

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

A NEW PARADIGM FOR SUCCESSFUL ADMINISTRATION

BY CLARENCE DUNBEBIN

Jim Luke¹ was a successful teacher who aspired to educational leadership. Friends assured him that he had the talents to become a good administrator. Intrigued by the potential for wider influence, he accepted the call to become a principal. From his first day at the new school, Jim applied his chosen paradigm of leadership.

Things did not go as he had planned. Jim could not understand why being a powerful leader who told his teachers what and how to teach produced distrust and divisiveness. He asked himself, "Surely that leadership style has worked for others. Why doesn't it work for me?"

In graduate school, Jim had heard about PODSCORB—an acronym for the tasks successful administrators perform. He did careful *planning* and *organizing*. He *directed* and *supervised* teachers. He had excellent *coordinating* and *budgeting* skills. However, he found that his employees

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the concept. Laurie Beth Jones, in *Jesus CEO*, appropriately attributes this management style to Jesus and other biblical leaders. She says, "The principle of service is what separates true leaders from glory seekers. Jesus, the leader, served his people. Most religions teach that we are put here to serve God; yet, in Jesus, God is offering to serve us."⁴

Jesus healed, forgave, and made social life more bearable for others because He "was coming from one power: love. To love is to serve. And God is love. The symbol of love is a circle. True service inspires service which completes the circle."⁵

Both Greenleaf and Jones believe that this new kind of leadership model should replace PODSCORB and other models that emphasize power and the financial bottom line. Greenleaf holds that organizations will become stronger when leaders put "serving others—including employees, customers, and community—as the number one priority."⁶ By building community, organizations grow strong and vibrant—and improve their financial standing.

What Is Servant-Leadership?

Placing *servant* and *leader* together may seem paradoxical. Can these traits be fused together in one person? Greenleaf and others believe that they can and

became increasingly resentful of his traditional, authoritarian approach.

Jim failed to understand how much times have changed since PODSCORB was an accepted guide to successful leadership. These subtle changes have produced a new paradigm—the evolving concept of servant-leadership. Today's employees want administrators who lead instead of manage. They want leaders who do not depend on power and authority to achieve their goals. Today's successful administrators are more likely to be those who work with and for their people, empowering and inspiring them to achieve personal and corporate goals.

Robert Greenleaf first defined servant-leadership in his essay, "The Servant as Leader," in 1970.² Since then, "management and organizational thinkers like Max DePree, Peter Senge, Peter Block, and Stephen Covey, among others, [have emphasized] the importance of an ethical base for organizations, the power of trust and stewardship, and the personal depths that authentic leaders must honor as they empower and serve others."³ The new models of leadership all include a spiritual dimension and a call for leaders to treat their employees as valuable assets.

While Greenleaf popularized the term "servant-leadership," he did not invent

should. For Greenleaf, servant-leadership begins with the “natural feeling that one wants to serve *first*.” After that, the conscious choice to be a servant “brings one to aspire to lead.” A servant-leader is “sharply different from one who is *leader first*.”⁷

The major difference between the leader-first and servant-first styles is “the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served.”

Greenleaf says the questions to ask are: “Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?”⁸

Given the moral conditions of our world, it is easy to wonder if a servant-leader can be effective. In answer to this implied question, Greenleaf proposes: “The forces for good and evil in the world are propelled by the thoughts, attitudes, and actions of individual beings. What happens to our values, and therefore to the quality of our civilization in the future, will be shaped by the conceptions of

individuals that are born of inspiration.”⁹

Larry Spears, executive director of the Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership, warns that servant-leadership involves a long-term transformation of life and work. It is a way of *being* rather than doing. Consequently, although servant-leadership has the potential for creating positive change throughout the organization and society, this does not happen overnight.¹⁰ It takes time “to select and grow” servant-leaders.

How to Recognize and Be a Servant-Leader

You will know servant-leaders by the skills and attitudes they demonstrate. These attributes help them promote the professional and personal growth of their colleagues. Servant-leaders:

- **Listen intently to others**—especially their co-workers. This may be one of the top two characteristics. They also listen to their own inner voice.
- **Have a commitment to integrity above all else.** Servant-leaders “understand the profound differences between gestures and commitment.”¹¹
- **Connect their voice and their touch.** The leader’s voice expresses his or her be-

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liefs, while the leader’s touch demonstrates competency and resolve.

- **Are aware of circumstances and challenges.** Being aware is no guarantee of solace. Rather, Greenleaf says, “It is a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed.”¹²

- **Willingly rely on persuasion rather than coercion.** Two contrasting approaches to leadership are *persuasion* versus *use of coercion or authority based on power or position*. Intentional use of persuasion is one of the clearest distinctions

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between servant-leaders and traditional authoritarian leaders. Servant-leaders seek to create consensus and foster teamwork.

- **Can visualize and conceptualize their dream.** They develop their ability to “dream great dreams” and articulate them as they inspire their colleagues. Servant-leaders learn also to maintain a delicate balance between conceptualizing and the day-to-day focus on achieving their goals.

- **Have foresight.** Unless leaders can foresee the likely outcome of a given situation, their leadership role can be in trouble. Defining the term *foresight* is difficult, although we generally know it when we see it. Foresight is the one servant-leader characteristic with which one may be born. Nevertheless, servant-leaders should give its development careful attention.

- **Are good stewards.** Servant-leaders know they have been appointed to hold their organization’s assets in trust for the constituency. Servant-leadership and stewardship alike presume that leaders and staff commit themselves to serving the needs of others and the organization.

They both imply a preference for openness and persuasion rather than controlling techniques.

- **Carry out their promises.**
- **Strive to show empathy and to be vulnerable.** Researchers repeatedly identify empathy and willingness to be vulnerable as essential characteristics of successful teachers and leaders. Spears notes: “The most successful servant-leaders are those who have become skilled empathetic listeners.”¹³ The good news is that with practice, everyone can learn these skills.

- **Help others to heal.** As servant-leaders communicate their desire to collaborate in the search for healing and wholeness, good things happen.

- **Grow people.** Servant-leaders accept the challenge of helping the members of their organization grow personally, professionally, and spiritually. They provide money and time in their budgets to help them achieve this.

- **Build community.** Servant-leaders accept the challenge to develop relationships. For school administrators, that includes teachers, auxiliary personnel, stu-

dents, and parents, as well as the neighboring community.

The Implications of Servant-Leadership

Many, both leaders and followers, believe that leaders must be decisive. They must “singlehandedly pull and push organizational members forward by the force of personality, bureaucratic clout, and political know-how. . . . Leaders must successfully manipulate events and people so that vision becomes reality. Leaders, in other words, must *lead*.”¹⁴

Sergiovanni says there may be a place for this kind of direct leadership from time to time. However, he believes that is only a part of the story. “The leadership that counts, in the end, is the kind that touches people differently. It taps their emotions, appeals to their values, and responds to their connections with other people.”¹⁵

Servant-leadership is morally based and includes stewardship of the highest order. Greenfield discovered this to be

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true in his study of an urban elementary school. Prior to his study, the principal and teachers had problems relating to one another. The moral orientation of the school's teachers made a major difference in fixing the existing problems.

Greenfield concluded: "Their persistence in searching out strategies to increase their colleagues' or their personal effectiveness in serving the needs of the school's children was motivated not by bureaucratic mandate or directives from superiors, but by moral commitment to children, rooted in their awareness of the needs of these children and their beliefs about the significance of their roles, as teachers in these children's lives. Much of the principal's efforts to foster leadership among the teachers . . . was directed to further developing and sustaining this moral orientation among teachers."¹⁶

While traditional wisdom has held that schools cannot improve from within, this report shows otherwise. Too many principals and teachers have concluded that they cannot make a difference. For some who accept this belief, the scapegoat

then becomes the central office or the rules and regulations imposed upon school staffs.

Madeline Cartright, principal of Blaine School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, saw her principalship as a form of stewardship and determined to do all she could to improve the lot of her students. The washer and dryer she bought with raffle money are examples of her stewardship. Those machines run every morning as she and others launder the clothing worn to school by their students.

Cartright says this about their "laundry": "This is one of the things we can do to bring about a change. My kids look good."¹⁷ Not satisfied with clean clothes, she identified her next target—the filth of the school—and recruited 18 parents for a summer cleanup project.

Some leadership experts felt that Cartright should limit her role to that of instructional leader and pay more attention

to items related to teaching and learning, such as charting, facilitating, and monitoring the school's program. She does not neglect those responsibilities. But she also embraces activities that she sees as part of her servant-leadership role.

This relates well to Greenleaf's test of success: "The servant-leader is servant first . . . The best test [to determine the servant-leader's success] and the most 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, not be further deprived?"¹⁸

All leadership depends upon the confidence that people have in their leaders. That includes trust in their character and competence.¹⁹ In schools where the leaders are motivated to serve others, principals no longer need to proclaim themselves the "headmaster" or "instructional leader." Everyone works together to achieve shared goals.

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“The more crucial role of the principal is as head learner, engaging in the most important enterprise of the schoolhouse—experiencing, displaying, modeling, and celebrating what is hoped and expected that teachers and pupils will do. The school as learning community provides an ideal setting for joining the practice of the ‘leader of leaders’ to servant leadership.”²⁰

Servant-Leadership and Spiritual Leadership

Although servant-leadership is a rather new concept in the secular arena, it is found in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Notable servant-leaders in the Old Testament include Moses, David, and Nehemiah.²¹ In the New Testament, the premier servant-leader is Jesus. Here is His mission statement: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10, NIV).

He sought to “make sure that other people’s highest priority needs [were] being served.” As Jesus served others, they became “healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants.”²²

*In describing His earthly mission, Jesus said, The Lord “hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.” Luke 4:18. This was His work. He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by Satan. . . . Love, mercy, and compassion were revealed in every act of His life; His heart went out in tender sympathy to the children of men. . . . The poorest and humblest were not afraid to approach Him.*²³

History shows that people—including teachers, students, and parents—hunger for something larger than themselves. “Leaders who offer that will have no shortage of followers. In fact, higher purpose is such a vital ingredient to the human psyche that a Scripture says, ‘Where there is no vision, the people perish’ [Proverbs 29:18].”²⁴

For additional information on servant-leadership, contact the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership, which offers a wide variety of information, including essays, books, and audio-visual products, as well as sponsoring conferences and retreats. Their Web page address is: <http://www.greenleaf.org/> They may also be reached by E-mail at greenleaf@iquest.net.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Not his real name.
2. In Larry Spears, ed., *Reflections on Leadership* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1995), p. 2.

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3. Don M. Frick and Larry C. Spears (eds.), *On Becoming a Servant-Leader* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), p. 3.
4. Laurie Beth Jones, *Jesus CEO* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), p. 250.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
6. Spears here is summarizing Greenleaf’s views. See p. 3.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 80. Italics supplied.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey Into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), pp. 14, 15.
10. Spears, p. 4.
11. Max De Pree, *Leadership Jazz* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p. 10.
12. Quoted in Spears, p. 5.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Thomas J. Sergiovanni, *Moral Leadership: Getting to the Heart of School Improvement* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992), p. 119.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
16. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 120.
17. Richard Louv, *New York Times Magazine* (November 15, 1990), cited in *ibid.*, pp. 120, 121.
18. Quoted in Frick, pp. 1, 2.
19. Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, and Rebecca R. Merrill, *First Things First* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), pp. 240, 241.
20. Ronald S. Barth, *Improving Schools From Within* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990), pp. 45, 46, cited in Sergiovanni, pp. 125, 126.
21. See Laurie Beth Jones, *The Path. Creating Your Mission Statement for Work and for Life* (New York: Hyperion, 1996), pp. 118, 119.
22. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, pp. 13, 14.
23. Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1979), p. 3.
24. Jones, *Jesus CEO*, p. 177. Italics in original.