



MAKE YOUR LIFE EXTRAORDINARY

The Teacher as Servant-Leader

— MICHAEL J. REILLY AND LARRY C. SPEARS

The essence of teaching and learning captures the noblest aspects of a person's inner being. Its foundation rests on the conscious giving of self, the creative sharing of one's knowledge and insights, and the contribution to the growth and development of others. Teaching has the capacity to enrich the potential of others. The learning process has the energy to transform the capabilities of others so that the lives of all become better and more fulfilled. Teaching transcends the ordinary, empowering all. Through giving, caring, and sharing, effective teachers establish genuine relationships with their students, thereby enabling them to lead more capable and meaningful lives.

The above reflection on teaching, with its powerful message of caring, captures the essence of a servant-leader as first described by Robert Greenleaf (1970/2008) in his original essay, "The Servant as Leader":

The servant-leader is servant first. . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, one wants to serve



first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead . . . the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and 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 he benefit, or, at least, will he not be further deprived? (p. 15)

Teaching's true components blossom and thrive when it awakens imaginations, stimulates curiosity, taps unknown potentials, encourages creativity, inspires a desire to learn, communicates a passion for learning, and shares knowledge joyfully, transforming lives and inspiring in others a personal quest for meaning and purpose. Service through the leadership of a teacher portrays the spirit of Greenleaf's description of a servant-leader.

THE UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

The idea of servant-leadership, now in its fifth decade as a concept bearing that name, continues to create a quiet revolution around the world. In countless for-profit and not-for-profit organizations today, we are seeing traditional, autocratic, and hierarchical modes of leadership yielding to a different way of working—one based on teamwork and community, one that seeks to involve others in decision making, one strongly based in ethical and caring behavior, and



one that is attempting to enhance the personal growth of workers while improving the caring and quality of our many institutions. This emerging approach to leadership and service is called servant-leadership.

The words servant and leader are usually thought of as opposites. When two opposites are brought together in a creative and meaningful way, a paradox emerges. And so, the words servant and leader have been brought together to create the paradoxical idea of servant-leadership. The basic idea of servant-leadership is both logical and intuitive. Since the time of the industrial revolution, managers have tended to view people as objects; institutions have considered workers as cogs within a machine. In recent decades, we have witnessed a shift in that long-held view. Standard practices are rapidly shifting toward the ideas put forward by Robert Greenleaf, Stephen Covey, Peter Senge, Max DePree, Margaret Wheatley, Ken Blanchard, Danah Zohar, Shann Ferch, and many others who suggest there is a better way to lead all organizations. Robert Greenleaf's writings on the subject of servant-leadership helped to get this movement started, and his views have had a profound and growing effect on many.

ROBERT K. GREENLEAF

The term servant-leadership was first coined in a 1970 essay by Robert K. Greenleaf (1904-1990), entitled "The Servant as Leader." Greenleaf, born in Terre Haute, Indiana, spent most of his organizational life in the field of management research, development, and education at AT&T. Following a



40-year career at AT&T, he enjoyed a second career that lasted 25 years, during which time he served as an influential consultant to a number of major institutions, including Ohio University, MIT, Ford Foundation, R. K. Mellon Foundation, the Mead Corporation, the American Foundation for Management Research, and Lilly Endowment Inc. In 1964, Greenleaf also founded the Center for Applied Ethics, which was renamed the Robert K. Greenleaf Center in 1985.

As a lifelong student of how things get done in organizations, Greenleaf distilled his observations in a series of essays and books on the theme of the servant as leader, the objective of which was to stimulate thought and action for building a better, more caring society.

THE SERVANT AS LEADER IDEA

The idea of the servant as leader came partly out of Greenleaf's half century of experience in working to shape large institutions. However, the event that crystallized Greenleaf's thinking came in the 1960s, when he read Hermann Hesse's short novel *Journey to the East*—an account of a mythical journey by a group of people on a spiritual quest.

After reading this story, Greenleaf concluded that its key meaning was that the great leader is first experienced as a servant to others, and that this simple fact is central to his or her greatness. True leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a deep desire to help others.

In 1970, at the age of 66, Greenleaf published "The Servant as Leader," the first of a dozen essays and books on servant-



leadership. Since that time, more than half a million copies of his books and essays have been sold worldwide. Slowly but surely, Greenleaf's servant-leadership writings have made a deep, lasting impression on leaders, teachers, and many others who are concerned with issues of leadership, management, service, and personal growth.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SERVANT-LEADER

The following characteristics are central to the development of servant-leaders:

Listening: Leaders have traditionally been valued for their communication and decision-making skills. While these are also important skills for the servant-leader, they need to be reinforced by a deep commitment to listening intently to others. The servant-leader seeks to identify the will of a group and helps clarify that will. He or she seeks to listen receptively to what is being said (and not said!). Listening also encompasses getting in touch with one's own inner voice and seeking to understand what one's body, spirit, and mind are communicating. Listening, coupled with regular periods of reflection, is essential to the growth of the servant-leader.

Empathy: The servant-leader strives to understand and empathize with others. People need to be accepted and recognized for their special and unique spirits. One assumes the good intentions of co-workers and does not reject them as people, even while refusing to accept their behavior or performance. The most successful servant-



leaders are those who have become skilled empathetic listeners.

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. Many people have broken spirits and have suffered from a variety of emotional hurts. Although this is a part of being human, servant-leaders recognize that they have an opportunity to help make whole those with whom they come in contact. In "The Servant as Leader," Greenleaf (1970/2008) writes: "There is something subtle communicated to one who is being served and led if, implicit in the compact between servant-leader and led, is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something they share" (p. 37).

Awareness: General awareness, and especially self-awareness, strengthens the servant-leader. Making a commitment to foster awareness can be scary—you never know what you may discover. Awareness also aids one in understanding issues involving ethics and values. It lends itself to viewing most situations from a more integrated, holistic position. As Greenleaf (1970/2008) observed:

Awareness is not a giver of solace—it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed. They are not seekers after solace. They have their own inner serenity. (p. 29)



Persuasion: Another characteristic of servant-leaders is a primary reliance on persuasion, rather than using one's positional authority, in making decisions within an organization. The servant-leader seeks 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. This emphasis on persuasion over coercion probably has its roots within the beliefs of The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), the denomination with which Robert Greenleaf himself was most closely allied.

Conceptualization: Servant-leaders seek to nurture their abilities to dream great dreams. The ability to look at a problem (or an organization) from a conceptualizing perspective means that one must think beyond day-to-day realities. For many managers, this is a characteristic that requires discipline and practice. The traditional manager is focused on the need to achieve short-term operational goals. The manager who also wishes to be a servant-leader must stretch his or her thinking to encompass broader conceptual thinking. Within organizations, conceptualization is also the proper role of boards of trustees or directors. Unfortunately, boards can sometimes become involved in the day-to-day operations (something that should always be discouraged!) and fail to provide the visionary concept for an institution. Trustees need to



be mostly conceptual in their orientation, staffs need to be mostly operational in their perspective, and the most effective CEOs and leaders probably need to develop both perspectives. Servant-leaders are called to seek a delicate balance between conceptual thinking and a day-to-day focused approach.

Foresight: Closely related to conceptualization, the ability to foresee the likely outcome of a situation is hard to define, but easy to identify. One knows it when one sees it. Foresight is a characteristic that enables the servant-leader to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future. It is also deeply rooted within the intuitive mind. As such, one can conjecture that foresight is the one servant-leader characteristic with which one may be born. All other characteristics can be consciously developed. There hasn't been a great deal written on foresight. It remains a largely unexplored area in leadership studies, but one most deserving of careful attention.

Stewardship: Peter Block (2013), author of *Stewardship and The Empowered Manager*, has defined stewardship as “holding something in trust for another” (p. xxiv). Robert Greenleaf's view of all institutions was one in which CEOs, staffs, and trustees all played significant roles in holding their institutions in trust for the greater good of society. Servant-leadership, like stewardship, assumes



first and foremost a commitment to serving the needs of others. It also emphasizes the use of openness and persuasion rather than control.

Commitment to the growth of people: Servant-leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As such, the servant-leader is deeply committed to the growth of each and every individual within his or her institution. The servant-leader recognizes the tremendous responsibility to do everything within his or her power to nurture the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of employees. In practice, this can include (but is not limited to) concrete actions such as making funds available for personal and professional development, taking a personal interest in the ideas and suggestions of everyone, encouraging worker involvement in decision making, and actively assisting laid-off workers to find other employment.

Building community: The servant-leader senses that much has been lost in recent human history as a result of the shift from local communities to large institutions as the primary shaper of human lives. This awareness causes the servant-leader to seek to identify some means for building community among those who work within a given institution. Servant-leadership suggests that true community can be created among those who work in businesses and other institutions. Greenleaf (1970/2008) said:



All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant-leaders to show the way, not by mass movements, but by each servant-leader demonstrating his own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group. (p. 40)

These ten characteristics of servant-leadership are by no means exhaustive. However, we believe that the ones listed serve to communicate the power and promise that this concept offers to those who are open to its invitation and challenge.

ESSENTIAL POINTS

- A person desires to serve; this inner motivation leads one to choose to serve. Choosing to be a servant, first, reflects a person's authentic leadership and way of life.
- One serves to be of assistance, and to enhance the growth of others. Both they and others become better, deeper, more fulfilled persons developing their own desire to serve.
- The servant-leader demonstrates a concern for those struggling, for the least fortunate, so that the lives of others become enhanced, more enriched.

THE COVENANTAL NATURE OF TEACHING

The characteristics, competencies, and practices of a servant-leader inspire others. The loftiest goals of the human spirit become apparent as one reflects on the individual power of each



quality of an authentic servant-leader. Taken collectively, the overall influence of these characteristics transcends ordinary expectations. Extraordinary possibilities emerge.

In this context, let's examine the energizing and transforming power of a teacher. Teaching represents a noble undertaking. A teacher:

- Unlocks unknown treasures within others.
- Transforms classrooms into creative environments for learning.
- Allows the exchange of ideas about knowledge to flourish.
- Encourages growing in wisdom and understanding.
- Assists the growth and development of others.
- Strives through everyday efforts to make all lives extraordinary.

A committed servant-leader teacher creates a positive environment where a culture of sharing and caring dominate. Teaching involves interacting with motivated people whose commitment to others drives them. It engages people, inspiring their vitality and untapped, unlimited potential. Teaching stimulates the mind to explore, to refine constantly, and to personalize knowledge and understanding. Teaching interacts with the world of ideas, allowing discovery, transformation, and creativity to emerge. Teaching touches the core of a person, becoming an integral part of the self, igniting one's passion for thinking and doing. It defines personal purpose, inspiring a sacred bond of commitment—a covenant—to all students.



Teaching is enmeshed in the world of idealism. Its fabric often inspires. Through sharing knowledge and exploring ideas, minds are opened to possibilities never before imagined. When such awakenings occur, thinking leads to reflection, and then untold possibilities emerge. People are free to act; they discover; they create.

- The artist might capture an incredible unseen moment.
- The musician might play or create an exhilarating piece.
- The chef might put together a sumptuous, nutritious meal.
- The architect might build a welcoming edifice.
- The business entrepreneur might establish a profit-sharing venture that serves the needs of others.
- The educationally challenged person might achieve beyond the wildest of expectations.
- The scientist might formulate new insights into understanding biological, chemical, and physical interactions to benefit the health of humanity.
- The health/fitness trainer might assist people to value active lifestyles so that long-range health benefits actually happen.
- The mathematician might help all realize the influence of mathematical constructs in the everyday living of life.
- The historian might influence the creation of a more just, equitable, and humane society.



- The reader, the writer, and the teacher of literature might inspire greater understanding of the human experience so that people are more tolerant and accepting of each other.
- The world language specialist might assist our capability to communicate with and gain understanding of people from a wide-range of different cultures.

Such a wide range of stimulating opportunities might encourage budding thinkers, writers, doctors, public servants, and philosophers to arise. Future peace activists, equal rights advocates, and social welfare protectors might work to ensure that poverty is eliminated; that the rights of all are cherished, respected, and honored by all people; and that all cultures, races, and religions would be valued.

Teaching truly reinforces one's purpose in life. It rejuvenates the heart, rekindles the spirit, and inspires the search for meaning in our lives.

MAKE YOUR LIFE EXTRAORDINARY

As one examines teaching, one can see many of the priorities, competencies, and characteristics of a servant-leader embedded in such a meaningful way of life. A teacher's constant focus and sense of purpose rest on assisting the ultimate growth and development of others. In fact, the life's work of an educator can best be summarized in the wonderful words of John Keating, the English teacher in the movie *Dead Poets Society* (1989). In a truly moving scene, Mr. Keating



encourages his students “to make your life extraordinary.”

These words, “make your life extraordinary,” capture the educator’s deepest aspiration for everyone. These powerful words reflect the ultimate hope that through a teacher’s professional efforts and caring, he or she will, in some special way, assist others to reach the unique, magical potential that is truly only theirs to achieve.

Educators give of themselves to enhance the growth and development of students in every facet of life. These interactions occur in the halls, the gym, at concerts, at plays and musicals, on the playing fields and, especially, in the wonderful theater of the classroom.

Who knows how each person will make his or her unique life extraordinary as a result of a teacher’s caring and sharing?

- Will it be reflected as they demonstrate a simple, humble act of caring?
- Will it be because they touched the lives of those in need of comfort and support?
- Will it be because they advocate for every person in society to be respected because of their human worth and not to be discriminated against because of their race, gender, religion, or place of origin?
- Will it be because they saw the needs of the least among us, the less fortunate, and acted to secure justice on their behalf?
- Will it be because they served the sick, the elderly?
- Will it be because they influenced the achievement of peace?



- Will it be because they live a life of loving those near and dear to them?

“Make your life extraordinary.” This is the wish and goal of the servant-leader teacher for every student.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHERS AS SERVANT-LEADERS

One can see in the ten characteristics of servant-leaders the countless ways dedicated teachers serve their students. Each of these defining attributes of servant-leadership are evidenced by a servant-leader teacher’s approach to those they teach. A servant-leader teacher reflects the true essence of these listed qualities when he or she applies the specific actions advocated after each of the servant-leader’s characteristics—

1. Listening: Encourages participation; respects insights and opinions of others
2. Empathy: Respects all; fosters acceptance of all in their diversity
3. Healing: Supports and encourages the capabilities of all; cares for all
4. Awareness: Is a reflective practitioner
5. Persuasion: Communicates and shares a passion for learning
6. Conceptualization: Purposefully teaches in daily classroom activities; creates and stimulates dialogue about future possibilities
7. Foresight: Understands past influences; stays knowledgeable of influences on the present; applies



- knowledge in dealing with the future
8. Stewardship: Is committed to meeting the learning needs of all; trusts the potential of all; gives selflessly so others may grow in understanding
 9. Commitment to the growth of people: Is committed to the growth and development of students
 10. Building Community: Provides an encouraging and supportive environment for learning through open exchanges; conveys belief in the unique capabilities of all; fosters development of a community of learning where the shared pursuit of knowledge and understanding creates unlimited possibilities

A teacher's approach and effective strategies foster the creation of possibilities for others. Aware of the everyday realities of daily life, a teacher who has servant-leadership as his or her focus emphasizes a positive outlook. A teacher's work recognizes that the real world beyond the confines of a classroom still operates and functions in a human context. We are each involved with each other in human interactions. Teaching's true essence revolves around the development of relationships. Caring teachers interact with students as people; they relate in human encounters—they feel, they listen, they touch. With such an approach, the servant-leader as teacher confirms teaching as a covenant of devotion, a covenant of giving, a covenant of caring.



HALLMARKS OF TEACHING AS SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

'Tis the human touch in this world that counts,
The touch of your hand and mine,
Which means far more to the fainting heart
Than shelter and bread and wine;
For shelter is gone when the night is o'er,
And bread lasts only a day,
But the touch of the hand and the sound of the voice
Sing on in the soul always.
(Spencer Michael Free, 1918, p. 523)

Poetry often inspires. How uplifting to think about the wondrous songs a teacher's touch stirs within the hearts and minds of students. A teacher's sharing of knowledge can be the catalyst that sparks a student's quest for understanding. A teacher's caring spirit can nurture a love for learning. A teacher's commitment can support a student's struggle to grasp an idea, a concept, a formula, an abstraction, a computer application. A teacher's life's work ennobles the halls, the offices, the playing fields, the classrooms of a genuine community of learning.

The real world calls for practical, measurable, defined advancement. The world of "what if...?" that a teacher conjures in the mind of a student calls for genuine human advancement. Such advancement calls for people whose minds are infused with compassion for a real-world situation and a calling to act in any helpful way. That is the legacy of the servant-leader teacher. Through commitment to teaching and the sharing of knowledge,



the teacher allows, encourages, and spurs people to be free, to become liberated minds, creative hands, powerful listeners, sensitive eyes, and imaginative hearts.

MINDS AND HEARTS

An educator with a genuine servant-leadership approach fosters the development of not only the minds but also the hearts of others. Teaching is effective when learning is an experience. The process is connected through the conscious, intentional, and sincere choice to impart knowledge.

As a *conscious choice*, teaching embodies an effective sharing of knowledge and insights through open, genuine exchange and dialogue. A teacher strives to encourage, motivating each student to take personal ownership and enjoyment in their learning.

As an *intentional act*, teaching conveys a genuine and respectful caring for the other. A dedicated teacher not only supports but also promotes a person's intellectual depth of understanding, his or her social development, emotional well-being, and overall personal growth as a unique individual.

As a *sincere desire*, teaching involves selfless giving to enrich the lives of others. In this context, a teacher's efforts reflect an ongoing commitment to assist the development of each person as an individual with unique capability and potential. One's teaching becomes truly dedicated to enhancing another person's humanity and enabling another person's capacity to live life to the fullest.

As Morrie Schwartz, the teacher wonderfully written about



by Mitch Albom (1997) in his book, *Tuesdays With Morrie*, profoundly states: “The way you get meaning into your life is to devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community around you, and devote yourself to creating something that gives you purpose and meaning” (p. 192). Consequently, a servant-leader teacher influences not only the learning of others, but also how they live their lives as knowledgeable, caring, involved and loving people.

LIVING A MEANINGFUL LIFE

As we reflect on the meaning of a teacher as servant-leader, the insightful words attributed to Father Pedro Arrupe, a former Father Superior of the Society of Jesus, stand out as poignant. As quoted in a book by Father James Martin (2010), Fr. Arrupe’s reflection speaks to a person’s, to a teacher’s most profound meaning and purpose:

Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is
than Falling in Love.

Falling in Love in a quite absolute, final way.

What you fall in love with,
what seizes your imagination,
will affect everything!

Who or what you fall in love with
will decide for you what will get you out of bed in the
morning,

it will influence what you will do with your evenings,
it will tell you how you will spend your weekends,
it will direct what you will read, who you know,



what may break your heart,
and what may amaze you with joy and gratitude.
Fall in love, stay in love,
and it will decide everything. (p. 219)

How simple a statement, yet how powerful its message!
Fall in love; stay in love; as humans we cherish the idea. Father Arrupe calls each of us to this deepest of human emotions. He challenges us to live our lives as passionately as we feel for that which gives our lives meaning.

The “what you fall in love with,” for a teacher, captures the essence of one’s commitment to teaching. Learning is an exciting endeavor. As a teacher looks at Father Arrupe’s words, one thinks of how his or her passion for teaching stirs the imagination, awakens creativity, and energizes one’s thinking.

Teaching and learning have unlimited potential. A teacher helps shape who a student will become. Teaching is a sacred trust to foster a person’s intellectual and personal development.

- A teacher has unforgettable influence.
- A teacher instills a desire to think, to create, to dream, to hope.
- A teacher emphasizes pursuing excellence while acquiring knowledge and understanding.
- A teacher encourages discovery, the development of original ideas.
- A teacher inspires a passion for living life intelligently, creatively, and with compassion.



By sparking a person's curiosity, a teacher enables a student to grow through the power of seeking greater knowledge and understanding not just in a subject area, but also through a greater sense of self.

THE LIBERATING NATURE OF THE TEACHER AS SERVANT-LEADER

A teacher's encouragement can transform students into active agents in their own education. Given the freedom to make knowledge one's own, each student experiences the exhilarating spirit of learning, investigation, inquiry, questioning, analyzing, and synthesizing. As thinkers they burn with passion, their minds are alive—ignited by the torch of knowledge—and their personalities bloom with conviction, a sense of purpose and service, and a desire to pursue greater knowledge and personal understanding.

Reflecting again on the essential dimensions of a servant-leader as described by Greenleaf (1970/2008), the importance of the person emerges above all else. Greenleaf advocated for a personal approach to others that was founded on genuine self-sacrifice, caring, and enhancing the lives of others. Consider the following:

- A person desires to serve; this inner motivation leads one to choose to serve. A person's entire leadership is as servant first; such service to others reflects a person's genuine way of life.
- One serves to meet the needs of others.
- One serves to assist and to enhance the growth of



others; others become better, deeper, more fulfilled persons.

The most powerful force that establishes the purpose of teaching and gives substance to the activities of teaching is the strength and nobility of individual commitment.

Personal commitment allows one's passion to unleash the philosophy, the rationale, the thinking, the reason for one's actions and choices. The why and the what of teaching emerge and flourish. The how involved in teaching is all about the power of the person and his or her impact on others. It is the strength of one's commitment that is the pulsating force that motivates and the spirit that breathes life into a teacher's being. This passion can ignite growth in self and especially in others.

The individual teacher activates caring, displays concern, fosters appreciation and respect, motivates dedication, and generates giving. The context of the teacher as servant-leader is the process of teaching; his or her focus is on others as one strives to create a genuine community of learning that influences those within and beyond its scope and confines.

THE TRUE TEST OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

The ultimate application of Greenleaf's affirmation of an authentic servant-leader is to assess his or her impact on others. The goal of teaching is to make people mindful of their personal responsibility to self and to others, of their essential choices, of their higher calling beyond self, of their social responsibility to their community and to society. Here it becomes essential to ask if the students of a servant-leader teacher will develop a desire to



serve; will they demonstrate a concern for those struggling, for the least fortunate, so that the lives of others become enhanced, more enriched, more fulfilled?

The following critical comparisons could serve as a way to assess the influence of the life's work of the servant-leader teacher by the choices a person makes. Hopefully, a person taught and served by a genuine servant-leader teacher takes the positive action stated when confronted with each of the following significant challenges...

- Sees poverty overwhelm: Will one act and work for the poor, or speak of blame, ignore, do nothing?
- Sees an abuse of power arise: Will one demand and ask for accountability, or remain passive, silent, and compliant?
- Sees violence and hatred influence: Will one intervene, or turn away and expect others to act?
- Sees new forms of genocide emerge, as in the Holocaust, Balkans, Armenia, Rwanda, Sudan, and so many other places: Will one show compassion and urge the world to intervene for humanitarian concerns, or will they find rationales to excuse inaction because of cost, economic reasons, and indifference due to a lack of identity on ethnic, religious, and cultural lines?
- Senses injustice: Will one strive to ensure equality of opportunity, or tacitly accept subtle forms of discrimination, especially of others different than them in color, ethnicity, creed, or culture?



- Becomes aware of ignorance: Will one work to have knowledge shared in a variety of formats, or allow the denial of equal educational opportunities to continue and permit the exploitation of other human beings to thrive?
- Becomes aware of any form of attack on academic integrity and the pursuit of truth: Will one stand up for the value of intellectual honesty, or allow political influences to compromise investigated, researched, and validated truths?

Today's world needs mindful, aware, engaged, knowledgeable people so that new realities of justice and equity can be created and then realized by all people. If the responses to the concerns posited above result in positive choices and actions, then the effects of the teacher servant-leader's teaching have long lasting influence. Such teaching involves a dynamic process of encouraging ongoing individual development. Such teaching fosters the possibility of personal evolution. Such teaching goes beyond the sharing of knowledge. It establishes caring and concern as equal hallmarks in the profession of teaching.

The commitment, the dedication, the passion of the teacher as servant-leader encourages the development of a quality of thinking so that an individual's acquired knowledge and understanding enhances and advances the lives of others. With such action, the servant-leader described by Greenleaf (1970/2008) teaches vibrantly and nobly.



THE CHOICE IS OURS

Robert Greenleaf's writings have influenced several generations of people. Part of Greenleaf's great contribution to the world was the simple act of bringing together the words servant and leader in an innovative hyphenated word, servant-leader. In providing us with a name for something that many of us intuitively understand, he has helped to link together many who might otherwise have felt even more isolated in their beliefs and in their workplaces. We believe that leading others can be quite meaningful. Serving others is better yet. However, both serving and leading others is the best. It offers opportunities for wholeness, for making a difference in the world, and for helping to fulfill Greenleaf's (1970/2008) "best test" of a servant-leader: Is one "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?" (p. 15).

It is helpful to understand that servant-leadership starts within each one of us, and that it is primarily a personal philosophy and commitment that we can choose to practice in any environment. If we understand Greenleaf's best test as the fundamental understanding of servant-leadership, then it becomes clear that the choice to seek to practice servant-leadership is ours to make and no one else's. Our personal embracing of servant-leadership does not require the approval of our supervisor or our organization's chief executive. We don't need anyone's permission to personally do our best to act as a servant-leader. It is our choice.



Another helpful insight is to state the obvious: There are no perfect servant-leaders, and no perfect servant-led institutions. Institutions are led by people, and people are imperfect. Even the most well-intentioned servant-leaders in training (and we are all of us, always, servant-leaders in training) will at some point in time do or say something that we regret. At those times, the best thing to do is to sincerely apologize and seek to learn from it. In other instances, someone else may become angry at us for a decision that we are convinced was the right one and made with the greater good in mind. When that happens, and if we are aware of it, the opportunity is there to try and promote healing by reaching out to one another. Of course, the effective use of foresight, listening, and other servant-leader characteristics can often help us to avoid this sort of thing in the first place.

Servant-leadership isn't pie-in-the-sky kind of work. It requires commitment and dedication. And, yet, for those who feel called to it, it makes all the difference in the world.

The servant-leader is servant first ... The best test, and 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 he benefit, or at least, will he not be further deprived? (Greenleaf, 1970/2008, p. 15)



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