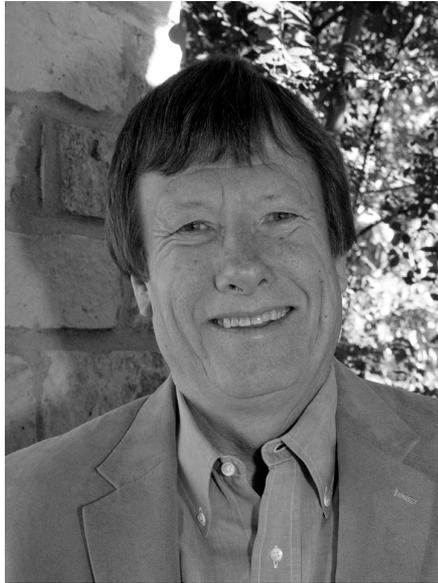


A CONVERSATION WITH LOUIS W. “JODY” FRY, PhD



Louis W. “Jody” Fry, PhD, is the founder of the International Institute for Spiritual Leadership and a professor at Texas A&M University Central Texas. Fry’s most recent book is titled *Maximizing the Triple Bottom Line through Spiritual Leadership* (Stanford University Press, 2013) and examines business models that integrate ethics, leadership, employee well-being, sustainability, social responsibility, profitability, and organizational growth. The case studies in the book are informed by more than a decade of research investigating spiritual leadership in organizations.

According to Fry, spiritual leadership “is an emerging paradigm within the broader context of workplace spirituality designed to create an intrinsically motivated, learning organization that maximizes the triple bottom line.” The triple bottom line is what an organization is thought to be targeting when it addresses not just the financial consequences of its actions, but also the social and environmental consequences. The triple bottom line refers to people, planet, and profit.

In the following interview, produced by *Quiddity* in partnership with NPR-member WUIS, Illinois Public Radio’s hub-station, Fry discusses how he arrived in the inspired scholarly space that brought forth the creation of his latest book which tackles a topic not often readily embraced by conventional corporate culture. He shares a multi-layered journey into the places and spaces where together, head and heart map the mystery of the human experience, and over a decade of academic research, charts a path toward the “co-creation of a conscious, sustainable world that works for everyone.”

The following is a direct transcription of the radio broadcast, which can be heard at quiddity.ben.edu; click “Episodes.”

Joanna Beth Tweedy (JBT): Welcome to *Quiddity*, produced in partnership with WUIS by Benedictine University, publisher of *Quiddity's* companion international literary journal. I'm Joanna Beth Tweedy.

Quiddity by definition means the real nature or essence of a thing; that which makes it what it is, and today we turn our attention to the essence of spirituality in business and management. We'll speak with Dr. Jody Fry, an organizational theorist and practitioner. We'll talk about how spirituality—which is a word not often tossed around at corporate board meetings—can contribute to an organization's people, to the planet, and also—to a matter quite often tossed around at board meetings—profits.

“[T]here was a section on the need to lead from love rather than from fear, and this needed to be the paradigm for leadership in the 21st century.”

Dr. Fry is the founder of the International Institute for Spiritual Leadership, and a professor at Texas A&M University Central Texas, but I caught up with him in Fayetteville, Arkansas, where he was presenting at a conference titled “Wisdom at Work,” held on the University of Arkansas's Global Campus.

Fry's most recent book with Melissa Sadler Nisiewicz—who is a consultant at the International Institute for Spiritual Leadership—was published in 2013 by Stanford University Press and is titled *Maximizing the Triple Bottom Line through Spiritual Leadership*.

The triple bottom line is what an organization is thought to be targeting when it addresses not just the financial consequences of its actions, but also the social and environmental consequences. So, the triple bottom line refers to people, planet, and profits.

I asked Fry how he arrived in the inspired scholarly space that brought forth the creation of his book, which tackles a topic—spiritual leadership—that isn't often readily embraced by conventional corporate culture.

Louis W. “Jody” Fry, PhD (LJF): Well, it's been a 13 year journey that began in 1999. I was teaching a course in leadership, and I had this new book; it had just come

out, and for the first time in a management text that I had never ever seen before there was a section on the need to lead from love rather than from fear, and this needed to be the paradigm for leadership in the 21st century. Then there was also a section on visioning or vision where it talked about the need to instill hope and faith in the vision. And so hope, faith, and love began the journey. It was also a very difficult time personally; I had just come off a divorce and it was very raw emotionally. It was a very rough period, and at the time I was teaching a graduate course in behavioral statistics, and we had a master's degree in family life counseling.

We had five army chaplains in that class and they came in at the beginning of the class and they all sat in the front row like birds on a perch. And I always gave this talk at the beginning of statistics class that if you, if you believe you can't do it, you can't, and somehow the discussion turned to faith. And even though I was asking it in a statistics class, it was really about me and I asked these chaplains, "How do you have faith in the face of death?" And they all chirped at once and said, "You act as if you have it."

So those were the forces that came together in terms of the sense that there was a spiritual component to leadership—based on hope, faith and love—and that it was an intrinsically motivating force; it was innate. And then there came this journey. Well, so what? What is it about that that then radiates or manifests? And so then, as an academic, I began this search. And I came upon a book by a man name Fleischman called *The Healing Spirit* (Paragon House, 1990) and it was on religion, but he had in there the essence, ten things that are the essence of the spirit and necessary for healing of the spirit. And two of these were the need for calling, for a sense of purpose, and the other was a sense of membership, of belonging.

So I had these two aspects out here spinning independently, and at that time I had a major car wreck and I nearly died, helicopter. It paralyzed my arm. So I had some time on my hands, and there was a coffee shop in town that also had like, a used book store. I was looking through the New Age section of these used books and I came upon this little book and the name of it was *GOD* (Association Press, 1937), "g-o-d" in capital letters. It's by this person named Horton, and it was written in the late 30's.

It was a metaphysical treatise on the essence of Christianity and capitalism in relation to national socialism and communism, which were very much in competition at that time of the Depression. It was not clear that our capitalist system would survive. And, in that, he had this continuum, this—"continuum of God"—he called it. We call it now, we've adapted it and call it the "continuum of higher power." And one of the challenges I was having, even though these two orbs were spinning, was wanting something we could take into organizations, to change organizations and change the

world. Now we call it, “to co-create a conscious, sustainable world that works for everyone.” That is our true vision. For now, *Maximizing The Triple Bottom Line Through Spiritual Leadership* is the way we see to begin to manifest that, through individuals, teams, and organizations.

JBT: You’re listening to *Quiddity*. If you’re just joining us, we’re speaking with Dr. Jody Fry about spiritual leadership in organizations—and how spirituality in the workplace can be a boon to an organization’s people, to our planet, and also to profits.

We just heard Fry describe part of his journey toward the study of spiritual leadership, during which he stumbled across a book that became the catalyst for his brainstorming on spirituality and leadership. The coffee shop where Fry found the book was called Wake Up and Smell the Coffee. But that particular wake-up call was just one part of a multi-layered journey into the places and spaces where together, head and heart map the mystery of the human experience.

LJF: So, here I am, and I’m trying to put this together, and then I was in the shower with one arm, and it came to me that in his continuum, he talks about the theism in the middle of it—Judaism, Islam, and Christianity—and on the left side is atheism and human secularism, or humanism. On the right side is pantheism. And his point is that in his definition of God was that anything we can draw on and become devoted to as a source of strength beyond our own self, or our own self will, which will fail us. So on the humanistic side, it could be nation states like Nazi Germany or Russia; it could be tribes; it could be families that we draw on for strength. On the pantheistic side, you’ve got Egypt that had the 200 natural gods, and today the pantheistic god, I believe, is our god of science and technology. So that became the bridge that put together that we could talk about hope, faith, and love and the spiritual aspect of leadership within any of these contexts. Now, Horton makes the point, though, that in these extremes away from theism, often if not most of the time they’re found wanting, so there’s this gravitation towards the unity or the non-dual, or God, in theism that becomes paramount.

JBT: So you’re speaking of a couple of things that have such a natural fit with organizations, such as a sense of calling, a sense of belonging, those two spinning orbs. Yet, these other concepts, such as love and technology, are a pantheistic pursuit, and those aren’t necessarily things that might be well received in a business context. How did you go about that approach?

LJF: Well, that was another story, of a day spent in the fetal position, and a very much agonizing, inward contemplation. And you see it here at this conference. How

do we package this, so it doesn't step on the natural tendency to proselytize or impose one's particular religion or view? Now, one of the ways we've done it is that we really focus on the spiritual qualities, the Golden Rule, that underlie all religious and spiritual traditions, which, at their essence, we believe are about hope and faith and a vision of love and service to others, and we believe that that's what successful organizations do, when you boil them down to their essence.

JBT: And let's talk about how you've managed that approach in the book.

LJF: Well, I guess I need to go a little further in this. One of the decisions was, "How are we going to package this?" You see it feels like positive psychology that is doing research on hope, faith, and love. And there are the virtue approaches. You know, there are a number of approaches that I call "stealth spirituality" and what they want to do is to sort of infuse our approach, not in a detrimental way, but so that we can get at these without using the "s" word. And I had people say, "Use values-based leadership," or something like that, you know. "You're not going to be able to do anything with this if you don't." And what I just decided to do is be true to what it is, and that ultimately gets at the book. It's the major purpose of the book: to find those people who are predisposed, who are looking to love and serve others through their organization. To me, this is manifested through the triple bottom line, that we want to enhance or maximize, employ well-being through love and service. We want to sustain our planet and be socially responsible through love and service, and to the extent we do that and love and serve our customers, we will be profitable. So, people, planet, and profit.

JBT: You're listening to *Quiddity*. If you're just joining us, we're speaking with Jody Fry about spiritual leadership—and how spirituality in the workplace can benefit an organization's people, our planet, and boost profits. His recent book, *Maximizing the Triple Bottom Line Through Spiritual Leadership*, explores business models that integrate ethics, leadership, employee well-being, sustainability, social responsibility, profitability, and organizational growth. I asked Fry about companies who are successfully incorporating each of these components in their business models through spiritual leadership.

“On the pantheistic side, you’ve got Egypt that had the 200 natural gods, and today the pantheistic god, I believe, is our god of science and technology.”

LJF: We highlight, in the book, four case studies of organizations we worked with, and each has a spiritual leader, even though some may not call themselves that. All, in their own way, maximize the triple bottom line. We have a chapter on implementing organizational spiritual leadership. In it, we give our models, methods, and tools. We have a survey that has been published in reputable academic journals. We found it to

be reliable and so valid that we can go in and establish a baseline on the spiritual leadership model and the spiritual well-being variables, and also raise the key issues that need to be addressed to move the organization to the next level.

“[W]e really focus on the spiritual qualities, the Golden Rule, that underlie all religious and spiritual traditions, which at their essence, we believe are about hope and faith and a vision of love and service to others, and we believe that that’s what successful organizations do, when you boil them down to their essence.”

JBT: What has surprised you in the research? What were some things that perhaps you weren’t expecting to find?

LJF: I think, more than anything, is the, golly, the underlying universality of it. That it’s not like we have to discover that it’s there. It’s more an issue of labels than anything else. For example, in the four case studies, one is the largest CPA firm in Austin, Texas. I mean, go figure, a spiritual CPA firm. One is an organization that thrived and died in the highly bureaucratic further education system of the United Kingdom, and it was a leadership development company. One is the largest producer of frozen foods in Canada, and one is the billion-dollar corporation headquartered in Dallas that does power supplies.

JBT: So, do you have a story that you can share, and this doesn’t

have to be from one of those case studies, something from your life or your own experience that really speaks to seeing spiritual leadership at work, and the power of what it can do, as far as benefiting people, the planet, and profit?

LJF: Well, really, in all of them, I guess the one that really is close to home, in Austin, is Maxwell Locke & Ritter, the CPA firm in Austin. And they don't use the word "spiritual." I mean, it's not like, they're not afraid of the word "spiritual." And I've been working with them since 2005 and every two years we give out the spiritual leadership survey. They have about a hundred professionals now, back then it was like thirty. So they've had explosive growth relative to their initial size. And we come together about every eighteen months. We all come together in one room, and right after they present the profits—and that's one of the aspects is transparency—they present all of the numbers to everybody. "Here's our bonus, here's the numbers we made." And then I go up and I give them the feedback presentation and show them where they're at and the issues that were raised, and it's all embraced within the organization. They live it. They live it. And it's the legacy of their founder, the guy who is a good friend, Earl Maxwell, who's now moved on and is head of a hospital foundation in Austin, so that's an ongoing relationship.

JBT: You've been working in the field for a number of years, and a lot of your heart and soul, it's apparent that it's gone into this. What do you hope your legacy might be in this area? What do you hope to leave? Let's say, fifty years from now? A hundred years from now? Five hundred years from now? What do you hope this place of spiritual leadership looks like on this Earth?

“[W]anting or having a sense of legacy is not spiritual...I don't feel like it's channeled. So, my hope is that this lights the fire, it ignites the chain reaction through which, sooner than later, we all will co-create a conscious, sustainable world that works for everyone.”

LJF: Well, first of all, I would say that, this will be more long stories based on the history of my life, but wanting or having a sense of legacy is not spiritual; it's not about me. I look at that book, I don't know who wrote it. I worked very hard. I did the work. I don't feel like it's channeled. So, my hope is that this lights the fire, it ignites the chain reaction through which, sooner than later, we all will co-create a conscious, sustainable world that works for everyone.

JBT: You've been listening to *Quiddity*. That was organizational theorist Jody Fry, expressing hope for the co-creation of a conscious, sustainable world that works for all. You can read about his research-rooted inquiry toward this hope in *Maximizing the Triple Bottom Line Through Spiritual Leadership*.

You can hear and learn more about the book and also about the International Institute for Spiritual Leadership at quiddity.ben.edu.

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You can access *Quiddity* programming as well as the international literary journal at quiddity.ben.edu. Or email the show at quiddity@ben.edu. As always, *Quiddity* remains profoundly grateful to its contributing participants and listeners, without whom our charge would be without quiddity. I'm Joanna Beth Tweedy.