



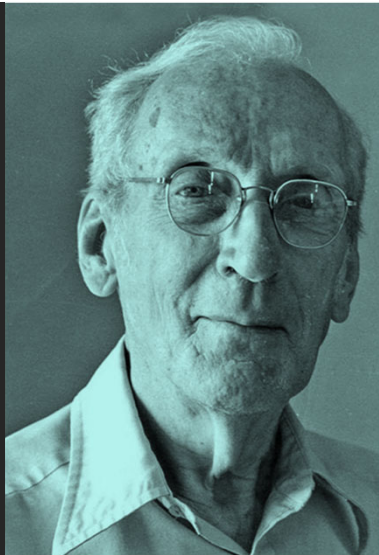
Servant-Leadership: The Key to Excellence

Shanon Radford, Gonzaga University, ORGL 530, October 2023

*“Leadership must
first and foremost
meet the needs of
others.*

*Good leaders must
first become good
servants.”*

Robert K. Greenleaf



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This quote is from Robert Greenleaf, the father of Servant-Leadership. He believed that the key to a better organization, community, world, even life, was in being of service to others.

Introduction

A leader is one who goes out first to show the way when the situation is unclear, hazardous, or offers opportunity for creative achievement.¹ But no one person, regardless of title or experience, has all the answers.

Leaders rely on followers to implement the visions and goals of their organizations. One proven way to build healthy, engaged, empowered teams capable of such implementation is through servant-leadership, the key to excellence.



Script: No additional script but for the introduction text, then advance to the next slide



What is servant-leadership?

This is a big question, and one that cannot be definitively answered in just a few slides. But let's explore one way of looking at it.

Servant-Leadership Is...

A philosophy of leadership placing the growth, well-being, and highest-priority needs of followers first¹

Profoundly relational, creative, holistic, and integrative²

A natural way to create an inclusive, accountable, equitable, and trusting workplace³

Script:

For me, servant-leadership is more of an underlying philosophy than a style, though style will become influenced by philosophy.

A servant-leader does not equate leadership with power, but with development of people. They act as coaches and facilitators for their subordinates, (Guillaume, et al., 2013)⁷ understanding that—though more difficult than simply issuing orders—this is the path to sustainable performance individually and at the organizational and community levels.

Robert Greenleaf (1977/2002)¹, who first coined the term “servant-leadership” in the 1970s, said that the servant-leader has “the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first...then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is *leader* first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions.” (p. 27). But he also reminds us that the leader-first and servant-first types are two extremes and there are many shades of grey in between.

Servant-Leadership Is Not...

A way to allow employees to take advantage of organizations⁴

Soft, touchy-feely, unrealistic, idealistic nonsense²

Akin to slavery, servitude, martyrdom, or a requirement to become completely selfless²

Among the criticisms of servant-leadership the three big ones are that 1) it encourages employees to take advantage by removing authority from the leader; 2) it is too soft to be used in command and control situations; and 3) it requires a level of altruism unattainable by normal people. This is a misunderstanding of the philosophy.

Servant-leadership is a philosophy not a specific style. There are characteristics (which we will cover later in this presentation) that servant-leaders need to develop, but how those manifest in daily practice will differ. What servant-leadership encourages is creating an environment of trust. When practiced consistently, servant-leadership builds the very foundation necessary for high employee performance. It also creates an environment where people may be *more* likely to take orders in command and control situations without complaint, knowing that they have had a say in how the organizational culture and processes have developed, as well as trusting their leader will return to the coaching/nurturing style after the crisis has passed (Manning, 2004)⁸.

Finally, it is not a call to become a martyr, slave, or completely selfless person. The use of the term “servant” and the hyphenation of the term “servant-leader” is meant to be disruptive, to encourage you to think about why you’re leading (Greenleaf, 1977/2002). If you really don’t like it, think of it as being a resource (Autry in Ferch, et al., 2015) or *of service*.



What does servant-leadership do for us?

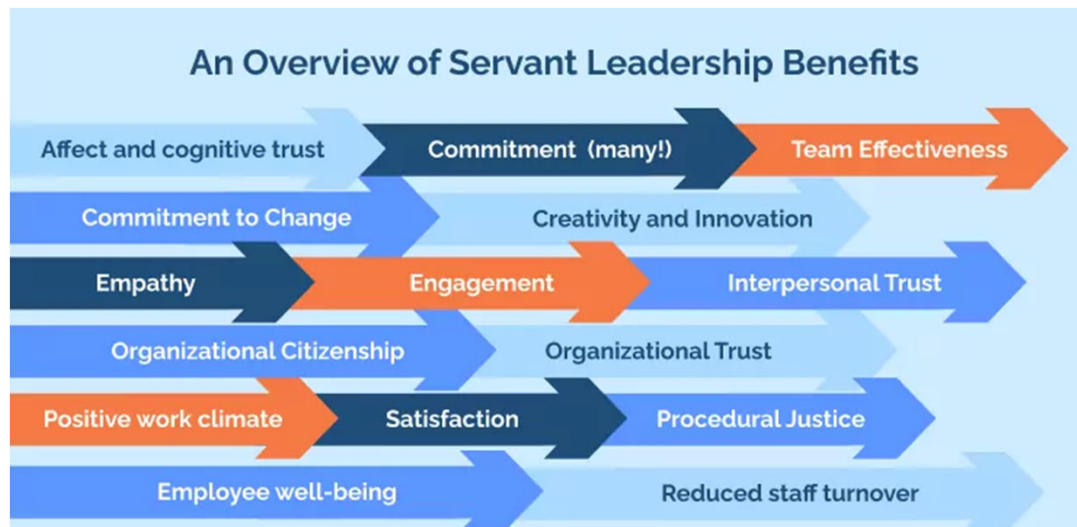
There are measurable advantages to the servant-leadership approach.

Benefits of Servant-Leadership⁶

- More engagement and accountability
- Added confidence and dedication
- Decreased sick days
- Increased employee retention
- Maximized profits

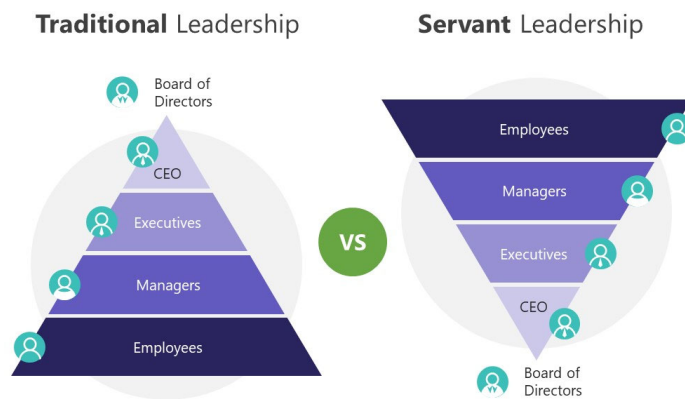
These five advantages published by the Servant-Leadership Institute and are general claims. But a 2019 article in Cath Lab Digest (Dittrich, 2019)⁹ also enumerates findings from the Cleveland Clinic. Specifically, in their 2008 Gallup employee survey, the clinic ranked in the 43rd percentile for employee engagement, with an actively engaged to disengaged ratio of 2.47:1, and their 2008 HCAHPS results from patient surveys put them below the 30th percentile. After diligently implementing servant-leadership, their 2013 survey results were 87th percentile for employee engagement, and their engaged/disengaged ratio went to 10.2:1. Finally, HCAHPS results were over the 80th percentile (where it has remained as of 2019).

There are more stories and many scholarly studies out there with similar results, particularly around engagement and satisfaction, but also profitability. Companies like Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, SAS Institute, and FedEx are all successful servant-led organizations.



The change management blog WalkMe offers this infographic of servant-leader benefits based on a synthesis of work done by researchers Lemoine, Hartnell, and Leroy, as well as Gary Roberts' book *Servant Leadership Human Resources* (2014). The WalkMe article is linked at the end of this presentation.

Invert the Pyramid



SERVANT-LEADERSHIP: THE KEY TO EXCELLENCE

2023 10

For healthcare (and particularly here at Children's), this should look very familiar. We have talked about "inverting the pyramid" for at least a decade, but we cannot seem to get there. Servant-leadership could help.

The biggest difference is in mindset and approach. Rather than coercing down the chain, barking orders that are expected to be followed, the servant-leader develops those around him or her. The Board is at the pointy end determining direction but also supporting the CEO, who supports and develops the executives, who support and develop their managers, who support and develop the remaining workforce. And along the way everyone is charged with responsibly stewarding resources (including human resources), behaving ethically, and creating an inclusive, equitable environment.

Or, as businessman Ken Blanchard put it, "Servant leadership is all about making the goals clear and then rolling your sleeves up and doing whatever it takes to help people win. In that situation, they don't work for you, you work for them."



How do I start?

It starts with a self-inventory. What brought me here? Why do I lead/want to lead? How do I view my role as a leader? You can take a servant-leader assessment (there are many online), or you can start by examining the characteristics of a servant-leader and evaluating your development in each area.

Characteristics of a Servant-Leader⁵

- **Listening** to understand others, and to one's inner voice, coupled with self-reflection
- **Empathy** to generate feelings of acceptance of the person even if performance or behavior requires correction
- **Healing** to create wholeness and work-life balance
- Both general and self-**Awareness** strengthens understanding, especially of issues involving ethics, power, and values
- Using **Persuasion** to convince others rather than positional authority coerce compliance
- **Conceptualization** to see beyond daily realities and see the bigger picture
- Using **Foresight** to leverage the lessons of the past and present into predictions for the future
- **Stewardship** to care for resources—including human resources—entrusted to the leader
- **Commitment to the Growth of People** to nurture the personal and professional growth of individuals
- **Building Community** within and without the organization

These are the ten characteristics of a servant-leader, as defined by Dr. Larry Spears (2010). Others have added to the list or rearranged it, but this is the list almost every servant-leader scholar references. I suggest reading the full paper (linked at the end of this presentation), then finding a quiet place to do an honest self-evaluation. Then pick one area where you need development and make a plan to start improving it. I picked listening and awareness, and I have been starting each day by setting an intention for how I want to show up and ending each day with an evaluation of how I did. If I fell short, I note that for the next day. Bit by bit, I am seeing improvement in both areas.

Or you can start with one concrete area in the work environment to try to improve using the characteristics as a guidepost for how you behave as a leader. For example...

Job Satisfaction and Retention

Servant leaders can create fulfilling job satisfaction with the following steps:

Leaders take an active interest in each employee. As a result, employees get tailored support for their needs.

Employees have opportunities for training, development, and promotion.

There's no micromanagement - each staff member is trusted to complete their job.

After successful projects, leaders "stand back" from the limelight: they ensure the team gets the praise.

Given the current rate of turnover and risk for more, focusing on employee job satisfaction and retention might be helpful. This graphic from Walkme (2023)¹⁰ suggests a four-step process for improving employee retention. They also explain that, "The benefits for job satisfaction also include the leaders themselves. Leaders act with humility, connection, and empathy and reduce the risk of isolation and stress from difficult decisions. Servant leaders recognize their limitations and reach out for help when needed!"

The important part is to tap into that desire to serve and to view your leadership role as part of that service. It doesn't mean you never provide corrective feedback or that you have to negotiate every decision. It means viewing your role primarily as resource to the people you lead, and then determine how best to be that resource in each interaction. It means leading with care.

Conclusion

Servant-leadership builds engagement, empowerment, ethical behavior, capability, and strong relationships, which are the keys to excellence.



I hope this presentation provided you with some new information, got you intrigued about servant-leadership, and inspires you to go out and lead with a servant's heart.

Additional resources

BOOKS

- Conversations on Servant-Leadership (Ferch, et al., 2015)
- Seven Pillars of Servant Leadership (Sipe & Frick, 2015)
- Crucial Conversations (Patterson, et al., 2012)

WEBSITES

- [Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership](#)
- [The Spears Center for Servant-Leadership](#)
- [Servant Leadership Institute](#)

ARTICLES

- [Firefighting Servant Leadership](#)
- [A Surgeon's Reflections on Love](#)
- [Taking Stock of Moral Approaches to Leadership: An Integrative Review of Ethical, Authentic, and Servant Leadership](#)

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10. WalkMe Team. (2023, May 1). *The 5 key benefits of servant leadership*. WalkMe. Retrieved October 20, 2023, from <https://change.walkme.com/servant-leadership-benefits/>

Photos and Figures

- All photos are either from the Seattle Children's Hospital open archive used with permission for educational purposes or from free use stock photos.
- Slides 9 and 13: Figures retrieved October 20, 2023, from <https://change.walkme.com/servant-leadership-benefits/>
- Slide 12: Figure retrieved October 20, 2023, from <https://slidemodel.com/templates/traditional-vs-servant-leadership-powerpoint-template/>



Thank you

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