their sense of community was threatened and they were even more dependent on their relationships with their co-workers. In 3 of the 4 participants, Karen, Gwen, and Sophie, the meditative practices allowed them at one point or another, to view and appreciate anew their connections with others. In my case, while the meditations allowed me to calm down, it surprised me that they did not allow me to perceive my relationships differently nor did they strengthen my sense of connection with my team. I had hoped that the meditations and the retreat would help me as they had in the past. When I had struggled at university, or gone through difficult financial times in my life, retreating and different forms of meditation had really enabled me to cope. I had expected that to translate to this new difficulty and help me deal with my peers and my team by finding a new awareness and balance and appreciate that we were all together struggling under the same difficulties. Instead I simply continued to feel isolated and alone.

The participants were also aware of the importance of their physical environment and indicated that the existing environment was draining. It is interesting to note that during the month following the retreat there were substantial changes in how they
perceived their environments and the impact that it had on their attitude towards work. In her final interview Karen noted that since the retreat she hadn’t once had to begin her day searching for her chair or cleaning up her area. Gwen also said that she returned after sick leave to discover that, in her absence, management had made some changes to the physical environment. In her post-retreat interview she said, “[T]he place was filled with plants and I felt healthy. I feel human. I feel connected.”

While some of the changes they experienced were a result of physical improvements that management had made (e.g. the plants), it is also possible that the retreat and the monthly experience of meditating allowed them to see their environments in new ways. It perhaps made them appreciate things like plants and cleanliness in a new and different way, which had a direct impact on their feelings towards their work environment.

**Meaning**

When I think of work, I think of purpose and meaning. Work, as Aquinas wrote, should be about living well (Fox, 1994). And meaning, as the literature suggested, is derived from creation, new experiences, and the choices we make with regard to suffering. If work is to have meaning, then it should encourage creativity, foster new experiences, and enable us to cope, or at least contribute to our abilities to cope, with all measures of change, challenge, and potential suffering. All the participants in this study were very clear in what they thought work should be. For some it was the end in itself; for others, a means to an end. I believe that work should be about contributing to our community. In her interview Gwen said that she worked to be a part of something. “I work because I like change and to be a part of change... I don’t want to work just to fill
the time..." Sophie also had a clear idea of what she thought work should be about for her. In her journal she wrote,

Working well to me means getting something personal out of one's work. Feeling like you’ve accomplished something when the day is done. Working should in some way mirror the way you like to live your life. It should fit into the balance of things. Working well helps you to grow as an individual and helps you to find your place in the scheme of life. (December 10th)

However, their ideals of what work could be and the reality of what their work was, were contradictory. Karen was working to save for retirement. At the age of 51, she felt that she had a few more years of work left in order to build a safe enough cushion for when she and her husband could retire. In her pre-retreat interview she explained this, "That's why I'm working. Just to save for when I retire....I want to keep myself a little bit active. I just want to be here, socialize with some friends at work [and] get that extra money." Karen was not interested in her work in the context of meaning and fulfillment, but as a means to an end. "It's not that I mind – I like working – but when you get older you see how fast time went by and you didn't get to do too much and you wonder – what's your priority?" The purpose motivating her work was monetary.

Sophie worked to pay the bills, viewing her work as a means to an end, but wanted more. When asked in the pre-retreat interview if she found meaning or purpose in her job she swiftly replied, "In this particular position I'm in, I don't – I can't see it right now. I don't think that it could fulfill my intellectual needs." Her comments would suggest that she thinks work could and should be meaningful but that the work she was currently doing didn’t fulfill her.
While Gwen often felt challenged by her work, it wasn’t necessarily what she wanted to do either. In her interview she said that she often felt that because she wasn’t learning and developing herself, she felt she was losing a part of herself. “There have been times when I have manipulated myself into being a non-creative person because that was what was expected of me. But I can feel that killing me….Sometimes, on the days I have to go into work, I feel that my time has been bought, that it doesn’t belong to me.”

In most cases, the participants did not view their work as being meaningful or didn’t expect it to be meaningful. Or rather, it wasn’t that the participants didn’t find their work meaningful, it didn’t hold personal meaning for them. For example, while Sophie realized that she was helping people by providing them with service in their time of need, this didn’t impact her in a personal way. In my case, while I could argue that my job was meaningful in the way that I had described it in that I was contributing to my community, I did not find it personally meaningful.

This can be explained by revisiting the definition of meaningful work and realizing that perhaps our conceptions of meaning were too limited. In order to be meaningful, work had to be, creative, contribute to new and positive experiences, and improve coping skills. Work, as Fox (1994) wrote, should be an expression of our creative self. As workers, our experiences suggests that we didn’t find our work creative, and we had lost the enthusiasm and growth that comes from new experiences because we’d all been in our jobs for several years. Rather than improve our coping mechanism, the changes and challenges in our department at the time were fostering a more negative attitude. Work had ceased to be an expression of our creative selves.

Initially I had believed that the way individuals perceive their work contributed
whole to a sense of purpose and meaning. If they could see how their contributions made a difference, if they could find some stillness and focus they would be able to connect with their soul and find more fulfillment. As Fox (1994) wrote, work should come from the inside out and be an expression of our inner being. I had hoped that the retreat and the meditations would enable the participants to discover the meaning and purpose in even the most mundane tasks when they could see how each task represented a part of the whole.

The data however would suggest that how we view our job in a “purposeful” sense is but a minor element when it comes to finding work meaningful. While I realized that in doing my job effectively I was helping people do their jobs more effectively and thereby ensuring some financial security for themselves and their families, this belief was overshadowed by more internal concerns. In my journal during the month of December I wrote about how I “didn’t fit in with the others.” How I was “being stifled” or I wasn’t allowed to “be myself” and how I was bored because it was always the same thing. Gwen says in her interview that she felt she was forced to deny her creative side. In her interviews, Sophie said that she remembered liking her job in the beginning because she was learning new things. At one point she had been working and taking classes at night and had felt better. “I feel useful sometimes, but the fact is that I don’t feel challenged in my job.”

Did the retreat have any impact on how the participants viewed their work? Did it help contribute to a higher level of meaning or sense of purpose? The data do not suggest that the retreat or the meditations had any effect on the participants’ perception of more fulfilling or meaningful work. From the pre-retreat interviews, through the journals and
the post-retreat interviews there does not appear to be any significant difference in how they perceived themselves and their job. Their job really remained a "job." I have to conclude that more time may be needed to sustain change or it may be that we simply need more practice with mind-shifting attitudes.

The retreat and the meditative practices were designed in a way to aid the participants in reflecting on their work and to encourage them to see something positive and new, and find meaning in that. Following their retreat and the month-long meditation practice, both Sophie and Karen maintained their previous views on work and their purpose in their current workplace. Gwen had gone into the study with a very positive outlook on her work. Work held meaning for Gwen as long as she was challenged and felt that she contributed to something. Her major concern had been a lack of recognition for the ideas and work that she did do. The data do not indicate a change in this following the study.

As Kouzes & Posner (1999) and Fox (1994) point out, when work is exciting, challenging, and fun it is easier to find a sense of fulfillment in it. But can work be exciting all the time? Perhaps some jobs can, but the repetitious nature of a call centre job excludes virtually any excitement. One of the biggest complaints was of boredom. Boredom is the antithesis of excitement, creativity, and novelty. As a result, its first casualty is meaning.

In her journal Sophie wrote on November 23rd, "This is my job. How can I be happy doing this? Sure I have contact with people in need and I know I help them in a way...but it bores me, same thing over and over." Gwen worries that if she stays in her position much longer she will be bored and feel unfulfilled. When work got boring, it
lost its interest and its meaning. I had hoped that the retreat and the meditation exercises would help the participants deal with this by transforming those instances of quiet into moments of stillness and contemplation. I thought that it would be possible to take advantage of what was perceived as boredom. However, the data indicate that neither the retreat nor the meditations aided the participants in combating their boredom. One thing that did alleviate boredom was the relationships they formed with their co-workers. As mentioned previously, when work was social it was easier, but not necessarily more meaningful or purposeful. As it often takes time to develop strong relationships with our co-workers, perhaps the meditations would have succeeded in alleviating boredom with more time and practice.

Another aspect of work that did help combat boredom and contribute to a greater sense of meaning was celebration. Work celebration is a form of ritual and as Fox (1994) mentioned, in order for a working spirituality to be effective, there had to be an element of ritual. Ritual involves celebration, giving praise and appreciation, acknowledging the body, playing, and honoring silence (Fox, 1994). My experience with corporate celebrations has indicated that unless there is an existing internal commitment on the part of the employees, employee celebrations and appreciation events have little long-term impact. In her interview, Gwen concurred with this and said that she had found evidence of this need for internal commitment in her workplace. She also felt that the success of such events depended on how much one invested in it. "It's how much you want to put into the spirituality - how much you want to take part in those rituals. How I see it - we're all in our little bubbles and if you want to connect we're a whole unit." She found that there were many opportunities that were provided by the company to practice
ritual celebration. In her eyes, we were "fulfilling our spirit... [and allowing it] to grow when we celebrate anything that happens in the company.... When we practice a custom – a ritual. And I think we have rituals here."

Our company has recognized the need for celebration and ritual. There are regular Contact Forums – large-scale meetings where the president and directors communicate directly with the staff about new and upcoming issues. There are employee appreciation days, awards for excellence in customer service, Christmas parties for the children, and a summer picnic. Nonetheless, the effect of these rituals and events are dependent on the individual employee’s perception of them. As Gwen said, you get out of it what you put into it. Furthermore, the effects are not long-lasting. These events serve as relief from the monotonous repetition of work in the call centre.

I believed that these company rituals and celebrations could be more effective if individuals would make a deeper and more spiritual connection to them. Perhaps if employees were directly involved in organizing their own social events, their own forms of appreciation and could, during these activities, ensure that their emotional and spiritual needs were being met, there would be greater level of commitment and long-term benefit. The retreat, and the ablution practice in particular, was aimed at helping the participants focus on ritual. As a ritual, ablutions help the participant focus on the moment and create a greater awareness of being in that moment. Ablutions are really a cleansing and a celebration of that particular moment of being. Gwen wrote that they helped her focus on this and she recognized the connection between her perception of celebration and the company’s rituals. "With the help of this small ceremony, every one of my senses is faced with its own path and expectation," Gwen wrote in her journal during the retreat.
Her perception of this ritual did not change because several weeks later, on December 22nd, she wrote, “Performing this practice (ablutions) on myself enriches me with the idea of Self-importance....Throughout the day, I feel clear and fresh. Confident and ready to take on all the barriers I may encounter.” Karen added that it made her think how refreshed she was every time she did it and it reminded her "of when the priests cleanse their hands before giving the Holy Communion." Even Sophie noticed a difference on the days she started off with the ritual of ablutions. "It felt good, refreshing. It was a good way to start the day....Though the morning was busy, I was calm. Can't say whether it was due to the ritual or not, but I was calm." In my journals I mentioned how these practices forced me to organize my time in the mornings before going to work and how on the days where I began the morning focused on the ablutions I felt “calmer and more prepared” for what that day was going to hold.

While only Gwen appeared to make the connection between personal ritual and company celebration, all the participants agreed that the ritual cleansing and ablutions had a positive effect on their day. It provided them with a sense of focus and helped them start the day off right. I believe that this ritualistic activity was so positive for the participants because it was something they did for themselves, it was a moment of serenity that they controlled and from which they derived a positive sense of connection and meaning.

**Balance**

The search for balance is a quest popular cultural has taken as a pet project. You can’t watch an episode of Oprah or visit a bookstore without hearing about the lifelong search for balance. I have to ask myself why this is such an urgent issue now. Can it be
because we are feeling isolated and out of touch despite the fact that we live in a "global village"?

Regardless of the reasons, this search for balance is something many of us are striving for. But what is it really? When we say balance, what are we really searching for? Equilibrium between our bodies, minds, and spirits? The proverbial middle ground where all things meet and mingle? In my opinion, balance is an ability to juggle all the aspects of my life in an effective way that contributes to the greater whole. Sometimes that means saying no to things I really want to do and other times it means saying yes. For me, it means managing my life in a reasonable fashion without sacrificing or compromising myself but oftentimes it means sacrificing my tendencies to extremism.

In her pre-retreat interview Sophie said that she was always striving for balance. “I certainly try to find a balance….being at one with myself, living my life for the good of myself and the people around me.” When Gwen mentions feeling torn between her ideas of God and the reality of the world, she is alluding to a lack of balance. In another sense, she speaks of how she doesn’t take enough time for herself, “I’ve committed to making a home, raising children, and being a wife and partner….But I don’t really spend time just by myself.”

It may be a simple way of looking at it, but in my opinion, the solution to the balance issue can be found in mathematics. The fulcrum is the key to the great balancing act whether it’s a teeter-totter or life.

Achieving a comfort level with that middle ground, finding that centre, is not as easy as it sounds. But it begins with simple awareness – awareness of the self and of the moment. Ideally, through meditation, one should be able to reach a state of heightened
self-awareness. In return, this heightened state of self-awareness may contribute to a new perspective on the world and our place in it. It may also aid us in making the decisions that contribute to a more balanced life.

The work world of the participants in this study often appears off-centre. As Sophie says in her interview, one minute it’s boring, the next it’s crazy. It is often a case of feast or famine, and in such an environment balance is in high demand and very rare. The ability to reach a state of focus and awareness could be a valuable skill. One of my main questions going into this was whether or not one could really be in the workplace and how did that impact the participants?

Karen displayed an incredible ability to be in a moment. Her descriptive passages following a meditation at work, home, or even in a restaurant very clearly demonstrate this. She was very focused on the moment, on what she was doing or feeling and discovered new thoughts, new tastes, and new ideas. In her pre-retreat interview, Karen had complained about how little she did other than work and clean her house. Following the retreat, it was as if she rediscovered these little things that she enjoyed, like feeling the sun or watching the clouds move slowly by. Once, after doing the morning ablution and going to work she wrote, "I find that this clears my mind and I also find that by doing this breathing exercise makes me more aware of the morning itself. It's like I make time stand still for a short moment." During her post-retreat interview, Karen also spoke of how the retreat helped her balance her emotions. "What would have happened if I didn’t do it [the retreat] then?...I think it really helped me. There was so much negative stuff going around. So much complaining. It kept me neutral...I think it kept me more at an in-between state."
I sometimes think my definition of “balance” was limited to a balance of the physical aspects of our life. Karen’s experience provides insight into how I view the ability to balance and expanded my ideas. She captured it perfectly when she referred to it as an “in-between state.” In the midst of the chaos in her workplace – chaos that was physical, mental and emotional – the retreat experience allowed her to expand her perception of what was going on, remain neutral, and cope with it in a productive manner.

In Gwen's case the heightened awareness and ability to be, allowed her to let go of things. The journal allowed her to track her experience and learn from it. In the post-retreat interview she commented, "I can go back to it and I did go back to it and see the progress or the decline, and seeing what happened and why and explaining to myself and how could I change it for myself. Studying myself." The focus also allowed her to appreciate things that she had forgotten. She had danced in the past and stopped and the retreat brought back to her the need for exercise and for appreciating food that her culture had embraced. In the post-retreat interview she said, "When you sat us down and did that [eating meditation], I appreciated it." The entire experience, whether it was the meditations, the ablutions, or the retreat itself gave her a new appreciation for herself. Prior to the retreat she was last on her list of priorities. However, following the retreat, she gained a new self-knowledge that allowed herself to take more time for herself. "Now I'm spending the time on me and somehow it gives me the confidence in my ability to be able to handle anything that comes my way that day." That is definitely something that has spilled over during her working hours in her ability to handle the stress of work as well as the stress of returning after a long illness and coping with her pain.
Karen and Gwen demonstrated that their increased ability to focus gave them a new perspective on their life and work. In Gwen’s case, this helped her achieve a more balanced approach to her life. While prior to the retreat she had indicated that she was aware of the need to spend more time on herself, the retreat itself provided her with the impetus to create those moments and to take the time for herself. She immediately benefited from this. In her post-retreat interview she spoke of the impacts that taking time for herself had on work life, of how it had helped her deal with the stress of work and the pain of her illness. “Five minutes of meditation gives me hours of energy and feelings of well-being. I feel the best, the most optimum….A break isn’t a break at work unless I’ve done some form of meditation during it!”

Sophie struggled with the ability to balance the varied pace of her work. In her pre-retreat interview she expressed frustration with how rushed her mornings were and how one day at work will be incredibly busy and then next it will be slow. Following the retreat she noticed a difference on the mornings she did the ablutions. In her journal she wrote, “I start off with morning ablutions and affirmations. I start off better prepared today and I’ve had a good night’s sleep. It was busy but I was calm and felt good.” It would appear that the act of morning ablutions helped her balance and focus her state of mind and prepare herself for her workday. As in the case of Karen and Gwen, the retreat activities enabled Sophie to find an “in-between” state that sometimes helped her at work.

My journals do not indicate that the retreat or the activities during the month that followed helped me achieve a greater state of awareness or balance. In fact, I found it increasingly difficult to cope with the threat to my job, the loss of relationship with my co-workers, and other aspects of my life such as my family and school. At no point in
my journal is there an indication that I am successfully balancing anything. One entry detailed an episode with a co-worker where I failed to juggle my emotions and the reality of the situation. In the cafeteria one afternoon my co-worker cracked a joke about my different tastes in things like music and activities. Unable to distinguish between a jest and my own unraveling emotions, I lashed out by saying, "It must be difficult to pretend to like me all the time." My lack of awareness and understanding of the stress everyone was going through, coupled with my inability to deal with my emotions resulted in a lack of balance that caused even more friction.

If I return to my original question with respect to balance, the data do demonstrate that it can be beneficial to achieve a more heightened awareness and that this contributes to a greater ability to balance different aspects of our work. The awareness of the need for balance helped Gwen make the commitment to take time for herself and she felt the impacts. Both Karen and Sophie also found that by achieving a more centred state they were able to cope with different things on the job.

**Power**

As Aubrey (1995) and Briskin (1998) in the literature suggest, the history of work has oftentimes been one of the struggle for power. Whether it was power over nature and the elements, or the different levels of power in a factory, most organizations that people work in are organized according to differing levels of power. In the case of this call centre, there is the Vice-President of the division, the Director, the Manager, then a group of executive supervisors. The decisions in the operations, decisions such as scheduling, staffing, and the physical environment are made by them. Management controls the business. The literature and my experience indicates that a lack of control or the feeling
of being “watched” or “policing” in the workplace can have a detrimental effect on people’s attitudes towards their work. I experienced this directly when prior to the retreat I had been provided with some confidential information through a supervisor. Immediately following this, I was approached by my manager and cautioned about spreading the information. Not only were my work ethics being questioned, but it was also implied that I was being watched to ensure that I kept quiet. At the same time there was talk in management meetings about informants within the work population that were providing information on employees considering leaving the company.

It is difficult to create meaning or find fulfillment when work or your work environment is controlled, dictated, and policed. How we deal with such a “powerless” environment is the key to attaining our own sense of inner power. Frankl (1946) wrote, "Man does not simply exist, but always decides what his existence will be, what he will become in the next moment" (p. 154). We may work in an environment that we can’t control to one-hundred percent. But we can make the conscious choices to decide how we will exist within that environment. I had hoped that the retreat would highlight the opportunity to make these choices a reality and that would somehow empower us. I thought that the retreat and this study would do this by strengthening our relationships, helping us to discover meaning, and striking a balance. The path to power, I believed, was the path of connection, meaning, and awareness that would empower us to make the conscious choices and decisions to positively impact our lives.

Were there “power” issues prior to the retreat? In my journal I talk about feeling “powerless.” In December I wrote, “I have no idea where I’m going to be this time next month, never mind next year!” When informed about the decisions concerning my job, I
remember feeling anger because the decisions had been made without any choice or consultation on my part. In a poem I wrote as part of my own story, I expressed this sense of futility as “My golden road of opportunity crumbles” (Appendix G). Gwen also experienced a loss of power. In her pre-retreat interview she said that she often felt that her time at work didn’t belong to her. “I feel that my time has been bought.”

In a sense, Gwen is correct in her feelings. Her time is being bought. This is business and maybe to expect anything else is unrealistic. Working in a call centre, I’ve often heard how time is money. Every second a telephone representative spends on the phone with a customer costs money. Every second they spend on their break or going to the washroom costs the company money. As a result, their time both on and off the phones is carefully monitored. In fact, a large portion of their performance appraisal and bonus is directly dependent on the statistics that measure their time. It is difficult to feel free or creative when you are being watched and monitored. Kouzes and Posner (1999) suggested that a sense of spirit in the workplace is dependent on the relationship between the individual and his or her work. How can spirituality or any sense of harmony flourish in a workplace where the employees feel controlled and stifled?

All 3 participants often felt like they had little or no choice over what they said or did in the workplace. In her journal, Sophie wrote of a dream she had that, I believe, spoke volumes of her inability to deal with the lack of control. In her dream she was in a large mansion with her co-workers and it was some sort of work celebration. And she finds out she has to sleep in a room with a ghost. “I feel panic. Why am I chosen to sleep here out of all these people?...I run to people and start begging them to let me sleep with them, where there are no ghosts....so I don’t feel the ghost in bed with me.” In
reality, Sophie often felt that she was working to pay the bills and didn't have much other choice. At work, she often feels that she has her hands tied to the computer and lacks freedom to do what she wants.

Gwen was also very vocal about the effects of the lack of control and choice. "The ultimate freedom is what I've always wanted. I don't like boundaries. I like to run something and be able to dictate my own boundaries." In my field notes from the retreat I noted that Gwen reacted strongly to the guided visualization. In a very short period of time she was able to descend into a very deep sleep. During the discussion following the guided visualization she said that she had been unable to envision her work environment as something beautiful, something that was completely hers. She fell asleep, dreaming about being yelled at or yelling at someone, telling them to stop.

Karen's issues with control also involved the physical environment. She hated going into work every morning because she always had to search for her chair. A chair had been ergonomically adjusted for her and each morning she would have to search it out, often interrupting people at their work in her search. In her pre-retreat interview she was very vocal about this. "Every morning it's the same thing! I don't like coming in to work in the morning. You know why? Because I have to look for a place to sit! I have to hunt around for everything to get myself going." Her inability to control her environment, her things, and her space had a direct impact on the way she began her day. She had no control and no power over this.

As Frankl (1946) proposed, power is about control and our ability to make conscious choices. For the participants in this study, this was very important. They wanted the freedom to make their own decisions and to have control over their physical
environment, be it how they sit at their desk or what chair they sit in. A complete lack of choice and freedom can leave some employees feeling embittered and controlled, not fulfilled or peaceful. As Frankl (1946) wrote, in circumstances where there is no physical freedom, no choice, and no control, it is a spiritual freedom that provides people with meaning and purpose. Within the workplace employees should feel free to make their own choices and decisions and from that, develop their purpose and meaning. However, in cases where this sort of freedom is not granted, I believe that meditation and retreating provides people with moments of contemplation and freedom if they should so choose. Unfortunately, some people are so intimidated by the controlling forces of management that they think themselves incapable of any sort of freedom. During this study the participants did question the control they worked under and they did challenge it by practicing the meditations and activities.

One surprising discovery for me was that the ability to make choices and decisions and regain some power, often simply involved making the decision to perceive something differently. If we can’t change our environment, if we are powerless within that environment, shifting how we perceive that controlling element can make a substantial difference.

For example, Karen perceived her hunt for her chair and her things every morning as a lack of control over her physical environment. However, following the retreat and the new emphasis she placed on relationships she was able to view these “hunts” every morning as an opportunity to connect with her co-workers. In her post-retreat interview she happily pointed out, “I haven’t had to hunt around for a chair every morning!”
Following a difficult day Gwen practiced the Loving Kindness meditation and in being able to forgive her co-workers and view her environment differently she felt stronger, “empowered, in control of my surroundings. And maybe a better person for it?” Following the shift bid, Sophie was put into a new area and on a different schedule which allowed her more freedom. “I will be able to make plans and enjoy the weekends like the rest!” She felt better about her job as well, “I feel as if I have more choice over what I can say and do for the customers.” Her comments would indicate that a greater flexibility in scheduling within the job helped her feel more in control and more positive in general. These events that she mentions occurred following the retreat, however, they are not directly related to the retreat itself but do, nonetheless, indicate the importance of freedom in relation to power.

Summary

There is no doubt in my mind that a workplace is a community built on the strength of our relationships with our co-workers and the richness we perceive in our physical environment. When these elements are challenged, our sense of place in the work community suffers. The retreat affected our sense of community and relationships in various ways. It would appear that it highlighted the importance of our relationships and enabled us to gain more comfort from our peers during difficult times. Through forgiveness and compassion, some of the participants were able to gain new insight or at least try to gain new insight into the people they worked with. Most importantly, the data would suggest that the connections made through the retreat and meditative practices were possibly strengthened when the practices were shared with family members. Furthermore, the impacts of the physical environment and their importance with regard to
our sense of community and connection cannot be minimized. Our physical environment plays an extremely important role in how we view our work and the meaning or sacredness we may attach to our work community.

Work should be an expression of who we are, it should have meaning and provide fulfillment. The participants in this study felt, to varying degrees, that their work was not particularly meaningful. It did not challenge them, it had lost its newness, and it bored them. Work had taken on the singular purpose of paying the bills. The retreat was designed with the purpose of helping the participants explore their work and their concepts of meaning they had attached to their work. My underlying hope was that by exploring what their work meant for them they would be able to perceive new meaning in it. However, the data do not suggest any perceivable change in how they perceive their work. It determined that the repetitious and boring nature of the work was all-encompassing. The only things that helped deal with this were the sense of connection with their co-workers, and company celebrations and rituals.

The need and desire for balance is an integral part of a working spirituality. The ability to juggle the demands of the work, our needs for fulfillment and purpose with the reality of paying the bills, our families, and our emotional, physical, and intellectual needs is not an skill that comes easily to most people. However, it is something that many of us desperately seek – that fine line – the space in between. Balance was key to the retreat and to a working spirituality. Meditation is supposed to increase awareness and focus. These are skills that can help us perceive our lives in ways that can enable us to more successfully find a balance. The retreat enabled the participants (myself being the exception) to begin finding a new sense of equilibrium. Oftentimes our ability to
balance anything is outweighed by the how we perceive the seriousness of our situation. In my case, no amount of breathing and meditating really helped me achieve a better state of focus during that extremely stressful time. However, Gwen was able to finally realize the importance of balancing her needs with her perceived demands of her family. It is safe to say that for the most part, the retreat and the meditation activities provided immediate and momentary moments of equilibrium. While we did have moments of greater awareness and focus, these did not have an overall effect on how we perceived our work at that time, nor did it help us balance the reality of our jobs with the need for fulfillment and meaning.

And finally, I will address the issue of power. Power is about control and our ability to make conscious choices. The data indicated that the participants felt a distinct lack of control within their work environments; whether that was a lack of control over their physical environment, or in the ability to make choices while performing their jobs or even something as simple as the flexibility of their schedule. In an environment where one lacks the ability to make decisions and choices it is difficult to feel empowered and to feel as if one's work and oneself is valued. The data suggest the retreat exercises helped some of the participants feel more conscious of their power within the workplace. One surprising outcome that I had not anticipated was that the retreat and meditations allowed the participants to change their perception of some of the key elements in their power struggles and this had favorable outcomes.

This chapter addressed the data with regard to the themes of relationship, meaning, balance, and power. The following chapter will evaluate the retreat activities and the study itself as well as explore the implications of this study and any further areas
of research.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

It has been over a year now since I began this study. I was initially inspired by a poem by Rumi in which he entreats the reader to let the beauty we loved be what we do, and to learn the many ways there are to kneel and kiss the ground. I connected strongly to his words because, at the time, I was in a job that I disliked. I was bored, felt unchallenged, and I was having a difficult time going into work every day. In my workplace I had observed that I wasn’t alone and there were others feeling the same way. I wanted to believe Rumi’s advice; that if we could let the beauty we loved be what we did, then we would feel more fulfilled. If we could learn to view our work as sacred and as holy as he viewed the earth to be, then we would feel more fulfilled. And so this study was born and I began to investigate the “many ways” there were to discover the sacred and the holy in the world. I decided that meditation might be a key to improve job satisfaction and that a retreat focusing on meditation would be an interesting idea to pursue. At the time, I was asking if retreating would help workers and what would be the nature of the experience? What would be the outcomes? What could I learn from this and how would it also enhance my own practice? So, with my faith in Rumi, my meditations selected, my retreat designed, and my participants, I was ready to change the world (or at least my small, work-related corner of it).

In chapter 1 of this study I discussed why and what my ideas and plans were. Chapter 2 provided an overview of the literature that expanded my ideas and plans and chapter 3 outlined the Action Research methodology for my study. In chapter 4 I presented the themes and findings that I obtained from the data. It is time now to revisit
my original idea and determine how or if I succeeded. In this chapter I will evaluate the effectiveness of the retreat and its activities, and propose some areas of change and opportunities for further research. Also, I will interpret the findings in light of their implications for this study.

The Retreat

To begin with, it is necessary to address the retreat itself. I have identified some of the reasons I didn’t look forward to going into work in the morning: I was bored, I wasn’t feeling creative or fulfilled, and I thought I no longer had control over my work and my life. I believed that if I could connect with my inner self and rediscover a sense of the sacred in my work that I would be able to improve my attitude, my feelings, and my practice. In my research into retreating I discovered that the goal of a spiritual retreat was to create the opportunity to experience the silence and solitude necessary to listen to the inner voice and dialogue with a divine source. Louden (1997) wrote that retreats created a space and time where ordinary life and its relationship to time no longer exist, enabling us to escape the needs and demands of others and tune in to our authentic selves. The literature on retreating emphasizes its spiritual and personal transformational rewards.

In my study, I wanted to introduce my participants to the practice of retreating in itself and also to various meditation activities. In addition, I set out to create a space and time where my participants could, through various meditative activities, begin to dialogue with their inner selves and perhaps place themselves on the path to spiritual and transformational riches.

I believe that the retreat was successful in that it introduced the participants to
various forms of retreat activities such as meditation, yoga, and visualization. The evaluation forms filled out immediately following the retreat indicated that the participants enjoyed the day and appreciated the opportunity to take time for themselves. They had approved of the location and the pace of the schedule. The flow of activities and the timing of breaks appeared to work well. Combining an eating meditation over lunch worked as it kept the momentum going through what otherwise would have been a long break. All the participants found it beneficial to begin the day with the morning ablutions and indicated that their day passed more calmly and that their attitudes were more positive. I believe that the morning ablution was so popular because it is really something we do everyday without realizing it, and by turning it into a conscious ritual we were able to see how something so simple and apparently common could be sacred. The data demonstrate that the guided visualization was also extremely effective. Following the retreat Gwen sought me out and asked for copies of various guided visualizations I had on tape as she felt that taking the time to listen to a guided visualization had a very positive effect on her.

One of my goals was to have my participants transfer the activities learned at the retreat to their workplace. I felt that if they were to benefit from the retreat and the meditations in their workplace then the activities should be useful there. While some of the retreat activities transferred more readily to the workplace, others did not. The walking meditation transferred well for some of the participants. Karen spoke of how she had done the walking meditation to the bathroom, on the way up the stairs, to the lunchroom and on her breaks. She found that doing this enabled her to move more slowly and feel less rushed. She sometimes felt as if she were seeing things as if for the
first time. Gwen found that doing the walking meditation on her breaks enabled her to cope with the stress of providing company tours and taking calls. Sophie however felt uncomfortable doing it at work as she found the place to be too public.

The breathing meditations were not so easily transferable as the participants often felt self-conscious. However, Sophie does mention one occasion of using the breathing meditations in between calls and she noted that it helped her remain calm and balanced. I also benefited from the breathing meditations at work. Oftentimes, during that stressful month of December and January, practicing the deep breathing at my desk was the only thing that kept me sitting there! Even if they didn’t feel comfortable practicing the breathing meditations at work, all the participants practiced at home, Gwen going so far as to introduce the practices to her family. The data suggest then that the breathing meditations were transferable from home to the workplace. Whether used at home, in between calls, or on breaks, the breathing meditations allowed the participants to gain some immediate sense of control over their emotions and stress.

Based on my findings, there are elements of the retreat and indeed the study that I would reconsider. At future retreats I would take additional steps to ensure that our space and environment was as free of distractions as possible. While turning off the phone and clearing out family members is an excellent start, I would also ensure that all pets are removed as the family pet caused a distraction (though with often hilarious results). Furthermore, I would give additional consideration to the size of the space. In choosing a new retreat site I would ensure that the participants had different rooms to go to if they felt they needed to be alone to complete an activity. While in this location there were other rooms, I failed to emphasize the availability of these places.
Space also became an issue when we did the yoga. In the future I would want a larger space that facilitated the yoga portion of the program. While I recognize the importance and benefits of yoga as a physical and mental exercise I am forced to concede that it isn’t for everybody. The yoga moves proved to be challenging for the participants who had never practiced yoga. For future retreats, instead of attempting a full yoga routine that incorporated numerous poses and meditations, I would shorten the routine and concentrate on a few basic moves. I would then provide the group with a handout with the remaining poses to practice at their own pace. One exposure to yoga is not enough; success comes over time and I believe that I expected too much from this brief sojourn into the activity. It is also possible that my own experience as a yoga instructor was not adequate. While I have led a couple of classes in the past due to my own instructor’s absence, it is possible that I felt self-conscious and was out of practice.

The one meditation I would not do at a future retreat would be the money meditation. I had thought this meditation would be an effective way of having the participants connect with the concept of financial motivation. The evaluation sheets indicated that the participants did not connect at all with this meditation. Sophie wrote on her evaluation form that she didn’t feel that it had much impact. My field notes also indicate a distinct lack of reaction and enthusiasm for this particular practice. “This meditation did not work...the silence felt awkward and everyone seemed unsure as to what they were doing. Am I not doing this right?” It is possible that I did not facilitate the activity adequately enough and that if I had provided more varied and larger denominations of currency it may have had a greater impact. It was my first time leading this meditation and it is quite possible that I was reacting to the “awkwardness” and came
across as less confident.

There are also several elements of the study itself that I would change. I believe, first of all, that my expectations may have been too high. I had hoped that with a one-day retreat followed by 1 month of practice, I would be able to effect sustainable change and transformation with my participants. I had elected for a one-day retreat because I felt that as difficult as it was to find time for ourselves, it was important to make the point that any time spent retreating is good time, and you didn’t have to take a week off to reap the benefits. And while I still believe that this is true, I would also consider that for an introductory style retreat, that is, a retreat where the participants are new and just learning these practices and activities, more time would be better. A longer retreat, 2 or more days, would provide more practice time to learn the meditations and this could possibly have a greater impact on their abilities to transfer them to their everyday lives afterwards. Another option may be to have several one-day retreats over a longer time span, perhaps one per month over 6 months with time in between to practice. The additional time would also allow them longer periods spent alone and separated from the rest of the group, something that this retreat didn’t really allow for. One day may be enough for experienced retreatants, but for future groups, I would extend it.

The journaling activity proved to be difficult for all the participants. I believe that they may have viewed the journals as something they had to do for the study, versus something they could do for themselves. Because I was comfortable with journaling I may have expected too much from the participants who had never kept journals before. Some of the participants were not disciplined enough while one of the participants was simply intimidated by the written format. I had hoped that the activities and quotes in the
journals themselves would address these issues, but it wasn’t enough. For future retreats I would, ideally, meet with the participants prior to the retreat and discuss with them what methods they would be comfortable with. Journals are but one means of expressing oneself. Participants may feel more comfortable expressing their experiences through other methods, such as keeping an oral account on tape or using the visual arts – painting, scrapbooks, sketching, photography, etc. In retrospect this experience has emphasized that words in themselves are but one form of expression.

I would also add regular group meetings. This would function as a motivating factor for those keeping journals or tracking their experiences. It would also help provide an outlet of expression for the participants who are not comfortable with the journal writing. Regular sharing could also reinforce the transfer of learning to the workplace, help with any issues, areas of struggle, or discomfort. It would also serve as a means of celebrating the successes we are experiencing on our journey.

In order for a retreat to be considered successful it must meet certain criteria. It must provide the participants with the opportunity to convene and dialogue with themselves. It must be entered with a purpose in mind and have clear intentions. It must create a space and time outside of the demands of everyday life.

While my retreat did meet all these goals, I have to remind myself that a retreat is more about the experience than the end result. Retreats are not one-time solutions, but mere moments in time that can provide us with the impetus to go on.

**Future Implications: Towards a More Spiritual Workplace**

Like the retreat, this study is not a one-time solution, an end in itself, but an exploration. This exploration has many implications as new questions arise. How can
retreats be encouraged for regular frontline employees who work in environments where personalized space is limited, jobs are repetitive, and customers are highly emotional? What would corporations have to do to enable their employees to find fulfillment and meaning and why should they? What is in it for them? What is in it for their employees? This section will address these questions.

The research and my data would suggest that there are employees working in repetitive, isolating jobs that do not fulfill them or satisfy them. I believe that a working spirituality – focusing on aspects of work that are meaningful and fulfilling – can improve job satisfaction. This study was but one attempt to find a way to incorporate a working spirituality into the lives of four call centre workers.

My original thought was that spirituality in the workplace could not be institutionalized but instead had to come from within each individual. I still concur that the internal commitment is absolutely necessary for a spiritual evolution in the work world to happen. However, I am forced to admit that it is not enough. We can be committed to finding meaning and fulfillment, we can meditate, we can retreat, we can visualize and affirm, and we can even change the way in which we view the power structures and control mechanism we work within. Nonetheless, these skills must be practiced over time because, as the participants in this study have shown, they are not, in themselves, enough to sustain lasting transformation and create substantial meaning. There are elements such as vacation time, the physical environment and personalized space, the nature of the job, schedules, and shifts that play an incredibly important part in how we create meaning in the workplace.

In order for a working spirituality to evolve and be sustained, the commitment
needs to be made on both sides – the employee and the employer. How can employers do this? I will briefly outline ways to alter the environment, build in retreat time, and to revise monitoring strategies. They can do it by first of all celebrating their employees’ decision to create meaning in their work. Create spaces that honour the earth, that honour the human spirit and that honour the heart. In my new area of employment I have headed a project where my peers and I are designing a “creativity” room. We have solicited feedback from the team about what they enjoy, what inspires them and we are bringing those elements into the room. We are bringing in the earth in the form of water fountains, plants, colours, and textures. We are bringing in the spirit in the form of music, words that inspire us on the walls and literature, and activities that celebrate the creative spirit. The purpose of this is to create a space removed from the pressures of work, where we can think and “be” in a creative mindset. My hope is that this space will create that “in-between” state mentioned by Louden (1997) and enable us to cope with the large amounts of information and technology that we work with. If we can do this, and allow, as Fox (1994) mentions, our work to flow out from within our creative centre, then we would be taking more steps towards a work story that is fulfilling and satisfying. By bringing nature and the earth into this space, I hope that we are moving towards what Allan Watts referred to as a philosophy which “like nature, has no purpose of consequence other than itself” (as cited in Nisker, 1998, p. 113).

I believe that corporations need to recognize and encourage their employees to take the time to retreat. While vacations are great, they are not retreats. Vacations, when people do manage to take them, are often more exhausting than working! Companies could provide their employees with designated retreat days at selected locales. Perhaps
they could have an agreement with a local resort, spa, recreational facility, or conservation area and their employees can schedule "retreat" days to go off by themselves at these sites. Other suggestions may be to have organized yoga classes during lunch hours or before work. Free massages or scheduled visualization workshops would also be possibilities. My own retreat model could be used as a weekend retreat for employees. There could be weekend retreats organized once a month and it would be at the employee's discretion to attend. The key would have to be flexibility – a program that is supported by the employer but personally managed by the employees. They would attend a retreat weekend when they wanted to and not because they were told to.

Companies also need to recognize the repetitious nature of some of their jobs and provide work that is varied, challenging, and offers the opportunity to build and strengthen peer relationships. Opportunities are needed for continuous learning in areas of interest rather than just the area one works in. Cross-functional training in other departments would help keep employees learning and challenged and they may potentially find a job that they really connect with. More freedom in the job they do function in could go a long way to helping relieve that sense of lack of control. Call monitoring for performance can oftentimes seem like policing. Perhaps a more communal approach would be more beneficial. What about installing rotating listening circles where everyone gets the opportunity to listen to their peers and learn from them and provide feedback? This may lessen the feeling of being watched and controlled as well as provide the call centre telephone representatives with time off the phones and more varied work.

Most importantly, there is a need for companies to encourage the strengthening of
employee relationships. I believe that oftentimes companies mistake team-building activities for relationship building. It is my opinion that you can learn to work as a team and you can learn to play together. Given the choice, I believe that playing together can lead to more effective teamwork. Companies need to recognize the difference. They need to allow their employees to talk together, to play together, to celebrate and socialize together in a context that is not always about work and profits. All too often, work celebrations are about work: employee appreciation events, celebrating profits or a good quarter. What about having events that celebrate the different cultural backgrounds of the workforce? What about recognizing the efforts that employees put into their communities outside of work? Whatever the event or celebration is, I firmly believe that it must be openly embraced and encouraged by management but organized and run by employees. Social event committees and employee newsletters are both great vehicles for managing this process.

Of course there is the question of how the company will benefit. In a 2001 survey of call centres across Canada done by the Service Quality Management Group Inc., the percentage of call centre employees in an average call centre who felt they were “very satisfied” with how they felt valued and respected in their jobs was 18% (SQM Survey, 2001). In overall satisfaction, the average call centre reported that only 39% of their telephone representatives were “very satisfied.” Because a call centre’s success depends largely on its relationships with its customers, the emotional and mental well-being of its frontline employees is critical to that success. The same report also reported a benchmark average turnover rate for telephone customer service representatives at 18% annually. Employees who lack value and meaning in their work are more likely to leave
and look for something new, exciting, and challenging elsewhere. This represents substantial costs for corporations in restaffing and retraining, not to mention the potential loss of customer revenue during the transition of new hires. It is a common marketing myth that it costs five times as much to win a customer back as it does to gain a new one. How much would it cost to keep employees versus hiring new ones?

In order for a working spirituality to occur, employers must encourage and support the personal spiritual journeys of their employees through their own commitment to an improved environment that addresses the spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional needs of their people. They need to provide clear guidelines, well-trained facilitators, and facilities for exploring these needs. Only by viewing humans as complete, complex individuals working and connecting with one another in a working community can both employers and employees succeed in a journey of the spirit, the mind, and the body.

A commitment is needed on both sides to sustain the transformation. Ultimately, I believe that for this working spirituality to be successful, employees also have a role. They have to make the decision on their own to commit to a process of spiritual transformation and growth. Going into this study I had an idea that a working spirituality was important, but I learned that it takes more than a few yoga exercises and some breathing meditation to make it happen. It takes a powerful commitment to the process of spiritual growth and transformation. It takes time and practice to sustain any lasting change. My participants taught me that the journey for a working spirituality takes place not only in the workplace but at home, not only with their co-workers, but with their families and friends. My retreat proposed but one solution and a handful of activities. It is clear that there needs to be more emphasis on other activities, other facilities and
methods for exploring and enabling employees to discover their own spiritual path and how that path connects their soul to their work and ultimately to their lives.

My own spiritual journey has taken years and it is nowhere near complete. I have faced obstacles and found peace in spiritual practices. However, I have not mastered the ability to transform my obstacles into opportunities, I have merely learned to cope with them. Perhaps that was why I found I was not as successful in this study as I had hoped to be. Am I further along the journey or were my expectations too high? I think that at times I became too caught up in running the study, and I lost sight of my own spiritual journey. But this, like any other obstacle, is but one more step, one more learning opportunity. This study, and my participants, have shown me that the journey is a long one, but a worthy one; that it occurs in tiny steps; that it occurs not in isolation, but within a community of other travelers.

Employees play an incredible part in this journey. They can hold the keys to the factory, if the factory owners will let them. Based on this study, I would advise employees to play their part, to search for meaning, to ask questions, to persist in demanding the right for work to have meaning. And to employers, I would appeal to them to recognize their own spiritual needs. Yes, spiritual activities in the workplace are new and for many they may seem unfamiliar. But they are valuable. Employers should be supportive and encouraging and ultimately, they should practice themselves and become part of that spiritual community. Perhaps it is possible that a working spirituality could serve to blur the lines between managers and the managed.
Areas of Future Research

This study was particularly focused on a call centre involved in the delivery of customer service and Emergency Roadside service. The results therefore are reflective of a specific setting involving repetitive, supervised roles. There are many areas of future research possible to improve the morale and conditions at similar sites.

I would be interested in adapting the study for different work environments such as factories, other call centres, hospitals, or schools. Factories often involve repetitive work in difficult physical environments. Which activities would transfer well to a factory and why? How would workers in a factory react to a retreat? Is there a perceived need for spirituality in such a workplace? How would the experiment differ and what connections would that have to the physical environment or the nature of the job? What of individuals with other high stress jobs such as nurses, teachers, and law enforcement officers where clients and customers are often emotional and negative? Is there a need for a working spirituality in those demanding environments, and what would be the possible solutions for them?

The results of this study were limited by the fact that its participants were all women. How would the results differ if the study were conducted with men versus women? What variables would I have to change with regards to the activities? What would the dynamic be if the study involved men and women together?

I believe that a further study could focus on the longitude factor. If the focus were on the sustainability of change, then participants would be contacted at different times in the future, 6 months, 1 year, or 2 years later to determine the effects of the retreat and the practices.
What would be the impact of changing the call centre environment from Emergency Roadside to a retail customer service one in a different corporation such as Convergys or Bell? What if it were run in a call centre where I am not known to the participants? How would the response be to the retreat and how would the results differ if the retreat were run by a stranger rather than a colleague?

Further research also needs to be done in the field of the physical work environment and how it relates to a working spirituality. What sort of call centre desk configurations, floor plans, colours, and decors would promote more awareness and contribute to a more meaningful environment? Would having employees be involved in the design of their area provide them with a greater sense of control and power? These are all questions that this study did not explore and it would be valuable to do so.

Furthermore, the repetitious nature of the work is a concern. The participants of this study felt bored and unchallenged by their work as telephone representatives. This study was not successful in discovering ways to alleviate this boredom through spiritual activities. What would be a more effective way of dealing with this issue of challenging employees in the workplace? How can they cope more effectively with the boredom of repetitious work or even eliminate it completely?

One issue that I had not anticipated was the level of commitment to work and I believe that this should be studied further. How does our existing commitment to our work affect our commitment to a spiritual journey in the workplace? In her journal Sophie wrote, “This is all helping me feel calm and feel good about me. However, I'm at a point where I don't feel good about the work I do and no longer want to be here.” Throughout the study she expressed doubt about both her job and her abilities to benefit
from the retreat practices and activities at work. The question begs to be asked – what do we do when we feel that there is nowhere left for us to go in our current position – no opportunities for advancement, or no interest in pursuing them? What kind of impetus is required to make the sometimes frightening leap, leaving a job that is financially secure but emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually draining, for something more promising and fulfilling? When does one know she/he has reached this point and how does one do it? I believe these are important questions that this study did not address and further research into this issue could be extremely beneficial to many people who find themselves in that position.

Ultimately this study was about finding ways to improve my practice by bringing the soul and the heart into my work and environment through retreating and meditative practices. Initially I felt that it hadn’t. I felt that I struggled through the changes and challenges in my workplace at the time. However, in retrospect, I must admit that the experience of leading the retreat and running the study gave me the confidence and the courage to pursue new directions in my professional life. This new confidence has enabled me to make positive decisions and choices with regard to my career. Currently I am in a job that provides me with new challenges every day and I am confident in my ability to deal with them, but most importantly, I am confident in my ability to lead and guide others through them. I don’t believe I would be at this stage in my journey had it not been for this experience.

**Conclusion**

My purpose in this study was to discover whether or not retreating and meditation, when incorporated into the workplace, could improve our practice by
imbuing it with a greater awareness and sense of spirituality. I wanted to know what happened when call centre employees went on a retreat and then meditated at work. Would it help them? Would it change their perceptions of their work?

Throughout this study I discovered that there were some elements of our practice such as, our sense of connection and our relationships with others, that were more important to the women in this study and directly connected to a sense of spirit. This sense of community is extremely important and contributes directly to how we perceive our work and our practice. When realized, relationships contribute to a working spirituality and enable us to cope with the stress and demands of the modern workplace.

This study has illustrated for me that it is indeed possible to alleviate stress in the workplace through breathing techniques. All the participants discovered that the breathing meditations and techniques helped them during difficult moments on the job by calming them and helping them think more clearly. While the breathing techniques helped in that moment, they did not have a sustainable or measurable impact on our overall stress levels on the job. Nor did they contribute to an improved, overall attitude towards our work. However, I believe that if management and employers valued this spiritual work and provided an ongoing incentive to keep practicing and engaging in these practices there would be more long-term effects.

A one-time retreat in itself cannot help someone find fulfillment at work. It needs to be combined with a personal commitment to the long-term goals of spiritual transformation and coupled with a supporting physical environment and management.

A sense of personal control and freedom of choice are integral to a working spirituality. It is a paradox that we can attain some measure of spiritual comfort within
the most confining environments and at the same time feel that we require freedom and choice to embrace spirituality. The retreat – by providing me with the distance and time to meditate – taught me that spiritual freedom is a choice we can all make. It is a choice we make with every moment of silence and contemplation and with every conscious choice we make to better our environment and practice. We can remain disempowered by rules and statistics and react by complaining or we can choose to work and live within the required guidelines without losing ourselves in the process. This conscious choice is directly dependent on the extent of our internal commitment. It depends on how much we really want to be balanced, content, and self-fulfilled.

For my participants, three people who I now regard as friends and who have helped me rediscover myself through their own journey, meditation and retreating was the key and the vehicle to help us all attain a greater awareness of ourselves, of each other, and of our workplace. Perhaps it didn't help us all discover a purpose or meaning in the work that we do, but it did help us cope in a time of need and illuminate our thoughts, our goals, and our feelings. Perhaps the seeds of greatness were planted as we realize that we are free to pursue our dreams and if that means leaving our current positions then we will find the strength to make that choice. Ultimately, what this retreat and study accomplished was to highlight for us the potential in us and in our lives when practiced with personal commitment and authenticity – with spirit.

Epilogue

On a personal note, my experience during this study had far-reaching effects to my personal story. When I began this journey I didn’t realize to what extent my father’s work story influenced my own. I didn’t realize that this story that I am telling, this work
that I have done, is more about him that it is about me. I learned that many of the decisions I have made with regard to my career have been influenced by what I perceived as his story while I was growing up. His work in the factory, the effects it had on his body, his emotions, and on his spirit provided a colourful thread in the tapestry of my own career path.

When I began this study I was in a job I disliked because I felt unchallenged and disrespected. I was working in an environment where the threads of trust, respect, and communication that bound my community together had been cut. My stress levels were incredibly high and I was feeling the physical and emotional effects – sickness, depression, and despair.

During the year that followed the retreat, my life underwent incredible changes. I am now working in a new area. While I am still working as a Learning Consultant, I am happy and fulfilled. My current job challenges me with varied and interesting projects. My team members accept me the way I am and honour the person I am. I feel respected, admired, liked, and trusted. My manager and director show a depth of understanding and compassion that is inspiring. My manager’s motto is: “Do what you need to do for you.” And my director adds to that, “Have fun doing it.” In such an environment I’ve been able to flourish and grow into myself, and into a more content and balanced person. I am growing into the person my father always wanted me to be. I am becoming the person I want to be.
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Journal Activity #1
"I AM"

Take a moment to list, in your journal, all the things that you are. This allows you to begin to discover who exactly you are and what makes you different from others. It also lets you see what your particular talents are. Then, try and find a metaphor for who you are at work. How you feel about your work.
Journal Activity 2

1. Write out all your negative perceptions and ideas about work.

2. On a separate page, rewrite these perceptions in the most possible way.

IE: Negative: I have no control over my work environment.

   Positive: Everyday, I make decisions that affect my work environment.

Now let’s get rid of the negative list!!!!!

Remember – keep the positive list with you. Take it out during the day and re-read them when you need to.
Journal Activity #3

Money Meditation

Following the money meditation, describe what money means to you. What does it look like, what can it buy, how necessary is it for you? How do you feel differently about the different denominations.
Journal Activity #4

Write a letter to the Higher Source (God). Describe your image of him/her. Describe how you feel about him/her. Describe how you see the relationship between this higher power and the world, your world. Describe what you think your concerns are with regards to your relationship with this power.

An exercise like this brings you into a soul-like state of mind and being. Asking yourself these questions and thinking about them is like prayer. Another activity would be to think to yourself that you have a year to live and you will be pain free for that year. How will you live it? Write it all down.

Further journal activities:

Imagine you can change two things in your life – what would they be and how would you change them? What would your life be like after?

Imagine that you are the soul you were before you were born. Imagine meeting other such souls and having a conversation with them about what you think will happen when you are born, what you think you will have to do when you take on a physical body.

Write up a list, very quickly, of what you are passionate about. What gives you energy. Are there connections, patterns? How do these things fit into your current job, how would you make them exist there if you could?

Focus on one thing you really want and like for a long period of time. Write down in your journal how many and what interesting things happen to you.

Record and write down your dreams, how you felt about them, what you think they meant.

For work to be soulful, you have to express your talents. What are they? How can you put them into your work and share of yourself?
Appendix B

Meditations

The following are meditations that range from easy to more challenging. Some of these practices are available from Charles MacInerney’s website at http://yogateacher.com/text/meditation.html.* Others are adapted from David Cooper’s book, *Renewing your Soul.* ** The money meditation and guided visualization are adapted from Lewis Richmond’s book, *Work as a Spiritual Practice.*

Breathing

*Simple Breath Awareness:* Assume a position of lying on your back on the floor or bed, with your knees bent or straight. Now observe the breath without trying to change it. The key is not to control the breath, but to observe it and allow it to shift on its own towards a perfect rhythm.

*Ujjayi Breath:* This is practiced by half closing the epiglottis at the back of the throat. In doing this, you partially restrict the flow of air, causing your breath to sound raspy or hissing from the back of your throat. This is how most people breath when they are sleeping. This is a basic breathing technique and is used in conjunction with other meditative practices such as walking meditation or sitting.

Belly breathing: This was taught to me by my Yoga instructor. While lying on the floor with arms straight at your side, breathe in deeply. On the inhalation, you focus on pushing your stomach as far out as you can, filling your entire diaphragm with air. On
the exhalation, you completely empty your diaphragm, sucking it in as you exhale all the air.

**Eating:**

*Sincere Appreciation:* This meditation involves eating slowly and contemplating the food you are eating with regards to where it came from and the many stages it has gone through to get to the plate and the mouth. You give thanks to the farmer who raised it, the sun that nourished it, and the miracle that the food represents.

**Walking:**

Walking meditation focuses on what is happening from the hips down while walking. The key is to find a stretch of about fifteen to twenty feet where you can experience walking without going anywhere. The practice begins by centering yourself and staying balanced between all four directions. Then you think about taking a step and notice what the body wants to do. Then, moving slowly, and concentrating on your movements, begin walking. The concentration is focused on the raising, floating, and setting down of the foot in each movement.

**Money:**

This meditation involves concentrating on two denominations of money – the highest available and the lowest in someone’s wallet. As you concentrate on it, notice the symbols on the bills, think and contemplate what they mean, what the money itself means, what its value is to you and to society. You ask yourself what it really is – a piece
of paper or what it can buy. You fixate on it until you are able to completely visualize it with your eyes closed. Then do the same with the lower denomination. Finally, try to imagine your workplace or your life without money. How would it change?

***Guided Visualization:
You need to sit quietly and close your eyes. Empty your mind of all extraneous thoughts and focus on your breathing. Now picture your place of work as it appears from the outside. See it as you would when you first approach it every morning. In all likelihood the actual building is rather nondescript. Perhaps it is an office high-rise or a low-flung factory floor. ……In any case, allow your imagination to alter your image of this place. Give it a different roof, the rood of a church, or a temple, a dome, skylights, trees, and branches….see its architecture as reflecting your spiritual ideals…. Now imagine yourself going inside. The room where you work is empty. Your colleagues have not yet arrived. Cast the gaze of your imagination around the room. In real life, no doubt your workplace is filled with the usual clutter, papers in piles on desks, stacks of uncollected transmissions in a jumble next to the fax machine, emptied trash cans. Against this mundane tableau, superimpose a different image, that of the inside of a temple or church. Imagine the feeling you have when you step inside a sacred space and visualize that feeling pervading your place of work.

Now imagine your coworkers entering and taking their places, one by one. At first you see them as they usually are. Some of them are your friends. Some of them annoy you. Others you do not know well, or at all. There is your boss, weaving her way through the desks and cubicles to a private office. About each of these people, with
whom you spend more time each day than anyone else in your life, you have some opinion, some like or dislike.

As these people take their places, set those customary attitudes and opinions aside. Imagine that a different kind of visual power opens up within you so that you can see your coworkers not as they appear on the outside but as they really are. Let that nature show itself as a shining jewel in the middle of each person’s forehead, glowing with a soft, pulsing light. Imagine the whole room being lit up by this subtle light. Your coworkers are going about their ordinary tasks, seemingly unaware of this luminosity. But you can see it, because you choose to see it, because you want to see it, as a conscious act of spiritual intention.

Sustain this vision for a few minutes. See your workplace as holy and all the people in it as holy.....Because you choose to sustain this vision of your workplace and your work mates, it is as real as anything is. Now, slowly, one person at a time, allow the chairs to empty, the room to thin out, until once again you are alone in the empty space. It is the end of the day; you are the last one to leave. You go out the front door, mentally shutting the windows and turning out the lights. Before you go, you turn back and look once more at the workspace from the outside. The roof and structure you gave it fades away. The building is once again as it was. You allow the vision to dissipate and slowly disappear. Once again the canvas of your mind is blank. You allow your attention to return to the rising and falling of your breath.
**Loving Kindness Meditation:**

This is adapted from the Jewish meditation called *chesed* and that which the Buddhists call *metta*. (Cooper, 1997, p.66) It is a good meditation to do at the end of the day.

Assume a relaxed, comfortable position on your back. Focus on the breath. Reflect on the day, or week, and its events. If an event stands out, let that be the focus, otherwise allow the meditation to be more general. Think to yourself, “If I have harmed anyone or anything, directly or indirectly, intentionally or unconsciously, I ask for your forgiveness.” Visualize being forgiven. Repeat the process with “If anyone has harmed me, directly or indirectly....I offer you my forgiveness.” Follow this with visualizing happy moments and events, peaceful moments, and moments of freedom. Visualize someone you care about and offer them these things. Think of someone you do not have strong feelings for and repeat. Visualize someone you have negative feelings about and repeat. Apply this to your workplace, your community and the world at large.

Finish off with the universal prayer for the welfare of all beings,

*May all beings be awake.*

*May all beings be happy.*

*May all beings be at peace.*
The text is not visible due to the overlay.
Appendix C

Pre-Retreat Interview Questions

Can you describe a typical workday? What about a weekend?

If you had more free time, what would you do with it?

If you had time to spend, just with yourself, how would you spend it?

Can you tell me about your job?

What exactly do you do?

How do you feel about the work you do?

How do you feel about being alone? Being quiet?

What comes to mind when you hear about things like retreats or meditation?

What is your ideal work place or job?

What do you think work is? Why do you work?

What part of your work is the least satisfying?

What part of your work is the most satisfying?

Do you think there is room in your work for creativity, joy? If so, where?

What do you think joy and happiness are? Do you ever experience them at work?

When?

What do you think will happen if you continue on in your current role?

Can you describe for me what you think business is?

Do you think there is anything sacred about the work you do? If so, can you tell me about it?

Are your dreams every related to your work? How?

What are you expecting from this retreat?
Have you ever kept a journal? If so, can you describe how you felt about doing it?

**Post-retreat Interview Questions**

Has your perception of your work changed? If so, how?

Did you notice any difference in how the day at work goes?

Did you feel or notice that you dealt differently with people, situations or emotions?

Did you discuss the retreat with your family? What part?

How comfortable were the meditation practices? Explain.

What successes did you experience? When?

Did you find the retreat activities helped change your perception of spirituality?

What is your definition of spirituality?

Have your relationships with your co-workers changed at all? How?

Do you have a better idea of what you need to make your work more meaningful? If so, what is it?

How did you feel about the retreat?

How did you feel about the meditation activities?

How did you find the week following the retreat? And after that?

Has your concept or your attitude towards your work changed? How?

How do you think you have benefited from this experience, if at all?

Do you think you will continue with the practices you learned at the retreat?

Do you find value in spending time alone working on being in the moment? Why?

What do you think you would need to support or encourage you to continue on this path?
Appendix D

Retreat Evaluation Form

Name: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

Researcher: _______________________

Please answer the following questions with as much detail as possible. Your feedback is extremely appreciated!

1. What did you think of the retreat location?

2. What was your favorite part of the retreat?

3. Were you comfortable in the retreat setting? If so, what made you comfortable and if not, what do you think could have improved the situation?

4. Would you participate in another retreat? Why or why not?

5. Would you recommend this retreat to other employees in your area? Why?

6. What, if anything, would you change about the retreat?
### Appendix E

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Let the beauty we love be what we do. There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.</th>
<th>For years, copying other people, I tried to know myself. From within, I couldn’t decide what to do. Unable to see, I heard my name being called. Then I walked outside.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Rumi</td>
<td>-Rumi</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>We take long trips. We puzzle over the meaning of a painting or a book. When what we’re wanting to see and understand In this world, we ARE that.</th>
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<td>-Rumi</td>
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<tr>
<th>The minute I’m disappointed, I feel encouraged. When I’m ruined, I’m healed. When I’m quiet and solid as the ground, then I talk The low tones of thunder for everyone.</th>
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<td>-Rumi</td>
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<tr>
<th>No more words. In the name of this place we drink in With our breathing, stay quiet like a flower. So the nightbirds will start singing.</th>
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<td>-Rumi</td>
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<tr>
<th>In meditation, go deep in the heart. In dealing with others, be gentle and kind</th>
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<tr>
<td>-Tao Te Ching</td>
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<tr>
<th>Knowing others is wisdom; Knowing the self in enlightenment; Mastering others requires force; Mastering the self needs strength.</th>
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<td>-Tao Te Ching</td>
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<tr>
<th>Stillness and tranquility set things in order in the universe.</th>
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<td>-Tao Te Ching</td>
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| You are more than you think you are, and something in you knows it. |
| - Jean Houston |

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Journeys bring power and love Back into you. If you can’t go somewhere, Move in the passageways of the self.</th>
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<tr>
<td>-Rumi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today every efficient office, every up-to-date factory is a ...prison in which the workers suffer...from the consciousness of being inside the machine. – Aldous Huxley</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assuming you feel this way, how do you think you can change this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice the Simple Breath Awareness meditation before you go to work. Note how you feel as you begin your day. Is it different from the day before?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At lunch, practice the Sincere Appreciation meditation. How do you feel while doing this? Do you notice a difference in the second half of your work day? What is it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice the Walking Meditation on your way to the bathroom every time today. How do you feel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice the morning ablutions. Note and document any differences during your day. If there isn’t any, document how you feel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice the Loving Kindness at the end of your workday. What event or person stands out. How do you feel about it? Have your feelings towards it changed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture your workplace as a sacred space. What does it look like? How does it feel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To live well is to work well, or display a good activity. - Thomas Aquinas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does working well mean to you? What does it look like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I most want is to spring out of this personality, then to sit apart from that leaping. I’ve lived too long where I can’t be reached. – Rumi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel at the end of your workday? Date:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take 10 minutes of your break today for complete silence and contemplation. Describe how that felt.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the end of your workday, practice the following yoga poses and meditations. Aleph, Beit and Gimel. How do you feel?

At the end of your workday, practice the Ayin yoga pose and meditation. Imagine your workday through the eyes of a higher power. What does it look and feel like?

Prior to going to work, practice the yoga pose Khaf and its corresponding meditation. Imagine you are going to enjoy a spiritual and well balanced workday. At the end of the day, write about your day noting any special differences or lack thereof.

Please continue to document your thoughts and feelings about your workday.
Appendix F

Form # 01 Revised Sept 1999

Brock University Research Ethics Board

1999-2000

Application for Ethics Review of Research with Human Participants

Statement of Ethics Review Requirements:

It is a requirement of the Brock University Senate that all research involving human participants which is conducted or supervised by its faculty, staff and students, must be reviewed and receive prior ethics clearance through the Office of Research Services, which serves as the Secretariat for the Research Ethics Board. This policy applies regardless of where the research is conducted or whether it is for academic publication or internal use only. It also applies to research conducted on Brock University premises by researchers who are not members of the Brock community. This requirement is outlined in the "Brock University Faculty Handbook, Section III:8". This section was substantially revised and approved by Senate on May 26, 1999. The revisions to these policies and procedures are in compliance with the "Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (August 1998)". The Tri-Council Policy Statement describes the policies of the Medical Research Council (MRC), the Natural Sciences & Engineering Research Council (NSERC), and the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). Paper copies of the Faculty Handbook, Section III:8 and the Tri-Council Policy Statement are available from the Office of Research Services and web-based versions are available for viewing via the Office of Research Services web site at http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices where they may be downloaded and used for submissions to the REB. The complete application package (Forms # 1 - 6), including the application form, expedited review request, sample consent forms, forms for annual progress reports and modification to an ongoing application and examples of completed protocols is now available on our web site at http://www.BrockU.CA/researchservices/mainethicsformpage.html or from the Office of Research Services.

Brock University Research Ethics Board:

The Research Ethics Board (REB) is a multidisciplinary board with representation that reflects the diverse research methodologies and content of the Brock University research community. The REB reports directly to the Brock University Senate. The terms of reference and composition and structure of the REB are outlined in the "Brock University Faculty Handbook, Section II:9" (last revised on May 26, 1999). Paper and electronic copies are available as noted above for Section III. The Chair of the REB for the 1999-2000 academic year is Dr. Robert Ogilvie, Professor of Psychology.

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Before undertaking any research with human participants, the researcher must be thoroughly familiar with the principles of research ethics (Brock University Faculty Handbook Section III:8 and Tri-Council Policy Statement on the Conduct of Research Involving Humans - as mentioned above). Researchers should feel free to consult the Research Ethics Board regarding these principles and other matters related to ethical research with humans.

2. No research with human participants shall commence prior to receiving approval from
the Research Ethics Board.
3. Please type or print legibly the responses to all of the questions in section "A" directly on the form and include signatures where required. Please type the responses to all of the questions to sections "B" through "F" on 8½ x 11" white paper and attach to section "A". **Forward three (3) copies of the complete application (sections "A" through "F") , including all attachments (e.g. consent form, research instruments, etc.), to the Director of the Office of Research Services.**
4. Answer all questions and provide all requested information. Failure to do so will delay the review process.

Revised Sept 1999 Expedited Review__ File # _______ Full Committee Review__

Brock University Research Ethics Board Application for Ethics Review of Research with Human Participants

A. GENERAL INFORMATION (PLEASE PRINT)
1. Title of Project (this title should be identical to that of any corresponding grant):

"The Transformation of Work to Livelihood: A Spiritual Retreat"

2. Faculty Investigator(s) Department Ext. # Email

3. Faculty Supervisor(s) Department Ext. # Email
Sharon Abbey 688-5550 ext3349 sabbey@ed.brocku.ca

4. Student Investigator(s) Department Home#/Ext # Email
Jennifer Doucet 788-9947 Jennifer.Doucet@CTAL.com

5. Nature of the Research (please check all that apply):
Ongoing track of research ( ) Independent Study ( ) Masters Thesis (X )
Single study (one-time only) ( ) Faculty Research ( ) Honours Project ( )
Doctoral Dissertation ( )
Class assignment (course # and name) ________________________________________

Other (please specify) ________________________________________________________
6. Funding Status:
Is this project currently funded? Yes ( ) No (X)

Details of funding: Agency

If no, is funding being sought? Yes ( ) No (X)

Agency

7. Has this application been submitted to any other Institutional Research Ethics Boards? 
Yes ( ) No (X)

If yes, provide name of Institution, date and decision. Attach a copy of the protocol (and approval if available).

8. Expected project commencement date (YY/MM/DD): June 1, 2000 and expected project completion date: January 30, 2000.

AGREEMENT
I/we have read the Brock University Faculty Handbook Section III:8 pertaining to Research Ethics and agree to comply with the policies and procedures outlined therein. In the case of student research, as Faculty Supervisor, my signature indicates that I have read and approved the application and proposal, deem the project to be valid and worthwhile, and agree to provide necessary supervision of the student.

Signature of Student Investigator(s) (Date)

Signature of Faculty Investigator/Supervisor (Date)

Reviewer Disposition (For REB use only - reviewers, please attach comments if necessary.)

Accepted as is ( )

Accepted as revised ( )
INSTRUCTIONS FOR SECTIONS "B" THROUGH "F":

- Please type responses to all questions to sections "B" through "F" on 8½ x 11" white paper and attach to section "A" (including signatures where required).
- Forward three (3) copies of the complete application (sections "A" through "F"), including all attachments (e.g. consent form, research instruments, etc.) to the Director of the Office of Research Services (ST1101).

B. SUMMARY OF PROPOSED RESEARCH

1. PURPOSE AND/OR RATIONALE FOR PROPOSED RESEARCH (describe the purpose and background rationale for the proposed project as well as the hypothesis(es)/research questions to be examined). Typically a one-half to one page summary is required.

2. METHODOLOGY/PROCEDURES (Describe sequentially and in detail, all procedures in which the research participants will be involved, e.g. paper and pencil tasks, interviews, surveys, questionnaires, physical assessments, physiological tests, doses and methods of administration of drugs, time requirements, etc. Be sure to address when, where, how long and who will be present during the participant involvement.) Please append copies of all research instruments to be used and/or copies of questioning guides for interviews and/or copies of protocols for observation and/or procedures for collecting unobtrusive measures.

3. PARTICIPANTS involved in the study (Describe in detail the sample to be recruited including number of participants, gender, age, range and any special characteristics. Describe the relationship between the investigator(s) and the participant(s).)

4. RECRUITMENT PROCESS (Describe how and from what source the participants will be recruited. Indicate where the study will take place. When recruiting, please ensure that copies of any poster(s), advertisement(s) or letter(s) to be used for recruitment are forwarded to the Office of Research Services for inclusion with your application.)

5. COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPANTS (Will participants receive compensation for participation and if yes, please provide details).

6. FEEDBACK TO PARTICIPANTS (Whenever possible, and upon completion of their part in the study, participants should receive a feedback letter expressing appreciation for their involvement and providing general information about the objectives/goals of the study. Upon final completion of the study, an executive summary should be offered. Describe the arrangements for provision of these two types of feedback, and attach a copy of a generic feedback letter to be used in the first instance.)

C. POTENTIAL BENEFITS FROM THE STUDY
(Please elaborate on each question: "Yes" or "No" is not sufficient)
1. Discuss any potential direct benefits to participants from their involvement in the project.
2. Comment on the (potential) benefits to the scientific community/society that would justify involvement of participants in this study.

D. POTENTIAL RISKS FROM THE STUDY
1. Discuss the known and anticipated risks of the proposed research, specifying the particular risk(s) associated with each procedure or test. Consider both physical and psychological/emotional risks.
2. Does this research involve a topic that might be expected to cause participants emotional distress (e.g. questions about death, sexuality, substance abuse, family conflicts, etc.)?
3. Does this research at any time isolate the participant and the researcher?
4. Might any aspect of this research be expected to cause participants mental or psychological harm (e.g. provoke anxiety, cause reduced self-esteem, induce guilt feelings, etc.), or social harm (e.g. cause participants to be embarrassed, offended or disconcerted)?
5. Might any aspect of this research be expected to cause participants physical harm to their health (e.g. vigorous physical activity without medical check-up, administration of drugs, etc.)?
6. Does this research in any way infringe on the rights of participants (e.g. withholding of beneficial treatments in control groups, restricting access to education or treatment, participation cost, etc.)?
7. Describe the procedures or safeguards in place to protect the physical and psychological health of the participants. Explain the steps taken to minimize any distress during the procedure and to restore participants to their pre-experimental state.

E. FREE AND INFORMED CONSENT
1. Attach a copy of a Letter of Information describing the procedures and a separate Consent Form (see sample Forms #3 and #4). If written consent will not/cannot be obtained or is considered inadvisable, justify this and outline the process to be used to otherwise fully inform participants (exceptional cases only).
2. In the case of minors, describe the process to be used to obtain permission of parent or guardian. Attach a copy of an information-permission letter to be used.
3. Does this study present any risks to participants beyond those outlined in the questions above (e.g. provide less than full and frank disclosure of all information relevant to free and informed consent by participants)? Describe and justify the need for partial disclosure.
4. Explain the debriefing procedures to be used and attach a copy of the written debriefing and post-debriefing form.

F. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY
Describe the procedures to be used to ensure (a) anonymity of participants; (b) confidentiality of data, both during the conduct of the research and in the release of the findings; and (c) explain how written records, video/audio tapes, questionnaires will be secured and (d) provide details of their final disposal.
Form # 02

To Expedite or Not Expedite

Researcher's Name: Jennifer Doucet

Title: The Transformation of Work to Livelihood: A Spiritual Retreat

In order to apply for an Expedited Review, the Researcher must be satisfied that the proposed studies involve no more than MINIMAL RISK. Minimal risk means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater, in and of themselves, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. The purpose of this checklist is to facilitate the review process and to identify the ethical issues with which the Committee is concerned. It is meant to be an aid for the researcher and for the Committee.

CHECK HERE:

[X ] THIS IS A NEW PROPOSAL.

[ ] THIS IS A RENEWAL OF A PREVIOUSLY APPROVED PROPOSAL.

[ ] THIS IS A CONTINUATION OF A PREVIOUSLY APPROVED PROPOSAL.

Please check YES or NO to each of the following questions:

YES NO

1. ____ X Will the populations studied be defined as consisting of any of the following: Minors (under 18), pregnant women, prisoners, mentally disabled? (If YES, underline all that apply.)

2. ____ X Will it be possible to associate specific information in your records with specific participants on the basis of name, position, or other identifying information contained in your records?

3. ____ X Will persons participating or queried in this investigation be subjected to physical discomfort, pain, aversive stimuli, or the threat of any of these? (If YES, underline all that apply.)

4. ____ X Will the investigation use procedures designed to induce participants to act contrary to their wishes?

5. ____ X Does the investigation use procedures designed to induce embarrassment, humiliation, lowered self-esteem, guilt, conflict, anger, discouragement, or other emotional reactions? (If YES, underline all that apply.)
6. X Will participants be induced to disclose information of an intimate or otherwise sensitive nature?

7. X Will participants engage in strenuous or unaccustomed physical activity?

8. X Will participants be deceived (actively misled) in any manner?

9. X Will information be withheld from participants that they might reasonably expect to receive?

10. X Will participants receive any type of compensation for their participation?

11. X Will a penalty result if they decide to withdraw from the study or not participate at all?

12. X Will participants be exposed to any physical or psychological risks not indicated above? (If YES, explain.)

13. X Does the research involve recording of data from subjects (18 years or older), using invasive procedures routinely employed in clinical practice? (including exposure to electromagnetic radiation outside visible range, x-rays, blood sampling, microwaves, etc.)

14. X Does the research require voice readings or recordings made for research purposes?

15. X Does this research require study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens?

16. X Can the investigation be reasonably expected to induce stress?

Considering the above, are you applying for
Expedited Review X Full Review ___

If the committee decides that Full Review is necessary, you will be informed by e-mail immediately.
1. Purpose and/or rationale for proposed research.

The evolutions of work and livelihood have shown an increasing lack of spiritual awareness in the workplace. A spirituality of the workplace would provide individual workers with methods for coping with stress, encourage individual belief systems and recognize the need for a more holistic approach to work. By spirituality, I mean the ability to live life mindfully, to revere life and to consciously make choices that are beneficial to the world. (Louden, 1997, p.4) To live and work spiritually is to see the interconnectedness of all things. The Newtonian parts mentality on the other hand, which proposed that an entity could only be understood by the sum of its parts, is at the root of the work world and transformed the workplace into an entity fragmented into tasks and roles. The modern workplace is not a place managed with relationships or spirit in mind, but with profitability. As a result, workers often feel isolated and overwhelmed by the information and technology. Recently, a survey conducted by the United Nations International Labor Organization cited job stress as “one of the most serious health issues of the twentieth century.”(Fox, 1994, p.15)

The truth of the matter is that most people spend more hours at work than they do with their families or involved in other activities. And in my role as a learning coordinator for a large corporation, I see first hand the effects of this lack of spiritual awareness on front line employees. I see exhaustion, high absenteeism, despair and cynicism. Everyday I witness the bitterness, the fear and worst yet, the apathy that comes from not enjoying, loving or
seeing the beauty in the work that people do. The intent of this study is to create a time and space in the form of a one-day retreat where the participants can be shown and guided in the many ways there are to undertake their work more joyfully. I want to create opportunities for employees to discover within themselves the potential to transform their jobs into livelihood. By creating an opportunity for front line employees to simply be in the moment, it is hoped that the voice of the soul will be heard, and provide guidance and relief from the moments of stress and anxiety.

My objectives are as follows: I wish to create a time and space devoted to spiritual contemplation. To undertake a spiritual retreat is to step back from everyday reality and concentrate instead on silence, simplicity and solitude. The retreat will focus mainly on meditation due to the inherent benefits of the meditative practice. The practice of meditation allows the mind to quiet down from the continual buzz of everyday life and study ourselves, freeing ourselves from mental and emotional conditioning. (Nisker, 1990, p. 118) It also improves our capacity to experience life and lowers blood pressure, reduces anxiety and stress. (http://yogateacher.com/text/meditation.html)

It is hoped that through this spiritual retreat, the participants will begin a journey towards personal transformation in their own work environments. In addition to this, I will explore the rewards of spiritual retreats for corporate, front line employees and examine the feasibility and suitability of the retreat format.

2. Methodology/Procedures.

A pre-retreat interview will be conducted with participants in order to gauge the extent of their knowledge of retreat practices, their feelings towards work, spirituality and what their
expectations are with regards to the retreat. These interviews will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher. See attached interview questions.

The retreat will follow. It will be a one-day retreat following a traditional retreat format of silence, simplicity and solitude. While there will be some group interaction and discussion, the participants can choose to withdraw from the activity at any time and pursue the goals of the retreat on their own if they wish. All activities and meditations will be approximately forty-five to sixty minutes in length and will be lead by the researcher.

The day will begin at 9:00AM and run until 5:00PM. The retreat will open with introductions and morning ablutions. The tradition of ablutions involves the practice of cleansing hands and face with water and reciting various positive affirmations to begin the day. While formalized religions will not be advocated, I have borrowed and combined practices from various religions. The practice of ablutions for example is one of the oldest spiritual practices of symbolically purifying the body and has traditions in both Christian and Judaic practice. The affirmations are directly tied to the various physical parts of the face and hands being cleansed. For example, in the case of the eyes, the affirmation will be, “I am cleansing my eyes so that I will be able to see things as they are in order to develop compassion for life.” (Cooper, 1997, p.27) Another example would be for the ears, “To hear the deeper truths of all that I encounter and not be corrupted by gossip and unskillful speech.” (Ibid.)

This will be followed by sixty minutes of Hatha Yoga. Hatha Yoga is a very gentle form of yoga that focuses primarily on holding particular poses and concentrating on breathing and relaxing. I have chosen a method developed by Hart Lazer, a Canadian teacher of Hatha Yoga which combines the asuna poses with the letters of the Hebrew aleph-bet. It is taught
that each letter of the Hebrew aleph-bet has a unique effect on the soul, the body, the emotions and the intellect just as each yoga pose does. (Cooper, 1997, p.93) For example, the asuna Supta Padangustasana is linked with the letter Beit that represents a house. While in this pose, the participant imagines a house and contemplates what passes in and out during everyday life and what they can do to protect their house. (Cooper, 1’997, p. 97) Combining the two provides a new and deeper way for connecting the body and the soul.

The participants will then do a journal activity that focuses on the spiritual questions of Who am I? Why am I here? They will simply contemplate these questions and begin to formulate a picture of who and what they are. The journal activity will be followed by a variety of breathing meditations and then an exercise involving writing personal affirmations. After lunch – which will involve an eating meditation, the participants will do a walking meditation. Then they will engage in a money meditation that involves contemplating a denomination of money. This will be followed by a journaling activity in which they explore what money means to them and how it figures into their lives. Please see attachments for full descriptions of all meditations and guided visualization.

As the afternoon winds down, the participants will engage in a guided visualization where I will take them through their workplace and describe for them the interdependence that exists between themselves, their workplace and their co-workers. A final journaling activity will involve writing a letter to their higher source. A higher source refers to any source of energy that guides them. If the participant does not have a known higher source, the letter may be written to themselves. The day will finish with a group discussion involving how they can incorporate meditative practices and activities in their workday. A final, loving kindness meditation will conclude the retreat. There will also be a brief
written evaluation form for them to complete at the end of the day. See attached evaluation form.

The group will be provided with journals where they are to document their experiences for one month following the retreat as they attempt to implement these meditative practices into their work routine. A post-retreat interview will occur one month following the retreat to determine if and how the retreat was successful in heightening spiritual awareness and if this in turn lead to a greater satisfaction at work. This interview will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher. See attached post retreat interview questions.

3. Participants.

The participants are volunteers from a large corporation in Welland. I am also employed by this corporation as a full time learning consultant. There are five participants and they are all female and range in age from 25 to 45. They are all in front line positions in various departments. Front line employees in call centres generally handle incoming and outgoing calls. The relationships between the participants and the researcher vary. Three of the participants are known to the researcher in a professional capacity, while two participants are not known to the researcher at all and heard about the retreat from other participants and employees.

The only fees associated with participation in the study involve a small fee for the lunch being provided the day of the retreat. The group, taking into consideration food allergies, will decide upon the choice of food and agree upon any cost.
4. **Recruitment.**

The five participants volunteered for this study. Once they had approached the researcher, a letter was sent to them providing details of the study and retreat. See attached introduction letter.

5. **Compensation for participants.**

Participants will not receive any form of compensation for participating in this study.

6. **Feedback to participants.**

During the study, all written transcripts of interviews will be reviewed with the participants to ensure accuracy. Following the study, the journals will be returned to them. Summaries of the study results will be provided to them upon completion of the study. Also, a letter of appreciation will be distributed. All transcripts and journals will be kept in a locked cabinet while the study is conducted. Only the researcher will have access to this material.

**C. Potential Benefits from the Study**

1. **Benefits to the participant.**

The participant will benefit from this study in several ways. Primarily, they will gain knowledge of various meditative practices that can aid them in managing stress and anxiety. They will benefit from the contemplative and meditative practices with increased concentration and focus. This study also has the potential for transforming their perspectives on work. By engaging them in spiritual contemplation and activities, the study will heighten their awareness of their own conceptual understanding about spirituality. In turn, this could have a direct impact on their health. A recent study by Duke University mentioned on CBC
Radio found a positive correlation between good health and spirituality. (Tapestry, CBC Radio)

2. **Benefits to society.**

In this case, the area of society that would benefit most from a study of this nature would be the corporate workplace due in most part to the nature of the participants. The recent flux of literature specializing in spirit in the workplace would suggest that this study is timely. Organizations are becoming increasingly aware that they are made up of individuals – not machine parts. And these individuals are complex human beings with mental, physical and spiritual needs. While organizations have traditionally focused on the mental and physical development of their employees and environments, the spiritual aspect has been delegated to churches and religious organizations. An increased awareness of the spiritual aspect of employees would reward organizations with increased job satisfaction and productivity, a more genial work environment that embraces compassion, generosity and kindness and potential health benefits due to the reduction of job related stress.

**D. Potential Risks from the Study**

1. **Known and anticipated risks.**

Retreats involve isolation and silence. Occasionally, a participant may feel uncomfortable about being in an unfamiliar location with strangers. This cabin is in a safe location and has full facilities: telephone, electricity and running water. The cabin is a five-minute drive from downtown Fort Erie and a ten-minute drive from Port Colborne. Adequate transportation will be available and there will be a phone number for the participants' family members to contact them in case of emergency.
null
It is not the intention to cause a negative emotional response, and in most cases, the results are positive. However, in rare cases, there may be a negative reaction to meditation and guided visualization. Because meditation and guided visualization are mental exercises not usually practiced, there is occasionally some minor resistance or embarrassment. While the participant may feel hot or cold flashes, may see auras, and may experience a shortness of breath, such feelings are quickly dissipated. The researcher will carefully monitor for any physical reactions and gently guide the participant back to awareness, making every effort to put the participant at ease. There also may be a rush of emotions experienced such as sadness, anger, happiness, and joy. The participant will be under no obligation to share these experiences with the group or with the researcher. However, the journal, the group and the researcher will be available as means of support. There will also be information available on an Employee Support Program for the participants if the need for additional counseling should result. The participants will be advised of all and any possible reactions, be they negative or positive, prior to the retreat. If, however, the participant should at any point desire to leave, they may do so.

2. Topics of emotional distress.

Whenever the topic of spirituality is addressed it is extremely important to be cautious. Questions involving belief, faith and spirituality may cause emotional distress in the participants. This study will not contradict any formal system of religious belief and will deal strictly with spirituality in a non-denominational fashion. Spirituality is defined as living life reverently and making conscious choices that contribute to the well being of the world. (Louden, 1997, p.4) This definition is strictly non-denominational. Any
contemplative activities are influenced by many religious traditions and do not target or contradict any one in particular.

3. **Does this research at any time isolate the participant and the researcher?**

   Yes. Pre and post interviews will be conducted in a meeting room in the workplace, outside of working hours. The door will remain open unless the participants choose to have it closed. Windows in the room provide a clear unobstructed view of the proceedings as well.

4. **Might any aspect of this research be expected to cause participants mental or psychological harm?**

   While it is not the intention to cause harm, there may be an emotional reaction to the meditation practices. Please see the answers to questions 1 & 2.

5. **Might any aspect of this research be expected to cause participants physical harm?**

   No.

6. **Does this research in any way infringe on the rights of the participants?**

   No.

7. **Describe the procedures or safeguards in place to protect the physical and psychological health of the participants.**

   The participants are volunteers and have the freedom of choice to participate and can choose to leave at any time. Literature will be available for them in case they need additional support or counseling following the study. Regular follow-ups will occur once a week to ensure that participants are comfortable with the practices and activities explored for the purpose of this study.
The physical site of the retreat has been inspected and is in safe and working condition. It is currently inhabited.

**E. Free and Informed Consent**

1. Consent letter is attached.

2. Permission letter is not applicable.

3. Partial disclosure is not applicable. All participants are over 18 years of age and once completed, they will be informed of the complete results and given a full debriefing.

4. Participants were sent a letter explaining the purpose and outline of the study. Various conversations have also occurred. A post debriefing form will be provided to the participants along with their data summary and letters of appreciation.

**F. Privacy and Confidentiality**

The data will be collected through interviews and journals. The researcher will transcribe all interviews. Data will be coded and the participants' anonymity ensured by changing the names. Only the researcher will have access to the data. It will be kept in a locked file at the researcher's residence until the study is completed. At that time, the tapes will be physically destroyed and all written data will be disposed of in a locked Sherwood box and shredded or returned to the participants.
Recruitment and information letter sent to volunteers.

Hello! Either we've spoken about this or someone else has mentioned to you the work I am doing on my thesis and the fact that you might be interested in participating. I just wanted to send you a note to provide you with some information on what it is all about and what you can expect from it and what I would expect from you.

I am researching and writing my Master of Education thesis. My focus throughout my degree has been in adult education and holistic education. For my thesis, I'm working on the assumption that most people do not find any meaning in their work. Unfortunately, because not all of us have the perfect dream job, most of us are stuck in jobs that pay the bills (sometimes barely) and, if you compare our spiritual well being to a bank account - many of us are living in overdraft. Matthew Fox (a social activist and defrocked priest) once said "If you get hurt at work, there's compensation. But it you harm your soul, well, you're on your own."

So, my work involves nurturing the soul at work - providing people with a kind of compensation for the wounded spirit. In case any of you are concerned about the religious overtones, let me assure you that I do not claim any "religious" background. I define "spiritual" as that which contributes to a growing awareness and development of the authentic self. The retreat activities and my theoretical/philosophical background all draw from various spiritual traditions - Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu etc....

All theory aside, my plan is to take a group of people away for a day and provide them with some tools to help them find meaning in their work and nurture themselves in the workplace so that the jobs they do can provide them with fulfillment. This is not a one day fix it all workshop. I am not providing you with a "meaning" pill or a "fulfillment" band aid. This is one step on a journey that only you can walk.

What you can expect from me: FUN. A day of reflection, meditation, individual and group exercises (small groups - there will be 6 of us) yoga, music and nature (weather permitting!). I will provide you with the day, the journals, handouts and all activities and guidance to get you started on your journey.

What I need from you: a short interview prior to the retreat in order to talk about your frame of mind, your attitudes towards work and your expectations. The interviews will be taped with your permission. The day of the retreat itself, and I need you to keep a journal for one month afterwards while you work and try to continue with the activities and things I've shared with you. I'd also need to do another interview at the end of that month. My research data will consist of the interviews, journals, observations made during the retreat and a post retreat evaluation form.

Obviously, all conversations and journals will be kept confidential and your names will be changed in my thesis for privacy. Because this is such a personal experience I want to
reassure you that I will protect your thoughts and your privacy. Please rest assured, that should you decide at any time to withdraw from the study, or if, for whatever reason, you should not want to participate in a specific activity, you may do so at your discretion. Also, neither your withdrawal nor participation in the study will ever influence your employment record or performance evaluation with CTAL.

If you feel this is not for you, please let me know. If it sounds interesting and worth a try and you are willing to commit to the process wholeheartedly, then great! If you know of someone who this might help, then please, pass the information along to them and let me know who they are.

There is no fee per say. The only cost involved would be for lunch - which we will chose and prepare as a group (food is important to a person's well being and deserves more time and ceremony than we give it!)

I hope this has intrigued you and that you would be interested in "testing" out my theories with me. I am involved in the project as researcher - but also as a participant like you. The retreat will take place at private residence in Welland and will last the whole day. (8-4??) Please let me know if you would like to participate or not. Or, if you have any questions, just send them my way.

sincerely, Jennifer Doucet
Title of Study: “The Transformation of Work to Livelihood: A Spiritual Retreat"

Researcher: Jennifer Doucet

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Sharon Abbey

Name of Participant: ______________________________

My name is Jennifer Doucet and I am a full time learning coordinator at Canadian Tire Acceptance. I am also a student in the Brock University Department of Graduate Studies in Education. My interests in holistic education and corporate training have led me to develop this study. The purpose of the study is to create a space and a time for front line employees to learn and discover methods to be present in the moment. I believe the capacity to be mindful and in the moment has the potential for transforming work into livelihood. The commitment on your part involves two interviews, one eight-hour day for the retreat and one-month following the retreat for journal writing. Please review the remainder of this document and if you agree to the conditions, provide your signature for consent.

I understand that this study in which I have agreed to participate will involve a day long retreat in which the topics of meaning, joy, fulfillment, work and satisfaction will be explored through the use of journal writing, various forms of meditation, guided visualization and group discussion. I understand that I will also be interviewed prior to the retreat and again, one month following the retreat. During that month, I will be required to keep an activity journal. The activities involves will be consistent with those practiced on the retreat.

I understand that the research data will comprise of taped interviews, journals, behaviors observed during the retreat and a post retreat evaluation. The interviews will be taped with my permission only, and transcripts of the interviews will be provided to me for verification of data integrity.

I understand that the group activities at the retreat are personal and confidential. I agree not to discuss the reactions of the group and will respect other participants’ privacy and need for personal space.
I understand that the retreat takes place in a private residence in Welland, Ontario. I will provide my own transportation and will not hold the researcher responsible for personal injury at the retreat location or travelling to and from.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without penalty. My participation in the retreat or withdrawal from any or all activities shall not have any influence whatsoever on my employment record or performance review.

I understand that there is no obligation to answer any question or participate in any aspect of this project that I may consider invasive.

I understand that all personal data will be kept strictly confidential and that all information will be coded so that my name is not associated with my answers. I understand that only the researcher named above will have access to the data.

Participant signature _______________________________ Date _______________________________

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the study, you can contact Jennifer Doucet at 905-788-9947 or Professor Sharon Abbey at 905-688-5550, ext 3349.

Feedback about the data or final results will be available upon request during the month of January, 2001.

Thank you for your help! Please take a copy of this form with you for further reference.

I have fully explained the procedures of this study to the above volunteer.

Researcher Signature _______________________________ Date _______________________________
Letter of Appreciation

Title of Study: “The Transformation of Work to Livelihood: A Spiritual Retreat”

Researcher: Jennifer Doucet

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Sharon Abbey

Dear, ______________

I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your participation in this study. I thank you for your enthusiasm, your encouragement and your faith in this study and in your own powers of transformation. I look forward to keeping in touch with you and hearing your stories of struggle and success as you learn to live in the moment and take time for yourselves to BE!

I am including with this letter a document, summarizing the data and conclusions drawn from the study, and I hope they prove of interest to you. If, at any point in the future, you should have further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at (905) 788-9947.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Doucet
Appendix G

The Journey - PART ONE:

Filth stains the porcelain tub and mom can't get it clean.
Another paycheck so small and insignificant
Insignificant until the plant closes down and there is nothing.
Nothing coming in, nothing going out as
One after the other, the lights go out.

Shutdown.

Bankruptcy.

Strike.

Layoffs.

Injury.

Molten lava, red hot, cascading from the cauldron.
Staggering heat at midnight on a winter night.
When life is measured by the punch clock
There is no escape from the factory fate
With no education.

My future will be different.

Straight As, it's all elementary
Teachers pet with a paint brush and quill
I will talk my way to the top and
Argue my way out of any corner.
I will not be trapped.
I will not be controlled.
I want to be an actress.
Artist. Writer.

I will not work in a factory.

High A's on the road to even
Higher heights of education
Travel and exploration show me
A world I need to conquer.
I will not be bound by time or walls.
I want to be a Politician.
Lawyer. Clean Professions.

I will not work in a factory.

Reality bites to a certain Degree
Corporate America calls and is
Waiting with jobs - a shopping spree.
Clean washrooms, expanses of
Carpeted hallways leading to high-rise
Offices a long way from the factory.
I want to be a Trainer.
Supervisor. Manager.

I will never have to work in a factory.

New employees full of anticipation
Old staff bored and empty
Friends and colleagues gather
To celebrate achievements
Winter comes with a blast
Call after call after call
There is no time to think
Or breath as we sink
Into despondency.

I love what I do.

In the beginning when all was new
But time has a way of wearing thin
The veneer of satisfaction.
Need more, more money
More challenge, space, control
Need more opportunity to be ME.

I am far down the yellow brick road
Far away from the factory.
Need another piece of paper on the wall
Perhaps that will keep me from climbing
The cubical that defines my space and will
Define me if I stay.
But **security** has a way of **strengthening**
The roots digging deep into familiar territory.

I seek out challenges and new projects
I study and give back what I learn
And all is well for the time being.
Who can complain with a job that
Is **Profitable** and **Secure**.
I can't. Can't say a word as I am **drowning**
As I fight to stay afloat, as I fight to breath.

I dig deeper, trying to settle my **roots**
In dirt that slides from my fingers like sand
These days it is difficult to **concentrate**.
Difficult to be happy when the only
Breathing is shallow and filled with **anxiety**
**Panic** as I'm left standing in front of an empty classroom.

Sinking, I close my eyes.
I let go. I **dream**. I breath.
In. Out. Blues and reds blend.
Inhale. Exhale. Reach for the sky.
Stretch, stretch my limbs, **bend**.
Don't break. Just Feel
Calm. Peaceful. Compassionate.
For five minutes. For ten.
Until I open them and the panic begins again.

My golden road of opportunity crumbles.
**Insecurity. Doubt.** How come I can't
Find a way out. **Freedom**.
Cool water a **baptism, a cleansing**:
    Splashed on my forehead -

    I will think only **positive** thoughts.

    Spilling down my eyes -

    I will see **beyond** this world.
Rushing over my mouth -

I will speak only beauty.

Running over my wrists and hands

Life will flow and ebb no matter what I do.

But driving to work, anxiety grips my stomach. My thoughts are probed, policed. The reality I see is cold and bitter. Every word spoken wounds and destroys And I am rendered powerless and frightened. The peace of the morning, I cannot maintain. And I want to stay in bed and never work again.

Is this how my father felt, a slave, a peon. I never wanted my life to feel this way. How come it doesn't work. The silence. The isolation. The simplicity. How come I can't make it work within the reality. Practice. Practice makes perfect. And I have missed the point On non-practice leading to mastery.

Improving my practice isn't perfect. Practice is a reality of ups and downs With moments of perfect serenity. Non-being is not non-Being. But Being completely within a Reality That I can't control or dictate. Laugh with my students. Give Praise. Receive gifts of life, laughter and tears And know that improving my life Improved theirs in small, measurable ways.

Work and Home teeter-totter And where the weight weighs heaviest Is where the problems lie. Balance is a give and take Balance is found in the purest
Breath. Balance is found in the spirit
Balance is where I place it. Where I AM.

I AM here.

I AM Beautiful. Smart. Successful.
I AM not perfect. But I AM a Perfect Being.
I AM a good friend. A good daughter.
I AM Spirit and Matter.
I Matter.

And I 'sound my barbaric yelp'
Into the hearts of everyone I touch.
And I AM a better person,
A better educator - for it.

WORK is a four letter word.


Work is what YOU make it.

I am more than my WORK.

But my WORK contributes to who I am.

PART TWO:

Years later he looks back and sees
A long straight road from A to B
Crossroads not taken and dreams forsaken
I wish, he says, that I had been a politician.

I look ahead, so many years
So many roads and possibilities
I am calm in this space
I have discovered inside of me.

I am a writer. An actress. Teacher.
I am unlimited, without boundaries
I look ahead and I breathe in
The beauty and reality of dreams.