

## Nine Characteristics of Effective, Caring Leaders by the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership

- ◆ **Put a plus sign where your person has strengths and a minus sign where they have weaknesses. If they are strong at times and weak at others, put a “+/-” (but be prepared to explain).**

The Servant-Leader is someone who is a “servant” first and a “leader” second. They may knowingly choose to lead through serving others, or they may choose to serve – and emerge as a leader. A servant-leader is a “service-first” person. The traditional leader, however, has often been a “leader-first” person (“*you follow me*”). How do you tell if someone is a “Servant-Leader”? According to Robert K. Greenleaf, “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”(Greenleaf p.15).

- 1. Listening:** When there is a problem, traditional leaders often react first, listen second (possibly). Servant-leaders respond to a problem by *listening first*. With discipline, a non-servant can become a servant by disciplining themselves to listen until it is second nature.
- 2. Imagination:** Servant-leaders are able to dream great dreams. And they are able to help others see the great dream – without saying too much. They don’t, however, force others to stay within a narrow definition of that dream because that would limit the growth of everyone involved – including the servant-leader.
- 3. Withdrawal:** A servant-leader knows how to pace his or herself, and they also know how to determine what is urgent and what is less important. This allows the servant-leader to have the energy and resilience to cope with emergencies.
- 2. Acceptance and Empathy:** The servant-leader *wants* to understand and empathize with others, and they have true interest in their followers. They don’t automatically reject a person, even though they are sometimes forced to refuse to accept bad behaviors or bad performance. Every human being is imperfect, and the servant-leader recognizes this fact. Servant-leaders are committed to the growth of the people they serve.
- 5. Foresight:** This is a skill servant-leaders develop in order to sense what will happen in the future and when it will happen. They learn to look at the present, compare it with the past, and make a fairly good prediction for the future. The process continues constantly, allowing the servant-leader to make choices – and not just react to events as they unfold.
- 6. Awareness and Perception:** Servant-leaders are highly alert and open to new opportunities. They are also able to see “the big picture” and how it affects everyone around them. A servant-leader is also able to stand back from a high-pressure situation and compose his or herself so as to work more effectively.
- 7. Persuasion:** Rather than using their authority to force people to follow, a servant-leader uses persuasion. They are clear and persistent. And while some leaders take on huge institutions, others lead by persuading one person at a time or by taking one small action at a time.
- 8. Conceptualizing:** Servant-leaders think beyond day-to-day realities. They love the people or institutions they serve; they have a clear *vision* of what must be done; they are passionate and dedicated; and most importantly, they have faith in the ability of the people they serve to accomplish great goals.
- 9. Healing:** Our society has moved from face-to-face communities to large, faceless institutions. In this process, people have been hurt in any number of ways – including the loss of love and ethical behavior. According to Robert K. Greenleaf, servant-leaders help rebuild communities, “face-to-face groups” so that “the liability of each [person] for the other ... is unlimited, or as close to it as it is possible to get. Trust and respect are highest in this circumstance and an accepted ethic that gives strength to all is reinforced.” He further states that without community “trust, respect [and] ethical behavior are difficult for the young to learn and for the old to maintain.” Servant-leaders help build community so that these damages and hurts can be healed as much as possible.

Based on “The Servant as Leader” by Robert K. Greenleaf

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