

### ***Servant Leadership Defined***

What is servant leadership? Scholars have addressed this approach from many different perspectives resulting in a variety of definitions of servant leadership. Greenleaf (1970) provides the most frequently referenced definition:

[Servant leadership] begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. . . . 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 . . . 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, will they not be further deprived? (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 15)

Although complex, this definition sets forth the basic ideas of servant leadership that have been highlighted by current scholars. Servant leaders place the good of followers over their own self-interests and emphasize follower development (Hale & Fields, 2007). They demonstrate strong moral behavior toward followers (Graham, 1991; Walumbwa, Hartnell, & Oke, 2010), the organization, and other stakeholders (Ehrhart, 2004). Practicing servant leadership comes more naturally for some than others, but everyone can learn to be a servant leader (Spears, 2010). Although servant leadership is sometimes treated by others as a trait, in our discussion, servant leadership is viewed as a behavior.

### ***Historical Basis of Servant Leadership***

Robert K. Greenleaf coined the term *servant leadership* and is the author of the seminal works on the subject. Greenleaf’s persona and writings have significantly influenced how servant leadership has developed on the practical and theoretical level. He founded the Center for Applied Ethics in 1964, now the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, which provides a clearinghouse and focal point for research and writing on servant leadership.

Greenleaf worked for 40 years at AT&T and, after retiring, began exploring how institutions function and how they could better serve society. He was intrigued by issues of power and authority and how individuals



in organizations could creatively support each other. Decidedly against coercive leadership, Greenleaf advocated using communication to build consensus in groups.

Greenleaf credits his formulation of servant leadership to Herman Hesse's (1956) novel *The Journey to the East*. It tells the story of a group of travelers on a mythical journey who are accompanied by a servant who does menial chores for the travelers but also sustains them with his spirits and song. The servant's presence has an extraordinary impact on the group. When the servant becomes lost and disappears from the group, the travelers fall into disarray and abandon the journey. Without the servant, they are unable to carry on. It was the servant who was ultimately leading the group, emerging as a leader through his selfless care of the travelers.

In addition to serving, Greenleaf states that a servant leader has a social responsibility to be concerned about the "have-nots" and those less privileged. If inequalities and social injustices exist, a servant leader tries to remove them (Graham, 1991). In becoming a servant leader, a leader uses less institutional power and control while shifting authority to those who are being led. Servant leadership values community because it provides a face-to-face opportunity for individuals to experience interdependence, respect, trust, and individual growth (Greenleaf, 1970).

### Ten Characteristics of a Servant Leader

In an attempt to clarify servant leadership for practitioners, Spears (2002) identified 10 characteristics in Greenleaf's writings that are central to the development of servant leadership. Together, these characteristics comprise the first model or conceptualization of servant leadership.

1. *Listening*. Communication between leaders and followers is an interactive process that includes sending and receiving messages (i.e., talking and listening). Servant leaders communicate by listening first. They recognize that listening is a learned discipline that involves hearing and being receptive to what others have to say. Through listening, servant leaders acknowledge the viewpoint of followers and validate these perspectives.

2. *Empathy*. Empathy is "standing in the shoes" of another person and attempting to see the world from that person's point of view. Empathetic servant leaders demonstrate that they truly understand what followers are thinking and feeling. When a servant leader shows empathy, it is confirming and validating for the follower. It makes the follower feel unique.



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3. *Healing.* To heal means to make whole. Servant leaders care about the personal well-being of their followers. They support followers by helping them overcome personal problems. Greenleaf argues that the process of healing is a two-way street—in helping followers become whole, servant leaders themselves are healed.

4. *Awareness.* For Greenleaf, awareness is a quality within servant leaders that makes them acutely attuned and receptive to their physical, social, and political environments. It includes understanding oneself and the impact one has on others. With awareness, servant leaders are able to step aside and view themselves and their own perspectives in the greater context of the situation.

5. *Persuasion.* Persuasion is clear and persistent communication that convinces others to change. As opposed to coercion, which utilizes positional authority to force compliance, persuasion creates change through the use of gentle nonjudgmental argument. According to Spears (2002), Greenleaf's emphasis on persuasion over coercion is perhaps related to his denominational affiliation with the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

6. *Conceptualization.* Conceptualization refers to an individual's ability to be a visionary for an organization, providing a clear sense of its goals and direction. This characteristic goes beyond day-to-day operational thinking to focus on the "big picture." Conceptualization also equips servant leaders to respond to complex organizational problems in creative ways, enabling them to deal with the intricacies of the organization in relationship to its long-term goals.

7. *Foresight.* Foresight encompasses a servant leader's ability to know the future. It is an ability to predict what is coming based on what is occurring in the present and what has happened in the past. For Greenleaf, foresight has an ethical dimension because he believes leaders should be held accountable for any failures to anticipate what reasonably could be foreseen and to act on that understanding.

8. *Stewardship.* Stewardship is about taking responsibility for the leadership role entrusted to the leader. Servant leaders accept the responsibility to carefully manage the people and organization they have been given to lead. In addition, they hold the organization in trust for the greater good of society.

9. *Commitment to the growth of people.* Greenleaf's conceptualization of servant leadership places a premium on treating each follower as a unique person with intrinsic value that goes beyond his or her tangible contributions to the organization. Servant leaders are committed to helping each person in the organization grow personally and professionally.





Commitment can take many forms, including providing followers with opportunities for career development, helping them develop new work skills, taking a personal interest in their ideas, and involving them in decision making (Spears, 2002).

10. *Building Community.* Servant leadership fosters the development of community. A community is a collection of individuals who have shared interests and pursuits and feel a sense of unity and relatedness. Community allows followers to identify with something greater than themselves that they value. Servant leaders build community to provide a place where people can feel safe and connected with others, but are still allowed to express their own individuality.

These 10 characteristics of servant leadership represent Greenleaf's seminal work on the servant as leader. They provide a creative lens from which to view the complexities of servant leadership.

### **Building a Theory About Servant Leadership**

For more than three decades after Greenleaf's original writings, servant leadership remained a set of loosely defined characteristics and normative principles. In this form it was widely accepted as a leadership approach, rather than a theory, that has strong heuristic and practical value. Praise for servant leadership came from a wide range of well-known leadership writers, including Bennis (2002), Blanchard and Hodges (2003), Covey (2002), DePree (2002), Senge (2002), and Wheatley (2002). At the same time, servant leadership was adopted as a guiding philosophy in many well-known organizations such as The Toro Company, Herman Miller, Synovus Financial Corporation, ServiceMaster Company, Men's Wearhouse, Southwest Airlines, and TDIndustries (Spears, 2002). Although novel and paradoxical, the basic ideas and prescriptions of servant leadership resonated with many as an ideal way to run an organization.

More recently, researchers have begun to examine the conceptual underpinnings of servant leadership in an effort to build a theory about it. These studies have resulted in a wide array of models that describe servant leadership using a multitude of variables. For example, Russell and Stone (2002) developed a practical model of servant leadership that contained 20 attributes, nine functional characteristics (distinctive behaviors observed in the workplace), and 11 accompanying characteristics that augment these behaviors. Similarly, Patterson (2003) created a value-based model of servant leadership that distinguished seven constructs that characterize the virtues and shape the behaviors of servant leaders.



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Other conceptualizations of servant leadership have emerged from researchers' efforts to develop and validate instruments to measure the core dimensions of the servant leadership process. Table 10.1 provides a summary of some of these studies, illustrating clearly the extensiveness of characteristics related to servant leadership. This table also exhibits the lack of agreement among researchers on what specific characteristics define servant leadership. While some of the studies include common characteristics, such as humility or empowerment, none of the studies conceptualize servant leadership in exactly the same way. In addition, Table 10.1 demonstrates how servant leadership is treated as a trait phenomenon (e.g., courage, humility) in some studies while other researchers regard it as a behavioral process (e.g., serving and developing others). Although scholars are not in agreement regarding the primary attributes of

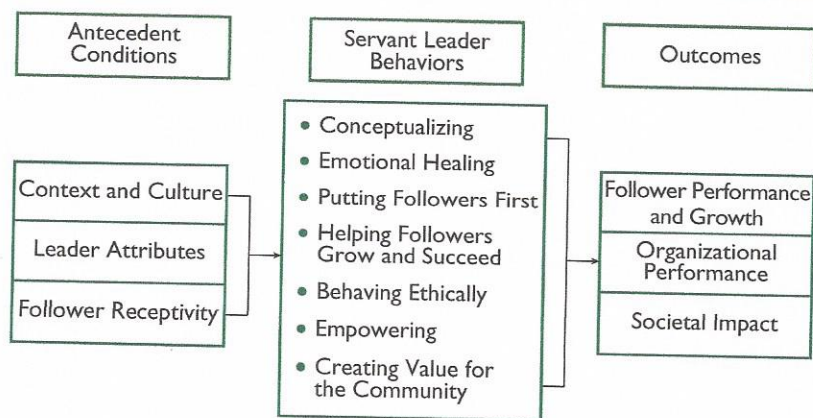
**Table 10.1** Key Characteristics of Servant Leadership

Laub (1999)	Wong & Davey (2007)	Barbuto & Wheeler (2006)	Dennis & Bocarnea (2005)	Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora (2008)	van Dierendonck & Nuijten (2011)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing people</li> <li>• Sharing leadership</li> <li>• Displaying authenticity</li> <li>• Valuing people</li> <li>• Providing leadership</li> <li>• Building community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serving and developing others</li> <li>• Consulting and involving others</li> <li>• Humility and selflessness</li> <li>• Modeling integrity and authenticity</li> <li>• Inspiring and influencing others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Altruistic calling</li> <li>• Emotional healing</li> <li>• Persuasive mapping</li> <li>• Organizational stewardship</li> <li>• Wisdom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowerment</li> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Humility</li> <li>• Agapao love</li> <li>• Vision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transforming influence</li> <li>• Voluntary subordination</li> <li>• Authentic self</li> <li>• Transcendental spirituality</li> <li>• Covenantal relationship</li> <li>• Responsible morality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowerment</li> <li>• Humility</li> <li>• Standing back</li> <li>• Authenticity</li> <li>• Forgiveness</li> <li>• Courage</li> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Stewardship</li> </ul>

SOURCE: Adapted from van Dierendonck, D., 2011. Servant leadership: A review and syntheses. *Journal of Management*, 37(4), 1228–1261.

servant leadership, these studies provide the groundwork necessary for the development of a refined model of servant leadership.

**Figure 10.1** Model of Servant Leadership



SOURCE: Adapted from Liden, R. C., Panaccio, A., Hu, J., & Meuser, J. D. (in press). Servant leadership: Antecedents, consequences, and contextual moderators. In D. V. Day (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of leadership and organizations*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press; and van Dierendonck, D. (2011). Servant leadership: A review and syntheses. *Journal of Management*, 37(4), 1228–1261.

## MODEL OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

This chapter presents a servant leadership model based on Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008) and Liden, Panaccio, Hu, and Meuser (in press) that has three main components: *antecedent conditions*, *servant leader behaviors*, and *leadership outcomes* (Figure 10.1). The model is intended to clarify the phenomenon of servant leadership and provide a framework for understanding its complexities.





### **Antecedent Conditions**

As shown on the left side of Figure 10.1, three antecedent, or existing, conditions have an impact on servant leadership: *context and culture*, *leader attributes*, and *follower receptivity*. These conditions are not inclusive of all the conditions that affect servant leadership, but do represent some factors likely to influence the leadership process.

**Context and Culture.** Servant leadership does not occur in a vacuum but occurs within a given organizational context and a particular culture. The nature of each of these affects the way servant leadership is carried out. For example, in health care and nonprofit settings, the norm of caring is more prevalent, while for Wall Street corporations it is more common to have competition as an operative norm. Because the norms differ, the ways servant leadership is performed may vary.

Dimensions of culture (see Chapter 15, “Culture and Leadership”) will also influence servant leadership. For example, in cultures where power distance is low (e.g., Nordic Europe) and power is shared equally among people at all levels of society, servant leadership may be more common. In cultures with low humane orientation (e.g., Germanic Europe), servant leadership may present more of a challenge. The point is that cultures influence the way servant leadership is able to be achieved.

**Leader Attributes.** As in any leadership situation, the qualities and disposition of the leader influence the servant leadership process. Individuals bring their own traits and ideas about leading to leadership situations. Some may feel a deep desire to serve or are strongly motivated to lead. Others may be driven by a sense of higher calling (Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008). These dispositions shape how individuals demonstrate servant leadership. In addition, people differ in areas such as moral development, emotional intelligence, and self-determinedness, and these traits interact with their ability to engage in servant leadership.

**Follower Receptivity.** The receptivity of followers is a factor that appears to influence the impact of servant leadership on outcomes such as personal and organizational job performance. Follower receptivity concerns the question “Do all employees show a desire for servant leadership?” Research suggests the answer may be no. Some subordinates do not want to work with servant leaders. They equate servant leadership with micromanagement, and report that they do not want their leader to get to know them or



try to help, develop, or guide them (Liden, Wayne, et al., 2008). Similarly, Meuser, Liden, Wayne, and Henderson (2011) found empirical evidence showing that when servant leadership was matched with followers who desired it, this type of leadership had a positive impact on performance and organizational citizenship behavior. The opposite was seen when there was no match between servant leadership and the desire of subordinates for it. It appears that for some followers, servant leadership has a positive impact and, for others, servant leadership is not effective.

### **Servant Leader Behaviors**

The middle component of Figure 10.1 identifies seven *servant leader behaviors* that are the core of the servant leadership process. These behaviors emerged from Liden, Wayne, et al.'s (2008) vigorous efforts to develop and validate a measure of servant leadership. The findings from their research provide evidence for the soundness of viewing servant leadership as a multidimensional process. Collectively, these behaviors are the central focus of servant leadership. Individually, each behavior makes a unique contribution.

**Conceptualizing.** Conceptualizing refers to the servant leader's thorough understanding of the organization—its purposes, complexities, and mission. This capacity allows servant leaders to think through multifaceted problems, to know if something is going wrong, and to address problems creatively in accordance with the overall goals of the organization.

For example, Kate Simpson, a senior nursing supervisor in an emergency room of a large hospital, uses conceptualizing to lead her department. She fully understands the mission of the hospital and, at the same time, knows how to effectively manage staff on a day-to-day basis. Her staff members say Kate has a sixth sense about what is best for people. She is known for her wisdom in dealing with difficult patients and helping staff diagnose complex medical problems. Her abilities, competency, and value as a servant leader earned her the hospital's Caregiver of the Year Award.

**Emotional Healing.** Emotional healing involves being sensitive to the personal concerns and well-being of others. It includes recognizing others' problems and being willing to take the time to address them. Servant leaders who exhibit emotional healing make themselves available to others, stand by them, and provide them with support.



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Emotional healing is apparent in the work of Father John, a much sought-after hospice priest on Chicago's South Side. Father John has a unique approach to hospice patients: He doesn't encourage, give advice, or read Scripture. Instead he simply listens to them. "When you face death, the only important thing in life is relationships," he says. "I practice the art of standing by. I think it is more important to come just to be there than to do anything else."

*Putting Followers First.* Putting others first is the sine qua non of servant leadership—the defining characteristic. It means using actions and words that clearly demonstrate to followers that their concerns are a priority, including placing followers' interests and success ahead of those of the leader. It may mean a leader breaks from his or her own tasks to assist followers with theirs.

Dr. Autumn Klein, a widely published health education professor at a major research university, is responsible for several ongoing large interdisciplinary public health studies. Although she is the principal investigator on these studies, when multiauthored articles are submitted for publication, Dr. Klein puts the names of other researchers before her own. She chooses to let others be recognized because she knows it will benefit them in their annual performance reviews. She puts the success of her colleagues ahead of her own interests.

*Helping Followers Grow and Succeed.* This behavior refers to knowing followers' professional or personal goals and helping them to accomplish those aspirations. Servant leaders make subordinates' career development a priority, including mentoring followers and providing them with support. At its core, helping followers grow and succeed is about aiding these individuals to become self-actualized, reaching their fullest human potential.

An example of how a leader helps others grow and succeed is Mr. Yon Kim, a high school orchestra teacher who consistently receives praise from parents for his outstanding work with students. Mr. Kim is a skilled violinist with high musical standards, but he does not let that get in the way of helping each student, from the most highly accomplished to the least capable. Students like Mr. Kim because he listens to them and treats them as adults. He gives feedback without being judgmental. Many of his former students have gone on to become music majors. They often visit Mr. Kim to let him know how important he was to them. Yon Kim is a servant leader who helps students grow through his teaching and guidance.



**Behaving Ethically.** Behaving ethically is doing the right thing in the right way. It is holding to strong ethical standards, including being open, honest, and fair with followers. Servant leaders do not compromise their ethical principles in order to achieve success.

An example of ethical behavior is how Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Elizabeth Angliss responded when one of her employees brought her a copy of a leaked document from their company's chief competitor, outlining its plans to go after some of Angliss's largest customers. Although she knew the document undoubtedly had valuable information, she shredded it instead of reading it. She then called the rival CEO and told him she had received the document and wanted him to be aware that he might have a security issue within his company. "I didn't know if what I received was real or not," she explains. "But it didn't matter. If it was the real thing, someone on his end did something wrong, and my company wasn't going to capitalize on that."

**Empowering.** Empowering refers to allowing followers the freedom to be independent, make decisions on their own, and be self-sufficient. It is a way for leaders to share power with followers by allowing them to have control. Empowerment builds followers' confidence in their own capacities to think and act on their own because they are given the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way they feel is best.

For example, a college professor teaching a large lecture class empowers two teaching assistants assigned to him by letting them set their own office hours; independently grade student papers, and practice teaching by giving one of the weekly class lectures. They become confident in their teaching abilities and bring new ideas to the professor to try in the classroom.

**Creating Value for the Community.** Servant leaders create value for the community by consciously and intentionally giving back to the community. They are involved in local activities and encourage followers to also volunteer for community service. Creating value for the community is one way for leaders to link the purposes and goals of an organization with the broader purposes of the community.

An example of creating value for the community can be seen in the leadership of Mercedes Urbanetz, principal of Alger High School. Alger is an alternative high school in a midsize community with three other high schools. Mercedes's care and concern for students at Alger is remarkable. Ten percent of Alger's students have children, so the school provides on-site

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day care. Fifteen percent of the students are on probation, and Alger is often their last stop before dropping out entirely and resuming criminal activities. While the other schools in town foster competition and push advanced placement courses, Alger focuses on removing the barriers that keep its students from excelling and offers courses that provide what its students need including multimedia skills, reading remediation, and parenting.

Under Mercedes, Alger High School is a model alternative school appreciated at every level in the community. Students, who have failed in other schools, find they have a safe place to go where they are accepted and adults try to help them solve their problems. Law enforcement supports the school's efforts to help these students get back into the mainstream of society and away from crime. The other high schools in the community know that Alger provides services they find difficult to provide. Mercedes Urbanez serves the have-nots in the community, and the whole community reaps the benefits.

### Outcomes

Although servant leadership focuses primarily on leader behaviors, it is also important to examine the potential outcomes of servant leadership. The outcomes of servant leadership are *follower performance and growth*, *organizational performance*, and *societal impact* (see Figure 10.1). As Greenleaf highlighted in his original work (1970), the central goal of servant leadership is to create healthy organizations that nurture individual growth, strengthen organizational performance, and, in the end, produce a positive impact on society.

***Follower Performance and Growth.*** In the model of servant leadership, most of the servant leader behaviors focus directly on recognizing followers' contributions and helping them realize their human potential. The expected outcome for followers is greater self-actualization. That is, followers will realize their full capabilities when leaders nurture them, help them with their personal goals, and give them control.

Another outcome of servant leadership, suggested by Meuser et al. (2011), is that it will have a favorable impact on subordinate in-role performance—the way followers do their assigned work. When servant leaders were matched with subordinates who were open to this type of leadership, the results were positive. Subordinates became more effective at accomplishing their jobs and fulfilling their job descriptions.