We Need Servant Leaders Now More Than Ever

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Robert Greenleaf (1970) advocated the idea that more servants should emerge as a leader and that individuals should only follow a servant leader. His unpopular thesis cautioned individuals against simply accepting the authority of existing institutions; instead, he suggested that they should only accept the authority of those who were proven servants. Trust, which is considered the "root of all great leadership" (Bligh, 2017, p. 34) was central to Greenleaf's view of leadership, perhaps in large part because of the power afforded people in those positions and the temptation to use that power for hedonistic pleasures. Keith (2012) compares and contrasts the power model of leadership with the service model of leadership and concludes that it is only the service model that is both moral and effective. He hinges his comments on the ultimate use of power. While the power model views power as an end to be attained and wielded for selfish gain, the service model views it as a tool to be acquired on behalf of others (Keith, 2012). Greenleaf (1970) envisioned institutions as the answer to many societal problems and believed that if people would insist on servant leadership, then the only viable institutions that would prevail would be those that were servant led. To Greenleaf, individuals and society would be better off under these institutions.

So where are we in 2021? People's distrust of leaders seems to be proliferating and has been a key driver of much of the social unrest that has affected many domestic and global communities. Practitioners and academic researchers identify distrust as a significant issue affecting individual performance and confidence in leadership (Conley, 2015; Lapidot, Kark, & Shamir, 2007; Spann, 2021). A number of factors have fueled this distrust, including: lack of leadership integrity, ability, withholding information, taking credit for other's work, and not honoring commitments (Conley, 2015; Lapidot et al, 2007). A recent Edelman (2021) report reveals that there is widespread distrust in societal leaders because people feel lied to by government officials, business leaders, and journalists. Edelman (2021) states that we are living in an era of information bankruptcy, which has

led to an extreme ideological and political polarization. However, the Edelman report also reveals that businesses have emerged as the most trusted institution. This places a great burden (and a great opportunity) on business leaders to lead not only on organizational issues, but societal ones as well. This was Greenleaf's expectation, that those served by the organization would grow and that the least privileged in society would also benefit or at least not be further deprived.

There is a growing body of empirical research revealing higher levels of employee trust in leaders and organizations that are servant led (see Joseph & Winston, 2005; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010). A review of Fortune's best companies to work for reveals that only 17 are servant led; yet, it is encouraging to note that half of the very best companies to work for (i.e. 5 out of the top 10) align with servant leadership (Lichtenwalner, 2011). Given the high levels of trust in servant leaders and their natural desires to place other's needs above their own, they may be uniquely positioned to address the present day distrust that has run rampant across many of society's institutions.

Now, onto the current articles. The present issue is comprised of: Chikeleze, Vigil, Hale, Johnson, and Williams' empirical examination of servant leadership and police officers' job satisfaction; Bellamy's empirical examination of servant leadership and organizational commitment in healthcare, Chan's introduction of flow and meaningfulness in servant leadership; and Mixon and Upadhyaya's review of the impact of research in servant leadership across journals and institutions.

Chikeleze and colleagues point toward the recent police killings of unarmed African Americans in the United States and the subsequent social unrest to make a case for the growing importance of developing collaborative relationships between law enforcement agencies and their communities. Whereas traditional policing philosophies have often created distrust between law enforcement and community, the authors examine the Coppell Police Department's servant leadership culture that was instilled in 2011 and attribute the high police officer job satisfaction and positive relationship with the community to the chief of police's deliberate decision to "police with a purpose; with a servant leadership mindset."

Bellamy assessed the relationship between servant leadership and organizational commitment by collecting data from 84 full and part time employees of a health profession's education unit within an academic health center. Her findings reveal that practicing servant leadership has the potential to positively influence employee's dedication to their workplace and ultimately impact organizational success and effectiveness.

Chan draws upon Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) conceptualization of flow (i.e. optimal experience) and connects this concept to servant leadership. Chan contends that servant leaders experience flow when serving and leading others. Furthermore, she reasons that servant leaders are inspired to create an environment where others can also experience flow. Chan makes a connection between servant leadership and optimal experience, as well

as a connection between servant leadership and meaningfulness and concludes that servant leaders have an inner harmony by channeling their energies toward helping others to achieve their potential and growth.

Finally, Mixon and Upadhyaya examine the impact of research in servant leadership across academic journals and institutions. They analyze the scholarly impact of the two dominant servant leadership journals (International Journal of Servant Leadership; and, Servant Leadership: Theory & Practice) and provide the first worldwide ranking of institutions based on the impact of published scholarship in the area of servant leadership.

I hope you enjoy the articles in this edition of SLTP. As always, how can I help?

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