

Servant Leadership



While servant leadership is a timeless concept, the phrase “servant leadership” was coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in *The Servant as Leader*, an essay that he first published in 1970. In that essay, Greenleaf said:

“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...The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.

“The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, 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?”

A servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong. While traditional leadership generally involves the accumulation and exercise of power by one at the “top of the pyramid,” servant leadership is different. The servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible.

Ten Principles of Servant Leadership

1. **Listening** - Making a deep commitment to listening intently to others in order to identify and clarify the will of a group. This means one must get in touch with one's inner voice, and seeking to understand what another's body, spirit, and mind are communicating.
2. **Empathy** - Understand others and empathize with them by accepting and recognizing their special and unique spirit. The servant leader must assume the good intentions of their coworkers and not reject them, even when forced to reject their behavior or performance.
3. **Healing** - Having the potential to heal one's self and others so that transformation and integration can take place. In *The Servant as Leader*, Greenleaf writes, "There is something subtle communicated to one who is being served and led if, implicit in the compact between the servant-leader and led is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something that they have."
4. **Awareness** - Being mindful of one's surroundings, and especially being self-aware, will strengthen the servant-leader. Fostering awareness can be difficult, as one never knows what may be discovered.
5. **Persuasion** - While traditional leaders rely heavily upon their positional authority in making decisions, servant leaders rely on persuasion to convince others in order to build consensus within groups. This principle is noted as one of the clearest distinctions between the traditional authoritarian model and that of servant leadership.
6. **Conceptualization** - The ability to look at a problem or the organization from a conceptualizing perspective so that one goes beyond the day-to-day realities in order to bring visions to reality.
7. **Foresight** - Using the intuitive mind to understand lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision in the future in order to solve complex problems.
8. **Stewardship** - Holding the institution in trust for the greater good of society.
9. **Commitment to the Growth of People** - People have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers, thus the servant leader is deeply committed to a personal, professional, and spiritual growth of each and every individual within the organization.
10. **Building Community** - Servant leaders seek to identify a means for building community among those who work within a given institution.