

maranatha

Servant Leadership

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Excellent performance and progress through Servant Leadership

Leadership! Everything rises or falls on leadership. Let's start with some observations and descriptions of leadership and leaders.

- Leaders make things happen. A leader is a person who produces change in society – Brian P. Lees
- Leadership transforms followers, creates visions of the goals that may be attained, and articulates for followers the way to attain those goals – Stogill & Bass
- Leadership is the ability to decide what is to be done and then to get others to want to do it – Dwight Eisenhower
- A leader is a person you would follow to a place you wouldn't go by yourself – Joel Barker
- Leadership is the behaviour of an individual when he is divesting the activities of a group toward a shared goal – Hemphill & Coons

- Leadership is the process by which an agent induces a subordinate to behave in a desired manner – W.G. Bennis
- Leadership is the art of influencing others to their maximum performance to accomplish any task, object or project – W.A. Cohen

The magic word in successful leadership is **service**. Success is the progressive realisation of a worthy goal and the willingness to serve. Putting others first and ourselves last, leads to a great life. This leads us to the consideration of **servant leadership**.

Servant leadership is **service leadership**, not “slavish leadership”. Properly understood and conscientiously practised, servant leadership enhances good leadership.

The concept of servant leadership has been credited to Robert K. Greenleaf (1904-1990); but Christ had actually crystallized the concept many centuries before him. Jesus Christ had taught and demonstrated it effectively. He said: *“But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. But I am among you as one who serves”* (Lk. 22.26-27). *“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet”* (Jn. 13.13-14).

A servant leader is one who is first a servant; beginning with the natural desire and willingness to serve. He puts other people’s needs before his personal gain. In the words of Larry Spears, *“True leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a deep desire to help others”*.

Paradox of Servant Leadership

“Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and

the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves” (Lk. 22.24-27).

The chapter in Luke which reveals Christ as “**Servant**” and “**He that serves**” also reveals Him as “**Master**” (verse 11), “**King**” (verse 29) and “**Lord**” (verse 33). The seeming tension in the paradox of being a servant and a leader at the same time is graciously resolved by Christ in His leadership model. He was **mighty** and **meek**, **friendly** and **firm**, **tough** and **tender**, **courageous** yet **caring**, **authoritative** yet **approachable**, **resilient** yet **resigned**.

Our supreme example of servant leadership was a **Master** and a **minister**, the **Shepherd** and the **sheep**, **Sovereign Lord** as well as **servile labourer**, the **Lion** and the **lamb**.

As a leadership approach, servant leadership will aid honest harnessing of the country’s vast resources to forge our sustainable wealth and welfare. It will ensure that ministers and leaders serve with selfless motives, unfettered by counter-productive actions. Leading to serve national interest, servant leadership will produce “increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, and the sharing of power in decision making”.

There are personal traits and acquired skills that make the servant leader successful. Among these are selflessness, empathy, attentiveness, persuasion, vision, awareness, conceptualization, focus on growth and community needs. Servant leadership calls us away from self-serving interests and makes us think harder about how to move and motivate subordinates towards national transformation. It has the potential for creating positive changes throughout our society.

Proper perception of Servant Leadership

The challenge of having and releasing transformational leaders that take us to the Promised Land is greater than ever. We need a new kind of leadership. We need leaders who will motivate us to do more than we

expected to do, by raising our awareness of higher values, by getting us to transcend our self-interests, and by moving us from where we are to where we should be.

Leaders who inspire and empower followers catch their attention through vision, communication, trust and empowerment. Such are the real servant leaders. They catch their followers' attention by the vision they generate. They also bring meaning through communication. And trust or strategy, because trust is the lubrication that helps relationships and organisations work smoothly. And having inner security, these leaders are able to train, equip, empower and free others to give their best.

Here again, Jesus is our model. Who had a greater vision than Jesus? Who knew better how to communicate with His followers? Who was more trustworthy and believable than Jesus in carrying through His mission? And who has ever been able to empower others more than He, through the total giving of Himself?

We gain better understanding of divinely inspired servant leadership as we consider seven components of Christ's leadership:

1. Servant of His generation

"They replied, If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favourable answer, they will always be your servants" (1 Kings 12.7). Leaders work for those they lead and consequently leave their mark on their generation and on the world. Christ said of Himself *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Mk. 10.45). He was a genuine leader. He never complained; rather He found a solution to every problem and always served. "No complaint, no conflict, no contempt, no conceit, no contrast, no combat" was the principle that characterised His service.

2. Supporter and sustainer of the grassroots

"The large crowd listened to him with delight" (Mk. 12.37). The grassroots – the common people – received the greatest benefits from Him. *"The common people heard Him gladly"*. Servant

leaders refuse to play power games. Instead of desiring to achieve positions of dominance in society (like the Pharisees and the Sadducees), they turn their creative efforts to meeting the needs of the common people.

3. Selflessness in giving

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn. 10.11). Servant leaders derive their joy of fulfilment from opportunities to give. They downplay material gain, put their commitments first and are always willing to go the second mile. Plato, the Greek thinker, sees the "lover of gain" as unsuitable for leadership.

4. Strategist with a goal

"In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world" (Jn. 18.37). Leaders burn with a vision and are always developing strategies to reach the goal. They also recruit servant leaders with passion and a single-minded purpose for goal achievement. The servant leader becomes a dynamo, persevering against all odds. Having a worthy goal, a clear vision and an iron commitment to fulfil that vision, he presses on with good conscience, courage and selflessness.

5. Separation from guile and greed

"For your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8.9). Leaders often want to compel or command a following. But people will not do what we want them to do simply because we command them. They will do it if we set an example to imitate. Servant leadership style that is service-centred and example-oriented will always have followers with integrity, loyalty and accountability.

6. Shoulder for His government

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders" (Is. 9.6). The shoulder of a

servant has always been expected to bear heavy weights. Serving in the government in any nation requires men and women who will not only survive opposition and difficulty, but thrive and rise with contrary winds. The servant leader is guaranteed to face problems, difficulties, oppositions and, perhaps, betrayal; so we must have staying power. *"The government shall be upon His shoulder"* – and what a shoulder that bears the problem of the whole world!

7. Submission to God and His glory

"For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me" (Jn. 6.38). The true servant is always submissive. But to who? To his master! Christ was submissive to God and the divine will, not to Satan, His detractors, the disciples who were ignorant of His mission on earth, or the society of people who could not recognise *"what would bring you peace"* (Lk. 19.42). The servant leader is an active listener, an intelligent listener, a discerning listener.

Powerful principles for Servant Leadership

Our supreme Servant Leader said, *"Learn from me"* (Matt.11.29). Our great Servant Apostle said, *"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ"* (1 Cor. 11.1). The humble Servant Warrior, Gideon, said, *"Follow my lead, do exactly as I do"* (Judges 7.17).

Servant leadership produced enduring, positive results. It is very instructive to glean powerful principles from past and contemporary servant leaders.

Principles span and transcend all cultures while specific application must be tailored to each culture and organisation. Many important principles emerge from successful servant leaders and we can only mention them without comments. Among others, we observe (1) the principle of vision, (2) the principle of goal-setting, (3) the principle of servanthood, (4) the principle of communication, (5) the principle of self-mastery, (6) the principle of sacrificial service, and (7) the principle of passion for excellence.

The servant leader is not merely a leader possessing only one attribute, one trait, one quality, one characteristic, one skill, or only one identifying mark. The servant leader possesses both humility and authority; he is a servant as well as a leader; a learner as well as a teacher; a player as well as a coach; a refuge for the weak as well as a restrainer of the wicked.

To be effective, the servant leader has to be **“made all things to men”**. Think of Christ’s leadership – the perfect pattern for servant leadership. The supreme servant leader is **“all things to all men”**. To the nation, He is the **Servant Leader**. To the world, He is the **Shining Light**. To all sinners, He is the **Sacrificial Lamb**. To the lost, He is the **Seeking Lamp**. To those alienated from God, He is the **Sure Ladder**. To the weak and the sick, He is the **Strengthening Loaf**. To the oppressed, He is the **Strong Liberator**. To the downtrodden, He is the **Supplicating Lawyer**. To the broken-hearted, He is the **Supportive Listener**. To the dejected, He is the **Soul Lifter**. To the unloved and castaway, He is the **Sympathetic Lover**. To the defenceless, He is the **Safeguarding Lion**. To the underprivileged, He is the **Strong Link** to the Father. To the dying, He is the **Skilful Lifesaver**. To all men, He is the **Sufficient Lifeline**. To the whole universe, He is the **Sovereign Lord**.

Napoleon Bonaparte, the famous French emperor, once made a striking affirmation while exiled on the rock of St. Helena. After carefully reflecting on the measure of his accomplishments, he called one of his aides, Count Montholon, to his side and asked him, *“Can you tell me who Jesus Christ was?”* The Count declined to respond.

Napoleon thus countered:

“Well then, I will tell you. I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between Him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for Him”.

Charles Ross Weade, a poet, has also penned down the following contrast between Alexander and Jesus Christ for our consideration as servant leaders:

Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three.
One lived and died for self; one died for you and me;
The Greek died on a throne; the Jew died on a cross;
One's life a triumph seemed; the other but a loss.
One led vast armies forth; the other walked alone.
One shed a whole world's blood; the other gave His own.
One won the world in life and lost it all in death;
The other lost His life to win the whole world's faith.

Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three.
One died in Babylon, and one on Calvary.
One gained all for himself; and one Himself He gave,
One conquered every throne; the other every grave.
The one made himself God, the God made Himself less,
The one lived but to blast, the other but to bless.
When died the Greek, forever fell his throne of swords;
But Jesus died to live forever Lord of lords.

Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three.
The Greek made all men slaves; the Jew made all men free.
One built a throne on blood; the other built on love.
The one was born of earth; the other from above.
One won all this earth, to lose all earth and heaven.
The other gave up all, that all to Him be given.
The Greek forever died; the Jew forever lives.
He loses all who gets, and wins all things who gives.

May He, the exemplary Servant Leader, live on and lead on through you and through me.