



BOOK REVIEW—

PRACTICING SERVANT-LEADERSHIP: SUCCEEDING THROUGH
TRUST, BRAVERY, AND FORGIVENESS

(EDITED BY LARRY SPEARS AND MICHELE LAWRENCE, JOSSEY BASS,
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In his seminal piece “The Servant as Leader,” Robert K. Greenleaf wrote:

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.

Thirty-five years later, Greenleaf’s words appear again within a short excerpt from this essay entitled, “Who Is the Servant-Leader?”, which serves as the lead chapter in the recently published *Practicing Servant-Leadership: Succeeding Through Trust, Bravery, and Forgiveness*. For many years, those of us—practitioners, scholars, and teachers alike—who have been inspired by the writings of Greenleaf have looked to the Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership, and to the Center’s President and CEO, Larry Spears specifically, for resources to put the ideals of servant-leadership into practice. In this collection of essays, the Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership, Larry Spears and co-editor Michele Lawrence present us with a tremendous aid to both theory and practice.

The majority of the resources in this collection are from the *Voices of Servant-Leadership Series*, booklets published twice per year since 1991 by the Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership. Provision of these booklets has been in the tradition of Greenleaf’s publication of his original essay on



servant-leadership in 1970, but the time has clearly come to make these writings accessible to a wider audience. Larry Spears and Michele Lawrence did not simply bind the booklets together; they placed them in a natural order for the reader, gradually widening the circle of servant-leadership's application from Greenleaf's theory to practice within a variety of organizational contexts.

The foreword to this new volume was written by Warren Bennis, and his sage remarks include references to our current war in Iraq and the evolving relationship between the United States and the international community. His final question, "Do you really want to lead?", is the perfect introduction to the content of the book, which provides guidance for those readers who answered "Yes!"

The first two chapters in the books are familiar to practitioners and teachers of servant-leadership: first is the short excerpt from Greenleaf's original essay noted above; second is Larry's Spears' foundational piece on the ten characteristics of servant-leadership. In the third chapter, John Carver draws upon his broad experience as a consultant for governing boards to present the qualities necessary for the board chair, the "servant-leader of the servant-leaders." The next chapter, by James Autry, builds upon this foundation to link his experience as a magazine editor with the practice of any servant-leader; both have as their fundamental objective "to bring out the best of people's work, not to impose [one's] own work on it."

Following Autry's reflections is a re-examination of the ten characteristics of servant-leadership by Larry Spears and John Burkhardt, who is the former program director for leadership and higher education at the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. This chapter is an application of the ten characteristics to philanthropic institutions, but it broadens Spears' original concepts as well. John Bogle continues the focus of servant-leadership within specific organizational contexts in his chapter based upon experience in a major mutual funds company; he accomplishes a masterful distillation of Greenleaf's writing from a business perspective. The next chapter effectively examines the dynamics of servant-leadership as experienced in a col-



laborative effort between the Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership and the National Association for Community Leadership, written from the perspective of the latter's president and CEO, Wendell J. Walls.

Don DeGraaf, Colin Tilley, and Larry Neal further expand on both the theory and practice of Spears' ten characteristics, especially in management and service delivery. Following their contributions, David Specht and Richard Broholm apply a theological lens to the portrait of institutions as both living systems and as servants. Daniel Kim expands this use of systems theory—especially “Total Quality” approaches—to present the concept of foresight as an ethical issue in light of the fact that, as Greenleaf wrote, “The failure (or refusal) of a leader to foresee may be viewed as an ethical failure.” Following this is the very moving chapter by Shann Ferch (included also in this inaugural edition of *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership*) on our capacity as humans to be broken by our faults and to seek meaningful change as a result; he illustrates this concept with engaging stories both from his own life and from major political events of our times.

The final chapter is an interview by Larry Spears and John Noble with Margaret Wheatley, a piece which integrates many different threads of ideas into a coherent explanation of the essential importance of relationships to the practice of servant-leadership. In her concluding remarks, Wheatley says, “The concept of servant-leadership must move from an interesting idea in the public imagination toward the realization that this is the only way we can move forward.”

This interview provides a perfect ending to an essential collection of practical reflections on servant-leadership. All of the works showcased in this rich volume cast light upon the question posed in the preface: “Do you really want to lead?” In response to his own question, Bennis writes: “In the end, if you choose to lead others as a servant-leader, then my best advice is this: Be brave. Be kind.” These are much-needed words, shedding light on an indispensable vision not only of a leadership concept, but also, significantly, of a way of life for our time.



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