



WHO IS THE SERVANT LEADER?

—ROBERT GREENLEAF

Who is the servant-leader? Is not every servant a leader because of influence by example? Walt Whitman may have answered this when he wrote, “We convince by our presence.”

Servant-leaders differ from other persons of goodwill because they act on what they believe. Consequently, they “know experimentally” and there is a sustaining spirit when they venture and risk. To the worldly, servant-leaders may seem naive; and they may not adapt readily to prevailing institutional structures.

The hierarchy of contemporary institutions that exist to serve humankind may be seen to be on three levels. In the base group are families, communities, businesses, governments, schools, and health and social agencies. Standing next above, in a position to serve both individuals and institutions, and with power to exert a value-clarifying influence, are churches and universities. At the third level, because of the great opportunity to harbor and nurture prophetic voices that give vision and hope, I see theological seminaries and foundations. In a sustained good society, the gap between opportunity and performance narrows progressively at levels two and three. When there is faltering, as there seems to be now, the gaps between opportunity and performance may have widened, perhaps most at the third level.

The transforming movement, should there be one, may come from anywhere and may spread in unaccountable ways. But that movement will be favored if seminaries and foundations give shelter and encouragement to the originators, and if churches and universities are effective mediators to base-line institutions. All have the opportunity to convince by their presence, by acting on what they believe *in their internal affairs*, and by being more hospitable to servant-leaders.



In the absence of solid evidence of such initiatives, servant-leaders may stand alone, largely without the support of their culture, as a saving remnant of those who care for both persons and institutions, and who are determined to make their caring count—*wherever they are involved*. This brings them, as individuals, constantly to examine the assumptions they live by. Thus, their leadership by example sustains trust.

They also serve who only stand and wait.
—John Milton