

Layoffs and Reconciliation

Tomasso Corporation: A Practice-Based Approach to Integrating Spirituality and Organizational Life

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“WHEN I WAS BEING INTERVIEWED for the job, I was exposed to the *Golden Book*, read it and was somewhat taken aback by the explicit reference to values and spirituality” recalled Vince, Tomasso’s Finance Director. “I understood that as part of the management team, we would be helping ‘Our Project’ (*Notre Projet*) grow into fuller implementation at Tomasso, but I was somewhat skeptical. I wondered how much we would actually be doing this stuff. Especially some of the specific practices like the expectation that we would follow-up with any former employees we had laid off. I read about that and said to myself, ‘I hope I don’t have to live that one someday.’”

During his interview, Vince was impressed by Tomasso’s emphasis on values, but at the same time slightly skeptical about the use of spirituality. He was also somewhat wary about whether his new company actually did what it said.

He could not have known then that it would be he himself who would soon be required to embody Tomasso’s values.

When Vince started at Tomasso, the company was in the midst of struggling with significant revenue shortfall and, as Tomasso’s new director of finance, he was confronted with the need to identify and implement cost cutting measures. “When I began, we were in the process of reorganizing to become more competitive, and

within two months I had to lay off two people I hardly knew. I came in mid-May, and we let them go in June. They were two ladies in their 50s. Both had a skill set that didn't quite match up with what we needed. I had a couple of sleepless nights. Both had been with Tomasso for ten years.

“We did it immediately and without notice, because the financial pressure to take action quickly was real. The two women were surprised. My meetings with each of them were five to ten minutes long. The second person already knew by the time I came to see her. They both cried. It was maybe an hour from when I met the first woman until they both left the building. You want to be efficient, because there is no way we can make it right for them in that moment. In the afternoon we met with everyone to let them know what was happening and why. For me it was a horrible day.”

While the company provided outplacement services, counseling, and a generous severance package for the two women, Vince found the experience one of the most unsettling and difficult of his management career. Even though he wanted the dismissal of the two women to be efficient and as painless as possible, he knew that this was not possible. His vision of coming to a value-based and spiritually aware company such as Tomasso had not included letting go two women who had been dedicated to the company. What did this have to do with values and spirituality?



Company Background and Its Practices

TOMASSO CORPORATION IS A PRIVATELY OWNED COMPANY in Quebec specializing in the production of familiar brand name frozen dinners and hor d'oeuvres in Canada, the United States and Mexico. The company was founded by Giovanina di Tomasso, who opened what quickly became a very popular restaurant renowned in Montreal for its authentic Italian food. In 1956, she began selling frozen versions of this same cuisine, with the frozen foods eventually eclipsing the restaurant as the main business. Giovanina's two sons, Paolo and Marco, followed her into the business.

When, in the mid-1980s, the company won a large contract with Costco, they approached Montreal businessman Robert Ouimet seeking capital investment to finance the necessary expansion. His holding company acquired 100% of Tomasso Corporation, with Ouimet himself becoming chairman and sole shareholder, while the Tomasso brothers continued to manage the business as president and vice-president of operations. At this point the business had 20 employees.

Beginning in the 1990s, however, rapid growth necessitated a number of predictable changes that stretched and stressed Tomasso:

- the workforce had grown to more than 100 employees
- a conventional management structure with new managers replaced the familiar and personal hands-on management style of the Tomasso brothers
- a modern frozen food product manufacturing facility was built at a new location
- the larger workforce unionized, with tense management-union relations
- a difficult adjustment to new production machinery negatively impacted customer service with some customers reducing orders or canceling contracts
- this, in turn, led to reductions in production schedule and wage cuts for employees, many of whom felt that their efforts went unrecognized and unappreciated by management. All of this put additional strain on management-employee relations.
- tension increased between Ouimet and the Tomasso brothers over the kind of company they wanted.

When in 2001 the Tomasso brothers decided to leave the company, long-term employees experienced their departure as a significant loss. With revenue and morale falling, Ouimet knew that the hire of the next CEO was crucial to the survival of the company and to the culture he wanted to create.

After a careful search, Rob McKenzie became Tomasso's new president. One of the criteria for his selection was agreement with the principles of *Our Project* as presented in the *Golden Book* (see appendix for a summary of the practices). By the time he began in 2002, McKenzie was confronted with the twin challenges of

rebuilding relations with key customers and resolving pervasive employee morale problems.

Long before Robert Ouimet acquired the Tomasso Corporation, he had been experimenting within his own company, Ouimet Cordon Blue (OCB) Inc.,¹ with various management practices that would harmonize spiritual/human values with the economic demands for productivity and profits. This effort grew out of Ouimet's desire to more profoundly connect his faith and his vocation as a business manager. Ouimet's deep personal piety as a Roman Catholic and his disciplined economic approach to managing OCB Inc. were like parallel tracks that run side by side without ever actually intersecting. He experienced a problem all too familiar to businesspeople who are also persons of faith.

Some have described this as the experience of a divided life, a lack of connection between the sacred ideals and cherished values of one's faith and the pressing workplace demands of profitability and productivity. While, in his private life, Ouimet valued compassion, charity, solidarity, authenticity, love, freedom, discernment and serenity, these values too often seemed remote from his business life, crowded out by the press for efficiency, short-term profitability, accountability, competitiveness, diligence, opportunism, productivity, and tough-mindedness.

As a business owner understanding the necessity of operational performance, Ouimet strongly believed that in order for these two worlds to be harmonized, there must be specific management practices to make this happen. Theory was all well and good, but irrelevant if not operationalized.

Eventually his quest to harmonize the spiritual and the economic dimensions of organizational life became the focus of a sabbatical from OCB. During this sabbatical Ouimet wrote a doctoral thesis more fully describing an approach to this harmonization. This lengthy thesis was summarized in a smaller volume that came to

¹ In addition to Tomasso Corporation other companies owned by Robert Ouimet's holding company, OCB Inc. included several companies in the foods sector, including Paris Paté, Esta Foods, Clark Foods and the original family business named after Robert Ouimet's father, René Ouimet Inc.

be known as the *Golden Book*, named for the color of its cover.² Recognizing the need for a broader participation in the task of developing and implementing this approach, Ouimet began to refer to the effort as *Our Project (Notre Projet)*.

Prominent in these documents was a list of specific management practices that Ouimet recommended to members of Tomasso's management team, among these the requirement that management follow-up with former employees who have been laid off or dismissed. Other management practices Ouimet advanced included (for the complete list of practices see appendix):

- a moment of inner silence, reflection and sharing at meetings of OCB's executive committee and boards of directors
- testimonials by guest speakers about their personal journey or a subject of interest – all employees are invited to these meetings
- a room for inner silence and reflection
- annual one-on-one personal conversations between managers and each of their employees
- service to the needy – where managers and employees would once or twice a year during paid work time participate in a project serving the poor and reflect together on this experience

Ouimet believed that these and other practices would, if given time, contribute to the development of an organizational culture that was spiritually and humanly rich. The practices were designed to serve as a vehicle to carry human and spiritual values into the workplace, values which in the past seemed never to make it into the building. These practices and the values that accompanied them served as the means to humanize and spiritualize the organization.

For Ouimet, *Our Project* and its vision of reconciling long-term growth in human happiness with sustained profitability served as the *raison d'être*, the reason for the existence of Tomasso. However, like most visions of any real consequence, this dream faced difficulties as it sought to become a lived experience within Tomasso.

² <http://www.our-project.org/en/home/home.htm>

The process of introducing the practices outlined in *Our Project* was slow and at times met with cautiousness and sometimes resistance. While there were multiple reasons for this caution and resistance, three stand out:

- **Leadership Resistance:** In many cases, existing management in OCB's companies – including the Tomasso brothers - never warmed up to the proposed practices and simply didn't implement them.
- **Fear of Proselytization:** In some instances the cause of the resistance was the worry on the part of management and employees that there was a proselytizing intent underlying some of these activities. Initiatives that evoked this sense of caution included the establishment of a room for silence and reflection – initially introduced as a “room for prayer.” Quebec Province, where Tomasso is located, had experienced one of the most radical transformations from a very religious Catholic culture to a very secular one. Ouimet's religious and spiritual demeanor reminded many of the managers and employees of days long past, which led to a certain reserve and suspicion of his motives, particularly on the part of disaffected Roman Catholics.
- **Inefficiencies:** Besides the worry about proselytizing, some managers saw the practices as simply an inefficient use of resources. For instance, when Ouimet decided to build a silent room in one of the facilities, an idea suggested to him by Mother Teresa, the managing director of the plant saw it as a waste of space and possible haven for lazy employees.

These problems and others made *Our Project* and its associated practices extremely difficult to implement. It wasn't until the arrival of new leadership in the person of Rob MacKenzie that the practices began to shape Tomasso's culture. Rob affirmed these practices, along with the human and spiritual values they were intended to support, when he began his tenure, and made a commitment to seek to reintroduce the practices, including the practice of following up with employees who have been laid-off or dismissed.



Reconciling a Deep Wound

THE IMPACT OF HAVING TO FIRE THESE TWO WOMEN was just beginning to fade for Vince when Rob MacKenzie, the president of Tomasso, approached him with the very last question he hoped to hear. “It was a month or so later,” Vince recalled. “We were meeting as a management team and Rob asked ‘Have you called the two women yet?’ I was stunned, ‘I can’t believe I have to call these people. I saw their eyes and one of them hated me.’ Rob said that he didn’t need to know what we talked about, but that he did need to know that we had spoken.”³

While Vince had no desire to call these two women, he nonetheless knew from day one that such a practice was part of his job description. “I kept putting it off. I thought on many days that this would be the day when I would call them, but then didn’t get around to it and was grateful that I was busy. I kept thinking through what I would say. I finally did it in September – about three months after we had laid them off. I remember thinking, ‘I’m going to do it ... do my job.’”

The first call went relatively well. The woman had already begun another job. Although she was initially surprised, she was cordial on the phone and grateful for the call.

Vince knew that his call to the second woman would not be as pleasant. When he finally made the call it was a mercifully brief but bitter conversation.

“I was very upset,” she said. “I felt like an animal.”

“Why,” Vince asked.

“I got thrown out on my ass, and I didn’t even get to say good-bye to my friends,” she responded.”

“I’m so sorry that you didn’t know that you could say good-bye,” he replied.

“Well, I didn’t think I could.”

During the drive home that evening, Vince reflected on his day, wondering about all that had happened. While the first call had gone well, the second was every bit as

³ Rob knew firsthand how difficult these follow-up conversations could be. Soon after Rob’s own arrival as Tomasso’s President, he dismissed (number) employees as part of a dramatic and ultimately successful high stakes change effort, and had himself followed up with each of these former employees.

painful as he had worried it would be. Once again he wondered aloud, “How on earth did I end up with this as part of my job description?”

Vince’s first follow-up call with his former employee wasn’t his last. “I called again six weeks later, and the woman who was very bitter on the first call was more receptive,” he recalled. “The first time I think she didn’t trust my motives. She was still early on in the healing process. She volunteered more information about how she was doing. It was important for me to know that she was OK.”

In retrospect, Vince talks about how the experience of making these difficult calls impacted him as a person and a manager. “Making these calls was really important to me. I found myself reflecting about this with Rob and my wife, and later spoke about what I learned from the experience in a management meeting. I learned how to act as a human being with others, giving people the respect they deserve. I had to do it, and hated doing it, but now I think that if I ever left to work somewhere else, I would do it there too. It made me a better human being.”

“Later on,” Vince recalls, “we invited these two ladies and several other former employees back to the company for breakfast. Both of them, including the one who was initially angrier, accepted right away. She had begun work in another job at this point, and was feeling better about things.”

What surprised Vince was that some of the employees at Tomasso were very uneasy when they heard about the idea. They were afraid that the laid-off employees would make them feel guilty about still working here. In the end, however, all of Vince’s staff decided to participate. “They were glad they did,” Vince recalled. “They enjoyed visiting with their former coworkers, and talked about wanting to do it again. This time she had the opportunity to say good-bye to her friends.”

Veronique, Tomasso’s human resources director, elaborated further about the benefits of this practice. “It’s good for our company. Managers who do this are impacted. It’s not just that they dismiss people differently after doing this. I think they also hire people differently, manage differently, evaluate performance more carefully and honestly.”

Pierre, Tomasso’s director of sales, recalled his own experience of following up with an employee he had dismissed. “It was one of my salespeople. He was doing an

OK job selling – above average – but his focus on self and his own personal goals were damaging our sense of team. In the end, the dismissal was about his attitude and negative effect on the group. Because he was a good salesman, I knew he would go straight into another job once he left Tomasso, and that we would be seeing each other. So I knew I wanted to do this right.

“His reaction to his dismissal was OK, not surprised, because I had met with him about my concerns already on a couple of occasions. And I was right – he *was* going straight into another job, which he had already sought when we didn’t offer him a promotion he thought he was in line for. After he left, I called him to ask how he was doing and whether there was any way I could be supportive. We still see each other at sales events once or twice a year. I think if we hadn’t already spoken with one another following his departure, these encounters could have been quite uncomfortable for both of us.”

The purpose of the practices, of course, is to more fully embody revered values within the life of Tomasso. In this instance, the practice of following-up with discharged employees gives concrete expression to the value of solidarity with those who are no longer with the company. If employees are seen as merely “human capital” there would be no need to follow-up with them, but if they are seen as *persons* endowed with “human dignity” then the relationship between managers and laid-off employees demand compelling practices which genuinely reflect the values of solidarity and reconciliation.



Reflection: The Importance of a Practice-Based Approach to Integrating Spirituality and Organizational Life — Values in Tension

IN THE LAST TEN YEARS WE HAVE SEEN A REVOLUTION of sorts in which business people are taking more seriously the relevance of their faith for their paid work. While most people of faith do not want to live compartmentalized lives, they are not able to imagine what an integrated life of faith and work looks like. The practices developed by Robert Ouimet and implemented by the leaders within Tomasso provide an especially helpful model of this intersection of spirituality, values and organizational life.

In truth, this dimension of concrete management practices is present to some extent in most organizations that are in some way seeking to integrate spirituality, values and organizational performance. Without such practical expressions of spiritual and human values in the day to day life of the organization, the espousal of ethical principles and spiritual ideals risks giving rise to cynicism about the possibility of ever really overcoming this compartmentalization within business organizations.

However, among those institutions that have made significant progress in expressing a genuine integration of spiritual and human values within their daily operational reality, most have not led this effort with the discipline of specific management practices in the way that Tomasso has during the past several years. Rather than specific practices, other organizations begin deductively with crafted statements of belief, or the identification of explicit core values. The intent of these statements is to provide a spiritual or moral compass by which to then guide the organization's policy and performance. The practices of the organization then typically emerge as management wrestles to discover ways of leading that genuinely reflect a commitment to the organization's espoused beliefs or values.

Tomasso, of course, also has in the *Golden Book* identified for itself a set of explicitly spiritual and human values and, as well, a conceptual framework which represents the organization's commitment to hold together in its life the twin commitments of a successful business performance and a workplace experience that

aspires to a deepening of spiritual and humanitarian values. These do indeed exist at Tomasso, but the leading edge of Tomasso's approach to actualizing this integration is decidedly practical and experiential, supported first and foremost by a carefully identified collection of specific management practices.

The experiential emphasis of Tomasso's practice-based approach has clear strengths as can be seen with Vince's story. Nevertheless, this approach is not without its potential problems and tensions. In this last section, we will highlight three tensions that Tomasso and any other company that follows this practice-based approach will likely encounter.

1. The Tension Between Yes and Why: The Different Ways of Knowing

SOMETIMES OUR DESIRE TO UNDERSTAND more fully is in truth an unconscious strategy for avoiding the moment of actually committing to a course of action and embarking on it.⁴ We are prone to posing an endless series of "how?" questions, as if the answer to that question would equip us to step confidently into the future. The real obstacle to our acting, however, is not the absence of adequate information, but rather the fear of acting in the face of the inevitable uncertainty of what consequences might follow.

This, of course, is the power of the practice-based approach – the power of a courageous "Yes" in the face of uncertainty as we move from anxious wondering to doing. Vince faced the prospect of actually placing the phone call to his two former employees with something approaching dread. In the days leading up to his actually making these phone calls, any abstract insights about why these calls might be important, even edifying, were utterly overwhelmed by his fears of calling the two women. Placing the calls was not in any true sense an act of rational assent; rather it was an exercise of volition and courage, the power of "yes" in the presence of uncertainty. It was only through the experience of making the calls, particularly the more difficult call to the second woman, that Vince began to understand the value of following up with laid-off employees.

⁴ See Peter Block, *The Answer to How is Yes: Acting on What Matters*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. 2002.

Yet, if practice is to yield the fruit of spiritual growth, its significance must be appropriated through personal and communal reflection that enables us to name and claim the deepest meanings of our experience. In the absence of such disciplined reflection, the unexamined experience of practice may fail to bear the fruit of virtue. It is through intentionally exploring the relationship of our lived experience to our highest ideals that we strengthen our sense of connection to these truths.

Vince could have easily disconnected the act of calling these women from the virtues of compassion and reconciliation by relegating it in his own mind to a distasteful experience of simply “following orders.” He could have simply said, “yes” to the practice, but care little about the “why” of doing it. He could have simply gone through the motions, something which may have happened in previous years at Tomasso.

What is it, then, that enabled Vince to appropriate the significance of this experience at a deeper level? While management practices are a powerful vehicle for embodying values within the life of the organization, commitment to these practices will break down if leaders and employees do not persuasively and consistently articulate their connection to explicit values. In the absence of consistently recognizing the connection of the practices to compelling values – linking “yes” and “why” – practices risk devolving into unconscious activism. When this happens, even the best practices are capable of poisoning the culture of the organization. Vince instead participated in a rhythm that linked “Yes” to “Why.” As someone who came from another organization that cared little about the dignity of workers, reconciliation with employees, Vince knew that these practices held an opportunity for real transformation in Tomasso.

Before he hired Rob MacKenzie to lead Tomasso, Ouimet had instructed previous management to implement some of the practices. Employees realized that there was limited commitment on the part of management to these practices, and the practices were experienced as burdensome obligations rather than as expressions of a clear and compelling philosophy of how the company should be operated. This, of course, had detrimental effects on the culture of the company. Again, this does not at all mean that a company should not commit to a system of management practices.

Such practices are indeed essential to embodying our best intentions amidst the complex and highly pressurized worlds of our organizations. Just as abstract values lack transformative power apart from practices that operationalize them, the opposite is also true. Practices alone are necessary but insufficient.

2. The Tension Between Invitation (Call) and Mandate (Compliance): In Search of the Authentic “Yes”

TO HIS GREAT CREDIT, ROBERT OUIMET has articulated a clear distinction between the kind of compliance Tomasso reasonably expects from its managers and employees around required standards of workplace performance and practice and the sort of “yes” that communicates genuine consent in the realms of interpersonal relationship and spiritual practice.

An employer can legitimately require the first kind of “yes” (compliance) of their employees as a condition of their employment. Obviously, when it comes to the unambiguous commitment to legal accounting practices and the disciplined pursuit of operational excellence and customer service, these expectations are built into job descriptions as performance standards and requirements for Tomasso’s employees and managers. Even beyond the legal and economic expectations, there are certain practices, such as following up with laid-off employees, which are mandatory. Vince was not given a choice in the matter. It was part of his job description.

On the other hand, Ouimet has steadfastly insisted that when it comes to invitations around matters spiritual only a “yes” which reflects a genuine desire and consent on the part of the employee is desirable or acceptable. There are a couple of examples of this that illustrate both the nature of this desire for an authentic “yes” and the difficult challenge this sometimes poses to Tomasso’s employees.

One example was the establishment of a “Silent Room” at Tomasso, set aside for employees of all spiritual and philosophical persuasions as a space for prayer, meditation, and reflection (see #16 in the Appendix). In creating this space, Ouimet’s sincere desire was to make possible the opportunity for such prayer or meditation to any employee who might desire this, without creating an atmosphere in which employees would feel obligated to use the room in order to meet the expectation of

Ouimet or other superiors. The intent was to create a space for spiritual engagement within Tomasso's facility *without* coercing anyone to use it.

A second example was the establishment of a spiritual support group (see #15 in the Appendix). This group gathers at Ouimet's corporate offices for a time of Christian worship and reflection. Once again, Ouimet's desire has been to extend an invitation to employees to share in this time in a way that welcomes *but does not coerce* their participation. To underscore the sincerity of his intent that employees choose freely their response to this invitation, Ouimet recalls the story of inviting one of Tomasso's management team to participate. "I welcome your participation, but if I ever find out that you said yes because you thought you had too, I'll fire you!"

The flip side of Ouimet's desire that employees respond to these invitations in ways reflecting authentic freedom of choice is his fear that they might respond inauthentically with an uncertain "yes" when they really wish to say "no." This concern resonates with the confusion on the part of some employees about whether there is a hidden religious agenda underlying these activities, a thinly veiled desire to proselytize employees. The possibility of coercion is real, *even if it is not intended*, simply because of the reality of the power and authority of Ouimet's organizational role as the one who is extending the invitation. Saying "no" involves for many the perceived risk of disappointing one's employer and being passed up for promotions and rewards.

The patient effort to nurture an environment over time in which it becomes increasingly possible to extend such invitations without fear of coercing or being coerced is essential as Ouimet and Tomasso's leadership seek together to deepen this journey they have begun together. It may be that the capacity to celebrate the faithful responses of those who would risk an authentic "no" to such invitations will create even more room for the emergence of the authentic "yes" that is the trademark of genuine spiritual seeking.

3. The Tension Between Economic and Human and Spiritual Values: Affirming the Faithfulness of Multiple Bottom Lines

TOMASSO HAS A RICH AND EMERGING PRACTICE-BASED APPROACH to integrating spiritual and human values with the complex demands of organizational performance. Their approach offers an extensive menu of management practices designed to complement and perhaps compensate for the potential excesses of what might otherwise be a single-minded preoccupation with the sole bottom line of financial performance. Nearly all of the practices that are identified in the appendix are designed to strengthen either spiritual or human growth within the life of their organization. However, this segregation of management practices which strengthen human, community and spiritual values from those practices which strengthen productivity and economic performance may unintentionally reinforce the familiar and unhelpful dualism between the spiritual and the material.

Operational proficiency, superb quality, and financial success are all related not only to the viability of Tomasso as a sustainable organization, but also to employee satisfaction with the purpose and quality of the work they do together at Tomasso. And yet there are no practices on this list within *Our Project* whose primary focus is to strengthen the financial or productive capacities and performance of Tomasso as an economic organization. This emphasis continues in the list of the values associated with *Our Project*, a list that includes many values related to human or spiritual growth, but relatively few that underscore in a positive way Tomasso's desire to sustainably steward its financial resources and to positively serve the world through its products.

The emphasis on practices and values in the areas of spiritual and human growth makes perfect sense as a corrective to the traditional imbalances of economic organizations, but taken alone – apart from the practices and values associated with Tomasso's operational and financial performance – these values also represent a limited understanding of organizational faithfulness. One definition of heresy is to mistake a partial truth for the whole truth. The whole truth about Tomasso is that in order for it to be healthy and serve faithfully over time, it needs to tend adequately to its financial life *and* its operational performance *and* the spiritual and human

wellbeing of the men and women who together form Tomasso's workplace community.

Of course, Ouimet, MacKenzie and others know that they need practices that enable them to be a financially disciplined organization. Yet, it seems that it would be prudent that the human, spiritual and economic dimensions be positively reflected in Tomasso's list of practices and values. Otherwise, every time Tomasso's managers make difficult decisions that seek to balance the needs of employees with the financial and business realities facing the company, Tomasso's leadership will be vulnerable to the perception that they are somehow compromising or betraying Tomasso's true values. In fact, faithfulness for Tomasso will inevitably involve managing the normative tension that exists between these legitimate values (some financial, some human, some spiritual).

But there is an even deeper problem at work than balance. It is the issue of integration. When it was decided to layoff the two women for economic reasons, the question that needs to arise is when is an economic reason moral. What level of financial difficulty represents the threshold that legitimates the elimination of jobs (people) as an acceptable remedial strategy? How far do you bring down profits before resorting to layoffs? How long and how much should a company sacrifice financially in order to protect the jobs of dedicated employees? When is it too soon? When is it too late? What are the possibilities of retraining employees when "skill sets" change?

In the just war tradition, there is a principle of "last alternative," that one should go to war after exhausting all other peaceful possibilities. Going to war is not simply a political decision, it is a moral decision. In a similar way, layoffs, because of the resulting emotional and financial impact on people, should be a last alternative. And even then, when seen as the alternative of last resort, one of the dangers of regarding layoffs as a purely economic decision is that it appears to suggest that the outcome was somehow inevitable. Yet, in truth there may have been poor management decisions that contributed to the situation resulting in a lot of pain for these two

women. So there may not only be practices of reconciliation, but also practices of confession.

Here, in instances when the potential layoffs are caused by economic pressures, we find ourselves at the nexus of the human and the economic dimensions that Tomasso has described. How, when this decision must be faced, are the economic and human factors weighed? Reell, another privately-held company profiled later in this book, when faced with a drop in economic performance refrains from layoffs until the company's profit margin drops below zero. Only at this point to they entertain layoffs as a solution. At times, even when reaching this point, they have avoided layoffs through other measures through which employees and management "share the pain."



Appendix

PRACTICES THAT CAN CARRY HUMAN AND SPIRITUAL VALUES INTO THE WORKPLACE⁵

Our Project

<http://www.our-project.org/en/home/home.htm>

I. Humanization Practices for the Workplace: These are practices having the greatest influence on the growth and psychic and physical well-being of people.

1. **A Gesture:** On company time, a group of employees are provided an opportunity, once or twice a year on a voluntary basis, to distribute food products to people in need. The food is provided *anonymously* by the company. After serving the meal, employees gather to reflect on the experience.
2. **Prize from the Heart:** Awarding a “Prize from the Heart” is aimed at promoting and rewarding particularly worthy behavior. Each year the prize is awarded to employees who everybody acknowledges as models of generosity, helpfulness, solidarity and fraternity. To win the prize, people also have to have show exemplary job performance. A committee of employees chose the winner.
3. **Annual Meal:** The company organizing an “annual meal” that brings together the entire workforce. The managers served the food, which was a simple buffet. Over the years, this activity helped to develop authenticity and humility in managers, as well as a spirit of solidarity, human dignity, and fraternity among all who attended.
4. **Support after Lay-offs or Dismissals:** Managers who lay off or fire employees must contact that employee at least two times within a year after the dismissal. The reasons for this practice are multiple but principally management needs to follow-up on a difficult and painful decision to be sure the employee is alright and to see if need further help. Another important reason for the practice is that the manager and employees have the opportunity to reconcile differences.
5. **Dinner of 4:** The hiring of all new people, and more especially managers, should be done—as a general rule—by including the person’s spouse, or companion, at the very end of the interview process, but before any final decision. In this way, right from the beginning, the understanding of *Our Project’s* spirit is reinforced, the spirit of collaboration and solidarity, which must exist in the company.

⁵ From *Reconciliation of Human Happiness and Business Profitability: It Can Be Done!* Dr. J.-Robert Ouimet, Ph.D., C.M., C.Q., L.Sc.Com., MBA, L.Sc.Pol. Second Revised Edition

6. **An annual, shared bonus plan:** Once the company's annual financial budget has been met or surpassed, an annual bonus to every employee—varying with each person's responsibilities and the company's performance. In addition, an extra bonus will be given to each member of the personnel on the basis of the number of children that person has in his or her charge.
7. **An ombudsman:** The Board of Directors choose someone to be the ombudsman of the company, which is someone on whom anyone can call, at any time, once the rigidly-defined stages of the complaint procedure have been tried. The ombudsman has all the powers necessary to ensure the increase of justice and fairness in all situations so that the spirit and values of *Our Project* will be fostered and lived.
8. **Nontraditional, warm, and authentic communication:** To resist the ordinary communications from becoming mechanical responses, the “hello” must be an authentic, inner spirit, one full of humility and openness to others. It must have as its only goal “to be authentically oneself,” to say to others a genuine “Hello, how are you?” a real “We value you.” Personal interest exclusively should never be the main reason for any communication. Even less, no communication should have “motivation manipulation” as its exclusive purpose, in the hopes of increasing productivity and profitability.

II. Humanization and Spiritualization Practices: These are activities having the greatest influence on the growth and psychic and physical as well as spiritual well-being.

9. **Interior silence and prayer during certain meetings:** In a climate of freedom, during official meetings of the Board of Directors, the executive committee, specialized committees, and other meetings, there can be brief periods of silence, sharing, reflection, and sometimes prayer.
10. **Testimonials:** Guest speakers, usually from outside the company, present reflections on their own chosen paths, existential situations, expectations, mistakes and successes, joys and sufferings, discoveries of certain values of humanization and sometimes spiritualization. These are strictly personal testimonials talks about their personal experiences in some sphere of life. The subjects dealt with had to have a deeply human content. The frequency of these and conferences varied, depending on the needs and wishes of the personnel, from monthly to bi-annually.
11. **An annual, personal one-on-one bilateral conversation:** These one-on-one conversations allow the two persons concerned to share ideas frankly and directly about tension of breakdowns that may have occurred in their personal communication during the last year. The discussions can develop values of confidence, solidarity, brotherhood, better understanding, and even reconciliation and forgiveness. This annual conversation, in a very special and essential way,

complements the annual evaluation of professional performance. The one-on-one conversation should, however, never be held at the same time as the meeting dealing with performance.

12. **Climate Study Report:** Every two years an organizational climate survey is conducted by an independent outside group to gather nonbiased information on the success, tensions and failures of *Our Project*.
13. **Research Studies:** These reflection groups allow interested personnel to know better and to deepen the values—Christian and other kinds—contained in the Project. Those participating in the groups will also be able to detect the values in the company that will allow human happiness and competitive profitability to increase steadily.
14. **Strategic Plan on *Our Project*:** Every three years, the board of directors and management will develop a strategic plan to develop a more effective implementation strategy for particular practices with *Our Project*. The plan complements the economic strategic plan so that the values are more concretely implemented throughout the company.

III. Spiritualization Practices: These are activities having the greatest influence on the growth and psychic and physical well-being, especially with spiritualization content.

15. **Spiritual support group:** These meetings allow those working in the company—those who desire to do so—to affirm their Christian faith—or the faith of their choice—in silence and interior prayer. In addition to the impact that these meetings can have on the participants, they certainly influence all those working in the company, on the level of faith, hope and love. They also have a human, moral and spiritual impact on everyone, even though this cannot be measured quantitatively.
16. **Silent Rooms:** In each geographic area of operation, a room will be set aside where the members of the personnel who want to, can be alone in interior silence, relaxation, reflection, and, if desired, personal and silent meditation and prayer. In the corridors of the company, posters present the themes that foster, among others, the values of friendship, generosity, welcoming, relaxation, and hope by using illustrations of flowers, animals, mountains, landscapes, people, etc. The mottoes are proposed to the personnel out of a “bank of sayings” that those who work in the company themselves have suggested. Each year, a saying is chosen by a vote of all the personnel.
17. **Gestures of reconciliation:** Here we have a group of gestures showing apology, humility, and reconciliation that one member of the personnel can make to another when normal, everyday friction and tension come up in the work place, and this regardless of whether the other person is on an equal, a lower, or a higher level in the company’s hierarchy.

18. **Counseling:** In the work place, it is sometimes possible (after several years of “breaking in” quite a few management tools of the Project) to make a specialist available to all members of the company—again to those desiring it. Such a person would guide and support them in a human, moral, and spiritual way as they themselves, individually or collectively, seek brotherhood, a welcoming ear, solidarity, well-being, happiness, advice, etc.