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## Spiritual psych program spurs self-discovery

Milwaukee school offers three-year course

The Business Journal of Milwaukee - November 8, 2002 by [Becca Mader](#)

Five years ago Steven La Plant, 35, held a communications position at a large health insurance corporation. Yet he wasn't completely satisfied and felt he was limiting himself.

La Plant thought about launching his own business but was too daunted to admit he wanted to leave the safety of his corporate job.

Through a journey of self-discovery — and a semiweekly trip from Green Bay to Milwaukee — La Plant was able to recognize what he wanted in his life, both professionally and personally.

An intensive three-year program at the School of Spiritual Psychology in Milwaukee encouraged him to take that leap into his own startup company.

La Plant now owns a marketing and communications consulting firm in Milwaukee's 3rd Ward called OneEarthMedia. It specializes in helping companies, such as manufacturers and information technology firms, with marketing in other countries.

"It gave me a lot of encouragement and helped me to be honest with myself," La Plant says.

The program, which La Plant described as a supercharged version of Steven Covey training, was started in 1980 by Jim Morningstar, a clinical psychologist who has a private practice in Milwaukee.

Spiritual psychology is a form of holistic thinking that helps people take a deeper look at themselves, identify their professional and personal goals, and discover a greater sense of purpose in life, Morningstar says.

Morningstar has been practicing spiritual psychology since the 1970s and was so transformed that he said he wanted to share the value of that approach with others.

The nondenominational program enjoyed an initial boost in the '80s because "people tended to gravitate toward something alternative for the sake of making a change," he says.

But now it's gaining even greater acceptance, he adds, as people look for a deeper spiritual meaning in their personal and professional lives as a result of corporate fraud and global instability.

"Our whole sense of life and meaning of life have been rattled," says Patricia Becca Berliner, a clinical psychologist with a private practice in Rockaway Park, N.Y., and member of the American Psychological Association in Washington, D.C. "More people have been turning to spirituality of sorts to bring some sense of meaning into their life."

Graduating to apprenticeships

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The curriculum is divided into three components — personal integration, spiritual leadership and graduate apprenticeship.

Students can enroll in individual classes or complete the entire three-year program to earn a certificate in spiritual psychology.

The first year runs from November to May and costs about \$3,000. Participants complete an emotional autobiography, learn about their belief systems and how to change things that are dysfunctional in their life.

The second year runs from October to May and costs about \$2,400. It focuses on things such as goal setting and developing leadership skills.

The final year extends from September to May, costs \$2,000 and involves a career analysis and application of the skills, techniques and principles learned during the previous two years.

A vast majority of participants within the second year make job changes or career shifts because of the personal reflection they have undergone in the previous year, according to Morningstar.

"The goal is that they gain a greater sense of purposefulness in life so their work and relationships have a sense of fullness and meaning," Morningstar says.

Each class has a maximum of 20 students who work in groups, as well as in one-on-one sessions with one of seven faculty members. They meet seven times a month at Morningstar's office, 4200 W. Good Hope Road. Three classes run concurrently for each level of the program each year.

The course includes reading and daily journal assignments, plus meditation techniques that include bioenergetics and breathwork, which help relieve tension within the body, similar to yoga exercises. The purpose is to integrate body, mind and spirit, Morningstar says.

Spiritual psychology has resonated within the business world, he says.

"It is mostly individuals looking for their own personal growth and addressing their life changes," he says.

Participants have ranged from 18 to 60 years old, but the majority have been in their 30s or 40s, Morningstar says.

He has also received requests for consultation services and has worked with real estate, printing and investment companies. He has given private consultations to chief executive officers and workshops to staff members. Each is tailored to the particular company setting or climate.

"It is very well suited for the business world," La Plant says. "It is the next step in helping organizations function more effectively."

Receptivity has increased

People have been gravitating toward spiritual psychology over the past 10 to 15 years as it has been more acceptable to do so, says David Klimek, a clinical psychologist in Ann Arbor, Mich., and a member of the American Psychological Association.

Spirituality doesn't have a religious affiliation, Klimek says, and there's less inclination now to think people are evangelizing if they talk about spirituality.

Psychology and spirituality work hand in hand, says Berliner, who's also a nun.

"Psychology and spirituality enable people to grow to the fullest of their potential," she says. "Any technique, means, book or process that helps a person to come into their wholeness will be of value."

People who go through spiritual psychology "will be much more humble, modest and more aware of their strengths and limitations," Klimek says. It is a very existential form of thinking that helps people clear up negative energy and become more competent and compassionate, he adds.

The growing popularity of Morningstar's classes has led him to start offering them this year over the Web, where students can listen to class tapes, read required materials, submit required exercises and journal assignments, and consult with faculty members. The program also is available in a self-guided format.

La Plant's sister, who lives in Paris, is one of 12 members of the distance-learning program. She decided to participate because she was impressed with his experience in the program.

"The best way to describe it is that it is personal effectiveness," says La Plant, who credits the program with helping him to better understand himself and his relationships with others. "It is really like getting a life coach."

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