



Servant-Leader as CPS Facilitator

By Tamyra Freeman

The term servant-leader was first coined in 1970 by Robert K. Greenleaf (1904-1990) to describe an age old concept. Good leaders, paradoxically, are seen as servants first. In his seminal essay, *The Servant as Leader*, Greenleaf describes the servant-leader as someone who begins with a natural feeling that they want to serve, to serve first. A servant is who the person is at the core of his or her being. Conscious choice then brings the servant to aspire to lead. (Greenleaf, 1977, 1991).

Facilitators of Creative Problem Solving intentionally choose a social role of leader. They provide facilitative leadership by taking responsibility for planning and managing a process that will support their client(s) to achieve a desired change. CPS facilitators are most effective in this role when they focus on helping others get their needs met (Isakson, 2000). Servant leadership offers the CPS facilitator an anchoring philosophy within which to carry out their chosen role.

Servant-Leadership:

- **Is** one metaphor for collaborative or inclusive leadership. Robert Greenleaf was known as a convener. He co-founded the Center for Applied Ethics in 1964 (renamed the Robert K. Greenleaf Center in 1985) as a think tank for those with a passion for exploring how large institutions could operate ethically.
- **Sets** an ethical benchmark. Our actions, while moving an individual, group, or organization towards its goals (bottom line), should also result in the growth of people and a more caring society (top line). Different situations may require different actions to meet this ethic, but the ethic remains constant. Greenleaf's "Best Test" provides us with criteria for measuring the outcomes of our actions against this benchmark (See Figure 1).
- **Provides** a holistic model for examining our actions in relationship to the effect we have on other individuals, groups, organizations, and society (See Figure 2). It was Greenleaf's thesis that more servants should emerge as leaders, or should follow only servant-leaders. He wrote a series of essays on the theme of "Servant as Leader" to stimulate thought and action for building a better, more caring society.

Stephen Covey (1998) describes servant-leadership as "a principle, a natural law". He believes natural laws are self-evident and universal. Natural principles are things we inwardly know are true. They are common sense. And yet, servant-

leadership provides a unique lens from which to view this universal principle. Peter Vail (1997) asserts that servant-leadership is a "Big Idea" that synthesizes a lot of smaller ideas. He identifies three qualities that make it unique among other leadership philosophies.

- 1. The servant-leader philosophy was developed by a practitioner.** Greenleaf spent almost 40 years at AT&T in the field of management research, development, and education. He held joint appointments as a visiting lecturer at M.I.T.'s Sloan School of Management and at the Harvard Business School. He began a second career in 1964 as a consultant to universities, businesses, foundations and churches. He described himself as a lifelong student of organization, i.e, how things get done.
- 2. Servant-leadership connects to a long history of humanistic [and religious] thought that echoes into our own roots and cultures/experiences.** Servant-leadership offers a point of convergence for many traditions. Most of us can tell moving stories of how our own personal and/or professional growth was enhanced by a servant-leader. Many of these individuals did not hold formal positions of authority, but used their influence to support us to make greater contributions to our families, work, and communities.
- 3. Servant-leadership does not claim to be a science.** In fact, it is more of a liberal art. Instead of passing off his own experience as systematic knowledge, Greenleaf invited each of us into a dialogue around the big, critical questions surrounding what actions must be taken to create a more humane society. Greenleaf wrote, "I will remind you in offering you these conversations that I am not presuming to tell you how you should think. Rather, I am offering what I think in the hope you will say what you think and then, out of the dialogue, all us will be wiser." Servant-leadership hinges on a developmental process where wisdom is increased through acting, reflecting, and sharing our experiences.

Larry Spears, CEO of the Greenleaf Center, has identified ten characteristics that emerge in Greenleaf's writing as he describes servant-leadership (Spears, 1995). These characteristics are not exhaustive, but they do help to convey the power of the concept. To support a more ecological approach to examining these characteristics, they have been overlaid in bold below on Isaksen's model for systematically understanding and recognizing creativity (Isaksen, 2000). This approach allows us to take a more comprehensive view of servant-leadership by looking at the traits of the person, the mental operations they use, the nature of the desired outcome, and the press or context in which the servant-leader works.

People: Servant-leaders have a sharp level of general **awareness**, but an even sharper awareness of themselves. Servant-leaders understand

Greenleaf's suggestion that, "If a flaw in the world is to be remedied, to the servant the process of change starts in here, in the servant, not out there." Servant-leaders see themselves as **stewards** that hold resources in trust for another.

In order to best serve others, servant-leaders **listen** intently to the needs expressed by their co-workers, employees, customers, communities, and/or other stakeholders. Servant-leaders strive to **empathize** with others by listening receptively and openly. People are accepted as unique human beings, even when their performance must be rejected. The servant-leader engages in what James Autry (1995), paraphrasing Peter Drucker, calls the "leaders' abiding challenge...to make people's strengths effective and their weaknesses irrelevant."

Process: Foresight is the ability to foresee the likely outcome of a situation. Servant-leaders use foresight to hold the lessons of the past and the realities of the present while projecting both into a desired future state. Servant-leaders seek a balance between **conceptualization** ("dreaming great dreams") and the need to operationalize day-to-day functions.

Servant-leaders rely less on authority and more on the use of moral **persuasion** as a basis for influence. Without engaging in coercion or manipulation, servant-leaders support individuals with information that allows them to come to their own conclusion that the proposed course of action is the correct one or to suggest an alternative. Dialogue and consensus-building are common methods employed by servant-leaders.

Product: The outcome of servant-leadership is clear; people grow! Servant-leaders are **committed to the growth of people** in all circumstances. While difficult to actualize in times of great personal or organizational stress, the servant-leader remains committed to identifying solutions that uphold this moral imperative.

Press: The servant-leader is a **community builder**. He or she creates an environment where inclusion, trust, and **healing** are paramount. People are supported to be authentic.

The Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership (www.greenleaf.org) identifies six major areas where servant-leadership is currently being applied. These include personal growth and development, service learning programs, leadership education, trustee development, and community development. Organizational development, another major area of application for servant-leadership, is highly visible in some of America's premier corporations. Three out of the top five places in Fortune Magazine's 2000 "Top 100 Best Companies to Work For" (Levering & Moskowitz, 2000) were held by companies which operate in keeping with the principles of servant-leadership. Southwest Airlines, TDIndustries, and Synovus

Financial, along with many other organizations, are committed to building people...the cornerstone of servant-leadership and business success.

Deceptively simple on paper, *The Servant as Leader* approach has many implications for organizational development. Contemporary writers are expanding the base of what it means for individuals and institutions to be servant-leaders by offering new models for organizational structure, decision-making, compensation, and work-life balance. A chorus of voices is beginning to explore how work might exist to meet the needs of the human spirit, as well as produce the goods and services that sustain life.

Servant-leadership is at the heart of the transformation that many organizations must make to attract key personnel and compete competitively in a changing economy. CPS facilitators are in a unique position to model the way. By definition, our role is to provide facilitative leadership that serves the content of our client(s). By becoming reflective practitioners of both Creative Problem Solving and servant-leadership, we have much to gain and much to offer others who are on this journey of serving *and* leading. For in Robert Greenleaf's words, "Except as we venture to create, we cannot project ourselves beyond ourselves to serve and lead."

References

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