

What Do Southwest Airlines and U2 Have in Common?

The ability to thrive and prosper no matter what

Unwelcome forces work against companies every day, but some companies thrive nonetheless. For example, although the airline industry suffered a major blow following the recession in the early 2000s and punctuated by 9/11, and as larger airlines battled bankruptcy proceedings, one continued to turn a profit: Southwest Airlines. Similarly, a band like U2, which has outlived the vast majority of other bands and survived decades in the music world, makes you wonder, what's their secret? The answer: For both Southwest and U2, maintaining a culture rooted in spirituality keeps them going strong.

In *Soul at Work* (Seabury Books), Margaret Benefiel, PhD, who teaches at Andover Newton Theological School, shows how such a culture can “transcend and enhance an organization's performance and success,” proving that soul can function across all faiths and traditions in real organizations facing real issues—from huge companies like Southwest Airlines to small nonprofits and even the band U2.

The key elements that protect organizations from the inevitable bumps in the journey and foster long-term success include

- **Building and sustaining a reputation for quality and integrity in their products and services.** U2 fans are rarely disappointed as the band continues to produce powerful music that includes social messages reflecting the band's goals and mission. Customers of Southwest expect friendly, “no frills” service and often choose Southwest for its dependability and dedication to quality that doesn't cost a fortune.
- **Building long-term trusting relationships with customers, suppliers, fellow coworkers and fans.** U2 band members keep their relationships strong through mutual respect and hard work. Their good-natured souls also have an enduring effect on fans, some of whom have been inspired to support many of the band's worldly goals. Southwest ensures that employees first have a good attitude, which translates to stronger ties among staff and between the staff and customers. Then the company can easily train for skills and ultimately sustain a fun, caring environment that stands the test of time.
- **Embodying a sense of community.** At U2 concerts, everyone feels a sense of unity and shares a view of how the world could be. Southwest's community of happy, soulful employees has a direct impact on the company's ability to retain employees as well as customers. Each member of U2 and Southwest draws upon his or her whole self—heart, mind, soul and spirit—to stay centered and focus on the overall goals and mission of the organization.

With these elements in place, organizations can meet the challenge of creating a caring, values-based atmosphere without it negatively impacting their bottom line. Best of all, those that find a cohesive soul and prioritize spirituality before profit enjoy an added opportunity, as they can help polish the tarnished images of our corporate leaders today. Southwest Airlines and U2 have set the example—clearly manifesting the hallmarks of soul at work. They make us wonder, What if a company like Enron had employed its own soul at work?

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