



THE SERVANT-MENTOR

Raising up the Next Generation of Servant-Leaders

—NATHANIEL PEARSON

As a generation nears retirement age, a new generation of leaders prepares to fill the previous generation's place in organizations across the globe. Organizations, both for-profit and not, face the challenge of raising up leaders that possess both the skills and loyalty needed to move forward while maintaining the organization's core values. Contemporaneously, leaders in the twilights of their careers face new questions regarding their lives and legacies. This article begins by providing a brief history of organizational mentoring from both a formal and an informal standpoint. It will then move to thoughts on servant-leadership, creating the foundation for the core of the text, in which a servant-leadership-based mentoring model is proposed. The paper concludes with an acknowledgment of the need for further research into the intersection of servant-leadership and mentoring, including real world testing of a servant-mentorship model.

In an interview with Spears and Noble, bestselling author Margaret J. Wheatley was asked whether she had encountered many organizations that had a plan in place for developing the next generation of leaders. Her response was telling. In her extensive research on leadership, Wheatley had come across only one organization that had a long-term leadership development plan: the U.S. Army. The Army, according to Wheatley, made a deliberate effort to look to the future through its strategies and initiatives. Remarking on the degree to which this intentional, forward-thinking attitude differs from the norm, Wheatley stated, "What I see in common contrast to that is organizations where to even ask younger people what their vision is feels like a breach of cultural norms" (Spears 2004, 256). The notion of intergenerational collaboration is too often a foreign one in a wide range of organizations.



According to Leveson (2000), companies hope to hire young, new talent, but have found that colleges and universities are falling short in teaching the practical skills necessary for the workplace. Still, workplaces across the globe are being flooded with new workers from the so-called millennial generation, which is comprised of people born from 1977 to 1997 (Meister and Willyerd 2010). Meister & Willyerd stated that by 2015, millennials will make up nearly half the world's workforce. Unlike the workforce of their parents' generation, the millennial generation is more concerned with job happiness and satisfaction than long-term stability (Williams 2009). As a result, organizations must develop new ways to promote longevity and loyalty from within. Opportunities for recognition, growth, and advancement must be made available for companies to retain their brightest prospects.

A Maritz poll showed that only 7 percent of employees strongly agreed that they trusted senior leaders to look out for their best interests, and a mere 7 percent strongly agreed that they trusted their co-workers to do so (Le Blanc and Drazen 2010). A culture of distrust translates into a workplace devoid of passion, cooperation, and growth. The role of trust in organizational satisfaction cannot be overestimated. The same poll found that 58 percent of respondents with strong trust in their management were completely satisfied with their jobs, and nearly two-thirds of self-identified satisfied workers stated they would be happy to spend the rest of their career with that company (Le Blanc and Drazen 2010). The numbers paint a clear picture, with a clear indication that a culture of trust must be at the forefront in organizations hoping to retain and develop workers from within. Employee turnover can be deflating for an institution's culture and morale. Additionally, a compounding factor of high turnover is tied to the bottom line. In a world of shrinking budgets, organizations need to make difficult choices regarding the allotment of funds to training programs (Finegold and Wagner 2002). A high rate of turnover translates to a major drain on staff and financial resources. Culture-defining budgetary and training decisions have the potential to set the direction of these organizations for the next several decades.

In mentoring, organizations have access to a training tool that combines specific occupational training with relationship building and employee development. Mentoring creates a culture of learning across the institution (Collins 2009). A myriad of organizations have created formal mentoring programs to improve technical knowledge and develop organizational culture (Allen, Eby, and Lentz 2006; Bragg 1989; Sugrue and Kim 2004). By utilizing an organization's own people, mentoring can provide tangible benefits



from both a financial and a personal-development standpoint (Zey 1991). According to Davis (2005), mentoring can have positive effects not only on the organization and protégé, but on the mentor as well, through increased recognition, job satisfaction, and greater productivity.

A key role of an organizational mentor lies in his or her ability to pass on the culture of an organization. Culture plays a key role in an institution's makeup. Wenger recognized the living nature of organizations. By studying "learning in the context of our lived experience of participation in the world" (Wenger 1998, 3), he developed the concept of communities of practice. Wenger elucidated the existence of four core components of a social learning theory: meaning, practice, community, and identity. Leider and Spears, working from a Greenleaf essay on the topic of growing older (cited in Spears 1998), identified "four flames of savoring life." They are: The flame of identity, the flame of community, the flame of passion, and the flame of meaning (Leider and Spears 2009, 4), clear extensions of Wenger's social learning theory. These four flames create a foundation from which servant-leadership-based mentoring, or servant-mentoring, can be built, an idea that will be expanded later in this text. Maturing leaders understand that they can leave a lasting impact through the intentional act of pouring their knowledge and experience into the life of another, much like the master and apprentice of old.

FORMALIZING ORGANIZATIONAL MENTORING

Mentoring and apprenticeship have a long and storied history. The Code of Hammurabi required artisans to teach their craft to the next generation (*Encyclopedia Britannica* 2012). From medieval Europe to Colonial America, apprenticeship provided opportunities for a tradesman to pass on his skill while benefiting from help with his labor. A craftsman's apprentice was more than a hired hand. He was to carry on the shop in the name of the original craftsman, upholding his name and reputation. It was expected that before a craftsman reached the point of waning production that he had already trained up an apprentice to take over his craft. Apprentices often had little to no formal education, and their apprenticeships provided a path to some level of financial security in the future (Fuller and Unwin 1998). With time, the structure of apprenticeships advanced from informal agreements to more regulated arrangements through the forming of guilds and unions (*Encyclopedia Britannica* 2012). In much the same way, mentoring has become formalized in a variety of institutions (Douglas 1997).



Allen, Eby, and Lentz (2006) recognized the increasing popularity of formal mentoring programs across a variety of organizations. Formal mentoring programs are those that are assigned and monitored by an institution for employee development and training (Douglas 1997). The history of formalized mentoring programs can be traced back to 1931, when The Jewel Tea Company established a program that matched newly hired MBAs with senior managers (Russell 1991). To date, a variety of organizations have developed formal mentoring programs. Examples include learning institutions (Kavoosi, Elman, and Mauch 1995) and government agencies (Collins 2009), as well as for-profit and nonprofit businesses (Catalyst 1993). While such programs find their roots in informal mentoring relationships, formal mentoring programs tend to be regimented and specifically tuned to enabling growth within the confines of an organization. For example, the formal mentoring program presented by Collins included goals of career development, leadership and management development, education support, organizational development and culture change, customer service, staff retention, recruitment, and the management and transfer of knowledge (Collins 2009, 4).

Over twenty years ago, it was estimated that more than a thousand formal mentoring programs were in existence across the United States (Zey 1991). Formalized mentoring relationships have been shown to have positive impacts on worker productivity, motivation, communication, and reduced turnover rates (Douglas 1997). Interestingly, workers report that informal mentoring relationships have even stronger impacts than formal programs. Informal mentoring relationships possess an organic element, and are based upon deep and genuine relationships. These relationships tend to last far longer than formalized apprenticeships, and their scope extends far beyond the workplace (Davis 2005). Chao, Walz, and Gardner (1992) found that informally mentored individuals reported higher salaries and greater career satisfaction than both formally mentored and nonmentored individuals.

Even in the most formalized form, mentoring is dependent upon relationship. The demands on both the mentor and the apprentice in terms of time, energy, and commitment are substantial. According to Pittenger and Heimann (2000), the self-efficacy of the mentor and the protégé are directly related to the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship. Self-efficacy has been defined as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (Bandura 1997, 2). The willingness of both parties to engage in challenging activities, be adaptable, and maintain a positive attitude throughout the process is



pivotal for the success of the mentoring relationship. The responsibility for success falls on the shoulders of both the mentor and the protégé. While a prospective protégé should exhibit curiosity and a willingness to learn, the mentor must exude a willingness to listen, a desire to help, the patience to disciple, and above all else, eagerness to serve.

THE PLACE OF SERVICE

A focus on service moves the mentoring relationship beyond self-improvement to impact on a larger scale. Robert Greenleaf advanced the concept of servant-run organizations, which place a premium not only on the success of an organization, but also on the community in which the institution exists (Greenleaf 2002). As such, a mentoring program built on the tenets of servant-leadership would aim to develop workers as both successful employees and impactful global citizens, implementing the deeper aspects of informal mentoring into a formalized structure. Servant-leadership is a term originally coined by Robert Greenleaf in his seminal work *The Servant-as Leader*, which was first published in 1970. He envisioned leaders who would place the growth and happiness of people over the well-being of the organization. These leaders have broad influence through helping others to rise to their fullest potential. In his careful study of Greenleaf's original writings, Spears (2004) identified ten characteristics that emerged as critical to the path and function of a servant-leader. These traits included: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. While Greenleaf never provided a formal definition of servant-leadership, van Dierendonck (2010) suggested that his "best test" provides perhaps the closest example. Greenleaf wrote,

The Servant-Leader is servant-first....It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead....The best test, and difficult to administer is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit, or at least not further be harmed? (Greenleaf 2002, 27)

Greenleaf's (1970) "best test" provides a measuring stick for servant-mentorship. The intentionality of the servant-mentoring relationship is reflected in the transformed culture of the organization.



THE MAKEUP OF SERVANT-MENTORSHIP

Servant-mentorship, which is based upon the tenets of servant-leadership, would allow for formal mentoring relationships that benefit the organization, the individual, and the community. The previously referenced “flames of savoring life” by Leider and Spears (2009, 4), present a framework from which servant-mentorship can be defined. In their original essay, the authors defined these flames as present in the lives of “new elders” (ibid.), for whom servant-leadership has defined their life’s work and mission. As leaders grow older, their role within their organization and community begins to change. During this transitional time, leaders reflect upon their work and legacy. Erikson identified the final two stages of psychosocial development that occur during this period, as “generativity vs. stagnation” and “ego integrity vs. despair” (Erikson 1968, 138–41). These stages are a time for the aging individual to explore new avenues of meaning while reflecting on his impact up to that point.

The four flames—identity, community, passion, and meaning—were originally presented as avenues for reflection of the senior leader (Leider and Spears 2009, 4). As the leader looks back on his or her life and its impact, these four flames can also form the catalyst for the work of mentoring the next generation of leaders. Together with Spears’s (2004) ten characteristics of servant-leadership, these flames create a foundation from which mentoring can take place. Table 1 illustrates the amalgamation of Leider and Spears’s (2009) four flames of savoring life with Spears’s (2004) ten characteristics of servant-leadership drawn from a systematic study of Greenleaf’s writings. In servant-mentorship, the shift moves from one of hierarchy, or boss/employee, to one of coaching and accountability (McGee-Cooper 1998). The servant-mentor puts the growth of her followers in the foremost position.

Identity

The first flame, the flame of identity, is the place where individuals look to claim their stories (Leider and Spears 2009). For many organizational leaders, much of who they are is tied to their work in the organization and community (Dorn and Sousa Poza 2010). This is neither a shallow nor an uncommon phenomenon. Identity is a key component to a person’s ability to thrive in his or her work. Ashforth and Kriener noted, “Research on identity indicates that individuals need a relatively secure and stable sense of self-definition—of



Table 1
*Overlap of “Flames of Savoring Life” with “Ten Characteristics of
Servant-Leadership”*

Identity	Community	Passion	Meaning
Listening Persuasion Foresight Healing			
Empathy Stewardship Awareness			
Growth of People Conceptualization			
Building Community			
L O V E			

who they are—within a given situation to function effectively” (Ashforth and Kriener 1999, 417). The prospective mentor acknowledges the role of identity in maturation and chooses to help another develop this gift. In contrast to strict program-focused formal mentoring relationships (United States Office of Personnel Management 2008; Collins 2009), servant-mentorship places a premium on the mentee’s ability to discover his or her own gifts and identity.

The process for identity development begins with listening. Listening is at the core of servant-leadership, for it is from here that the other characteristics can be developed (Ferch 2012). The servant-leader aims to listen not only to the words of others, but purposes to hear her inner voice as well (DeGraaf, Tilley, and Neal 2004). As the servant-leader learns more about her role in the organization and the world, she is able to help her protégés to do the same. True listening extends far beyond the mere hearing of another’s words. Active listening involves creating a safe and nonjudgmental place where people can express their true thoughts and feelings. The servant-mentor should emulate “a sustained intentness of listening” in every relationship (Greenleaf 2002, 30). Through reflective listening, the skilled mentor can help the mentee to identify the values that are most important to him.

Greenleaf referenced the prayer of Saint Francis regarding empathetic listening, “Lord, grant that I may not seek so much to be understood as to understand” (Greenleaf 2002, 31). Empathy flows naturally from purposeful listening. Empathy allows the mentor to put himself into the shoes of others, to laud their victories and share in their pain (Ferch 2012). Empathetic listening allows depth to develop in the mentoring relationship. The mentor strikes a balance of teaching, correcting, and listening, making room for the



other. Through this relationship, the mentor is able to learn more about the mentee, helping to develop his or her gifts in a manner that will serve the organization, the community, and the protégé. Through the demonstration of compassion, understanding, and acceptance, the servant-mentor helps those whom she mentors to move toward a place of significance. Servant-leaders “go far beyond seeing people as ‘hired hands,’ to seeing them as ‘hired hearts’” (Poon 2006, 3). The servant-mentoring relationship, by focusing on identity development, prepares servant-leaders who will bring a sense of wholeness to their world.

Community

The flame of community sparks of belonging (Leider and Spears 2009). Moving from the place of individual identity, the focus of both the mentor and protégé shifts to one’s place in the community. There is an understanding of being a part of something greater than self. Generally, a mentor is a person who has significant experience in his or her organization, often in a leadership role (Ragins, Cotton, and Miller 2000). As such, the mentor is in a defined role within the organization. Servant-leaders, according to Greenleaf (2002), are stewards of their organizations and communities. Block defined stewardship as “holding something in trust for another” (cited in Spears and Lawrence 2004, 25). The servant-mentoring relationship involves the passing on of that which was kept. Servant-mentoring is an investment in another. Not only is the servant-leader committed to the care of the community, she is also committed to the growth of people. Mentoring is a natural outflow of the servant-leader’s commitment to the other.

Community is a key aspect of servant-leadership. Greenleaf himself remarked, in a manner most applicable to the notion of mentoring, “Where there is not community, trust, respect, ethical behavior are difficult for the young to learn and for the old to maintain” (Greenleaf 1970/1991, 21). The idea of community encompasses several of the characteristics that Spears (2004) gleaned from Greenleaf’s writings. *Building community* is the clearest, while *commitment to the growth of people*, *stewardship*, and *persuasion* fit together as characteristics that involve the developing and nurturing of mutual relationships. Commitment to the growth of people is paramount to the mentoring relationship. Showkeir and Showkeir described this trait as a desire “to actively create an environment where people are encouraged and supported as they develop their unique talents and maximize their potential”



(Showkeir and Showkeir 2011, 163). Greenleaf asserted that the best test of servant-leadership is found in the growth of people in the areas of health, wisdom, freedom, autonomy, and a willingness to serve others (Greenleaf 2002, 27). Stewardship assumes the holding of something of value for another. The servant-mentor should approach her protégé with a sense of responsibility and obligation, understanding that she has been entrusted with the empowerment of another. Empowerment allows for the cultivation of diverse approaches, making room for the mentee's unique creativity and passion to emerge (McCollum and Moses 2011). The servant-mentor uses persuasion, then, not as a tool to regulate and build conformity, but as an invitation to dialogue. In this way, the servant-leader is able to demonstrate the ethos of servant-first leadership, in direct contrast to the positional authority that exists in many organizations (Spears 2004).

Passion

Mentoring has long been about the passing on of job knowledge and competency (Ragins, Cotton, and Miller 2000). For the servant-leader, the mentoring relationship is also an opportunity to pass along her passion, the work that she cares about and to which she has dedicated her life. Community is a large component of the servant-leader's approach to life, as is the development of each person's individual identity. Yet the greatest passion for the servant-leader comes through the very act of service (Batten 1998). Mentoring plays a key role in the servant-leader's ability to serve the next generation. This is illustrated in Batten's final step on the continuum of actualization, "coactualization" (Batten 1998, 43). In 1934, Goldstein introduced the idea of self-actualization, which he defined as the motive to realize one's full potential (1995). Twenty years later, Maslow famously placed self actualization as the penultimate achievement in a person's growth through the hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1987). Batten hypothesized that as the servant-moves forward with a passion to serve others, he is able to move beyond the place of self-actualization to a place of coactualization, which is marked by shared meaning, symbiosis, and synergy (Batten 1998, 43).

Another side of passion for the servant-leader is illustrated by the word *compassion*. The word compassion is developed from the French words *com*, meaning "together" or "with," and *pati*, which is the root of the word *passion* and means "to suffer" (Harper 2012). In the mentoring relationship, the servant-leader has opportunity to help her protégé to develop a heart for the community



and world beyond the walls of the institution. It is from the heart of passion, and its derivative, compassion, that servant-mentoring creates a space for people to explore how their unique gifts and interests fit the needs of their organization and community (Leider and Spears 2009). At the end of his career, the experienced servant-leader has the opportunity to look back on a lifetime of achievements and failures. From this vantage point, he is able to take stock of what things truly really mattered. The servant-mentoring relationship can be a time for the sharing of lessons learned and a continued reminder to maintain proper perspective. An important aspect of this exchange is the reminder to see life through the lens of hope. As Batten stated, “Hope is the living 24-hour-a-day evidence that we count, we are real, there is good in life. Without hope, we have no motivation to live, to work, to grow” (Batten 1998, 51).

The servant-leader’s passion is perhaps best illustrated in the Biblical tale of the Good Samaritan:

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” (Luke 10:30–37, NIV)

The Good Samaritan saw beyond his own immediate world. His awareness extended beyond the worries and demands of daily life, allowing him to be available to the one in need. The servant-leader lives in a paradox, existing equally in a place of reflection and service. Sadly, too many leaders become so entrenched in their work that they miss out on the real needs of the people around them. Such was the fate of the priest and Levite in the parable. The servant-leader passes down a lifestyle of leadership that is not centered on image or stature, but on service, love, and compassion.



Meaning

A man who becomes conscious of the responsibility he bears toward a human being who affectionately waits for him, or to an unfinished work, will never be able to throw away his life. He knows the “why” for his existence, and will be able to bear almost any “how.” (Frankl 1984, 80)

In his quintessential text, Frankl developed the ideas of logotherapy, a therapeutic approach to psychological distress that identifies the desire for meaning as the primary human drive. Leider and Spears identified the fourth “flame of savoring life” as “the flame of meaning” (Leider and Spears 2009, 4). The flame of meaning is tied to the question, “What is my purpose?” (ibid.). Meaning plays a key role in the servant-leader’s life and work, which are closely tied together. Looking upon their life achievements, leaders begin to consider what their legacy will be, for what they will be remembered (ibid.). Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of legacy in terms of three factors: length, breadth, and height. The idea of length speaks of the degree to which a person is successful in living up to their own goals and aspirations. Breadth represented the impact that a person has on the people with whom she comes in contact. Height refers to a person’s standing with God and the degree to which she is living up to the purpose for which she was created (King Jr. 2001, 40). Mentoring provides an ideal opportunity for the experienced leader to leave a lasting legacy by sowing into the life of another.

The value of meaning extends not only to the mentoring servant-leader, but also to the mentee. A goal of servant-mentoring is not only that the protégé excel in her work, but that she find her life’s work to be meaningful. As Greenleaf remarked, “For the person with creative potential there is no wholeness except in using it” (Greenleaf 1970/1991, 5). The servant-mentor aims to help the other achieve wholeness and meaning in life and work. Gladwell defined meaningful work in this way:

Those three things: autonomy, complexity and a connection between effort and reward are, most people agree, the three qualities that work has to have if it is to be satisfying. It is not how much money we make that ultimately makes us happy between 9 and 5. It is whether our work fulfills us.... Work that fulfills those three criteria is meaningful. (Gladwell 2008, 149)

Gladwell’s (2008) premise echoes that of Bowie (1998), who presented a Kantian-based model of meaningful work centered on autonomy, independence, and moral development. For the servant-leader, such moral development



is predicated on the notion of love. Greenleaf stated that love begins with “unlimited liability” (Greenleaf 2002, 52). The servant-mentoring relationship, then, is one in which full investment in another is modeled throughout.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This paper serves as an introduction to the subject of servant-mentoring. As such, it is fully theoretical in nature. The ideas herein are based on a review of the literature in both mentoring and servant-leadership. The specific model, however, has not been tested in a real-world organizational setting. It would be beneficial to test these ideas in a variety of formal and informal mentoring settings, making any necessary modifications based on the outcomes produced.

The intersection of servant-leadership and mentoring is a subject that can be developed with further scholarship and research. The development of a formalized servant-leadership-based mentoring program would provide a baseline from which to measure effectiveness in a variety of organizations. A comparison to various informal and formal mentoring models would highlight the uniqueness of servant-mentorship. Longitudinal studies would be most effective in identifying the individual, organizational, and community successes that could come from the exercise of servant-mentorship.

A LOOK AHEAD

In *The Journey to the East*, the story that Greenleaf (2002) credited as the inspiration for his ideas about servant-leadership, Hesse introduced the character of Leo. In the tale, Leo is a humble servant who accompanies a league of travelers on a journey to the East. It is not until Leo disappears that the group realizes his true importance, for as a servant, he was also their leader. In a beautiful dialogue with the story’s narrator, Leo shares the essence of love that is servant-leadership:

“The law?” I asked curiously. “What law is that, Leo?”

“The law of service. He who wishes to live long must serve, but he who wishes to rule does not live long.”

“Then why do so many strive to rule?”

“Because they do not understand.” (Hesse 1972, 23–24)



As servant-leadership and mentorship meld together, communities of practice can emerge that are focused not only on bettering the organization, but the betterment of society as a whole. The principles of servant-leadership can fit into a variety of institutions (Spears and Lawrence 2002, 2004). Similarly, the servant-mentorship relationship is not a model unto itself. The application of its principles can undoubtedly add depth to both formal and informal mentoring relationships. The addition of the servant-mentorship model moves the focus of mentoring beyond the betterment of the organization. The servant-mentoring relationship delves into the personal development of the mentee as well as the enrichment of the greater community, focusing on the “four flames” of identity, community, passion, and meaning (Leider and Spears 2009, 4). Servant-leadership has the potential to transform the way organizations operate, placing service in the foremost position of organizational values. This is a shift that requires people who are willing to build serving (Greenleaf 1977) and learning (Senge 1990) organizations.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nathaniel Pearson lives in the Greater Seattle area, where he directs a nonprofit counseling program while pursuing a PhD in leadership and meaning. He is a self-professed “old soul” with a love for jazz, family, sports, and the pursuit of true happiness.