YES...
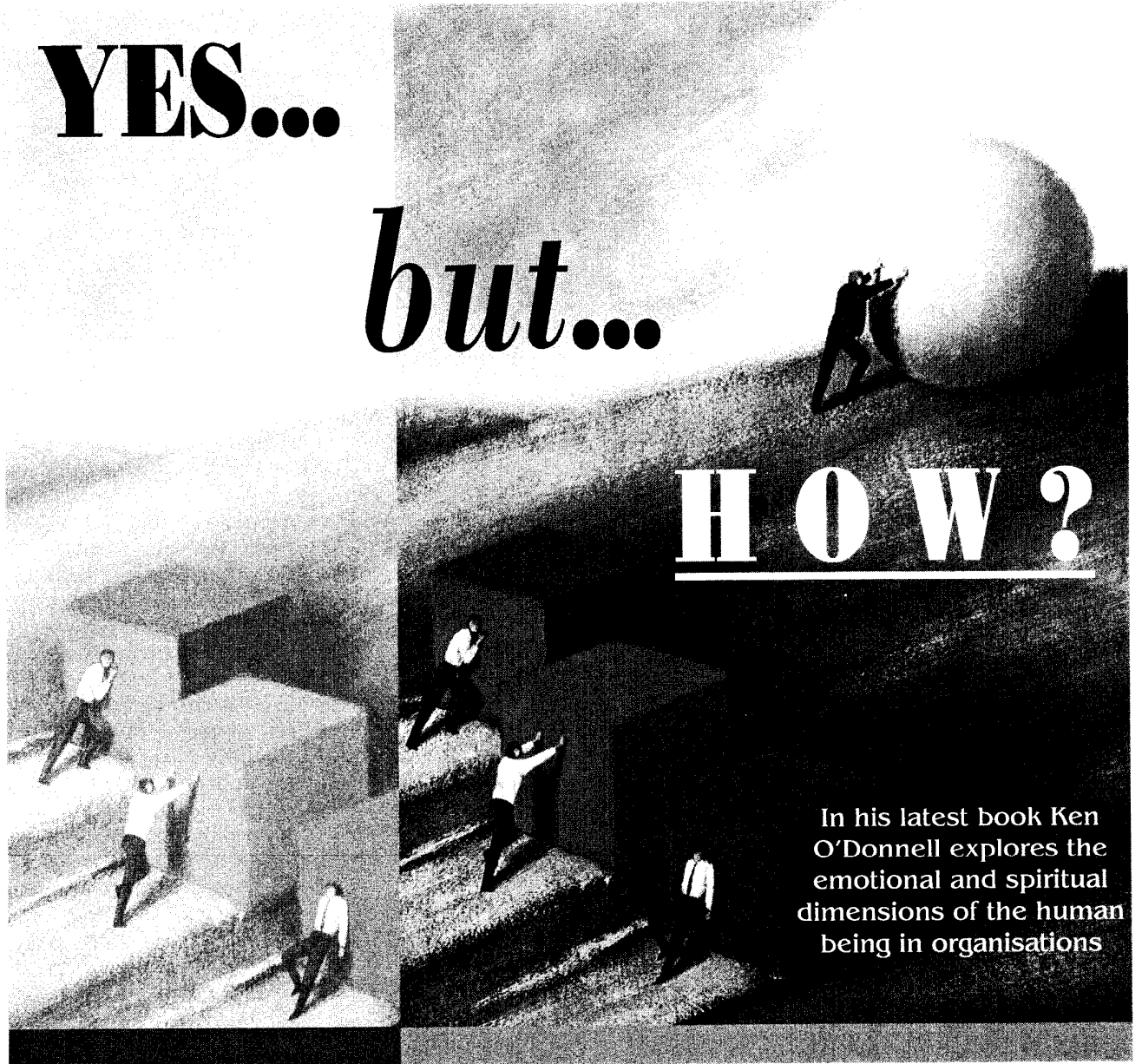# *but...*
HOW?

In his latest book Ken O'Donnell explores the emotional and spiritual dimensions of the human being in organisations

"Apart from the economic implications, it is evident that, as humanity moves towards the end of the millennium it rejuvenates the desire to build a new world. That desire will only take place through an affirmation of the spiritual side of human nature, balanced with the continuous search for a better life through science."

Megatendencies for the Nineties. *John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene.*

The time for being human has arrived! If you are reading this article it is likely your name is on the list of pilgrims wending their way to a better future. And it may be that you (the reader) and I have many experiences in common. For example, many of us now receive an avalanche of invitations for congresses, courses and seminars on the new tendencies of business and work. We realise that the need for transformation at the individual level in organisations has a prominent position in the priorities of the moment. We are incorrigible idealists in wanting the world to be a better place to live and work in but we are a little at a loss as to how exactly to bring about this change.

'Understanding the Human Factor - the Competitive Differential in the Era of Excellence' was the title of a recent event on human resources whose colourful brochure arrived on my desk. Opening it up, I found that the organisers wanted to go even deeper into 'Bringing out the Essential Values of Being.' Other such invitations for events and training sessions on 'Spirituality at Work,' 'The Human Being and Organisational Transformation,' 'The Human Side of Quality,' 'New Values in Organisations,' 'Quality of Life at Work' certainly reveal how far we have come in our grappling with the most basic aspects of our reflections on the direction of work and the worker for the new millennium.

Seeing such expressive titles we may wonder if the event will really approach these urgent themes with the required seriousness and depth or if it will be just another talk-fest. Will it be just one more round of pleasant exchanges of clichés about how change in human beings is important, how the correct consciousness is essential to face our many challenges, how it is important to implant the new paradigms

that will take us towards glory and success?

We take our seats in the sessions of these courses and events in the hope that this time it will be different, mainly because our time and resources are short. We have other more important things to do than to lose hours hearing expositions about the new behaviour demanded by the present difficulties that not even the presenter probably puts into practice. After the enthusiasm provoked by the rhetoric, jokes and exhortations for a culture of change, we return to the reality of our day-to-day carousel with the reinforced conviction that is easier to speak than to bring out the best in us. After all, we are also one of these human beings that 'needs to discover and develop his or her own values.' It is great to make lists of the values so necessary to a working professional, but to practice them demands extra power and self-discipline that we may not have access to. To think that it is the 'others' at my work (and not me) who have to be rescued from their ignorance and lack of initiative ends up being a very expensive mistake. It all starts with my own change.

Another symptom that we probably share in our search for a better world is of a more personal nature. Within our professional and social activities and more specifically, our internal world, we have already initiated our own process of transformation. To hear from someone else, yet again, that we have to change begins to seem like disrespect for the effort that we have already done. How easy it is to list the values that a good professional needs at the brink of the new millennium - agility, flexibility, sensibility, courage, respect, co-operation, detachment from the past and so many others. If I try to imagine someone with all these virtues developed fully I cannot envisage a human being but an angel. Perhaps it's not such a bad idea after all to be an angel. At least I wouldn't have to worry so much with God around to

give me a hand whenever the going got tough. Certainly, the new values and attitudes that we have to develop urgently go beyond being able to verbalise the words that are politically and socially correct for our friends, colleagues and customers. The time for putting into practice that which we know to be true and good has arrived!

This search for more effective answers to our individual crises is one of the clearest symptoms of this time. In a research conducted in England at the beginning of the eighties, 33% of the interviewees were mainly worried about their survival, 47% with external and material accomplishments and 20% with internal accomplishments. Ten years later the same research detected that the same 33% were worried about their survival, 27% with external and material accomplishments and 40% with the internal accomplishments! Imagine if the survey were to be conducted today.

It is not by chance that the books that sell more globally are about self-improvement. For this reason, the movement towards more spirituality gains strength in leaps and bounds. It is not an organised movement. As HR Magazine puts it, "The trend towards spirituality in corporations seems to be the result of spontaneous and personalized efforts of managers; departments, factories and, companies all over Canada and the United States. There is no doubt that the interest in spirituality in the work place is growing."

After years of restructurings through programmes like Total Quality and Re-engineering and being tossed around by the hurricane of globalised and unstable markets, many companies and their employees find themselves reeling in dizziness. The dismissal or forced redundancy of many colleagues and friends didn't just affect and generate fear amongst the survivors, but they inherited the 'less-people-for-more-work' syndrome as well as more complex technologies that they need to master. To work with emotional scars, fear and work overload that permeate organisations today, an expressive spiritual strength is required.

As Judith Hoy, president of Learning Systems and of the Organisational Development Network says in the same article mentioned above, "The downsizing, re-engineering and personnel cuts have made corporations (North American) into not very friendly places. The employees desire deeply to have the inner strength to help them to do their work and to live their lives in spite of the fears and insecurity." It has taken time, but by pure force of circumstance, spirituality is finally an issue in board-rooms, and training programs in organisations throughout the world, that see the task of making the work place more respectful, safe and sane, are seen as imperative.

In the work place of the seventies, spirituality was totally confused with religion or even with the hippie movement which at that time was at its heights. Even today, when one speaks of spirituality in the work place, it creates fear or concern in those responsible for human resource development. They imagine all sorts of religious activity - lunch-hour rituals, séances, scripture readings and proselytism taking over the minds of the employees. What they need to understand perhaps, is that is that spirituality is basically the study and development of human values, and not to be confused with religious practice as is commonly accepted. It implies the return of self-esteem as the basis for personal growth. It opens the way for exactly the same values that a successful employee or leader needs at this time of existential and economic chaos.

And so perhaps the time has now finally arrived when we will focus on how to enhance the quality of the human being at the emotional and spiritual levels, not just in the professional environment but in everything that life involves.

There are four phases in the construction of a building - study of the basic concept of the construction, evaluation of the place of construction, the architectural project and the execution of the work. In the same way there are four steps to improve our internal quality:

• **Conceptual basis** - what is quality and where it applies; notions of the systemic or holistic vision of processes and the individual's importance in the several systems of the which it is part

• **Evaluation of the current situation** - why institutions and the individuals that compose them are not developing to their full potential

• **Project of self-change** - how to plan and initiate personal transformation that brings 'total quality' to life

• **Construction of a better life** - motivation and the practice of self-reflection in order to develop proactive relationships.

One of my major learning points that has always encouraged me towards this goal is the following: If I always seek to improve myself I have nothing to lose. If the world improves I will be better prepared to take my place in it than someone who doesn't prepare. If the world gets worse, my effort to develop positive values now will help me to face the difficulties better than someone who does nothing. And finally, without even considering the future, my effort to improve now and the consequent personal victories, big and small, already help me in the present! It is extremely interesting to observe and be part of a phase in human history that the future will remember as the great turning point.