Servant Leadership and Ten Supporting Attitudes

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ABSTRACT

The popular concept of servant leadership is discussed as are the characteristics of servant leaders and the relationships between the servant leader approach and power usage and service. Servant leadership is compared and contrasted to several other common leadership styles. Ten attitudes that support and facilitate servant leadership behaviors are identified from the leadership literature. Leadership practices that flow from these attitudes are examined. Emphasis is placed on the supportive, enabling work environment created by servant leaders.

PROLOGUE

Like many workers, my early career consisted of several different jobs with several different organizations. Before, during and after college, I was a concession stand attendant, road repair worker, telephone company driver, steel mill pipefitter's helper, production engineer, quality assurance engineer and quality assurance manager. Some of my personal work experiences were highly satisfying and enjoyable; others were decidedly not. I became very curious about what made the difference between the places I wanted to work and the places I didn't. The environment of work became such a personal interest that after my first graduate degree in Engineering Management I decided to pursue doctoral studies in business management and organization behavior.

Upon attaining my Ph.D. and beginning my teaching career I came to know many college students searching for their first job, and I have had the pleasure of staying in touch with many of them through their early careers. I noticed that they had very similar experiences to my own. Some were very happy, comfortable and motivated with their work situations while others realized they had made a poor job choice and soon resumed their employment search. In general, I believe it is fair to say, many simply accepted the highest paying position offered to them or the one with the employer of highest reputation or perhaps the one closest to their "dream" location, assuming all job environments were pretty much the same once they entered their employer's door. Large numbers of these former students came to know that compensation, employer reputation and geographic landing spots were not the most important contributors to their satisfaction with work. This is no surprise to many experienced workers, of course. But it was enlightening to see how many early career workers thought money, prestige or location were the answers in their search for satisfaction and motivation at work.

Through my own teaching and research, I focused on what I thought was the true differentiator between good places to work and poor ones – the quality of leadership. Over time, I came to realize that servant leadership was the single most influential factor in creating a successful work environment.

A SERVANT LEADERSHIP WORK ENVIRONMENT

Servant leaders do many special things for their organizations. One of their major contributions is setting the stage for other people to succeed. Because high numbers of followers achieve success, servant-led organizations accomplish great things.

This article addresses the characteristics of servant leaders and the attitudes servant leaders adopt. In a less detailed way, it is about the skills servant leaders develop and apply as well as the behaviors they practice over time to create the environment for others to succeed. The focus is on what servant leaders do to establish and maintain a supportive, facilitative climate where people strive together to enact a compelling shared vision of a better future, where people simultaneously accomplish tasks and build relationships and where leaders empower workers to meet high expectations while holding them accountable for their performance and behaviors.

Different terms and approaches are used by many authors to describe the environment servant leaders create. For example, Ken Blanchard (2004) describes a climate where people willingly contribute their hearts, minds, creativity and excellence toward mutually beneficial goals–an environment where workers commit to the mission and to becoming the best they are capable of becoming.

James Kouzes and Barry Posner (2012) write about enabling others to act through fostering collaboration and strengthening them. Collaboration is fostered by building trust and facilitating relationships while followers are strengthened by enhancing self-determination and supporting development of their competence and confidence.

Nancy Ortberg (2004) writes that servant leaders release others to do their work by trusting them as they trust themselves to accomplish outstanding results.

James Hunter (2004) describes the servant-led environment as one in which leaders are driven by the institution's mission and where their followers simultaneously accomplish goals and build relationships. It is a climate where excellence is demanded, people are held accountable for performance and community is built.

John Maxwell (2007) says leaders empower people in the workplace. His Law of Empowerment states that leaders themselves have a strong sense of self-worth, and they believe not only in themselves but also in their mission and their people. To Maxwell, empowering followers means leaders help others reach their potential by being on their side, encouraging them, giving them power and helping them to succeed.

James Autry (2001) says servant leadership is concerned with creating a place in which people can do good work while finding meaning in their efforts. It's a place where followers are free to bring their spirits to work.

Of great interest here is how servant leaders affect others through who they are and what they do. That is, how followers' satisfaction, commitment, productivity and creativity are improved through the environment servant leaders create. This is where servant leadership shines. This environment is applicable to the workplace, the community, the congregation, the family, the sports team or whatever particular unit may be guided by the servant leader.

Creating such a climate is attractive to many leaders. It's not hard to imagine that it should be. It is an environment where people "want to" work instead of feeling like they "have to" work. It's an environment that supports participants' dedication to mission, personal fulfillment, pride in accomplishment, sense of responsibility for achieving results, desire to be both effective and efficient and willingness to create new methods and relationships.

However, acting as servant leader for one's enterprise, agency, community, family or team is

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not a simple matter. It's a way of behaving one adopts over the long term. It's individual as well as organizational. Servant leadership is based on values, both personal and institutional, as well as relationships. The servant leadership style can be learned and applied by people who possess the intent to change, grow and improve. That is, servant leadership involves the type of person you are as well as the style you apply to lead others.

Generally speaking, leadership is a process through which a leader influences the behaviors of others toward a common goal. A vast amount of research informs us that an enterprise's performance is related directly to its leadership quality. Leadership accounts for the difference between long-term success and failure no matter how performance is assessed–in terms of growth, quality of service, financial results, innovativeness or any other means.

Because leadership is so important to people and institutions, the topic has been the subject of much interest and research for many decades. The contingency approach dominates the extensive literature on the subject. The appropriate style of leading others depends upon the situation. Some contexts call for autocratic leadership, some for democratic or participative leadership. Best results are attained in other situations by using transformational or transactional approaches, and still others call for bureaucratic, charismatic or laissez-faire leadership styles–and so on.

Servant leadership's timeless relational and values-based principles help to address many of the myriad challenges facing those in leadership positions today. Organizations around the globe are revamping their approaches toward people, relationships and leadership. And servant leadership is emerging as a preferred practice as demonstrated by its adoption at numerous successful and admired business enterprises across all industries and cultures as well as at many government agencies and multitudes of not-for-profit organizations and religious institutions.

According to Lichtenwalner (2017, April 29), Fortune magazine and others, some of the organizations seeking and/or developing servant leaders include: 7-Eleven, Balfour Beatty Construction, Catholic Relief Services, Darden Restaurants, Evergreen Freedom Foundation, Federal Express, Heartland Health, Herman Miller, Hess Corporation, Marriott International, McKinney Capital & Advisory, Medtronic, Nordstrom, Opportunity International, SAS, ServiceMaster, Southwest Airlines, Starbucks, Synovus Financial, TD Industries, Toro Company, U.S. Cellular, U.S. Army/Marine Corps/Navy, Wal-Mart Stores, Vanderbilt University, Whole Foods, Yum Brands and Zappos.com. Many enterprises are including the practice of servant leadership principles as necessary or desired on the job descriptions they are posting when recruiting for various leader, manager and administrator positions.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVANT LEADERS

Researching the background of servant leadership as well as what it takes to be a servant leader quickly leads to the finding that the servant leadership approach is not new. Jesus was the ultimate servant leader. He tells us that he comes to serve, not to be served. However, the term *servant leadership* was introduced into the modern leadership literature in 1970 when Robert Greenleaf published his seminal essay "The Servant as Leader." Greenleaf spent a long and highly successful career at AT&T working in the fields of management, research, development and education. His essay was based on his personal experiences and offered a unique insight into the nature of leadership and a holistic slant to the behaviors distinguishing excellent leadership.

He believed the effective leader leads with a compelling vision shared with all who contribute to an organization's efforts, sets clear behavioral expectations and serves as an authentic practitioner of the values proclaimed.

Among its many features, Greenleaf's approach to leading included a dedication to the value of service, a call to personal transformation and an emphasis on community. He recognized the need to produce high-quality work, achieve challenging goals and hold people accountable for their results and behaviors. But his relational and communal emphasis distinguished his ideas from prevailing leadership practice by emphasizing more about the power of love and less about the love of power, more about listening and connecting to others and less about watching and correcting and more about finding out what people want, less about telling people what to do.

There is broad agreement that Greenleaf's "servant as leader" approach draws upon and fosters the best within individuals and organizations.

Primarily, servant leadership focuses on the growth and well-being of people and the communities in which they operate. At its core is respect for the human person and for the dignity of work. Servant leaders place the needs of others first, share power, involve others in decision-making and help people reach their full potential.

Larry Spears, President and CEO of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership from 1990-2007 as well as author and editor of hundreds of articles, books and other publications on servant-leadership, has identified ten characteristics of critical importance to servant leaders. This set of attributes provides a valuable overview of the effective, caring leadership provided by those who see themselves as serving others.

Figure 1

Characteristics of Servant Leaders

Listening
Servant leaders strive to identify the will of a group and also help clarify that will. Servants listen receptively to what is said and unsaid. They also listen to their own inner voices. Listening, combined with self-reflection, is necessary for the growth and well-being of servant leaders.

Empathy
Servant leaders are skilled empathetic listeners. They accept and recognize people for their special, unique spirits. Co-workers' and colleagues' good intentions are assumed. They are not rejected as people even when leaders must refuse to accept their certain behaviors or performance.

Healing
Many people possess broken spirits and emotional hurts. This is part of being human. Servant leaders recognize the potential for healing self and relationships to others. They seek opportunities to make whole those with whom they interact.

Awareness
While servant leaders have their own inner serenity, their keen awareness of general conditions awakes and disturbs them to action. It helps them to understand ethical, power and values issues. Awareness helps servants observe situations from an integrated and holistic perspective.

Persuasion
Servant leaders do not coerce others into compliance by relying on the traditional authoritarian model of leading within organizations. Rather, they rely upon persuading, convincing others. They are effective consensus builders within their groups.

(Continued)

Figure 1 (con't)

Characteristics of Servant Leaders

Conceptualization
Servants lead by visioning. They dream great dreams. They balance their necessary focus on day-to-day issues and problems with a conceptualizing perspective on what can be. Opportunities matter. Servant leaders call others forward to a grand future none could be capable of achieving alone.

Foresight
Rooted within the intuitive mind, foresight enables servant leaders to integrate past lessons, current realities and the likely future consequences of their decisions. Foresight is the hard-to-define ability to anticipate potential outcomes of a situation. It is closely related to the conceptualization characteristic.

Stewardship
Since above all servant leaders recognize and attend to the needs of others, they view their role as holding their organizations in trust for the greater good of society. Leaders do so by emphasizing openness and persuasion, not control.

Commitment to the Growth of People
A belief that people have intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers drives servant leaders' strong commitment to every constituent's personal and professional growth. Servants nurture others' development through funding for training, taking personal interest in their ideas, encouraging participative decision-making and many other practices.

Building Community
Servant leaders strive to build community within their institutions. Emphasizing common pillars, like mission, vision and values, helps create shared identity and unity of direction and expected behavior.

(Spears, 2010)

Fundamentally, Greenleaf discussed leading others not from the pedestal-style sources of authoritative power, control or dominance but as an attitude and perspective about self, about others and about a meaningful, fulfilling life. The simplicity of his message has reverberated in people of different generations and across many cultures. Greenleaf believed that by first learning to be a good follower, a servant leader acquires "habits"–ways of *being with* others and *for others*–or what ethicists would term "virtues."

The other-centered personal habits of a servant leader emanate from strong self-awareness and social consciousness, and they translate into positive organizational behaviors and leadership approaches.

They meld into a distinctive posture that allows a person to be both leader-servant and servant-leader simultaneously. From this dual position questions of "For whom do I work?" or "Whom do I serve?" and "Why do I work?" or "For what purpose do I serve?" are active continuously to keep leaders on track, that is, focused on a better future for the organization and all its constituents.

With personal humility servant leaders place themselves at the service of others. The servant leadership approach focuses on the needs and interests of others. Leaders serve followers, not the other way around. The personal needs of the servant leader are subservient to the desire to help followers grow both personally and professionally. According

to Greenleaf (2008), servant leadership begins by demonstrating integrity, creating relationships based on trust and assisting others in learning, growing and developing into leaders themselves. Because leaders are committed to developing their followers, they encourage the freedom to experiment and take risks as well as to make mistakes without fearing punishment.

Some of Greenleaf's intriguing people-growing and community-building tenets of servant leadership may be expressed as:

- leaders and leadership can emerge from any place in any enterprise, agency, congregation or community; leaders are not necessarily those with formal position and authority;

- the best leaders are dedicated followers (servants) first, then emerge as leaders; and

- most group members realize intuitively who their *real* leaders are.

What led Greenleaf to develop this concept that has been embraced by practitioners, academics and consultants over the years and has been adopted by hundreds of organizations as their leadership philosophy? Two stories help to relate his motivation.

First, in Greenleaf's (2002, p. 21) own words we come to understand the genesis of his realization:

> The idea of the servant leader came out of reading Hermann Hesse's *Journey to the East*. In this story we see a band of men on a mythical journey, probably also Hesse's own journey. The central figure of the story is Leo, who accompanies the party as the *servant* who does their menial chores, but who also sustains them with his spirit and his song. He is a person of extraordinary presence. All goes well until Leo disappears. Then the group falls into disarray and the journey is abandoned. They cannot make it without the servant Leo. The narrator, one of the party, after some years of wandering, finds Leo and is taken into the

Order that had sponsored the journey. There he discovers that Leo, whom he had known first as *servant,* was in fact the titular head of the Order, its guiding spirit, a great and *noble leader…* to me, this story clearly says that *the great leader is seen as servant first,* and that simple fact is the key to his greatness. Leo was actually the leader all of the time, but he was servant first because that was what he was, *deep down inside.*

Second, while a student in a college course titled "Sociology of the Labor Problem," Greenleaf accepted a challenge issued by his professor to develop a way to make the world a better place. His particular professor wasn't charismatic or dynamic, personal traits often mistakenly associated with leadership. Instead, Greenleaf's teacher was advanced in years and a quiet man who asserted that social change occurs only when people within organizations, not outside them, choose to make their institutions themselves forces for public good. Greenleaf accepted the professor's challenge. He became such a force during his AT&T career.

The wise teacher's advice is still applicable today. A few brief passages from Greenleaf's writings illustrate his insights into human nature and the prudence of servant leadership.

On who the servant leader is:

> The servant-leader is servant first … It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from the person who is *leader* first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions… The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.

> The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other peoples' highest priority needs are being served.

The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they, *while being served,* become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And* what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, will they not be further deprived? (Greenleaf, 2008, p. 15)

On considering what one is trying to do:

A mark of leaders, an attribute that puts them in a position to show the way to others, is that they are better than most at pointing the direction. As long as one is leading, one always has a goal. It may be a goal arrived at by group consensus, or the leader, acting on inspiration, may simply have said, "Let's go this way." But the leader always knows what it is and can articulate if for any who are unsure. By clearly stating and restating the goal the leader gives certainty to others who may have difficulty in achieving it themselves (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 29).

On seeking, listening to others, hope and optimism:

But if one is *servant,* either leader or follower, one is always searching, listening, expecting that a better wheel for these times is in the making. It may emerge any day. Any one of us may find it out of their own experience (Greenleaf, 2008, p. 11).

On power and authority:

A fresh critical look is being taken at the issues of power and authority, and people are beginning to learn, however haltingly, to relate to one another in less coercive and more creatively supporting ways. A new moral principle is emerging which holds that the only authority deserving one's allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader (Greenleaf, 2008, p. 11-12).

Transforming from conventional leader to servant leader is not a simple task. It requires conscious effort to change one's ways of thinking, acting and reacting. It means ensuring one has the requisite attitudes, skills and behaviors of a servant leader.

James Autry (2001), author of *The Servant Leader: How to Build a Creative Team, Develop Great Morale, and Improve Bottom-Line Performance,* writes that it is easier to develop an attitude of service if leaders develop ways of being authentic, vulnerable, accepting, present and useful to others.

Authenticity means being who you really are in all circumstances, practicing the same values in whatever role you fulfill. Being vulnerable requires courage because it entails giving up some traditional notions of a leader always being in control. Vulnerability means being open and honest about your feelings in the work environment. It means expressing candidly your doubts, fears or concerns about personal ideas or a constituent's performance. Also, vulnerability includes admitting your mistakes to others and being able to say, "I was wrong" and "I am sorry." Acceptance requires embracing disagreement as part of the work process. Humans will disagree. Acceptance doesn't imply that you agree with others' ideas merely because they have been expressed. Rather, it means that you accept ideas as valid for discussion, review and critique and that you focus on the ideas themselves and not on the individual who offers them. Being present means applying your values at all times to tasks and decisions at hand and being fully available to others as you react to their issues or problems. Finally, by being useful, Autry means providing service to others, seeing yourself as a resource to them and for them.

Those who lead as servants put the needs of their organization and people before their own; conceptualize what "can be" and lead with an inspiring vision for the future; listen to, understand and empathize with others; and accept others with tolerance for their imperfections but may refuse to accept some of a person's effort or performance as sufficient, that is, they hold people accountable for their performance and behavior. Also, servant leaders persuade rather than coerce; appreciate the value of learning; adapt to change readily; work hard to gain trust; help others reach their potential; encourage others to try new things and new ways; support people in healing when

necessary; and withdraw regularly to renew themselves through reflection.

Servant leaders do not lead from the top. They do not always visualize themselves at the peak of an organizational pyramid. Instead, servants see themselves in various flexible positions within any hierarchy. As servant leaders they do not force people to follow through authoritarian means but walk among followers, helping them move in a direction that unites all in a common vision by facilitating, educating and coaching them.

Several researchers have developed scales for measuring servant leadership. Some of the behavioral dimensions identified are: accountability, altruistic calling, authenticity, behaving ethically, conceptual skills, courage, creating value for the community, emotional healing, empowering, forgiveness, helping subordinates grow and s ucceed, humility, interpersonal acceptance, organizational stewardship, persuasive mapping, putting subordinates first, relationships, standing back and wisdom.

From these results it can be seen that servant leaders give first priority to the interests of others while delivering necessary support and affording credit to others for accomplished tasks. They demonstrate genuine concern for others' career growth and professional development by providing encouragement and aid, even mentoring. Servant leaders use their deep organizational knowledge to facilitate others, especially immediate followers, in identifying and solving problems as well as determining when and how to complete tasks. They interact openly, fairly and honestly with others, make genuine efforts to know, understand and support others in the institution and emphasize building long-term relationships with close followers. Importantly, servants foster a proactive, self-confident attitude among followers and engender in them a sense of personal power. They hold others accountable for performance they can control while keeping their own accomplishments in perspective and, when appropriate, admit their own fallibility and mistakes. They take reasonable risks and embrace new approaches to problems and

situations. Servant leaders take responsibility for the organization's well-being, acting as caretakers for their institution and role models for others. They have a conscious and sincere concern for helping the community as well as demonstrate sensitivity to others' personal concerns.

The servant leader employs a powerful shared vision to inspire others to work enthusiastically and to be committed to a brighter future which benefits the collective interests of the group, the organization and/or society. Among widely diverse constituents, servant leaders build community by emphasizing unity as defined by common mission, values and vision.

LEADERSHIP AND POWER

Greenleaf points out that leaders' influence over others necessarily involves power. Power is the ability to act. It moves people and organizations. Power is to leadership what energy is to physics; it makes things happen.

However, Greenleaf describes very different types of power. Servant leaders may influence others through persuasion and example. In these approaches "power is used to create opportunity and alternatives so that individuals may choose and build autonomy" (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 55). Followers' behaviors may be influenced by leaders' articulation of superior organizational knowledge derived from their "closer to the ground" position within the enterprise; leaders hear, see and know things others may not.

Another potential power source for leaders is coercion. Greenleaf writes that coercive power is used "to dominate and manipulate people … into a predetermined path" (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 55). Coercive power derives from leaders' positions of formal authority and their ability to sanction the actions of others by providing or withholding effort, support or money. The author warns of negative consequences when coercive power is exercised; it strengthens resistance among followers. Accordingly, servant leaders avoid the exercise of coercive power.

Referent power is another source of influencing behavior, and it is afforded to people to whom others naturally refer when leadership is necessary. This type of influence does not depend on the authority that accompanies a formal position of organizational leadership. Rather, referent power emerges from a voluntary relationship between leader and followers. Others sense that their referent leader possesses personal characteristics and appeal, inspiration, wisdom or expertise. Seeking guidance and direction, followers are drawn to them even though they are not formal leaders within their enterprise. Servant leaders tend to be high in referent power.

It is interesting, perhaps fascinating, to view power as possessing something of a mystical quality. Under certain conditions power is not depleted when it is used. Rather, power multiplies. When leaders' power is applied for the purpose of meeting the needs of the institution or advancing the capacity of followers to accomplish work, power is not an exhaustible resource or even a zero-sum game among powerholders. The more power is shared, given away by leaders, the more it accrues back to them. Sharing power increases followers' willingness to work toward organizational goals as well as the resources (connections to authority) they need to make things happen. Thus, the effectiveness of workers increases. When followers accomplish more, organizations thrive, and leaders are recognized as effective. Effective leaders garner more responsibility and power.

What does this power multiplication look like in day-to-day operational terms? Leaders share power with everyone, including those closest to where organizational action takes place–for example, where well-trained, self-confident and clearly-directed nurses care for patients, faculty teach students, attendants serve passengers, mechanics repair equipment, designers create products, salespersons sell to customers and so forth. At all points where followers contact clients they may be far removed in place and time from their hierarchical leader, but they are able to make decisions and take actions that bring to fruition the organization's vision without checking all the way back through the chain of command. In other words, followers are empowered.

Servant leaders' attitudes and skills are applied to develop many specific behaviors that contribute directly to workplace environments where followers feel empowered to act. This is the real "magic" of servant leadership.

Should leaders be perceived as using power to satisfy their own personal needs, followers judge them to be self-serving leaders, not servant leaders. In that case, followers tend to limit leaders' power to the formal authority they have to tell people what to do on the job. Workers will do what is necessary to keep their jobs, and that's about all. Self-serving leaders see their power to affect workers' behaviors dwindle over time.

But power used effectively, as it is by servant leaders, can be viewed as demonstrating a mystical quality. When it is used to meet the legitimate needs of the organization and its workers, power multiplies.

LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE

While servant leadership involves the exercise of power, as do all forms of leadership, it also is about service, caring about others' needs and interests and about the organization's well-being. Like power, service can be viewed as having a mystical quality.

Leaders serve others by advancing their capacities for achieving success. Because servant leaders facilitate, educate and coach their followers, people grow in self-awareness, abilities, organizational knowledge, connections and self-confidence. They feel capable because they are aware of vision and values–what the institution wants to accomplish and how everyone is expected to behave. They are motivated because they believe their work is important. They feel valued and supported. Leaders serve others by creating this environment for success. Also, servant leaders model their leadership style for others. They educate and inspire through example. And service multiplies when followers being served are inspired to serve others. As Greenleaf suggests, one of the results of servant

leadership is that followers are more likely to become servant leaders themselves.

VIRTUES, VALUES AND TRAITS

Effective leaders and their followers practice virtues and act on their shared values. Practicing virtuous behavior, which entails acting with courage, wisdom, justice, patience, humility or other virtues, builds *character* in leaders and others. Practicing values, such as the espoused core values of an organization, builds *community* among leaders and their followers.

No one is born with character. Rather, it is developed through an inward journey supported by virtuous living, honest reflection and self-discipline. That is why it is often said that great leadership starts with *self-awareness,* realizing what is important to us, and *self-knowledge,* such as recognition of our personal motivators, strengths and weaknesses.

Applying ideas emanating from the inspiring and highly practical leadership research of James Kouzes and Barry Posner (2012) as published in their book, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations,* once we know ourselves well, we can find our own voice and start to develop effective relationships between ourselves and others. After all, in the end, leadership is not about me or about you; it's about *you and me.*

One key aspect of self-awareness related to servant leadership is a personal understanding of whether we attain satisfaction and fulfillment by serving others or by acting in more self-serving ways. The servant leader, of course, is called to serve others first. Those with different sources of satisfaction and fulfillment will most likely be more comfortable with other leadership styles.

Leadership finds its personal origins in faith. Faith in ourselves is *confidence,* a widely recognized trait associated with leadership. Faith in each other is trust, a critical success factor for any interdependent group, team or organization. Faith in an institution is *loyalty* and *commitment,* highly

prized organizational attributes that contribute to operational stability and long-term success. Of course, it should be recognized that for many people, faith begins with their relationship with God. And the stronger their faith in God, the easier they find it to have faith in themselves and each other.

Leaders become trusted by others, that is, they become *trustworthy,* by acting with integrity. *Integrity* is the integration of leaders' values and behaviors. In other words, leaders demonstrate their integrity when they practice what they preach, walk their talk and honor their promises. When followers observe integrity, they find it possible to believe in their leaders. As a result, leaders possess what Kouzes and Posner (2012) call *credibility,* the most critical trait for exemplary leadership. One will do well to attend to Kouzes and Posner's First Law of Leadership: if people don't believe in the messenger, they won't believe the message.

LEADERSHIP STYLES

For many decades two major approaches to studying leadership have involved traits and behaviors. Trait studies consider particular elements of character or personality as well as social, physical or intellectual attributes that differentiate leaders from non-leaders. Traits describe "what leaders are made of." If all we needed to know about leadership involved traits, we could select the potentially effective leaders from among any population.

Behavior studies describe a leader's actions, practices or performance. In other words, behaviors describe "what leaders do." If all we needed to know about leadership involved behaviors, we could readily train just about anybody to be an effective leader.

Appreciating servant leadership requires an understanding of both traits and behaviors.

Many different leadership styles have been identified and studied. Each has its advantages and disadvantages. Each tends to be effective under certain circumstances such as the types of followers being led, the structure of tasks undertaken, the relative power positions of leaders and followers,

the culture within which leadership is practiced and a host of other factors. Here the purpose is to help the reader better understand the concept of servant leadership by suggesting other leadership styles that are very different from servant leadership or similar to it.

Autocratic leadership, or the classic *command-and-control leadership* style, involves exercising high levels of power over people. It is a very different approach compared to servant leadership. The autocratic leader issues commands to others and practices close control over them. Autocrats tend to make solo decisions, rely on the formal power vested in their organizational position and are likely to exercise power for personal interests and seek personal recognition and status within their enterprise. Servant leaders, on the other hand, delegate responsibilities to others, support followers' initiatives (as long as they are directed toward the organization's vision and comply with the organization's values), involve others in decisions, emerge from anywhere within the organization (with or without a formal power position), access organizational power for use by team members and give credit to others instead of accepting it personally. In the long term, servant leaders engage and free others while classic autocratic leaders can deaden motivation and erect barriers to progress.

The servant leadership style has often been compared to other leadership approaches such as transformational, transactional and charismatic leadership.

Transformational leaders are said to transform people and organizations through their focus on enterprise-wide change and a shared vision of the future. They are often described as demonstrating integrity and high emotional intelligence and as being self-aware, authentic, empathetic and humble. Transformational leaders are highly visible and spend much time communicating. They tend not to lead from the front, but delegate responsibilities among team members, and then expect the best from them. They are concerned that followers reach their personal potential; they challenge others to reach higher levels of motivation and performance; they listen and react to individual's needs; and they

seek to inspire others to achieve extraordinary outcomes. Through these behaviors and processes, transformational leaders support followers' efforts to become leaders themselves by developing their own personal leadership capabilities. As a result, followers' self-confidence increases, and they become more concerned with their personal growth and achievement.

There are many similarities between servant and transformational leadership, and differences can be somewhat subtle. Some authors observe that transformational leaders' primary focus tends to be on the organization. Thus, those applying this leadership style direct followers' commitment toward institutional objectives. Servant leaders' focus, on the other hand, is on followers. They try to find out what people need to be successful. They want to make a difference in others' lives and, in the process, impact the organization. For servant leaders accomplishing organizational objectives, while still important, is subordinate to meeting followers' needs. With followers being first in servant leadership, servant leaders do not dominate, direct or control, but instead prefer to share control and influence with their followers. This can be somewhat different in transformational leadership where leaders may act to influence and motivate their followers.

Perhaps another difference involves servant leaders' stronger emphasis on the role of personal and organizational values as guidelines or boundaries for followers' behaviors. For servant leaders results and behaviors are important. This leads some analysts to suggest that a strong link exists between servant leadership and ethical behavior in institutions.

Transactional leaders are thought by many observers to be more managers than leaders. That is, they focus more on day-to-day or short-term tasks. They do not attend to "bigger picture" strategic issues, such as future visions for the organization, like transformational and servant leaders. Transactional leadership begins with the premise that team members agree to do what they are told by their leader when they accept payment for their labor; the "transaction" is that the enterprise pays them and they comply with their leaders' commands.

Effectiveness derives from transactional leaders' close attention to clarifying peoples' roles and responsibilities, organizing their efforts and keeping people motivated to work toward common goals through systems of rewards and consequences. This leadership style has significant limitations for knowledge-based or creative work, but it is a very widely applied style in numerous institutions.

A key point to understand here is that every organization has need for an effective mix of leaders (like servant and transformational leaders who inspire through compelling "big picture" visions) and transactional leaders or managers (who organize people, equipment, materials and other resources and motivate followers daily through rewards and punishments). Many organizations are under-led and over-managed.

Charisma can be described as a special attraction between a leader and followers. Followers at first may identify strongly with the message and later with the persona of the leader. Charismatic leaders can be spellbinding communicators or charming individuals on an interpersonal basis. All leaders benefit from at least a little bit of charisma. Otherwise, they may attract no followers at all.

Charismatic leadership can appear similar to servant or transformational leadership in that the leader injects high amounts of enthusiasm into the team and is very capable of driving others forward. However, charismatic leaders may not be other-centered. They may not listen to others well, believing more in themselves than in their team members. They may not be "organization builders" like servant and transformational leaders. They may not create a foundation for future success by supporting team members in their own personal growth and development and may not cultivate new generations of leaders. Thus, there is real risk that a project, or even an entire organization, may collapse if its charismatic leader exits their position or the enterprise.

Around the globe today people are looking for those who stand out in front of others to conceptualize a better future, communicate it effectively to constituents and inspire all to work together in community to achieve it. They seek honest, authentic leaders who care about both results and relationships and strive to make the world a better place. And they welcome leaders who see their role as humble facilitators, educators and coaches who build strong organizations that will thrive under future generations of "home grown" leaders. Those capable of applying servant leadership fill the bill.

LEADERSHIP'S THREE-LEGGED STOOL

Servant leadership can be viewed as a three-legged stool - leadership is based upon a foundation of 1) attitudes, 2) skills and 3) behaviors.

Attitudes: general outlooks on life, work, relationships and so on that largely determine the way we experience reality. An attitude is a mental state of readiness we learn and organize through our experiences. Commonly, attitudes are thought to be functions of our personalities, perceptions, feelings and motivations. *The remainder of this article will discuss 10 common attitudes of servant leaders identified in the literature.*

Skills: abilities to do certain things well stemming from one's knowledge, practice or aptitude. Typically, skills are proficiencies acquired through deliberate, systematic and sustained efforts. Leaders, of course, require a very large number of skills no matter what style(s) of leadership they may prefer. Skills particularly relevant to servant leadership include acute awareness of one's personal values and ability to share those values with others; communicating (including listening; asking questions; telling stories; being optimistic; saying "we"; stimulating informal conversations); visioning; managing time; running a meeting; and forgiving.
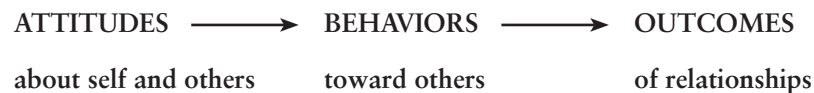
Behaviors: applications of leaders' adopted attitudes and developed skills. Neither attitudes nor skills create real value for leaders or their organizations until they are put to use through leaders' behaviors. The behaviors relevant to servant leadership and the facilitative work environment it creates are: being

proactive; establishing credibility; building trust; building networks; empowering others to act (the result of the previous four behaviors); embracing change; planning the future; and reflecting.

ATTITUDES OF SERVANT LEADERS

A few common *personal attitudes* (defined previously) involve what we think about our own adaptability, confidence, flexibility, optimism, passion, pride, self-respect and satisfaction. For example, how we would rate ourselves "high-low" on each of these individual characteristics. Some *relationship-based attitudes*–outlooks we have about others–include acceptance, approval, devotion, disdain, dislike, intolerance, rejection, respect, scorn, skepticism and trustworthiness.

Attitudes are determinants of behavior. That is, attitudes have a significant effect on the way we respond to people, objects and situations. Additional factors affect our behavior, but attitudes play a key role in determining how we act.

How we perceive others and how they see us depends on attitudes. A generally positive attitude toward others (acceptance, approval) likely leads to friendly, supportive behaviors and positive outcomes in relationships. A negative attitude toward others (disdain, skepticism) typically leads to unhelpful behaviors and negative relationship outcomes. To be sure, attitudes drive behavior. They are precursors, pre-determinants of behavior. And they affect the outcomes of our relationships.

ATTITUDES ⟶ **BEHAVIORS** ⟶ **OUTCOMES**

about self and others **toward others** **of relationships**

Attitudes provide an emotional basis for our interpersonal relationships and identification with others. Therefore, attitudes relate to our comfort and willingness to use specific leadership styles– such as autocratic, participative or servant leadership styles.

Leadership is about relationships, and you can choose whether or not to adopt certain relationship-oriented attitudes. To behave like a servant leader, you have to have the attitudes of a servant leader. The purpose of the following discussion is to identify and review ten attitudes that are linked closely to servant leadership behavior in the literature. If you possess naturally, or if you can willingly adopt the attitudes discussed here, servant leadership may well be an effective leadership style for you.

1. Think and say "We" not "I"

Servant leaders are other-centered. They place the needs, desires and contributions of others above their own. Therefore, they seldom think about saying "I," but tend to use the inclusive "we" when

referring to efforts they lead. "We envision our future." "We recognize and celebrate our common values." "We plan together." "We succeed." In communications, the terms "we," "us," and "our" are used much more frequently than "I," "me," and "my." Servant leaders do not seek personal success in organizational efforts. They seek the common good achieved by collective efforts–and use speech that coincides with that attitude. Servant leaders are the ultimate team players. They naturally share the credit for successful organizational performance with their followers who contributed to it. While they are quick to point out the contributions of others, they do not seek attention for their own contributions. They share credit, emphasize the team over themselves, and define success collectively rather than individually.

When is it acceptable for a servant leader to say "I"? When things go wrong, when goals are not achieved, when failure is encountered, servant leaders shoulder the blame personally, shielding the group they lead from their responsibility for failure. This is not to say that servant leaders will not meet

with followers privately to discuss each constituent's role in failure. They will hold people accountable, and they will discuss how better performance will be achieved in the future. However, in public, servant leaders will say "That failure is my responsibility."

Figure 2
Servant Leader Tips – Think and say "We" not "I"
Demonstrate comfort using team-related terminology such as "we," "us" and "our"– not "I," "me" and "my"
Distribute credit for success to followers
Accept personal responsibility for failure

2. Value statements are meant to be practiced, not stored on a shelf

Cooperation, customer focus, growth, honesty, innovation, learning, productivity, profitability, quality, respect, service, teamwork, winning. These are only a few of the values organizations tend to include as elements of their official values statements.

Expression of organizational values has become quite popular over the past few years. That's a very good thing. Businesses, not-for-profits, government agencies and the like have recognized the important role values play in their identity and operations. Values statements are expressions of what community members believe collectively. They are principles and standards that serve as common ground for all members. They are the truths that bind together otherwise diverse constituents, providing a common foundation for behavior, decision-making and action-taking within the organization.

Far too often, however, after initial development and publication, usually as part of an organization's strategic planning process, value statements are relegated to a dusty shelf never again to see the light of day. Therefore, they fail to fulfill their impactful promise. They guide no behavior. They do not form members' common ground.

Servant leaders give life to their organization's values in many ways. They are used to define unity and community within promotional and public relations documents that link the organization to its environment. Values are applied internally to community-building by forming the foundation of interviews with potential workers, hiring decisions ("getting the right people on the bus"), on-boarding programs, performance evaluation systems as well as recognition and reward schemes.

Sometimes the 4-6 values typically expressed in an organization's values statement are designated one per year for special attention. That is, one of several organizational values is identified annually for continuous emphasis in leaders' speeches, celebrations, letterheads and other forms of communication. Importantly, values are given life in the stories a servant leader tells about the organization's heroes–past and current members who have achieved success by living the organization's values. Through such stories all can learn how "we" think, act, decide, relate, serve and succeed.

Servant leaders know that values have a central place in the organization's vision. Why does a community envision a particular future? The answer has to be structured around the community's common beliefs. Values and vision unify communities of workers. But values are only pretty words unless leaders give them life through continuous use.

Figure 3

Servant Leader Tips – Value statements are meant to be practiced, not stored on a shelf

Create an organizational values statement, identifying 4-6 values that define your community
List values in order of priority for organization members to consider and apply
Provide a sentence-or-two description for each value; don't assume members will share the same interpretation of each value
Use organizational values regularly in promotional and public relations communications; link them to significant decisions and actions
Make organizational values part of your candidate interviews, hiring decisions and on-boarding programs for new hires as well as your systems for performance evaluation, recognition and rewards
Designate one organizational value each year for special attention; include it prominently in leaders' talks, written communications, organizational events, celebrations, and so on
Tell stories of organizational heroes (past and present workers) to demonstrate application of organizational values

3. Vision isn't everything, but it's the beginning of everything

The goal of servant leadership is to institutionalize the virtue of serving others first, not serving oneself. This can only be accomplished if the leader leads with a compelling vision, sets clear behavioral expectations, and serves as an authentic practitioner of the values proclaimed.

First and foremost, servant leaders lead through their vision, their motivating description of what tomorrow will be like. Their vision is the mental picture of success they create for others. It expresses high ideals and values, giving focus to human energy. A servant leader's vision inspires both the leader and his or her followers to take action and to accomplish goals.

Visions incorporate hopes, dreams and aspirations. They are ambitious and optimistic. David McAllister-Wilson writes, "Vision isn't everything, but it's the beginning of everything" (2004, p. 56). Sometimes visions require leaps of faith. McAllister-Wilson describes visions as necessarily hyperbolic, unrealistic and irresponsible. That is, they are far from being safe and practical. They have a rainbow quality. Very often new leaders of mediocre, unsuccessful or failing organizations say, "There are so many problems. Where do I start?" The best approach is to start by developing a vision. A vision is a good story, an energizing future story. It is a call to action.

Where do visions come from? Often, they emanate from followers themselves. Leaders know what inspires their constituents because they invest time listening to constituents' needs and desires. Leaders listen deeply with their ears, eyes and hearts–not just to followers' words but to their emotions. Servant leaders know how to enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations that can be shaped into a unified purpose. Effective leaders apply what they hear from constituents to formulate an appealing vision that demonstrates how each individual's personal needs can be met while serving the common good of the organization and/or the constituents served by the organization.

Sipe and Frick (2009) tell us that servant leaders see where to go in the future through their own foresight, stimulated by collecting information from their followers. Then they paint a compelling picture of the destination, the vision, and invite others to "Come, follow me." They suggest that a worthy vision doesn't need to be grandiose, but it must be grand. That is, it must appeal to workers at all levels of an organization. Followers must see it as a means of attaining their own personal satisfaction. A vision shows them they can be part of something they value that is bigger than themselves. Through visioning, servant leaders give voice to constituents'

feelings. Workers at all levels of an organization have to see their stake in the organization's vision. They must recognize their own aspirations. A vision statement is not likely to excite followers unless they help create it and recognize their own aspirations within it.

"Growing return on sales to 8% per year" or "increasing market share to 15%" is not a vision. These may represent worthwhile organizational goals, but they don't motivate all followers to get out of bed in the morning and give their all for the cause. Neither does a generic call to achieve something like "be recognized for world class customer service."

An excellent vision will provide heroic context for even workers with the most mundane tasks. With an effective vision, everyone and everything counts. "Every activity is a small sparkle that contributes to the larger light the team is generating" (Sipe & Frick 2009, p. 120).

All followers at all hierarchical levels should see their stake in the enterprise's success and their contribution to its vision. Servant leaders' foresight is possible if and only if their organizations and their members have the vision to know who they are, whom they serve, how they serve and where they want to go in the future.

Visions define the future. They direct human endeavor, inspire and motivate. They are not just 'pretty words'. "As you sit down with colleagues to express or revise a vision, remember that this is not an exercise in semantics. It is the stuff of your very identity" (Sipe & Frick, 2009, p. 121).

Kouzes and Posner discuss the vision as a shared sense of destiny:

> Teaching a vision–and confirming that the vision is shared–is a process of engaging constituents in conversations about their lives, about their hopes and dreams. Remember that leadership is a dialogue, not a monologue. Leadership isn't about imposing the leader's solo dream; it's about developing a shared sense of destiny. It's about enrolling others so that they can see how their own interests and aspirations are aligned with the vision and can thereby become mobilized to commit their individual energies to its realization. A vision is inclusive of constituents' aspirations; it's an ideal and unique image of the future for the common good. (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 143)

Helpfully, Kouzes and Posner recommend Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech as a model for people who are drafting a vision. The speech is about seven minutes long; about two typed pages or so. It is not just a sentence or a slogan (although millions of people inspired by Dr. King's famous call to action remember it by its four-word title, which was repeated throughout the speech). Visions take on many formats. It can be a 5-10 minute speech, a letter to constituents, a paragraph in an annual report, a 30-second elevator pitch, a slogan or a word. Passion matters, not length. As a truly effective vision statement, Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech is long enough to deliver vivid detail for people curious to know where a leader wants to be several years into the future–and how it feels to be there, really. That's the power and emotional connection, the call to action, a servant leader can deliver through a vision.

Now, many visions are abbreviated into a slogan or a sentence or two so they can be shared quickly and, hopefully, remembered. That's the vision form with which most people are likely to be familiar. In Figure 4 a few examples of these types of well-constructed, broadly appealing vision statements are provided (It is up to the reader to judge whether or not these statements inspire). However, it is important to realize that these represent only one form of a vision statement. Effective servant leaders have much more richly developed visions to deliver in a conversation, speech or document.

Figure 4

Vision slogan examples

- **Shaping the future by preserving our heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing our resources with the world (Smithsonian)**
- **To transform communities by inspiring people throughout the world to open their minds, accept and include people with intellectual disabilities and thereby anyone who is perceived as different (Special Olympics)**
- **To enrich people's lives with programs and services that inform, educate and entertain (The BBC)**
- **To make people happy (Disney)**
- **Creating community through food (BiRite)**
- **Better health and active ageing for all Australians (Australian Department of Health)**
- **To be the number one advocate in the world for human worth in organizations (Ken Blanchard, consultant and writer)**
- **A South Africa in which all our people have access to lifelong learning (South African Department of Education)**
- **Spreading the power of optimism (Life is Good)**
- **Capture and share the world's moments (Instagram)**

Servant leaders actively use a vision as a tool for communicating, unifying and motivating. The vision is not a static document or statement. Once the vision is in place, a servant leader will refer to it frequently, using it to paint a compelling picture of what it means to work with *these* people for *these* ends. A servant leader will constantly reinterpret the vision and not be afraid of refining it. This is all part of being a "visionary leader" (Sipe & Frick, 2009, p. 121).

Inspirational leadership is not about selling a vision to others. Rather, it's about showing people how the vision can benefit them and how their personal needs can be satisfied. Servant leaders strive to sense the purpose in others. Followers don't really want to hear the leader's vision. They want to learn how their own aspirations will be met. They want to learn how their hopes and dreams will come to fruition. They want to be able to see themselves in the future picture being painted by the leader. The best leaders know that it's about inspiring a *shared* vision, not about selling their own personal views of the future.

Through careful listening and assimilation, leaders identify their followers' common themes, then serve as the unifying force for their organization by expressing these themes as a vision for a better tomorrow. Consider a skilled craftsperson working with a fine piece of hardwood. The wood has a grain. It can be shaped successfully into some forms–and not into others. Groups of followers also have a "grain." They can be shaped into some futures–and not others. An effective servant leader reads the grain.

Also, consider that people support what they help to create (and they tend not to support what they don't help to create). If constituents are convinced their leader has listened to their aspirations and included them in the vision, they are more likely to become motivated followers.

Of course, leaders must also be motivated personally by the vision. Therefore, they may infuse the "big picture" with their own personal desires to which they can commit and from which they can derive a personal sense of achievement. A vision, then, may meld the best of what constituents desire and what the servant leader personally wants to accomplish.

Consider this vivid image: as spokespersons for their organizations, leaders hold up a mirror and reflect back to their constituents what they most desire. Servant leaders can articulate what their group of followers are thinking and feeling. They know that the secret to winning the support of numerous constituents is to lead them (at least in part) where they already want to go. The servant leader assimilates the collective vision then empowers constituents to achieve it.

Visions can also serve as useful recruiting tools. A well-communicated vision can aid in attracting those who share the values and aspirations expressed in the vision. Attracted followers are strong "fits" for the community the servant leader is seeking to build and maintain. Conversely, those who do not share the vision's expressed values and aspirations will realize that this is not the purpose that will help them fulfill their personal passion–and in the long run potential members' decisions not to join a team can be just as valuable to effective community-building as decisions to join.

The first step of a servant leader's success journey involves expressing a vision that will unify, energize and attract followers to what everyone can recognize will be a better tomorrow. An effective servant leader realizes that "vision isn't everything, but it's the beginning of everything." Servant leadership starts by expressing how you and your followers will serve in a meaningful way.

Figure 5
Servant Leader Tips – Vision isn't everything, but it's the beginning of everything
Get in touch with your own personal values by completing values exercises
Gather input about followers' aspirations from casual conversations and planned encounters
Ask questions to gain others' perspectives on who your organization serves, how it serves, how it can serve better, what obstacles people perceive, etc.
Ask followers and stakeholders about their hopes and dreams; invest time in listening to the responses with your ears, eyes and heart; discover their emotions as well as their ideas
From all you hear assimilate major themes that appeal to common aspirations – some sample vision themes include: access, advocacy, community, connection, empowerment, family, flexibility, growth, innovation, inspiration, justice, opportunity, participation, stewardship, support and transformation
Write an inspiring vision that is a call to action; create multiple formats of the vision
In composing your vision statement consider mission elements, organizational values, followers' and stakeholders' passions, themes that inspire others, what is recognized as serving the common good, metaphors relevant to challenges foreseen and visual images that can appeal to followers and help them visualize a better future

4. Everyone is good at something (and I am a talent scout helping people connect their talent to the organization's vision)

Often people do not see in themselves what someone else sees in them. Effective servant leaders share a common attitude that "everyone is good at something" (Ortberg 2004, p. 93). Imagine the positive environment that is created when leaders adopt this perspective. Upon encountering an employee or peer, servant leaders realize it is their responsibility to identify that person's special talents and help them realize how they can apply their gifts toward achievement of the organization's vision.

This is a powerful approach to human resource development. Followers' contributions are not limited by their formal organizational role or by their specific job description. They are enabled by a servant leader to use their special talent to take the organization toward its vision via new, perhaps unplanned, directions.

Servant leaders see themselves as talent scouts. They believe that everyone has a unique contribution to offer. Further, they believe it is their job to recognize it (even if the follower does not) and direct it toward vision attainment.

Figure 6

Servant Leader Tips – Everyone is good at something; I am a talent scout

See every personal encounter as an opportunity to recognize what special talent an individual possesses
Accept the responsibility to link every person's talent to the organization's vision
Communicate this link to the person you encounter
Follow up to ensure people are applying their talents to accomplish the vision
Be a facilitator; remove obstacles that may prevent individuals from applying their special talents

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5. I am committed to your success

Another attitude that reflects the servant leader's other-centered approach involves seeing the leader's role as facilitator, educator and coach (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

The support of a servant leader can make a difference in the lives and careers of their followers. Servant leaders let followers know they will be working with them to help them grow. Leaders observe followers executing tasks, encouraging them and doing everything possible to develop them into high performers and future servant leaders. If they sense there is something they cannot develop personally, they will find others who can and bring their tutelage into play. Servant leaders will make sure followers' gifts are fanned into flames so that constituents are strengthened and serve others well.

Followers, in turn, come to believe in their leaders and trust their intentions to help them develop skills. Strong leaders stand apart because they assess the abilities of others and assist them in capturing the best of those abilities. Figuratively speaking, servant leaders can bring others to life. They can improve a follower's performance dramatically because the leader cares deeply for each constituent and has faith in his or her capabilities. Followers can respond positively to the leader's high standards and expectations because they possess the necessary abilities and because they trust the support and encouragement the leader extends to them.

Of course, facilitating followers' talents has a payoff for the organization's long- term success as well. John Maxwell's Law of Reproduction states: "It takes a leader to raise up a leader." Focusing on the

growth of others and helping them develop their skills is what helps develop the next generation of organizational leaders. "It takes one to know one, show one, and grow one" (Maxwell, 1998, p. 141). According to Nancy Ortberg (2004), some of the most powerful words a leader can offer to a follower are, "I am committed to your success" (p. 95).

Take an example from the animal kingdom. As wild geese fly thousands of miles annually, they cheer each other on by honking encouragement to one another. Leaders who cheer those around them, offering well-directed praise for things done right, are leaders who will win the hearts of others and see great things accomplished by their team.

Servant leaders are motivated by the intention of serving others and are committed to develop their followers. When leaders work toward building character and competence among their followers, they add to their own credibility as well as the credibility of their team members. By directing followers' special talents toward accomplishing the organization's vision, servant leaders create a collaborative and effective team environment by utilizing everyone's strengths.

An important prerequisite to developing followers' talents is trust. The servant leadership style contributes to trust building with employees, customers and communities. Servant leaders learn to put into others the same trust they have in themselves. Then leaders can release followers to do their work. Trust is the foundational element of good leadership. Of course, trust has to be earned. Leaders have to establish trust with followers before they can do their best.

Leaders can earn trust by working hard to recognize each follower's special talent, helping them see how it can be applied toward the vision and committing to the success of each follower. When this is accomplished, the leader's credibility increases, each follower's contribution grows and the organization thrives.

Servant leaders take a trusting approach to managing the talented followers they have recruited for their community. They understand that vision communicates the desired future and that organizational values serve as behavioral guidelines (or constraints, if you like). As long as followers are working toward shared vision and applying organizational values, they are pursuing the desired ends through the expected means. Trust them to do the work. Let them go. Servant leaders set the stage for success, and they trust followers to do the right things. There is no need to look over their shoulders.

Figure 7
Servant Leader Tips – I am committed to your success
See yourself fulfilling a role in the lives of your followers; you are a facilitator, educator and coach
Create opportunities to encourage followers, develop followers through training and challenging ("stretch") experiences and bring others into their lives to do the same
On a regular basis walk the shop, find people doing things right and praise them
Demonstrate trust in your followers; use vision to communicate the desired future and use values to establish behavioral guidelines; release followers to make it happen. Monitor their performance – don't look over their shoulders

6. It's useful to give my power away

Many people are motivated to attain positions of leadership because they seek the legitimate authority associated with the leader's position. They conclude that formal authority within their organization will allow them to issue commands, implement their ideas, allocate resources and rewards and, generally, make things happen. They like to get things done and they see "being the boss" as the means to be effective.

Servant leaders, however, are motivated by their desire to serve others. They view leadership as the

best way to achieve this service objective, and they recognize the paradox of power; they become more powerful when they give their power away. Servant leaders are probably least motivated by and least dependent upon the legitimate power base (having a formal leadership position, being "the boss"), but they frequently find themselves building a strong referent power base as they give away their power to constituents through delegation, empowerment and the practice of subsidiarity.

Do servant leaders give all their power away? Certainly not. The assumption that they relinquish all influence and assume the role of cheerleader is one basis for the frequently encountered misunderstanding that servant leadership is passive–or even "warm and fuzzy." Servant leaders are very strong, even autocratic, in certain aspects of running an organization. They are careful to control definitions of mission, values, vision, standards (how the organization defines and measures excellence) and accountability (what consequences accrue when there are gaps between standards of excellence and actual performance). Servant leaders don't commission a poll, hold a meeting or take a vote among constituents to answer these questions. In fact, people look to the leader to establish such direction. However, upon developing direction through mission, values, vision, standards and accountability, servant leaders help followers succeed by turning the traditional organizational structure upside down. Leadership becomes responsive to those being led. Leaders facilitate the success of others who are closer to those whose needs are being served.

For servant leaders, giving away power contributes to their personal goal of facilitating others in growing to their maximum potential. Good leaders give away power by applying the organizing principle of subsidiarity. They push decision-making down. That is, they believe that matters ought to be decided and dispatched by the smallest, lowest or least centralized component authority and that higher level leaders should maintain a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at the local level. Therefore, servant leaders tend to pass along as much decision-making authority and control as possible to the organizational level closest to those whose needs are being served. In other words, *at the operational level* the organizational pyramid is turned upside down.

Effective leaders strengthen others by creating a climate in which followers are engaged and feel in control of their own work. Constituents have latitude to make decisions based on vision and values. They work in an environment where they can develop their abilities to complete assignments and build self-confidence. They hold themselves accountable for results and feel ownership of their achievements.

Maxwell's Law of Empowerment (2007) states that only secure leaders give power to others. That is, leaders who give power to others make themselves indispensable by making themselves dispensable (at the operational level). By giving their followers power, leaders are empowering followers to reach their potential. When a leader can't or won't empower others, organizational barriers are created and workers cannot overcome them. If the barriers remain long enough, workers lose motivation, perform minimally or they move to another organization where they believe they can maximize their potential.

Giving away power may be challenging for many leaders, but a true servant doesn't always lead from the top. Leaders who give their power away do not blindly agree with the opinions and decisions of their followers. Rather, they accept the views of others and give them the ability to practice power. A servant leader applies Autry's (2001) Law of Acceptance which does not imply that the leader accepts everyone's ideas without critical analysis, discussion and judgment–only that the leader accepts ideas as valid for discussion and review, and that decision makers focus on the ideas themselves, not on the person who presented them. Giving followers the opportunity to express their ideas makes them feel like they are in control and have a say in decisions, bolstering job satisfaction as well as team and organizational success.

Servant leaders fulfill their roles as coaches and facilitators by moving from being in control to

giving control away. Fulfilling the coach's role, servant leaders learn to trust each follower with the work that they are doing. Leaders are willing to delegate their authority while maintaining their organizational responsibility, standing on the side lines helping followers achieve their best results. Leaders place constituents at the center of organizational operations, not themselves. Leaders use their power in service to others, not in service of themselves. Others may not do a job exactly the way the servant leader would do it. That doesn't make it wrong, just different. Results count. Don't judge approach and methods; measure performance.

Power holders will do well to learn to be servant leaders and not self-serving leaders. Humility is the key to a servant's heart and approach. Servant leaders don't think less of themselves, they just think of themselves less.

Figure 8
Servant Leader Tips – It's useful to give my power away
Fulfill the leader's direction-setting role; establish and communicate mission, values, vision, standards and accountability
Realize your role as facilitator, educator and coach
Push decision making down: let those closest to the customer make decisions and take action
Give budget authority to the lowest possible follower
Delegate meaningful tasks to others
Trust followers to accomplish mission and vision; set performance standards; hold people accountable for achieving vision and behaving within the guidelines of organizational values
Accept, even enjoy, the fact that other people will not accomplish tasks exactly the way you would
Empower followers to teach/train in their areas of expertise or on topics you want them to learn (people learn best what they have to teach to others)
Put followers on meeting agendas as discussion leaders; give them opportunities to lead

7. I don't have to be right all the time

Related closely to the practice of humility, servant leaders adopt the attitude that they need not be right all the time. They listen. They know and act on the concept that other people have good ideas, too. Their job is to surface the best ideas, not just their own. And they are comfortable crediting good ideas to others. In fact, they realize that is their job as a servant leader.

Further, servant leaders demonstrate their humility by admitting their mistakes. When appropriate, they admit errors. They know everyone is human and all of us make mistakes. In a work environment characterized by trust, leaders and followers admit their mistakes and work together to pursue continuous improvement.

Figure 9
Servant Leader Tips – I don't have to be right all the time
Listen to others' ideas; critique their ideas on merit, not your opinion of the person offering them
Create opportunities for expression of ideas; hold brainstorming sessions for solving problems and developing opportunities
Admit your mistakes (you may even enhance your reputation for honesty)

8. Listening is hard work – and it's worth the effort

Servant leaders listen first. Robert Greenleaf (2008)) writes, "Only a true natural servant automatically responds to any problem by listening *first*. When he is a leader, this disposition causes him to be seen as servant first" (p. 18).

Greenleaf goes on to suggest that the best test of whether we are really getting through to a communication partner is to first ask ourselves if we are really listening. Are we really listening to the one we want to communicate to? Also, he reminds us that we must not be afraid of a little silence because a relaxed approach to dialogue will involve welcoming some quiet, silent moments.

James Kouzes and Barry Posner (2012), authors of the best-selling book *The Leadership Challenge,* advise leaders to "listen first–and often." Management guru Peter Drucker (2006) advised leaders to remember this good communication practice: when in a leadership position, "listen first and speak last." John Maxwell (2007) proposes this valuable lesson: "…inexperienced leaders are quick to lead before they know anything about the people they intend to lead. But mature leaders listen, learn, and then lead." Also, Maxwell offers his Law of Addition. He observes that we add value to others when we know and relate to what others value. How do we know what others value? We listen to them.

By asking good questions, servant leaders can identify their followers' dreams and aspirations. Listening allows the servant leader to sense the purpose in others, enhancing the leader's ability to incorporate their followers' hopes and dreams into a compelling vision that gives voice to followers'

feelings. Kouzes and Posner (2002, p. 149-150) tell us, "Leaders find the common thread that weaves the fabric of human needs into a colorful tapestry. They develop a deep understanding of collective yearnings; they seek out the brewing consensus among those they would lead."

Servant leaders are present. That is, they are available to their constituents. They "walk the shop," engaging in informal conversations in order to know their followers and be known by them. Servant leaders ask open-ended questions about both work-related and personal issues to draw out constituents' opinions and attitudes. They listen deeply with their ears, eyes and hearts. In so doing, they glean the emotional content of their follower's conversations so they can align the organization's vision with the professional and personal goals of constituents.

Of course, when the number of followers is too large to permit informal conversations with all, attitude and/or opinion surveys can be utilized as supplemental listening techniques. Surveys can help canvas large numbers of followers efficiently and effectively–and help the servant leader perceive changes in dreams, desires, attitudes and opinions over time.

Effective servant leaders are willing to adhere to the 2:1 ratio of questions to commands often suggested by trainers during listening skill development sessions. That is, when auditing their personal behaviors, it is apparent that servant leaders ask two questions for every direct order or instruction they deliver to followers.

Perhaps the most significant direct effects of listening involve: 1) building trust between the servant leader and followers and 2) increasing the self-

esteem of followers. When a leader listens intently to followers' ideas, she demonstrates respect for their opinions, helping to develop a bond of trust. And trust is the cornerstone of the leader-follower relationship. Also, when a leader listens, followers conclude their ideas are important, helping to bolster their self-esteem and improve related outcomes such as job satisfaction, productivity and organizational commitment. Moreover, listening can inform servant leaders of their followers' experiences and lead to adapting such experiences to enhance organizational innovation.

Servant leaders maintain a strong commitment to listening. They share the understanding that listening is hard work which demands a considerable investment of their personal time and cognitive effort. Also, they share the attitude that the numerous positive outcomes of listening to one's constituents are worth every ounce of energy expended.

Figure 10
Servant Leader Tips - Listening is hard work – and it's worth the effort
When building a relationship or addressing an issue, problem or crisis, listen first
Welcome a little silence
Listen first–and often
Listen first, speak last
Listen, learn, then lead
Sense the purpose in others
Seek out the brewing consensus in those you would lead
Be present to others; walk the shop
Ask open-ended questions
Adhere to the 2:1 ratio; ask two questions for every instruction or command you deliver
Demonstrate respect for others by listening
Build trust with others by listening
Enhance the self-esteem of others by listening
Listening is an expensive process; commit the time and energy necessary to be a good listener

9. Feedback is a gift

Another aspect of a servant leader's humility involves welcoming and accepting feedback. Since servant leaders recognize their purpose as serving others, what better way to improve their service than to receive from those served direct feedback regarding their performance and perceived effectiveness?

Feedback is a good thing if leaders adopt the attitude that others' opinions and perspectives provide an opportunity for personal improvement. Otherwise, feedback can be a threat.

A helpful method for telling the difference between servant leaders and self-serving leaders is to observe how they react to negative feedback. If leaders attempt to "kill the messenger," they are self-

serving. Criticism ignites their deepest fears. When leadership flaws are pointed out, that may mean followers don't want them any longer. Since their position defines who they are, negative feedback is a serious personal threat. Since self-serving leaders are committed to maintaining both their position and their control, leaders may well dismiss the offered feedback and the bearers of this bad news.

However, servant leaders consider feedback a gift. Welcoming feedback is, of course, an important form of listening. Even negative feedback is received with appreciation. All feedback–positive and negative–should receive a reply similar to: "Thanks, I value all comments and suggestions I receive because I am always trying to improve. I am happy to consider your feedback along with all other comments I collect."

When things go poorly, servant leaders look in the mirror and ask, "What could I have done differently?" Ideas offered by those they serve are welcomed humbly because servant leaders have the attitude that feedback is a gift.

Sipe and Frick adapt some ideas from Fred Nickols to offer very useful guidelines for servant leaders receiving feedback:

If you want to know how you are doing, you have to accept the responsibility of finding out. By inviting feedback you have a chance to measure how you are doing on progress toward attaining your goals. When receiving feedback, you should strive to be:

1. *Open*
   Listen without interruption, objections, or defensiveness.
2. *Responsive*
   Be willing to hear the speaker out without turning the table. Ask questions for clarification.
3. *Thoughtful*
   Seek to understand the effects and consequences of your behavior.
4. *Calm*
   Be relaxed, breathe. Assume a comfortable body posture. Be aware of your own emotional reactions.
5. *Explicit*
   Make it clear what kind of feedback you are seeking, and why it is important to you. Offer a structure for the feedback–questions, rating scales, stories.
6. *Quiet*
   Refrain from making or preparing to make a response. Do not be distracted by the need to explain, defend or fix.
7. *Clear with your commitment*
   Describe how you have benefitted from the feedback and what specific steps you will take toward improvement.
8. *Accepting*
   Open to assuming their good will.
9. *Clarifying*
   Make sure you are clear about what they are seeing, saying, and recommending. (Sipe & Frick, 2009, p. 65-66)
10. *I am a community builder*

Figure 11
Servant Leader Tips – Feedback is a gift
Regularly ask your constituents how they perceive your leadership abilities and practices
Apply helpful guidelines for receiving <u>feedback:</u> be open, responsive, thoughtful, calm, explicit, quiet, clear with your commitment, accepting and clarifying
Accept feedback–positive and negative–with a smile
Especially, resist the temptation to explain yourself or defend yourself
Say "thank you" when feedback is provided

Servant leaders realize their success derives from the attitude that they are leading an organizational effort to develop a productive community. They strive to build a community centered on members' shared values and vision. And they employ collaborative decision-making and action-taking. Servant leaders know that leadership is a team sport, not a solo performance. It involves a relationship between those who seek to serve by leading others and those who make the conscious choice to follow. Organizations are built on trust, and trust develops from effective relationships between leaders and followers. Taking responsibility for relationships is more than a necessity, it is a duty.

To build community successfully it is imperative to select the right people. For servant leaders it is vital to know who to recruit, who to retain, who to develop and who to extricate from the ranks. Jim Collins (2001) explains that the "Good to Great" leaders in his research "… first got the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus and the right people in the right seats" (p. 13). Strong communities are built around people who share the organization's values, are passionate about the vision and are motivated by it, and whose strengths match the organization's needs for achieving the vision–or at least they are ready, willing and able to be trained to develop such strengths.

Peter Drucker (2005; 2006) discusses the importance of looking for people's strengths. Developing the attitude to ask "What can a person do?" instead of "What can a person not do?" helps a leader see strengths clearly and determine whether or not those strengths can be directed productively toward the common vision.

Servant leaders stoke the fire of community through appeal to common vision. They help constituents see that their work is bigger than themselves. It is even bigger than the enterprise they work for. Their work is something ennobling. It serves vital needs, uplifts those served and even enriches society. This "bigger picture" approach lifts morale and increases motivation. The work is important, it matters to the

servant leader–and that attitude is passed along to workers.

Organizational effectiveness depends on the strength of the community the leader builds, and the community's strength depends on choosing the right people. This is addressed by Maxwell's Law of the Inner Circle. The potential of the leader, as well as the potential of the entire organization, is determined by those closest to the leader. Building a community creates a cohesive network of personnel capable of achieving success in any situation. Maxwell (1998) explains that an effective leader brings into her inner circle people with five qualities:

1. potential value: those who raise up themselves
2. positive value: those who raise morale in the organization
3. personal value: those who raise up the leader
4. production value: those who raise others, and
5. proven value: those who raise up people who raise up other people.

A productive community is not a place free of conflict. Rather, servant leaders recognize that there should be a degree of conflict in a healthy community so that the best ideas emerge from honest discussions and analyses based upon high performance standards. A strong community is a place of conflict resolution, not conflict avoidance. Healthy conflict resolution is supported in an environment where people treat each other with respect, listen to each other, are comfortable being assertive in achieving high standards, are open to challenges, value diversity within the team and feel safe to be themselves. An organization's shared values either support such behavior or they work against it.

Additionally, community building is supported by taking care to celebrate successes. This calls for leaders' involvement in hosting and/or addressing gatherings of constituents. Gatherings, of course, may include formal meetings, annual events, assemblies to mark milestone achievements, holiday celebrations and the like. Community may not be a

characteristic of mediocre organizations, but it is the hallmark of great ones–ones with strong cultures. Servant leaders are aware that every gathering is an opportunity to renew organizational and employee commitment. They don't miss chances to ensure that followers know why they are gathered and how a particular celebration connects to values and vision. Through the inevitable daily encounter of problems and distractions, servant leaders keep constituents focused on these two key organizational guiding lights.

Servants walk the shop to provide listening opportunities, as discussed previously. However, walking the shop also contributes to community building. Leaders visit frequently the sites where work is being accomplished, where consumers' needs are being served. They make sure they observe their followers doing the right things so that, as leader, they can compliment followers on their successes, encouraging their hearts through verbal recognition. (You can't do this sitting behind your desk.) This helps develop community by affirming the type of work that supports the vision.

Also, servant leaders take care to recognize both individual contributions and team achievements through rewards, awards, gifts and "thanks-you" of many types. Presenting a plaque, naming an employee-of-the-month and honoring a retiree are just a few of the numerous opportunities to tell the stories of workers' successes and to reinforce the community's shared values and common vision. Productive communities require building and tending. Servant leaders are aware of their vital role in bringing together the right people who are energized to achieve great things through shared values and vision. They also know that without a leader's continuous reinforcement, organizational values diffuse and visions blur. Therefore, servant leaders recognize the important role of gatherings and celebrations in maintaining community.

Figure 11

Servant Leader Tips – Feedback is a gift

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Apply helpful guidelines for receiving <u>feedback:</u> be open, responsive, thoughtful, calm, explicit, quiet, clear with your commitment, accepting and clarifying
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CONCLUSION

To conclude this discussion, I offer a simple and, I believe, profound idea about servant leadership that is taken from previous authors on the topic. My hope is that it will encourage those with a servant's heart (and I am sure there are many) to consider the servant leadership style and conclude that it is okay to behave this way.

In my many years as a management professor I have read a lot of text books on management, leadership and associated topics. In none of them did I run across the word "love." When I started to read about servant leadership, I did.

Leaders should love their followers. That is, leaders should be patient with others and treat them with kindness and respect. In their dealings with others, leaders should be honest, humble, selfless and forgiving (another word not often found in management text books). Leaders should listen to others and be committed to high principles based on their own personal values as well as their organization's values. Finally, leaders should love others by expecting them to achieve great things and hold them accountable for doing so while

seeing their own leadership role as facilitating their followers' success. Is this not the way people express love for each other outside the workplace?

When leaders love their followers, work environments become places where people want to do their best knowing their work is important and their contributions will be appreciated.

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