



THE HEART OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

Ten Years of The International Journal of Servant-Leadership

—SHANN RAY FERCH

There is no greatness where there is not simplicity, goodness, and truth.

—Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*

In the tenth volume of the journal, I am grateful to recognize ten years of interdisciplinary and international leadership studies focusing on servant-leadership. Here, on the advent of the next ten years, the *International Journal of Servant-Leadership* contains the fresh critical vigor shown in feminist gender-integrative understandings of servant-leadership, a continued look at the vast field of theory and science that exists in the contemporary world of servant-leadership studies, and an enduring focus on the poetry of servant-leadership.

When I think of the simplicity and complexity of servant-leadership, I think of my mother's bright voice, an invitation to greater life. And I think of my father's hands, like a map of their own wilderness.

As a boy I walked with my father along the Yellowstone River on the northern edge of the Beartooth Range in southern Montana. We walked with a purpose and looked intently into the clear pools. Sun filled the basin. The land held the gold and silver of grasses, hardy cottonwoods along the river, the black and gray of rock promontories, and the dark green of forests that reached behind us to the sky.

I was fourteen and the world was new. I was a freshman in high school, and manhood seemed far off. Into the river we went. Up to the waist in water, I felt contained by water and light. I wore jeans and old shoes. The river flowed around me. Bare-chested, I leaned back and the water held me in place. I was small. The river was big. My father stood upstream in a flash of sun over the ripples. A giant. A shadow. He moved his hands over



the water. A parachute adams (a common dry fly used in fly fishing), brown bodied, with rust in the tail and the signature white crown, flew overhead and came to rest on the water at the top of a draw below a large rock. My father's line jumped and bowed, moonlike from his outstretched arm, and he called to me. I shouted back to him. He drew a rainbow from the river and we smiled and laughed and kept on until we had enough for dinner.

Balance this against the aggression we sometimes felt for each other, that and my own fears of life without him leading me. Fly fishing, like servant-leadership, can be seen as a subcurrent of life, or perhaps an essential essence that mirrors all of life, a passage strewn with daunting obstacles, brambles and gnarled trees, cut banks and the laddered spill of whitewater carving its descent through rock. Smoothness in the outflow. My father and I have always loved rivers. We have also always loved people, and love, as I see it, forms the foundation of the profoundly varied landscape we call servant-leadership throughout the world. In the demanding presence of a landscape too beautiful to be named, the art of fishing, of becoming an authentic fly fisher, is not something that occurs quickly. This progression is similar to the progression involved in becoming an authentic servant-leader. My own early failures fly fishing remind me in their way of distrust and incomprehension, emotionally blunt instruments through which every fish seems to pass beyond reach. And yet we improve. We gain headway. Sometimes our mothers or fathers lead us deeper into the realization that a line laid down with precision and elegance over good water contains unforeseen possibility.

There is a wilderness in me, in my mother and father, and in the life of everyone I know. In Montana the sun fills the sky with light. The loop of the line and the fall of an adams parachute, the miniscule lie of the white tuft on the surface of the big river, the rise of something from great depth . . . on the water a sincere call is followed by an ecstatic response—and one almost hears the world asking us to leave ourselves behind, the ache of our woundedness, the immutable fires and great losses. Can we love others more than we thought possible? Can we atone for the distance between us? When I see my mother with her bright beautiful spirit, her hands reading a great book, or her laughter filling the air, I am renewed. When I see my father in the long light of evening, the river purling at his waist and the fluid arc of his arm in the sky, affirmation speaks, unexpected and steadfast, and sets the soul at ease.



Without measure servant-leadership imparts greater wisdom, freedom, autonomy, health, and service for the humanity's greater good. May you receive of this profound outpouring, and in turn, lead others in well-being, peace, and love.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shann R. Ferch is professor of leadership studies with the internationally recognized PhD Program in Leadership Studies at Gonzaga University. He is the author of *American Masculine*; *Balefire*; *Forgiveness and Power in the Age of Atrocity: Servant-Leadership as a Way of Life*; and *The Woman Who Dreamed of Sunlight*, forthcoming in the fall of 2015. He is the editor, with Larry C. Spears, of *The Spirit of Servant-Leadership* and *Conversations on Servant-Leadership: Insights on Human Courage in Life and Work*. Shann serves as the editor of the *International Journal of Servant Leadership*.