

SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN THE WORKPLACE: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

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1. WHAT IS SERVANT LEADERSHIP?

Servant leadership is a powerful approach to achieving common goals in which the leader acts to serve those who are led.

2. WORKPLACES SUCCEEDING THROUGH SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Some of the most successful workplaces in the world embrace servant leadership.

Servant leadership fueled the dramatic growth of Starbucks. Southwest Airlines built its strategy on servant leadership. The Container Store practices servant leadership every day.

Countless companies apply servant leadership, not just these brand names.

Big companies. Small companies.

And servant leadership can be found in all kinds of industries.

TDIndustries pursues servant leadership in the construction business. Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen does so in food franchising. The Cleveland Clinic implemented servant leadership in healthcare. The National Park Service champions servant leadership across the United States.

Servant leadership is practiced in workplaces across the globe, too. Tata Group companies practice servant leadership in India. Panasonic practices servant leadership in Japan.

Some of the best entrepreneurs are servant-leaders. Some of the most successful start-ups have servant leadership in their DNA. Companies from A to Z – Aulas Amigas to Zappos.

3. WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Some companies use the terms "servant-leader" and "servant leadership" to describe great leadership as they see it. Some use other terms. Or no term at all.

Practitioners of servant leadership agree: It doesn't much matter what we call it. It matters that we do it

So, don't get hung up on the name. Use a term that works best in your corporate culture.

4. BENEFITS SERVANT LEADERSHIP BRINGS TO THE WORKPLACE

Servant leadership brings meaning, prosperity and joy to the workplace.

MEANING

"Deprived of meaningful work, men and women lose their reason for existence." – Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Work can be meaningful – significant with an underlying value. Or work can be meaningless – just a way to pay the bills. Workplaces practicing servant leadership provide things beyond a paycheck, things that employees value very deeply.

Servant leadership makes work meaningful in three main ways.

First, **belonging to a community.** Human beings derive great meaning from group membership. The best places to work– the servant-leader organizations – provide a sense of belonging.

Second, **contributing to a mission**. The best businesses take their mission statements to heart. Studies show that when employees feel connected to that mission – when they feel like they are contributing to a common cause – they are more engaged and more energized.

Third, **growing as a person.** Opportunities for personal and professional development can make a workplace meaningful apart from the community and mission elements.

Smart companies know that meaning is part of the compensation they offer to their employees.

Which is why smart companies value servant leadership.

PROSPERITY

There is plenty of evidence that **organizations practicing servant leadership outperform their peers economically.**

For businesses, that means higher sales, profits and stock prices. For nonprofits, it means higher donations and lower mission costs. Organizations practicing servant leadership tend to have superior employee engagement. You can find them on Fortune's "Best Places to Work For" list.

Higher employee engagement means higher levels of effort and lower levels of turnover.

But wait, there's more!

Companies practicing servant leadership prosper because they provide better customer experience, are more innovative and attract the best talent.

Customer experience? The Walt Disney Company and The Ritz Carlton practice servant leadership.

Innovation? Look to servant leadership practitioners Mailchimp and Roam Innovative Workspace.

Attracting talent? Chik-Fil-A and McKinsey are servant leadership exemplars.

A growing body of academic research confirms the relationship between servant leadership and success in business. Investors are increasingly looking to make investments in companies with servant leadership cultures.

JOY

Do you look forward to going to work in the morning? Do you like being with your colleagues? Does your workplace provide you a feeling of happiness? Do you appreciate a supervisor who takes care of you? If the answers are yes, then lucky you! That's joy.

Joy is an emotion commonly found where servant leadership is practiced.

Why? Because joy is an emotion evoked by well-being and success. And servant-leaders focus strongly on both.

Picture a company that provides its team members with meaning – purpose, belonging and personal growth. The company is growing. Sales and profits are up. The conditions sound right for . . .

. . . joy!

Joy is experienced working with good friends. Joy is found in wining a sale, finding a creative solution to a problem or providing great customer experience. There are countless other workplace examples. It's hard to define joy fully. But you know it when you feel it.

Servant-leaders drive fear out of the workplace. In its place, they make room for joy.

5. SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN THE WORKPLACE - 3 KEY PRIORITIES

Good leaders in the workplace understand their priorities. And they act on them. But what priorities distinguish servant-leaders from other good leaders? Here are three workplace priorities that make servant-leaders different – and special!

DEVELOPING PEOPLE

The growth and development of people is a hallmark of servant leadership.

Servant-leaders in the workplace are strongly committed to both the professional and personal development of their team members. Development of people increases team performance, of course.

But people development is also considered a goal of servant-leadership in and of itself. Servant-leaders want to create more servant-leaders, not more followers.

The best servant-leaders don't think of people development as a separate activity at work.

Instead, they **integrate servant-leadership development tightly** into their daily activities.

BUILDING A TRUSTING TEAM

Sure, servant-leaders work to develop individual team members. But at the same time they work to build a strong **team.**

Indeed, a group of superstar individuals is often no match for a strong team. And strong teams are characterized by high levels of **trust**.

Trust makes things move faster. It creates the conditions for greater innovation. There is ample evidence that high levels of trust correlate with organizational success. Furthermore, groundbreaking new work by Google confirms that the best teams have more collective empathy and social sensitivity that poor ones - the members trust each other.

So, building trust is a **priority** for the servant-leader.



ACHIEVING RESULTS

Servant-leaders in the workplace are results-oriented.

They play to win.

Sure, they may not define success or winning in traditional ways (achieving personal power, wealth and fame, for example). And they may seek win-win outcomes whenever possible.

But all the same, servant-leaders want to lead their followers towards success.

Which is a reason so many people follow servant-leaders with great loyalty.

Servant leaders make results a shared priority.

In today's complex, fast-moving and competitive world, workplace leaders unconcerned with results won't likely be leaders for long.

6. SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN THE WORKPLACE - 3 KEY PRINCIPLES

Principles are guiding rules that influence how things are done. Servant-leaders follow these three workplace principles.

SERVE FIRST

Robert K. Greenleaf coined the term servant leadership in his important 1970 essay, *The Servant as Leader.* There, Greenleaf contrasts two types of leaders, which he called the "servant first" and the "leader first."

"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. 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."

In the workplace, to use Greenleaf's term, the "leader first," puts personal considerations before the mission, company and team.

On the other hand, the "servant first" is the one who says:

"It's not about me."

Servant-leaders measure their individual success by the success of those they serve.

PERSUASION

Greenleaf's friend, Peter Drucker, is considered the founder of modern management science. Drucker, says:

"Accept the fact that we have to treat almost anybody as a volunteer."

Drucker means that, in the modern economy, people are more likely to quit jobs if they are mistreated. Drucker also recognizes, as does Greenleaf, that the act of persuasion in the workplace is usually more important than the exercise of authority.

Every employee has an amount of "discretionary effort" available to be given or withheld from the employer. The authoritarian leaders – the dictators and the commander-and-controllers – never get the benefit of that discretionary effort.

But the persuasive leaders in the workplace – the servant-leaders – are able to access vast amounts of extra creativity, productivity, quality, attention and level of effort.

We follow such leaders voluntarily, not because we have to, but because we want to.

EMPOWERMENT

Servant-leaders in the workplace act to empower their followers in two senses of the word "empowerment."

First, servant-leaders **empower their followers by sharing organizational authority.** They know that this kind of empowerment gives people a stake in outcomes, increases innovation and raises employee engagement.

Second, servant-leaders help their followers grow stronger, more confident, wiser and more autonomous – as employees and as whole people. That's another form of empowerment.

Servant-leaders are **good stewards of power.** They don't try to grab power or hoard it once they have it. Instead, **servant-leaders are generous with power.**

Why?

Because as author Stephen R. Covey observes:

"An empowered organization is one in which individuals have the knowledge, skill, desire, and opportunity to personally succeed in a way that leads to collective organizational success."

7. SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN THE WORKPLACE - 3 KEY PRACTICES

Servant leadership can look different in different contexts. Maybe that's why there are so many lists of good servant leadership practices. Here are the top three practices of servant-leaders in the workplace context.

EXTREME LISTENING

Listening is one of the most important practices of servant leadership – maybe the single most important practice.

Greenleaf writes:

"I have a bias about this that suggests that only a true natural servant automatically responds to any problem by listening first."

Servant-leaders listen broadly and deeply. And they listen comprehensively – to what is being said and to what is not being said – to the verbal and to the nonverbal.

Furthermore, and in a manner of speaking, servant-leaders are always "listening to the future" by exercising foresight.

Show me a good servant-leader in the workplace and I'll show you a person who listens first, asks good questions and never drowns out or talks over a colleague.

PURPOSEFUL DELEGATION

Servant-leaders at work delegate at different levels.

At a high level (especially if they are managers), servant-leaders determine who is best suited for a particular role on a team or project. **Then they help match talent to task.**

Once Drucker was asked, "What is the most important decision an executive makes?"

Drucker answered:

"Who does what."

There you have it – the importance of high-level delegation in three words!

At a day-to-day level, servant-leaders know the importance of good delegation skills to high-performing individuals, teams and organizations.

Likewise, servant-leaders know the potential for damage done by good delegation's evil twin – micromanagement.

What distinguishes a servant-leader from any other good delegator is the servant leadership reasons for doing so.

Servant-leaders delegate intentionally to share power, to develop people, to build trust and – last but not least – to form more servant-leaders.

CONNECTING FOLLOWERS TO A MISSION

Servant-leaders always have a goal – a destination to which they are **leading others on a shared mission.**

At work, servant-leaders make a regular practice of connecting their followers to the mission.

One way, Greenleaf reminds us, is simply by making that goal hard to forget:

"By clearly stating and restating the goal the leader gives certainty and purpose to others who may have difficulty in achieving it for themselves."

Recent research shows that best way to keep team members energized and engaged is to make sure they stay connected to mission.

Servant-leaders do that in lots of ways. They flaunt their mission, recite it, recruit with it, onboard with it, and help their team members experience it directly.

8. WHO INVENTED SERVANT LEADERSHIP?

Servant leadership has its origins in human prehistory. So, no one person invented servant leadership.

In more recent times, people refer to Robert K. Greenleaf as the founder of the modern servant leadership movement. Greenleaf was a businessperson. He worked as an executive at AT&T and became an inhouse expert on leadership.

Retiring after 38 years, Greenleaf went on to teach at MIT Sloan school of business and consulted with leaders at major corporations. His work remains influential.

Many writers and scholars have built on Greenleaf's work in the business context. The most notable include Howard Behar, Jim Collins, Stephen R. Covey, Adam Grant, Daniel Pink and Simon Sinek.

9. WHAT MAKES SERVANT LEADERSHIP SPECIAL?

What makes servant leadership special? Two things.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP IS GROUNDED IN A DEEP DESIRE TO SERVE OTHERS

That's the primary thing that makes servant leadership different from other leadership approaches.

Greenleaf says it this way:

"The great leader is seen as servant first, and that simple fact is the key to such greatness."

Since Greenleaf's time, research in neuroscience and evolutionary biology has revealed that the desire to serve is hardwired into human beings. That's likely why homo sapiens have enjoyed such extraordinary evolutionary success.

Moreover, recent studies in behavioral economics show that serving behavior may be the best way to success in modern culture.

In short: serving works.

SERVANT-LEADERS SEE THE COMMON GOOD AND SERVE IT

A better future – you might also call it a vision – is the goal towards which the servant-leader leads.

It's not a goal of narrow self-interest.

In the workplace context, it is a goal of improved lives for a wide audience – employees, customers, vendors, shareholders and those in communities where a company operates. Servant-leaders define their stakeholders broadly.

Sometimes companies practicing servant leadership measure results on a "triple bottom line" - **people** (the well being of those they serve); **planet** (environmental sustainability); and **profit** (financial performance).

Regardless of how they phrase it or measure it, the best servant-leaders want to enrich as much of the world as they can.

10. SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN THE WORKPLACE - 3 CARDINAL VIRTUES

Servant leadership scholars and practitioners recognize these 3 cardinal virtues servant-leaders in the workplace.

HUMILITY

Most simply defined, humility is not acting as if one were better than others. It's the opposite of arrogance.

Humility is about appreciating something greater than oneself. Servant-leaders tend to be humbled by the cause they serve. For the servant-leader, "it's not about me" – it's about serving something greater than me.

Based on extensive research, author Jim Collins found that the best leaders "blend the paradoxical combination of deep personal humility with intense professional will."

Collins considered using the term "servant-leader" to describe them, but settled on "Level 5 Leader" instead.

Call it what you will, humility is essential.

GENEROSITY

Generosity is the virtue of giving.

Giving elevates us towards one another. Gifts can bring people together and bond them.

So, not surprisingly, servant-leaders are givers. In the workplace, they give time, attention, advice, coaching, feedback, praise and constructive criticism, among other things. Perhaps most importantly, servant-leaders are generous with power.

In his important book, *Give and Take*: A *Revolutionary Approach to Success*, Wharton professor and best-selling author Adam Grant examines the science behind giving. Based on rigorous research, he shows that the most successful people – which would include the most successful leaders – are the ones who give widely, freely and intelligently.

FORESIGHT

Foresight is good judgment, sound decision-making and wisdom in knowing what will be needed in the future. Its synonyms include "prudence."

"Foresight is the lead the leader has," Greenleaf writes.

For Greenleaf, exercising foresight is an ethical obligation of a servant-leader.

A "loss of leadership," Greenleaf continues, comes from "a failure to foresee what reasonably could have been foreseen, and from failure to act on that knowledge while the leader had freedom to act."

Servant-leaders in the workplace use their foresight to inform good decisions. They are both **decisive and deliberate.**

11. WHO CAN BE A SERVANT LEADER AT WORK?

Anyone.

The CEO can be a servant-leader and the newest recruit can be a servant-leader. A supervisor of many people can be a servant-leader and one with no direct reports can be a servant-leader. An executive with decades of experience can be a servant-leader and a young person starting that first job can be a servant-leader.

Servant-leadership has nothing to do with one's place in the organizational hierarchy.

Indeed, organizations that practice servant leadership tend to be less fixated on org charts, titles and reporting relationships than organizations that ignore servant leadership.

If anything, servant-led organizations have an attitude sometimes called "inverting the pyramid" – a way of seeing the highest-ranking executive on the bottom of the org chart and those who serve customers at the top. The Home Depot has shown how effective this inverted–pyramid attitude can be.

Greenleaf offers this "best test" of a servant-leader.

"The best test [of a servant-leader], and difficult to administer, 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?"

No mention of titles or positions here. For Greenleaf, anyone meeting this test would be considered servant-leader.

12. SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN THREE WORKPLACE - 3 MYTHS

MYTH #1 - SERVANT LEADERSHIP IS "SOFT"

Servant-leaders play to win. They are fiercely driven to see their organizations achieve their missions. They make tough decisions – including tough people decisions – disappoint people and even make enemies.

Servant-leaders want results and get them.

Indeed, some of the most successful organizations in the most competitive situations practice servant leadership.

Adding to those already mentioned, the leadership development program at the United States Air Force Academy is grounded in servant leadership. The United States Marine Corps has an expression that captures its servant leadership attitude: "Officers eat last." The Navy SEALS practice servant leadership, too.

Does anyone think leadership in those organizations are soft?

MYTH #2 - SERVANT LEADERSHIP IS FAITH-BASED

Servant leadership is a timeless leadership approach. It can be found in countless cultures and places.

Indeed, many world religions include servant leadership principles and practices. But, one does not have to be a person of faith to appreciate servant leadership and practice it in the workplace.

Servant leadership thrives in secular and faith-based contexts alike!

It can blend with any workplace culture.

MYTH #3 – SERVANT LEADERSHIP CAN'T BE LEARNED

Some people are natural servant-leaders. Maybe they learned servant leadership as children, from important role models or experience. Other people learn servant leadership as they go through life.

But the important thing to remember is that servant leadership can be learned.

There are many ways one can learn to be a better servant-leader, especially in the workplace. Seeking out and following servant-leaders is one way. Ask a servant-leader to be your mentor. **And act as a servant-leader mentor to others.**

Maybe the best way to become a better servant leader, individually, is to cultivate the key practices of servant leadership, including the ones mentioned above. Make them habits, first for yourself: **be the change you want to see in the world.** Then find ways to promote servant leadership in your team. If servant leadership takes root in your workplace, you may be surprised how it spreads.

Servant leadership is a journey.

There is no final destination. There is always room for learning and continuous improvement.

13. TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN THE WORKPLACE

Visit the <u>Cairnway</u> website to learn more about servant leadership in the workplace.

We post a weekly <u>blog</u>, regular <u>podcasts</u> and have a <u>recommended reading list</u>.

We cultivate relevant content on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.

I would appreciate your feedback on this ebook. Feel free to contact me if you have questions or comments: joe@serveleadnow.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After serving as CEO of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, Joe larocci founded Cairnway. **Our Cairnway mission is to promote servant leadership in the workplace.**

Visit the <u>Cairnway</u> website to learn more about all the <u>Cairnway team members</u>.

All of us at Cairnway would welcome the chance to be part of your servant leadership journey. Thanks!

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