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## SERVANT LEADERSHIP- PUTTING YOUR TEAM FIRST

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### ABSTRACT

Servant leadership is a leadership philosophy built on the belief that the most effective leaders strive to serve others, rather than accrue power or take control. The aforementioned others can include customers, partners, fellow employees and the community at large. The term was coined by management expert Robert K. Greenleaf in an essay, "The Servant as Leader," published in 1970. According to Greenleaf, the seminal idea grew out of his reading of *Journey to the East* by the German writer Hermann Hesse. The novella tells the story of a band of luminaries on a quest for the "ultimate Truth." When the humble servant charged to take care of their needs disappears, the group bickers and abandons the quest. Much later, the narrator discovers the humble servant is, in fact, the leader of the organization that sponsored the quest he and his fellow travelers failed to complete. Proponents of servant leadership argue this style of leadership brings advantages beyond engendering an ethical employee-boss relationship. Employees treated with respect are more likely to be loyal to the institution, provide superior service to the institution's customers and come forward with ideas and innovations. The servant leadership approach has recently gained currency as companies look to flatten their organizations, empowering employees and teams to make decisions in an effort to keep up with a fast-moving business environment.

***Keywords - Leadership, Manager, Transformation, Interpersonal Relationships***

### INTRODUCTION

The words "servant" and "leader" might seem at odds with each other, but they come together to represent a powerful

management style called servant leadership. Servant leadership centers on empathy, and encourages listening, sharing praise, and helping others grow — all of which can help a company, and its employees, thrive.

## What is servant leadership?

Servant leadership is a management style in which a leader acts as a servant to their organization, earning their authority rather than simply imposing control onto others. In this leadership style, the manager (a boss, CEO, or any type of executive) serves their employees and peers, rather than the other way around. In turn, employees are more motivated and high performing, enabling them to be innovative and successful.

Robert K. Greenleaf first coined the term servant leader in his 1970 essay “The Servant as Leader.” In the essay, he wrote that the servant leader “focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong.” These leaders “put the needs of others first and help people develop and perform as highly as possible.”

## **SERVANT LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS**

Greenleaf outlines ten fundamental principles of servant leadership.

### **1. Listening**

Servant leaders must be good listeners to get to know their employees. Knowing your workers on a deeper level allows you to

better support their needs and improve their work experience.

### **2. Empathy**

Servant leaders should make employees feel seen, heard, and understood. Empathetic leaders don't just dole out criticism, but instead work to understand the why behind employees' actions, allowing them to offer custom solutions and correct behaviors in more positive, productive ways.

### **3. Healing**

Not all employees are used to healthy work environments, and many will take time to become comfortable with the style of servant leadership. Leaders should be patient when getting to know new employees and foster an environment in which they can build trust slowly over time.

### **4. Self-Awareness**

Servant leaders understand their position within their team. For example, if you're speaking over others in meetings, delivering public criticism, or rigidly enforcing authority, you're likely not acting as a servant leader, and could be pushing employees away. Be aware of how you are perceived by your team on a day-to-day basis and alter your actions accordingly

## **5. Persuasion**

Servant leaders use persuasion instead of power and authority to influence their teams and get everyone on the same page. You should convince others and get buy-in without forcing compliance or telling people that they simply have to do something because you said so.

## **6. Conceptualization**

Conceptualization means that servant leaders can develop a direction for their teams that will bring company success. This requires leaders to think in a conceptual way, looking beyond day-to-day priorities and focusing on the bigger picture.

## **7. Foresight**

Foresight is the ability to predict what will happen in the future. With servant leadership, this means using historical performance and current objectives to predict future outcomes and to estimate what resources employees will need to help them succeed.

## **8. Stewardship**

Stewardship is synonymous with accountability. The leader can take

responsibility for their actions and understand how their support for their employees contributes to the overall performance of their teams.

## **9. Commitment to the Growth of People**

Servant leaders want employees to be equipped with the tools and resources they need to succeed. As such, servant leaders must be committed to the growth and development of people. In practice, this can look like ensuring employees have the proper training for their duties, planning development opportunities, or checking in with workers to understand their career goals and figuring out how to help them get there.

## **10. Building Community**

Workplace communities foster a sense of trust and togetherness, so people feel they are working together to meet a common goal. As a servant leader, ensure your workplace feels like a community by building relationships with others and encouraging people to build relationships with their co-workers.

## **SERVANT LEADERSHIP EXAMPLES**

### **Leading by Example**

A servant leader is willing to do any task that they ask an employee to do. If an employee on the social media team is falling behind on the number of posts they need to hit per month, the team manager will step in and take off some pressure by creating posts themselves.

### **Fostering Collaboration**

Servant leaders collaborate with their teams rather than barking orders. This means looping in employees and team members in decision-making processes rather than delivering final outcomes. This way, employees feel invested and engaged in the company, and know their thoughts, feedback, and concerns will be heard.

For example, the director of a marketing department holds a monthly all-hands meeting in which she welcomes feedback from workers. She encourages employees to email her throughout the month with their ideas, and facilitates brainstorming coffee sessions with her team members.

### **Showing Empathy**

Servant leaders show empathy to their employees by making sure everyone on the

team knows they are valued as humans and individuals. Empathetic leaders understand where their employees are coming from, and work to make their lives easier, not harder.

For instance, an executive at a tech company wants his employees to know that they bring more to the table than just their hard skills and labor. He implements generous parental leave for those who are starting families, unlimited time-off policies, and programs that cover mental and physical care for employees so that they can take care of themselves well.

Additionally, empathy could be shown by a leader taking the first 10 minutes of every one-on-one meeting to learn more about their employees on a personal level. Upon hearing that one employee has recently suffered a loss in their family, a servant leader would be empathetic to what that might mean for their mental health, and encourage the employee to take personal days.

### **Being Persuasive**

Servant leaders persuade their employees and peers rather than ordering them to follow their lead. Persuasion requires having an effective argument for why you want to make the decision you've come to, and is

backed with evidence and research. For example, rather than simply telling the team of writers that their articles need to be half as long, a servant leader would present the data they used to come to that decision. This makes any decision making a more collaborative process.

### **Building Community**

A servant leader will take steps to foster community within their team and the company. This might take the form of scheduling social Zoom events for remote teams, in-person dinners or activities, or team-building retreats and off-sites. Purposeful programming that makes time for relationship-building outside of day-to-day responsibilities can create deeper relationships between workers.

### **Listening Well**

Though it seems simple, being a good listener separates great servant leaders from the pack. Rather than being checked out in meetings, taking notes or answering emails while their employees speak, good servant leaders listen actively.

This means giving your employees physical cues that you're hearing them (nodding, smiling, and giving live feedback) as well as

following up on the information that's been presented to you. This could mean asking follow-up questions, referencing the information in a later conversation, or crediting one of your employees when a different team member mentions their idea. Although different from leaders following more traditional styles, servant leaders can build motivated and capable teams. If you're a leader looking to try your hand at this leadership style, make sure that you understand who your employees are as people, provide them with the tools and support they need to succeed, and act as an ever-present resource.

### **10 principles of servant leadership**

Here are the 10 principles of effective servant leadership to help you become a better leader:

#### **1. Listening**

Effective servant leaders don't just speak but listen to what their team has to say. They give ample opportunity for all members to be heard, and then, listen carefully to what is being said and potentially what is not being said.

They give others their full attention, notice coworkers' nonverbal cues, avoid

interrupting them when speaking and give constructive feedback. By gathering observations and insight from all team members, servant leaders understand growth opportunities.

## **2. Empathy**

Effective servant leaders care about their team on a personal level. They understand that when their team feels happy and fulfilled in their personal lives, it contributes to success in their professional lives. They value others' perspectives and approach situations with an open mind. Because of this, servant leaders make it a priority to show team members they care about them and try to help them with personal issues when they can.

## **3. Healing**

Effective servant leaders understand the importance of fixing problems before moving on to new goals and projects. For example, your team may have suffered a setback last quarter due to a team disagreement. To face the new challenges of this quarter, the team needs to be able to heal and come to an agreement first. Servant leaders make sure their team has the knowledge, support and resources to do their jobs effectively,

## **4. Self-awareness**

Effective servant leaders are aware of themselves and their teams. Self-awareness is the ability to look at yourself, think deeply about your emotions and behavior and consider how they affect the people around you. In being self-aware, servant leaders accept and grow from their own weaknesses. Just as important is that as leaders, they are aware of their team's individual strengths and weaknesses to help them grow and learn.

## **5. Persuasion**

Effective servant leaders guide and persuade team members. Where an authoritarian leader might tell team members what to do, a servant leader tells them why it's the best method or process. They seek to convince the team as a whole and build a consensus.

## **6. Conceptualization**

Effective servant leaders can think beyond small tasks and communicate larger goals and why they are important to their teams. They help their team understand their roles and stay motivated while focusing on the company's long-term objectives and goals.

## **7. Foresight**

Effective servant leaders understand the importance of learning from past mistakes and successes and using lessons learned to productively evaluate present decisions. They identify what's happening now and understand the consequences of their decisions and then help their team do the same. They use tools like SWOT analysis to evaluate their current situation and environment and SMART goals to plan ahead.

## **8. Stewardship**

Effective servant leaders acknowledge and understand the importance of their responsibilities. They protect and uphold the trust and confidence given them in their role and communicate this to their team. As a steward of their company's assets and goals, they work hard, arrive on time and are dependable. They lead by example, demonstrating the values and behaviors that they want to see in others.

## **9. Commitment to growth**

Effective servant leaders motivate their teams to grow. They are committed to helping their teams develop professionally. Servant leaders help their team members

become leaders themselves by leading by example and providing their team with opportunities to grow and develop. They also find out what their employees' personal goals are and give them projects or more responsibilities to help them achieve those goals.

## **10. Building community**

Effective servant leaders encourage collaboration and engagement within their organizations. They value the opinions of everyone on their team and encourage them to share those opinions and to actively contribute to the team regularly. They provide opportunities for interaction through social events, workspace design or by even opening meetings with non-work-related conversations.

### **How to become a servant leader?**

Follow these steps to help you develop the skills of a servant leader:

#### **1. Lead by example**

A servant leader should always lead their team by example. As a servant leader, you should be willing to do anything that you ask your team to do. When your team members see you are willing to put in the same amount of work and effort they do, it

helps motivate them to engage in their work and the organization.

## **2. Show people why their job is important**

When employees feel that what they do is important to the overall success of the organization, they usually feel more empowered and are willing to work harder to help it succeed. You should try to make sure your team members know why the work they do is important and how their work directly affects the company's overall success.

## **3. Encourage collaboration and employee engagement**

Servant leaders are also great at making their teams feel their voices and opinions matter. When you take steps to encourage your team to work together and suggest ways to improve the organization, it shows them you care about what they have to say and appreciate their contributions. This can motivate your team to put forth their best effort to produce higher-quality work.

## **4. Help your team grow and develop**

Servant leaders don't only focus on being great leaders themselves but are also interested in helping their team members become great leaders. You should encourage

your team to participate in continuing education and employee development programs to help them expand their knowledge and skills. You can encourage team members to take active leadership roles during group projects. If they know you are committed to their professional growth, they are more likely to listen to suggestions to help improve their work.

## **5. Care for your team members personally**

Another thing you can do to become a servant leader is to show your team members you care about them on a personal level. Being empathetic and trying to offer advice when you can help create a more positive work-life balance for your employees and help them cope with personal stress better. When your team feels that they matter as individuals and not just as employees, they are more likely to be happy about coming to work and producing quality work.

## **6. Ask for feedback**

Finally, servant leaders should always be looking for how they can improve their own leadership and contribute to their team. Encourage your team members to provide feedback when they have an idea to improve

workflow or help the company succeed. Try to make your team members feel empowered to come to you with suggestions at any time and regularly ask for feedback from those who don't naturally provide it.

## CONCLUSION

Servant leadership is a management style in which you focus on your team's growth and well-being to put their needs first. The theory is that instead of employees serving the leader, the leader serves the employees. This type of manager believes that when their team members feel personally and professionally fulfilled, they

produce high-quality work more efficiently and productively. Employee satisfaction and collaboration are important concepts in servant leadership. You can use this leadership style in any type of business but it is particularly popular within nonprofit organizations. Servant leadership is important in business because it creates a work environment in which employees at all levels of your organization feel respected, appreciated and valued. Businesses that follow a servant leadership philosophy tend to have stronger work cultures with high employee morale and engagement

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