

# How InterPlay® Can Help Your Organization

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by Tom Henderson

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Every organization, it seems today, wants to get more from its employees (without losing them to burnout). At the same time, employees are asking more from their jobs. Beyond great pay-checks, vacations, health care, and stock options, people want two things - a voice in decisions that effect them, and the ability to bring all of who they are to work.

A recent study in Sloan Management Review (Mitroff and Denton, Summer 1999) revealed that “people are hungry for ways in which to practice spirituality in the workplace without offending co-workers or causing acrimony.” Spirituality here is “a sense of interconnectedness” - connection “with one’s complete self, others and the entire universe.” The authors believe strongly that “unless organizations learn how to harness the ‘whole person’ and the immense spiritual energy that is at the core of everyone, they will not be able to produce world-class products and service.”

InterPlay can help you tap into that immense core energy. It is a system of new ideas and practices that reintegrate body, mind, heart and spirit. Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter, the creators of InterPlay, have been exploring the intersection of physicality and spirituality for more than twenty years. As a former development scientist and manager, I believe today’s companies can learn a lot from the InterPlay approach. InterPlay

- uses simple “forms” to play with movement, stories, voice and stillness;
- enables individuals and groups to access their innate wisdom and creativity;
- takes an incremental approach,
- is adaptable to any body, and
- provides an affirming, satisfying experience - more ease, fun, creativity, and community.

**Creativity and Risk Taking:** “Who could have predicted that Dell Computer, a company started by an undergraduate at the University of Texas, would outperform the world’s most powerful technology company? Or that America Online, long ridiculed as a destination for ‘newbies,’ would acquire the world’s best-known media company?” So reads a recent article in Fast Company (April, 2000) on the importance of generating heretical ideas to challenge the industry dogma. InterPlay encourages “heretical” ideas. We take a playful approach. We notice that when we practice playing with ideas instead of pre-judging them, remarkable things happen. Certainly there’s a time and place for evaluation. But this usually happens much too early, as when some-

one risks suggesting something, and someone else immediately says “that won’t work because...” How long before the person who risked suggesting that idea suggests another one?

**Affirming Physical Experience.** In InterPlay, we pause to notice our physical experience. One thing we notice is that affirmation (versus critique) produces more of what we want! We often invite people to witness others or to be witnessed as they practice an InterPlay form. In InterPlay, witnessing means, first, noticing my own physical experience as I watch and listen and, second, affirming the person I have witnessed by telling them my own physical experience in just a few words or images. There are two reasons for this: 1) Most people find at least one of the forms we teach to be pushing the envelope of what they think they can do. When they are witnessed doing it and affirmed doing it, they begin to experience themselves as actually able to do it. If that were all (achieving some internal sense that I am able to do something I could not do before), it would not be enough, but it isn’t all. I have seen over and over again how people actually blossom in this process. They seem magically to create works of beauty and power that were unimaginable earlier. 2) Equally important, the witness has an experience of his or her own. That this is a common occurrence can be verified by taking note of the crunch in the pit of your stomach when you see a trapeze artist slip and almost fall. One of the most important questions people have about any group they are part of is: “Will they hold me up if I’m falling?” If the answer is “no,” not much of consequence happens. But when we witness someone taking a risk, identify with it, and affirm the risk taker, we erect the safety net that encourages them to risk being even more of themselves.

**Empowerment:** InterPlay teaches a respect for your own internal authority, your own body wisdom. A simple example: If we ask what people have been taught (by parents, teachers, institutions, the culture) about “sleep,” they tend to respond with conventional wisdom: “early to bed, early to rise...,” “you need eight hours a night,” etc. If we then ask what they know, we find they do know things about their own body rhythms: “My energy drops right after lunch, and I do best when I take a 10-minute nap then or a walk,” etc. We call this kind of knowledge about oneself body knowledge. Body wisdom is putting such knowledge to use for the good of oneself and others: “I know my energy is low after lunch, so I avoid making appointments then, if possible; then I’m able to give my best and others get my best.” When we exercise our self-knowledge in this way, everyone wins.

**Teamwork and Individual Initiative:** Everyone says they want great teamwork. Trying to make it happen can be exhausting! But does it have to be so hard? It’s not often stated, but good teamwork requires both good leadership and good followership. Following isn’t much valued in our society outside of the military - not many good images for it (lemmings or sheep!). Yet, for a team to accomplish its goals, someone has to lead (initiate something), and others have to follow. A basic tool for creating improvisationally is “leading and following.” When groups play with this form and then stop to notice their experience, they usually find that they’ve learned some things about leading and following that apply elsewhere in life. They notice, for example, that if you want someone to follow you, you must initiate clearly, that nothing will happen if no one initiates (e.g., for fear of doing the wrong thing), that a piece won’t “work” if some decide not to follow because they think it was a stupid idea, that a piece will be more satisfying for frequent

changes in leadership, that it's important to be able to shift from leading to following quickly, and that it is possible to do this without struggle and with grace and ease.

**Inclusiveness and Diversity:** InterPlay builds community rapidly. When people create together in the moment, the information we bring to the task comes from a deeper place than when we polish and filter it through our notions of political correctness. We tend to tell our own truth, some of which may be painful, but in the process, I believe, we realize a larger truth - that all of us do want many of the same things (like being part of the community and having our individuality recognized and valued). When we begin to see our similarities as greater than our differences, we not only build community, but we also create an environment in which diversity is honored and individuals do dare to excel, not at the expense of others, but for the sake of the whole.

**Productivity without Stress:** Does any of this translate to the real world? A writer says: "InterPlay is sneaky. You think you're just having fun, but later you realize that your writing is easier, your life is easier." InterPlay has the power to create positive change almost without conscious awareness, working its magic in an atmosphere of ease and affirmation. A vice president of a creative "fast" company says: "Written words cannot adequately describe the kind of potential transformation which can occur through this methodology. InterPlay accesses each person's unique contribution - which contributes mightily to the overall team goals." An event manager says: "It strikes me that InterPlay accomplishes what ropes courses do, but in a more accessible way."

The principles and tools of InterPlay are easily practiced, do not rely on specific skills or gifts and can be applied to individuals and groups. They are effective in bringing body, mind, heart, and spirit together in organizations, resulting in greater creativity, productive power, organizational health, and success.