

## **Heaven and hell — which are you creating at work?**

*One night, a man (generic) had a dream, and in the dream an angel comes and takes him on a tour of heaven and hell. They visit hell first. It turns out that hell, surprisingly enough, is a huge banquet room, with tables full of all the food and drink one could possibly want. The people at the tables, however, are angry, frustrated, rude, despairing, depressed, stressed, thin, emaciated and wasting away. The silverware in hell is about four feet long and can only be picked up at one end. Thus, all these folks, who are interested only in feeding themselves, are unable to do so, are unable to manage a four-foot utensil in such a way they can bring the other end to their own mouth.*

*They leave hell and then go to visit heaven.*

*It turns out that heaven, surprisingly enough, is also a huge banquet room, with tables full of all the food and drink you could possibly want. The folks in heaven are joyful, happy, content, engaged, and manifest a healthy sense of well-being. The silverware is exactly the same as in hell, four feet long and can only be picked up at one end. The difference? Here, in heaven, the people are reaching across the table and feeding each other.*

In every social system, in every work environment, everyone, yes, everyone, makes a contribution overtly or covertly, actively or passively, consciously or unconsciously and, most importantly, for the "good of the order" or, conversely, for the "ill of the organization" — but everyone, i.e., you, contributes one way or another.

What you believe about yourself, how you see others, and what you believe about others, contribute to whether you are creating heaven or hell in your workplace in some way, shape or form.

How do you experience life in your organization (or, if you dare, in your family, or relationship)?

So, is your life at work centered on feeding yourself?

Consider:

Is your life at work "all about me?" Are your relationships at work built around a "What's in it for me?" motive? Are you a bully, gossip or blamer — do you need to coerce, dominate, control and be authoritative? Are folks expendable in your "take no prisoners" approach to project management or meeting deadlines? Do you hoard information? Are you consistently critical of others' behaviors? Are your sole reasons for working built around promotions, raises, corner offices and bonuses? Are you a workaholic? Do you sacrifice integrity, ethics and morals for the sake of money or prestige? Do you show favoritism? Do you treat others as "stupid?" Do you blow off others' requests, emails, and questions? Do you shun accountability for your actions and behaviors? Do you focus only on your own immediate tasks and responsibilities? Do you avoid risk-taking and conflict? Do you exhibit bias or prejudice? Are you distrustful, disrespectful and uncooperative? Do you have hidden agendas; are you secretive? Do you make more statements than you ask questions? Do you engage in irrational thinking and emotional reactivity? Are you inflexible, selfish, arrogant and egotistical?

Or, is your life at work centered on feeding others?

Consider:

Do you encourage and inspire the folks you work with? Do you live in integrity and authenticity at work? Do folks regard you as decent, honest and trustworthy? Do you assume accountability for your actions, behaviors and mistakes? Do you think more about supporting others than about what's wrong with

others? Do you treat others with decency and respect? Do you feel everyone has a right to a seat at the table? Are listening and coaching hallmarks of your leadership or management style? Do you show confidence in your direct reports? Do you exhibit empathy and concern for others' well being? Are you energetic, upbeat, enthusiastic and optimistic? Do you encourage others to experience work-life balance? Are you self-aware and master of your emotions? Do you take time for self-reflection and encourage others to do so as well? Do you lead and manage with your heart as well as your head? Do you believe in yourself? Do you live your organization's values? Do you encourage others to contribute their thoughts, ideas and wisdom? Do you treat others like adults? Do you engage in open and honest communication, and give honest and timely feedback? Do you praise in public and deal privately with problems? Are you fair in your dealings with others? Do you act as a facilitator and guide? Are you an advocate for others? Are you humble? Do you initiate conversations and then make an effort to understand before being understood? Are you comfortable with conflict? Are you aware of your own limitations? Do you understand the challenges folks are facing and what frustrates them? Do you encourage collaboration? Do you encourage information sharing? Do you point out folks' strengths? Do you honor your commitments and keep your promises?

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- Are you contributing to your own or your colleagues' experience of hell in your workplace? If so, what story or stories do you make up to rationalize/justify your attitudes and actions to allow this to happen?
- Are you contributing to your own or your colleagues' experience of heaven in your workplace? What attitudes and actions support your contribution? How do you feel about your contributions?

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Peter G. Vajda, Ph.D, C.P.C. is the founder of True North Partnering an Atlanta-based company that supports conscious living through coaching and facilitating. With a practice based on the dynamic intersection of mind, body, emotion and spirit, Peter's approach focuses on personal, business, relational and spiritual coaching. He is a professional speaker and published author. For more information, [www.truenorthpartnering.com](http://www.truenorthpartnering.com), or [pvajda\(at\)truenorthpartnering.com](mailto:pvajda@truenorthpartnering.com), or phone 770.804.9125. You can also follow Peter on Twitter: @petergvajda