
SERVANT LEADERSHIP -- AN INTRODUCTION

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The Concept

The paradoxical term, “servant-leadership,” which appears to touch an innate need in many of us, and which therefore harks back to the beginning of time, became popularized twenty-five years ago by Robert Greenleaf in his books *Servant Leadership* (1977) and *Teacher as Servant* (1979). The servant-leader first has the desire to serve others, and then learns to lead as a servant. The ideas of serving, helping, self-effacing, and effectiveness permeate the servant-leadership concept. Greenleaf, for many years an executive at AT&T, sought to express his desire to serve, while making use of his executive talents. By serving on the boards of non-profit organizations, and encouraging other private sector managers to do likewise, Greenleaf hoped to instigate a cultural revolution—not just in terms of executive behaviors, but in terms of a mindset that dissociates material situation from psychological or spiritual health. Both rich and poor need caring and guidance, and the servant-leader concept intends to communicate that serving, leading, receiving, and giving are intermingled and not so discrete and dissociated as some economists or social theorists might think.

Caring and leading have traditionally been at least partly a function of propinquity. But our traditional

concept of distance has been blown apart. We can be emotionally separated from the person sitting next to us, and be intimate with someone 3000 miles away—vicariously via videophone or internet, or in person after a 5-hour plane ride. Our work partners need not be close by, as we ship and receive work products from around the globe within seconds.

Where 100 years ago the family was the unit upon which society was based, this source of economic, social, and emotional support is no longer dependable. Government can supply money, but it does not supply caring attention. The servant leader can demonstrate caring attention to the needs of another, and demonstrate leadership. The idea of servant-leadership fits within this search to find new ways of engaging that are consciously interdependent. Being in relationship to another has psychological, social, and economic implications. Realizing an interdependent relationship to another, a servant-leader, can position the other for emotional growth. Within this changed demographic environment the servant-leader has an important role in today's world. The articles in this issue help describe the servant-leader role.

The Articles

Mary Ann Feldheim and Gail Johnson, in their article, "Normative Education: Putting the Servant in Public Service," combine a normative concept of learning with servant leadership and Kohlberg's theory of emotional growth. They put the ASPA ethics code as the centerpiece of authentic communication in exemplifying virtue ethics in a way compatible with Robert Greenleaf's ideas. Aspirations are goals that are slowly realized, one step at a time, and maintaining patience over the long haul is needed. This notion of cultural change ties in

with the argument of the final article here, by Lori Riverstone.

Saundra Reinke's "Service Before Self: Towards A Theory Of Servant-Leadership" is an empirical study showing that a servant leadership style of behavior builds trust within the organization and toward the leader. These findings support the argument of Feldheim and Johnson, showing that aspirational goals and authentic communication reward the organization with improved effectiveness.

"Servant Leadership in the Bedouin-Arab Culture" by Yasin Sarayrah shows the cross-cultural applicability of the servant-leadership concept. The traditional tribal leader was expected to be a servant as well as a leader, one who would put the interest of family above his own interest, who would host guests on behalf of the tribe, who would mediate inter-tribal disputes, and who would uphold the tribal honor by always acting in a selfless manner. The timelessness and the applicability of servant-leadership to real life is demonstrated by the author, who grew up in this environment and lived these experiences demonstrates.

"Civic Learning via Service Learning" by Brian N. Williams and Leigh Z. Gilchrist brings the service learning concept into servant-leadership. Williams and Gilchrist argue that the foundation creating a vibrant democratic polity depends on socialization practices, that the appropriate learning for a democratic civil society involves moral learning, and that moral learning is experienced and practiced via service learning. Citing the experiential learning theories of John Dewey and David Kolb, the authors show that service learning creates the experience and conceptual foundation for an ethos of policing which bonds the caregiver to the community. Servant leadership can be a product of service learning.

Lori Riverstone's *Servant Leadership: A Manifestation of Postmaterialism?* sketches a larger canvas—accounting for the increased interest in servant leadership in terms of the secular phenomenon of postmaterialism. She includes the human relations approach to management, the Maslowian psychology of emotional growth, and the tremendous economic surge worldwide during the 1950s – 1970s as bringing about a cultural change where many in the developed world, satiated by their material abundance, have turned to psychology or religion for guidance in finding a more meaningful life. Servant leadership marries the traditional work ethic to an altruistic concern for helping others, so the transition is easy.

Finally, Marilyn Smith focuses on the concept of Stewardship as a component of Servant Leadership in her article, "Steward Leadership in the Public Sector." She maps the concept of Stewardship from its religious roots to its application in the practice of Public Administration. In her position as a practitioner, she utilizes her experience to suggest ways of incorporating Steward Leadership into MPA programs through the core curriculum.

These servant leadership articles follow a prior collection in *Public Voices* (2002), and reflects a surging interest in religious and spiritual matters; see (Lynch 1998, Cunningham 2003, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003).

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Biographical Sketch

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