

LITERACY TEXAS 2017

Servant Leadership

Robert Greenleaf coined the term *servant-leadership* in his seminal 1970 essay, “The Servant as Leader.” The servant-leader serves others, rather than others serving the leader. Serving others thus comes by helping them to achieve and improve.

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Servant Leadership

It is important not to dismiss the leadership style as soft and easy and not productive. Servant leadership is a natural model for working in advocacy and volunteer groups.

The servant leader meets people where they are. This leader helps others fulfill their needs, while being true to the mission of your organization. The theory grows out of an ancient Chinese teaching “to rule truly is to serve”. This leader is not often formally thought of as the “leader” in the traditional sense.

Servant leaders achieve on the basis of their values and ideals. When someone at any level within a group leads simply by virtue of meeting the needs of the team, the person is described as a/the “servant leader”. The development of others is the true test of the impact of the servant-leader.

What is Servant Leadership?

- A servant leader is one who leads by serving others.
- The servant leader gets things done by serving others.
- The servant leader serves others by empowering them to use their talents to accomplish the organization’s goals while they are meeting their needs and growing as unique human beings.
- Servant leadership is characterized by a belief that leadership development is an on-going, life-long learning process.

What do Servant Leaders Do?

- Devote themselves to serving the needs of others.
- Focus on meeting the needs of those they lead.
- Develop others to bring out the best in them
- Coaches others and encourages their self-expression.
- Facilitate personal growth in all who work/serve/volunteer in the organization.
- Listen and build a sense of community.
- Servant leaders commit to continual development in the 12 characteristics of servant-leadership.

Implementation

Effective implementation requires turning the traditional hierarchical pyramid upside down: member contact and responsiveness is at the top.

- ✓ Transformation is a vehicle for personal and organizational growth.
- ✓ Paramount aim is the best interest of those being led.
- ✓ Ego is under control-“I don’t think less of myself- I just think of myself less”.
- ✓ Servant leaders are willing to listen- they love feedback and information that helps them to serve more effectively.
- ✓ Community building is a way to create organizations in which people can trust each other and work together for the mission.

Five key steps for servant leaders to help others become successful and value their experiences and opportunities as advocates for children:

- ✓ Make the vision real- let them know what is to be done
- ✓ Show them how it can be done effectively and the outcomes for them, the organization and the community
- ✓ Let them try
- ✓ Observe performance and coach, coach, coach.
- ✓ Praise progress, praise the efforts of others and if needed redirect their efforts.

12 Principles of Servant Leadership

The following 12 characteristics of Servant-Leadership have been identified by Larry Spears, CEO of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership. He views them as being critical to the development of servant-leaders. These are by no means exhaustive. However, they serve to communicate the power and promise this concept offers.

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|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Listening | 7. Foresight |
| 2. Empathy | 8. Stewardship |
| 3. Healing | 9. Growth |
| 4. Awareness | 10. Building Community |
| 5. Persuasion | 11. Calling |
| 6. Conceptualization | 12. JOY! |

1. **Listening**

Traditionally, leaders have been valued for their communication and decision making skills. Servant-leaders must reinforce these important skills by making a deep commitment to listening intently to others. Servant-leaders seek to identify and clarify the will of a group. They seek to listen receptively to what is being done and said (not just said). Listening also encompasses getting in touch with one's inner voice, and seeking to understand what is being communicated.

2. **Empathy**

Servant-leaders strive to understand and empathize with others. People need to be accepted and recognized for their special and unique spirit. One must assume the good intentions of members/partners and not reject them as people, even when forced to reject or call into question their behavior or performance.

3. **Healing**

Learning to heal is a powerful force for transformation and integration. One of the great strengths of servant-leadership is the potential for healing one's self and others. In *"The Servant as Leader"*, Greenleaf writes, "There is something subtle communicated to those being served and led if, implicit in the compact between the servant-leader and led is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something that they have."

4. Awareness

General awareness, and especially self-awareness, strengthens the servant-leader. Making a commitment to foster awareness can be scary—one never knows what one may discover— as Greenleaf observed, “Awareness is not a giver of solace –it’s just the opposite.” Do others believe you have a strong awareness for what is going on? Servant leaders have a strong sense of what is going on around them. They are always looking for cues from their opinions and decisions. They know what’s going on and will rarely be fooled.

5. Persuasion

Servant-leaders rely on persuasion, rather than positional authority in making decisions. Servant-leaders seek to convince others, rather than coerce compliance. This particular element offers one of the clearest distinctions between the traditional authoritarian model and that of servant-leadership. The servant-leader is effective at building consensus within groups.

6. Conceptualization

Servant-leaders seek to nurture their abilities to "dream great dreams." The ability to look at the organization, and any issues within the organization, from a conceptualizing perspective. This means the leader must think beyond day-to-day realities. Servant-leaders must seek a delicate balance between conceptualization and day-to-day focus.

7. Foresight

Foresight is a characteristic that enables servant-leaders to understand lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision in the future. It is deeply rooted in the intuitive mind.

8. Stewardship

Servant leaders are often characterized by a strong sense of stewardship. Stewardship stems from medieval times when a steward would be assigned to hone the skills and development of the young prince to prepare him for his reign. A steward in an organization is responsible for preparing it for its destiny, usually for the betterment of society. When we describe a leader as having a strong sense of stewardship, we refer to a desire to prepare the organization to contribute to the greater good of society—not unlike preparing the prince to serve the greater good of the kingdom.

9. Growth

Do others believe that you are committed to helping them develop and grow? Servant leaders have a strong commitment to the growth of people. They believe that everyone has something to offer beyond their tangible contributions. Servant leaders work hard to help others develop in a number of ways. Servant-leaders need to connect to others’ developmental needs and actively find ways to help them reach their true potential as staff, volunteers and advocates.

10. Building Community

Do others feel a strong sense of community in the organization? Servant leaders have a strong sense of community spirit and work hard to foster it in an organization. They believe the organizations needs to function as a community and work hard to build community within. Servant-leaders are aware that the shift from local communities to large institutions as the primary shaper of humanity has changed our perceptions and caused a sense of loss. Servant-leaders seek to identify a means for building community among those who are part of the mission.

11. Calling

Do members believe that you are willing to sacrifice self-interest for the good of the mission? Servant leaders have a natural desire to serve others. This notion of having a “calling” to serve is deeply rooted and values-based. The servant leaders desires to make a difference for others and will pursue opportunities to make a difference and will pursue opportunities to impact the lives of others and the community—never for their own gain.

12. Nurturing the Spirit- JOY!!

We accept the need for this journey to provide joy and fulfillment through satisfying volunteer and staff opportunities, training and social experiences. The servant- leader is someone who understands the deep human need to contribute to personally meaningful enterprises. He/She nurtures the individual’s spirit through honest praise and supportive recognition. Criticisms and suggestions are not personal or harsh. The servant leader reminds others to reflect on the importance of both the struggles and successes.

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7 Pillars of Servant Leadership

1. Person of Character

- Makes ethical, principle-centered decisions
- Maintains integrity
- Demonstrates humility
- Serves with a higher purpose (the mission of the organization)

2. Puts People First

- Helps others meet their goals in the organization and in leadership and advocacy
- Displays a servant's heart
- Is mentor-minded
- Shows care and concern

3. Skilled Communicator

- Listens earnestly and speaks effectively
- Demonstrates empathy
- Invites feedback
- Communicates persuasively

4. Compassionate Communicator

- Strengthens relationships, supports diversity, and creates a sense of being
- Expresses appreciation
- Builds teams and communicates
- Negotiates conflict

5. Has Foresight

- Imagines possibilities, anticipates the future, and proceeds with clarity of purpose
- Visionary
- Displays creativity
- Take courageous and decisive action

6. Systems Thinker

- Thinks and acts strategically, manages change effectively, balances the whole with the sum of its parts
- Comfortable with complexity
- Demonstrates adaptability
- Considers the "greater good"

7. Leads with Moral Authority

- Worthy of respect, inspires confidence, and establishes quality standards for performance
- Accepts and delegates responsibility
- Shares power and control
- Creates a culture of accountability

The Bases of Social Power

1. **Reward power**- based on the leader's ability to reward others.
2. **Coercive power**- based on the leader's ability to induce compliance and conformity through manipulation and threats of punishment.
3. **Legitimate power**-derived from cultural expectations, responsibility and authority associated with a leadership position.
4. **Referent power**-derived from a member's desire to become identified and closely associated with the leader, because of relationship and the leader's personality.
5. **Expert power**-based on the knowledge and expertise attributed to the leader by others.
6. **Information power**-based on the leader's possession of/or access to valuable information.
7. **Connection power**-based on the leader's "connection" with important and powerful people/groups etc. inside and outside of the organization.
8. **Political power** –based on the leader's ability to maintain power and weaken any opposition through bureaucratic control and inside maneuvers.
9. **Inspirational power**- based on a leader's ability to inspire members to embrace a shared vision and a higher purpose; to motivate them to do their very best.
10. **Transformational power**-based on a leader's ability to transform the culture, climate, and direction of the organization through the strength of his/her courage, integrity, character, and charisma.

Experienced and effective servant-leaders make use of all the above powers; however, they would do well to focus on the development of **inspirational and transformational powers**. In contrast, autocratic, self-seeking leaders would prefer **coercive and political power** to control others and agency operations.

Servant Leaders and Autocratic Self-Seeking Leaders

The Differences:

1. Different motives- Servant leaders use their power to **develop others**; they build the agency through developing the full potential of all involved. Self-seeking leaders use their power to **control** the board and membership; they build their reputation by using or exploiting members, policies, procedures etc..
2. Different preferences- Servant leaders prefer inspirational and transformational power, because they seek to **influence** and transform members. Self-seeking leaders prefer positional, political and coercive powers, because to rule with unquestioned authority, they need to **control** the board and staff.
3. Different outcomes-If we define power as the ability to influence members then servant leadership is more efficacious, because the arm of control is short, while the reach of influence has no limits.
4. Different orientation--Servant leaders are sensitive to individual and situational needs, because they exist to serve others; therefore, they are **relation-oriented and situational**. Self-seeking leaders are only concerned about their own authority and power, and they demand blind obedience from everyone regards of members and situational needs; therefore they are **task-oriented and directional**.
5. Different levels of skills- Servant leadership requires a higher level of leadership skills and abilities because it takes a lot of (a) interpersonal skills and (b) positive inner qualities to inspire and influence others. However, authoritarian self-seeking leaders only need two sets of primitive skills to succeed: (a) demonstrate unquestionable loyalty and obedience to their friends/personal cadre of supporters, and (2) to use coercive power to enforce obedience and conformity. You do not lead by hitting others over the head – that's assault, not leadership.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

Several misconceptions about servant-leadership make its understanding and acceptance more difficult. They are:

1. Servant-leadership is a weak form of leadership.

Quite the opposite. It is a strong leadership style that requires discipline, strength, and character. This misconception arises from the notion of servant hood as weak rather than fundamentally strong. The person who aspires to lead as an act of service rather than an indulgence of the ego must be willing to listen, to be wrong, and to follow when more effective leaders emerge. Servant-leadership is not a form of servitude; it does not require us to be doormats. Instead, it requires us to act on strong mission driven principles.

2. Only powerful people can be servant-leaders.

Servant-leadership is not a form of leadership that only works from the top-down. Transformation can begin at any place in the organization. Although, the implementation of any form of leadership is facilitated by buy-in from across the organization.

3. Servant-leadership is not the same as service leadership which is based in service rather than servng.

The nuance is important. One can be of service without being a servant. One cannot, on the other hand, be a servant without being of service. Servant-leadership requires a commitment to helping others achieve their highest potential, which is a more complex goal than merely being of service to them.

4. Servant-leadership sounds good in theory, but it's not practical.

Servant-leadership is practicality itself because of the profound effect it can have on others. Servant-leadership is based on pragmatic principles that have been judged valid for centuries and that describe the way in which people are to interact with one another. Servant-leadership has been tested in for-profit and non-profit organizations and has proven superior to obsolete, autocratic styles of management, particularly in an area of rapid change. To suggest that servant-leadership is impractical is the same as to say that honesty is nice in theory, but it's impractical in the real world.

By Dr. Hamilton Beazley

Are You A Servant Leader?

Place a check in the circle of each of the following questions that you would answer with a “yes.” If you can check more than seven of these, you may be well on your way to becoming a servant leader.

- 1. Do others believe you are willing to sacrifice your own self-interest in support of the organization’s mission?
- 2. Do others believe you want to hear their ideas and will value them?
- 3. Do others believe you will understand what is happening in their lives and how it affects participation?
- 4. Do others come to you when the chips are down or when something traumatic has happened in the organization?
- 5. Do others feel that you have a strong awareness of what is going on in the agency and in the movement to advocate for children?
- 6. Do others follow your requests because they want to as opposed to because they “feel they have to?”
- 7. Do others communicate their ideas and vision for the agency when you around?
- 8. Do others have confidence in your ability to anticipate the future and its consequences?
- Do others believe you can help to prepare the organization to continue to make a positive difference in the community?
- Do others believe you are committed to helping them develop and grow?
- Do others feel a strong sense of community in the organization?

Think About It...

1. Describe the relationship of the philosophy of servant-leadership to the mission of your organization.

2. How can becoming a servant leader support your role as a literacy leader in your organization and in the community?

1.

2.

3.