



THE JOURNEY OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

—LARRY C. SPEARS

With great joy, I want to commend all our authors in this year's journal. The depth of thought and willingness to enter the crucible of life with an enduring vision of servant leadership have been very inspiring to me. The articles collected in this volume represent many countries, varied points of view, and a vast landscape of human courage. In my own life, I recently decided to take a purposeful voyage of my own through a landscape that has captured my imagination for some years. As the song says, I took a trip on Route 66. The famed American highway lived up to its billing and the trip was a transformative experience. What follows are some of my thoughts on the conclusion of that journey. I hope these thoughts aid you in your own significant journeys in life, work, and love.

While I suspect that I will continue to gain insights from my Route 66 Journey, I want to share a few thoughts that have come to me. For most of January 2010 I traveled on Route 66, and in my initial blog posting of January 6, I mentioned that I had wanted to make this journey along Route 66 for quite a few years, but that I had repeatedly postponed it. The simple idea of taking three weeks off to do something like this seemed like a frivolous idea to me. I use the word *frivolous* in an effort to help make clear the essence of what it was that had kept me from making the trip: My own sense of logic and responsibility had led me to reach other conclusions.

What finally enabled me to turn that dream into reality occurred last fall when I asked myself two questions: "Why do I want to make this journey?" and, "What is it going to take for me to do this?"

My answer to the first question ("Why do I want to make this journey?") included such things as: The desire to try something new; my love of long-distance driving; my use of long-distance driving as an opportunity for contemplation; the opportunity to visit with friends along the way; interest in seeing things that I had read about over the years; and, a vague feeling of



wanting to jump-start the New Year in a different fashion. As I look back on it, most of these answers had always been a part of why I was eager to take this trip.

It was my answer to the second question, “What is it going to take for me to do this?” that finally made it happen. The idiosyncratic answer that unlocked the door for me was: Perhaps I could make some use of the trip as an opportunity to do some writing about both the journey itself and servant-leadership. For some, the need to ask that question in the first place, or to find an answer for it, may be perplexing. For others, I can imagine that the question may make sense, but that the answer might seem odd. Speaking as someone who has been called “Mr. Responsibility” on more than one occasion, I can only say with some clarity that my particular answer to that question was the key to my making the journey.

THE GRAPES OF WRATH AND SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

I brought along with me on this trip a copy of John Steinbeck’s great work, *The Grapes of Wrath*. First published in 1939, *The Grapes of Wrath* is the classic story of the Joad family who are forced to leave their home in Oklahoma during the Great Depression, and of their journey along Route 66 (“The Mother Road”) in search of the mythical good life in California. *The Grapes of Wrath* provides an unflinching look at the circumstances of farmers-turned-migrant workers as they traveled west in search of jobs and stability. Acts of violence and cruelties both great and small befall the Joads and their extended family along the way. Their difficult lives in this novel are punctuated by occasional acts of kindness. And yet, it is these few acts of kindness that help to fuel their sense of hope for a better future. As I finished reading the book while on my Route 66 journey I was reminded of Robert Greenleaf’s “Best Test” of servant-leadership, and how it, too, fuels my own sense of hope for a better future. Greenleaf writes: “*It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test 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?*”

Following years of thinking about making the Route 66 journey, once I had convinced myself to make the trip I wanted to start immediately and



not put it off any longer. While it wasn't the ideal time of year in terms of weather, I chose to make it happen at the earliest time possible, which ended up being January. As I reflect upon the highlights of the journey now ended, these are some of the things that come to mind—

FRIENDS

I thoroughly enjoyed visiting with old and new friends on this trip, including: Larry Fidelus in Joliet, Illinois; Jamie and Maren Showkeir, Victoria Crawford, and Jeff and Jennifer McCollum, all in Phoenix, Arizona; Cobe and Bruce Frobos in Rio Verde, Arizona; Warren Bennis, and Roger Slifer, both in Santa Monica, California.

GEOGRAPHY

I enjoyed seeing areas of the United States that I had never seen before. In particular, I was impressed with the stark beauty of so much of the landscape in New Mexico and Arizona. The snowcapped mountains were wonderful to see. And, while it rained during my short sojourn in Santa Monica, it was also good to see the Pacific Ocean once again. I have visited the Atlantic Ocean twenty or thirty times over the years; but, I have only been to the Pacific Ocean a handful of times.

CITIES AND TOWNS

It was interesting to stay overnight in the following towns and cities along the way: Joliet, Illinois; Springfield, Illinois; Springfield, Missouri; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Amarillo, Texas; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Flagstaff, Arizona; Phoenix, Arizona; Rio Verde, Arizona; Kingman, Arizona; Barstow, California; Santa Monica, California; Beaumont, California; Goodyear, Arizona; Deming, New Mexico; Tucumcari, New Mexico; Clinton, Oklahoma; and, Lebanon, Missouri.

THE DRIVE

While the winter weather made driving quite challenging on some days (I encountered snow, ice, hail, rain, and high winds on roughly half of the trip),



on the whole I enjoyed the long hours of driving Route 66 and associated highways. I traveled much of the journey in silence and enjoyed having the time for reflection, and to think about several creative projects. I also had the pleasure of listening to all of the Beatles' albums, once again, while on this trip.

STATISTICS

Over the course of twenty-one days I traveled a total of 4,844 miles through the following states: Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. While weather woes prompted me to skip some parts of Route 66 in favor of the better maintained highways, I estimate that I drove on 1,700 out of the 2,300 miles that constitute Route 66.

WRITING

I wrote a total of 38 pieces (about 14,500 words) that were posted in a travel Blog at the Spears Center Web site. Roughly half of them had to do with the journey, and the other half dealt with servant-leadership in some fashion, including two interviews that I conducted along the way. I especially enjoyed writing short pieces, but a large quantity of them. Also, while I am used to writing mostly in the third person, I enjoyed the act of writing most of these Blog items in the first person. The discipline of writing one or two pieces per day was an interesting exercise in and of itself.

BOOKS

I made the time to read and reread a number of books along the way. These included four books written by friends of mine, plus one classic novel:

Authentic Conversations: Moving from Manipulation to Truth and Commitment, by Jamie and Maren Showkeir (Berrett-Koehler, 209 pages, 2008, www.henning-showkeir.com). One of the best books available on how to improve the quality of meaningful dialogue in the workplace.

The Art & Practice of Trust: Finding Your Way Through Uncertainty, Change, & Transition, by Victoria Crawford (Way of Discovery Press,



153 pages, 2009, www.wayofdiscovery.com). A caring look at personal growth and development through four guideposts of willingness, awareness, discernment, and action.

The Streets of Forest Highlands: Stories Behind the Names, by Cobe Frobes (Forest Highlands Association, 70 pages, 2006). A delightful anthology comprised of some thirty biographical sketches of founders of the town of Flagstaff, Arizona, after whom streets have been named.

On Becoming a Leader, by Warren Bennis (Perseus Publishing, 218 pages, 2003 edition). A wise and inspiring book, *On Becoming a Leader* offers great insights into the nature of leaders and leadership. One of the truly classic books in contemporary leadership literature.

The Grapes of Wrath, by John Steinbeck (Penguin Books, 619 pages, 1992 edition). The defining work by this Nobel Prize-winning author, *The Grapes of Wrath* was a book that I first read in college some thirty-five years ago. It was the original source of my awareness and interest in Route 66 (“The Mother Road”).

SURPRISES

I was surprised by how much I enjoyed my visit to the Route 66 Museum in Clinton, Oklahoma, and by how well organized it was. It was a great mix of information and inspiration. I was also surprised by my discovery of the Bible Museum located within a room at the Hampton Inn in Goodyear, Arizona, along with learning that it had links to the Byrd family in Indiana. Most of all, I was surprised by how interesting I found nearly every aspect of this trip to be. In that way, it proved to be a tremendously satisfying trip.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

I either learned and/or was reminded of some things as a result of this trip:

12. There is something about long-distance driving that I find quite satisfying.
11. I valued the opportunity to read more, and more intensively, than is usually the case.



10. I enjoyed looking at the mountains in the distance much more than I did actually driving up and down them.
9. We live in a large country that is filled with fascinating people and interesting sights to see.
8. Having a GPS in your car is a wonderful thing, especially when you aren't sure where you are going.
7. I enjoyed writing these short pieces for the Blog, and I am glad I made it an integral part of the trip.
6. I appreciated seeing places along Route 66 that I had read about for years.
5. There is an element of fun to be found in adventures great and small.
4. I value my friendships, and I am grateful for them.
3. There is an element of insight that comes as a result of quiet contemplation and solitude.
2. I appreciated my wife Beth's understanding as I was away from home for three weeks.
1. There is no place like home.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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