

All Things Connected...



A COLLECTION OF
SERVANT LEADER REFLECTIONS

Linda W. Belton

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Other books by Linda W. Belton

A Nobler Side of Leadership: The Art of Humanagement

A Nobler Side of Leadership: The Art of Humanagement

The Workbook

The First Shall Be Last: Servant Leadership in Scripture

The Intentional Servant Leader: Premise & Practice

The Intentional Servant Leader: Premise & Practice

The Workbook



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INTRODUCTION

For many years, I have written essays or “think–pieces” and shared them with work colleagues and friends. These mental meanderings were personal and introspective. They were regularly distributed throughout my organization and passed on from one employee to the next. They were sometimes used in private meditation and often in team reflection. Every now and then, to my humble delight, I would discover one tacked to a wall or taped on a desk. I am often asked for reprints and so have pulled together some of my favorites here.

My tendency is to view conventional wisdom from a slightly unconventional perspective. The themes may look traditional, but they are meant to stimulate discussion and to tweak complacent points of view.

These are commentaries with a twist.



Some of the pieces appear as “*All Things Connected*” in *A Nobler Side of Leadership: The Art of Humanaement.*



Others show up as “*Thinking Between the Lines*” in *The Intentional Servant Leader: Premise & Practice.*



Some have even found their way into the narrative and verse of *The First Shall Be Last: Servant Leadership in Scripture.*

This book is a stand–alone collection of those materials, offered in bite–sized chapters. I hope that you find something here that opens your mind, speaks to your heart, and inspires your journey.

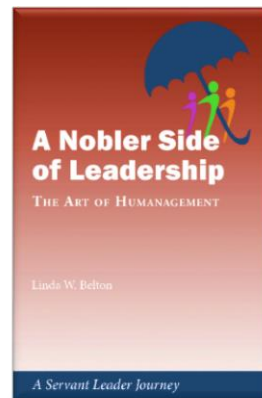


KEY

Each selection carries a logo to indicate the book from which it is derived:

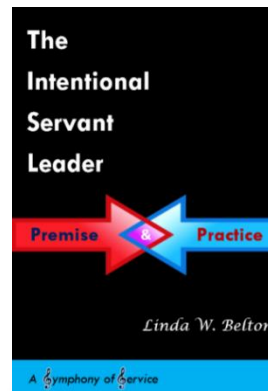
A Nobler Side of Leadership: The Art of Humangement

A Servant Leader Journey



The Intentional Servant Leader: Premise & Practice

A Symphony of Service



The First Shall Be Last: Servant Leadership in Scripture





POLLYANNA

Do you remember the children's story of *Pollyanna*? Pollyanna is an orphan taken in by her reclusive aunt. Despite a difficult life, she always looks for the positive; searches for the best in people. Conversely, her aunt always expects the worst and has a low estimation of human nature.

Events escalate until Pollyanna's brightness is finally extinguished by the persistent negativity around her. With her light gone, family and townsfolk acknowledge how empty their lives have become. Of course there's a happy ending when the community "culture" shifts to adopt Pollyanna's optimism.

It has always baffled me to hear the derisive tone associated with "being a Pollyanna." What does it say about a society where cynicism has higher value than idealism? Where a cheerful, hopeful approach is seen as unrealistic or *flaky*? Where caring is overridden by judging? Where learning about someone's failure is more satisfying than hearing of their success? Where we seek to define our separateness more than our connection?

Sociologists blame our disillusionment on the state of politics, corporations, and the economy. Since workplaces are a microcosm of the larger culture, it is no surprise that those attitudes trickle down.

It's easy to become distrustful of those who have more power, who work in unfamiliar environments or hold different views. It's common to suspect their motives, question their intentions, become defensive or push back. Sometimes those reactions are warranted. Almost always, at some level of consciousness, they are an attempt to redress the balance of power.

One way to deal with those feelings is to write them off, but beware of rationalizations for being less than our higher selves. "It's just business," or "No margin, no mission," may be clues that we've disconnected who we think we need to be from who we really are. Any time we suspend our values to get over a bump in the road, our internal alarms should go off.

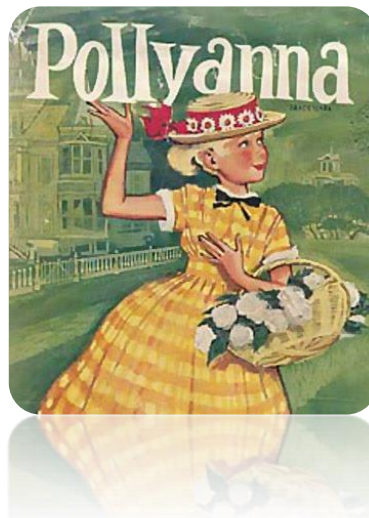
We are faced daily with life's tough realities, things we don't like, events beyond our control, and even pain. It's not unnatural to become jaded, frustrated, and demoralized. But perhaps there has never been a time that we needed Pollyanna's more.

Let's not forget among our heroes those Pollyanna's who, in the face of a dim reality, create their own reality; who are quick to smile, ready to help, slow to anger,

disposed to listen, and who delight in saying, “Yes!” Those who don’t write off what seems impossible, but ask how to make it possible. Who shape their environment instead of being shaped by it. Who dig deep to uncover opportunities, even when they’re buried in the muck. Who lead culture change within their sphere of influence, no matter how small or large that sphere may be. Who look past conflict and confrontation to glimpse the radiance of our humanity.

“Pollyanna-ism” is not head-in-the-sand behavior: it’s a perspective of hopefulness and possibility. Being called a Pollyanna is a testament to resilience, self-actualization, character, and compassion.

If you are so fortunate as to wear this label, don’t protest. Say, “Thank you!” Refuse to let your light be extinguished.





WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

In one of the episodes of the sitcom “Seinfeld”, the character named George is distraught about the possibility that his private life will intermingle with his dating life: in his words, that *happy-go-lucky George* will meet *relationship George*.

Because he puts on his best self for his girlfriend, he does not want her to meet his other friends, with whom he behaves more naturally. He is nervous about all the funny but embarrassing stories his friends will tell. He worries that he’ll have to share secrets of *private George* with the girlfriend (like PIN numbers) and humiliating things with the gang (like the couple’s sappy pet names).

He rejects offers to double–date, torn about which *George* he would play with both sides at the same dinner table. He sees the situation as a dangerous split and goes to great lengths to keep his dual roles from intersecting. If this should happen, George laments, **worlds would collide!**

George’s dilemma is not so far–fetched and can be a familiar vulnerability in the work world. Traditional leaders sometimes experience lapses in authenticity; gaps between their self-concept on the job and in the rest of life; between who they have to be at work and who they really are.

- ❖ When I hear someone say they are in it for the paycheck, working for the weekend, or marking time until retirement, I know that *they have become disconnected from their work–spirit*.
- ❖ Leaders can become wrapped up in pleasing the boss (no matter how high we climb on the career ladder, we always have a boss). They make decisions in the best interest of the organization, but not necessarily in the best interests of employees or customers. *They have misplaced their conscience*.
- ❖ Some leaders distance themselves from those they supervise and those they serve. They stay busy with tasks at the expense of relationships. *These leaders have lost their sense of mission*.

- ❖ And a few leaders find that they have strayed so deeply into thickets of corruption or ethical abysses that the consequences are cast in stone and there is no redemption. *These leaders have hopelessly lost their way.*

Most leaders set out with grand motives and strong values. When the inevitable tests of character and will come along, it is easy to rationalize a questionable choice. “I can play around the edges and not fall off my scruples”, we say.

- If I have to stretch the limits a bit in order to get elected, I’ll do it. I can’t change the system if I don’t get in.
- If I admit my mistake, I may lose my job. I have a family to support.
- I’ll look the other way, just this once.

The next tests are a little easier...until they cause us barely a ripple of disquiet and our integrity is scarred.

“Integrity” comes from the same root as “integrated”, meaning “whole; undivided”. Divided leaders become experts at compartmentalizing—holding their knowledge, beliefs, and feelings apart from their work lives. Remaining in this state of *values dissonance* takes a toll on the leader and the organization.

A business environment is not a social environment, but leaders must maintain their professionalism without compromising their wholeness.

- ✓ If you believe in the Golden Rule at church, you must live it in the workplace
- ✓ If you practice integrity in your community, then practice it at the office
- ✓ If relationships are important to you at home, they should be important to you at work

Don’t make the mistake of isolating your “selves” from each other. You’ll breathe easier, carry yourself more lightly, smile more often, and maybe find some peace.

When worlds collide, they become one.



WHERE'S WALDO?

Life is art. Work is the canvas on which we display our souls.

As we learn to appreciate a good painting, we understand it at several levels. We can walk through a gallery and enjoy a well-wrought picture of a landscape, a fine portrait, or a mind-altering modern masterpiece for just what it is. Often the simple pleasure of seeing what is in front of us is enough.

But sometimes there's more going on beneath the surface. I'm a fan of hidden-object puzzles where, embedded within a picture, are all sorts of items waiting for discovery. It's necessary to squint or peer off-center to find the hidden images. We are at risk of not seeing them unless we explicitly search for them.

As I contemplate the brushstroke of a Rembrandt, the palette of a Vermeer, or the eccentricity of a Bosch, I'm intrigued by the intricacy of what is behind the scenes; "below the line." Those observations shape how we perceive and react to the painting itself. If we don't know enough to look for the hidden, there's no chance we'll find it.

So we **see** a work of art at an observable level, and we **think** about it at an analytical level. But perhaps the artist most hoped we would **feel** it at a sublime level. How does it affect our senses? What is the ethos or "field" it creates? Does it lift us from the mundane? What is its story? How do we absorb it from an ethereal perspective? Does it produce an epiphanal moment? Are we better for having experienced it?

You are no less a work of art. I can choose to relate to you as I encounter you every day, with courtesy and civility—no more, no less. I can judge you by your appearance, your status, my own personal biases, and our history together. I can regard you through an *exterior* lens.

Or I might decide to dig deeper, identify what makes you tick, recognize your multi-dimensional nature, and uncover your buried treasures. I may have to squint or peer off-center, but unless I alter my vantage point, I won't know what treasures are there to find. We see what we expect and want to see. I can regard you through an *interior* lens.

Better yet, I might transcend what I see and think, and reflect on my impression of you. Everyone creates an energy or “field” that reveals our principles, priorities, and values. It emanates from us.

Our reputation as honorable or opportunistic, serving or self-centered, kind or harsh, is the manifestation of that field. It is how others “know” us.

What is the ethos or field that surrounds you?

I can choose to rise above the irritations and annoyances that wound our relationship and conceal the authentic you. I can elect to be mindful of the message “above the line,” and regard you through a *superior* lens.

I admire the Sanskrit expression **Namaste**: “the sacred in me greets the sacred in you.” Far more than a New Age sentiment, this is a profound declaration of our inherent worth.

We can choose to interact from our surface selves, our analytical selves, or our higher selves.

This is not a lesson in art appreciation: it is a reminder that, even in the madness and mess of the workplace, we can resolve to reach that greater consciousness which connects us all.





KUDOS OR CALLING?

A young man recently approached me, asking for advice about a career move. It would mean a promotion, a significant rung up the organizational ladder. It would also be a huge responsibility, and not in his immediate area of expertise. As excited and gratified as he was, he questioned the *rightness* of and his *readiness* for such a step. It was a big decision. How could he be sure?

Promotion, power, paycheck, and position are on everyone's wish list, but, I probed, is there an opportunity to serve? To serve at a higher level, or to serve more broadly, or to serve more deeply?

Traditional leaders may be content with the "4 P's" above. This is characteristic of the *leader-first*. Those opportunities may be flattering; they may feed the ego and the bank account. But I believe that without a deeper component, real fulfillment is always elusive, to be found in the next promotion or the next accomplishment—seldom in the *now*.

Servant leaders jump to the "service" question at the outset. They listen to their hearts to understand whether the new opportunity is indeed what they are being called to do. Is it the right place for them to serve? Is it the right time? Will it make the best use of their particular talents? Will the present organizational environment allow them to use those talents to elevate workers and the work itself? Is it attractive for the right reasons? Is it a wish or a charism?

We all encounter many career prospects in a lifetime. If we are honest, they aren't all the most beneficial for us or for the organization. Or the timing might be off—a great choice, but for another day. Career goals are healthy, but they need to be suffused with discernment.

For thirteen years I held a prestigious and influential position as the leader of a multi-hospital health care system. I was responsible for almost 200,000 employees and a budget of nearly \$1 billion. Then I was given an unparalleled opportunity to create an Organizational Health function at the national level. I would be able to spend my time teaching and talking about the cultural issues that make an organization thrive: civility, service, leadership, empowerment, etc.

All of my colleagues were supportive, but a few were also cautionary. In the new role, I would no longer have a large staff and budget to carry out the work. In fact, I would have to persuade and cajole for personnel and funding. These colleagues warned that without the position and its cachet, I would lose prestige and power. I would no longer be among the “elite” and my authority would be forgotten.

It took me nine months to reach a conclusion, continually weighing the pros and cons. I loved running a confederation of medical facilities, but this was a chance to instill corporate excellence from the ground up and from coast to coast. Accepting the assignment was a decision I never regretted. It was always much bigger than just a “job”: it was a passion. True, I did not wield the same power in the new position, but I believe my *influence* proliferated.

Servant leaders rightfully see their work as a vocation, a mission, a crusade—a calling. Many of us experience the work as a battleground where struggles are replayed every day: struggles for authority and power, for recognition and voice, for principle and the highest good. Generosity confronts greed, justice competes with mercy, service challenges control, and stewardship clashes with self-interest. Work is the ground on which these nobler battles are fought, and servant leaders are the warriors who fight them.

My advice to the young man? If the opportunity is not a calling, enjoy the compliment, but think twice. Wait and prepare yourself. Be ready for the one that is.





HUMILITY – A SEAT AT THE TABLE

Where do you sit – at the head or foot of a table, or somewhere in between? At the right hand or the left? Does it make a difference if you are at a dinner table or a conference room table? At a party or a meeting? Where do you sit in church or in a classroom? Unless we are directed to do otherwise, most of us tend to sit in the same general place.

A seat at the head of the table often confers, or at least implies, authority. Traditionally it may be a place of honor. In many work environments, the leader is found at the head of the table, with others seated in some kind of descending order. Those who have less power are inclined to gravitate toward the foot of the table or even find seats around the periphery.

In a town hall or classroom setting, it is construed that the more enthusiastic or better prepared participants will be “front and center”, while those just going through the motions are hiding in the back or on the fringes. Conventional wisdom may judge a person by where he elects to sit.

But is there another way of looking at *place*? For example, one may establish himself at the head of the table to better be seen, to intimidate, to court favor, or to gain status. Or one may just be more outgoing. Those at the foot of the table may simply be more reserved.

In reality, a particular seat at the table is wholly neutral: it has only the meaning we give it. In subtext however, the head of the table denotes honor and the foot conveys humility.

In high school days, it was often said, “He thinks he’s God’s gift to the world”, in response to someone who seemed egotistical; who thought too highly of himself. Recently I heard that comment again and my immediate thought was, “You’re right! He is God’s gift!” Indeed we are each God’s gift to the world!

We learn lessons in humility from an early age. We are taught not to boast or brag; not to be proud or put ourselves forward. Parents take pains to make sure their children don’t grow to be conceited. This often becomes internalized in self-deprecation, downplaying accomplishments, and being unable to accept good news about ourselves. We mistake innocent eagerness or excitement with pride. We confuse humility with humiliation and modesty with shame. We have it backwards.

Humility has gotten a bad rap, often confused with sycophancy, false modesty, or submissiveness. That is not humility: it is hubris. Humble leaders lead from their competence rather than their position.

Humility is one of the distinguishing traits of a servant leader. In true humility this person is confident, unpretentious, and authentic. While humility may be quiet, it is not weak. While it may be transparent, it is innately powerful, yet that power is shared freely. While it shows deference to others, it nourishes its own spirit.

Servant leadership turns the power pyramid on its head. The principle of *primus inter pares*, or first among equals, disperses the power. Leading humbly means leading from a level playing field. The leader is not the sovereign of those she leads, but their servant.

Primus inter pares decentralizes decision making and builds consensus. It focuses less on hierarchy and formal rules, and more on empowering the team.

The leader who is first among equals does not abdicate accountability, but builds a team of leaders who are able to participate in problem solving and invest in solutions. By “teaching them to fish”, she is growing new servant leaders. Primus inter pares is a significant departure from the usual. It overlooks rank and hierarchy, status and title, allowing great ideas to emerge from below and acknowledging that success is a collective effort.

In the servant organization, the person at the figurative head of the table shares that honor with everyone at the table. She invites those on the sidelines to join at the table. She offers everyone who wants it a seat at the table. She includes and welcomes all comers.

A seat at the table is prime real estate.

It is a stamp of humility to accept the designation of servant.



HANDLE WITH CARE

A patient waiting for service runs out of patience and loses his temper with the clinic nurse. Upset, the nurse considers calling Security. Instead, she puts her hand on the patient's shoulder and says, "You must feel like you're lost in the system. Let me see what I can do." The nurse could have written off the patient. Why didn't she?

A clerk notices a senior standing in a long line at the Returns counter, looking a bit shaky. The clerk grabs a chair from his office, offers it to the man, and stands with him a few minutes to be sure he's alright. The clerk is not responsible for the man. Why didn't he just let the Returns staff handle it?

An employee makes a grave mistake which could have resulted in harm to a client. The supervisor would be justified in pursuing termination, but the employee shows remorse and insight, and has performed well in the past. The supervisor opts to give her another chance. Why?

A manager has been "losing it" lately—public outbursts, bouts of crying, irritable with staff, missing some critical deadlines. The work unit has become tense and employees are complaining. When they learn that the manager is caring for her dying mother, they decide to offer support. The employees could have lodged a formal grievance or transferred off the unit. Why didn't they?

There is a one-word answer: COMPASSION.

Compassion is empathy, kindness, benevolence, consideration, or caring. It is not just an observation from outside another person's experience, it *enters into that experience with him*. Compassion is the opposite of detachment or indifference. It reflects the capacity and desire to serve.

Compassionate service is also high-quality service. It is the supreme manifestation of customer service. It can't be mandated or policy-driven. The potency of compassion is not that we *have to*, but that we *can*.

We know that transactional work inhibits compassion, that multi-tasking is the enemy of mindful presence, and that technology can be distracting and depersonalizing. What if your job relates more to tasks than to people? Does your customer have to compete for attention with a computer screen? Is your only connection by telephone or email?

Here are some small, but meaningful, opportunities to build compassion into our work:

- Help a caller who's being shuffled from one extension to another
- Give a frazzled colleague a hand
- Forgive someone who has treated you badly
- Offer honest, respectful feedback
- Cut a teammate some slack when she's having a rough day
- Assume the best about a co-worker
- Extend a word of encouragement
- Advocate for a client, even when it's uncomfortable
- Choose to ignore a slight
- Stand with a colleague who's in trouble
- Be truly happy for someone else's good fortune



Now think back to the opening vignettes. Each potential action would have been justifiable: calling Security, letting Returns staff take responsibility, firing the employee, reporting the manager. But in each situation, the participants chose to go another way. By doing so, they achieved different and more desirable outcomes:

- ✓ The nurse defused the situation by personally connecting with the patient.
- ✓ There is no such thing as "He's not my responsibility." The senior received immediate assistance, and the clerk modeled serving behavior.
- ✓ The supervisor knew this employee would be *exceptionally* careful in the future.
- ✓ Staff saw an immediate change in the manager's behavior and built more honest team relationships.

We don't use the term *compassion* very often in business. Some see it as weakness, lack of accountability, letting people off the hook, or being soft.

I believe compassion is the ultimate expression of power, in all its altruism, generosity, and potential. Only leaders with courage can be vulnerable enough to show compassion. Only those who accept their own flawed selves can serve imperfect individuals in uncertain situations. Only those comfortable with their own humanity can risk entering into the humanity of others.



THE SCIENCE OF CONNECTION

“Connections” are an ongoing theme of Organizational Health. We can intuit connections, observe them and measure them. But is there an empirical basis for them?

Disciplines of the New Science, particularly quantum physics and cellular biology, translate scientific models to leadership and culture. So here is a scientific case for connection, from a layperson’s perspective, and the lessons I have derived:



CONCEPT: **CELL MEMBRANES**

A cell membrane has two major functions—***protection and growth***—that are activated by hormones and proteins, and stimulated by genetic or environmental triggers. The organism (cell) can’t do both at once. When it’s in protection mode (a stress response), growth is impossible. Protection is always the cell’s default function.

Lessons

- This is a physiological validation of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs: it explains why people (human organisms) cannot achieve higher level needs (love, relationship, self-actualization) when their basic survival and security needs are not met.
- If we want staff to be engaged, productive, and in growth mode, it is necessary to cultivate an atmosphere of respect, fairness, and psychological safety.
- It’s imperative to guard against situations, systems, and environments that preserve a constant state of stress. Being stuck in protection mode limits growth. Learning is chilled in a fearful environment.



CONCEPT: **EVOLUTION**

Gene-centric theories of evolution and growth tend to support Darwin’s “survival of the fittest.” In this view, genes are determinant, and competition and violence are the primary principles of survival and evolution.

Epigenesis theory regards genes as predictive, not determinant, and evolving through interaction with environmental stimuli. Single cells congregate naturally to form “communities” that share similar functions. Epigenesis defines cooperation as the essential element for survival and evolution.

Lessons

- Though we bring individual skills and experiences to our jobs, we’re most effective *in community*. Teams that share tasks, goals, and purpose are more likely to be successful.
- A healthy organizational culture is critical to fostering “communities of cooperation.”



CONCEPT: **WAVE/PARTICLE THEORY**

Subatomic particles change form and properties as they respond to one another and to the scientist observing them. They form patterns of relationship that correspond to what the observer anticipates. If the observer expects to see them as a wave, they appear as a wave. If he expects to see them as particles, they appear as particles.

Lessons

- Behaviors arise from interactions between individuals and are influenced by the environment.
- We unconsciously create the organization we expect. Literally, what we envision is what we get.



CONCEPT: **FRACTAL THEORY**

Fractals are patterns which replicate themselves at deeper levels. Fractals are seen at the molecular level and in nature (clouds, broccoli, ferns, etc.). While fractal components are not identical, a similar pattern or archetype is evident. (Every cauliflower floret resembles the whole cauliflower from which it comes.)

Lessons

- Behaviors are patterned into organizations.
- Organizational *macro-culture* can be replicated and sustained at all levels of the organization.
- *Micro-culture* (work unit culture) can reflect local relevance while retaining the values of the parent organization.



CONCEPT: FIELD THEORY

Subatomic particles are situated in vast areas of space. This space is filled with non-visible fields, such as gravitational, electromagnetic, and cyber fields. Scientists postulate that it's also filled with *morphogenic* fields: fields that influence behavior and create the culture.

Lessons

- Think about the organizational impact of fields. Imagine service fields, ethics fields, team fields, and engagement fields filling our workplace.
- Leaders shape fields through consistent modeling and messaging. This *is* organizational culture.



CONCEPT: MIRROR NEURONS

Mirror neurons spontaneously create brain-to-brain connections between people. They give us the capacity to assimilate the thoughts and feelings of others and to mirror others' behavior. Mirror neurons play a key role in our ability to empathize and socialize. Do you feel happier in the presence of an upbeat colleague? The mirror neuron network is the WIFI that connects us all.

Lessons

- We understand others not by thinking, but by feeling.
- Modeling positive (or negative!) thoughts and behaviors is contagious.
- Personal contact remains important in an electronic age.



CONCEPT: **NON-LOCAL PHENOMENA/QUANTUM ENTANGLEMENT**

Einstein called it “spooky action at a distance.” This is the idea that two quantum particles can be so deeply entwined that they share the same existence. When something happens to one, it instantaneously influences the other, regardless of the distance between them.

How often have people in different places come up with the same idea or invention at the same time? Have you ever answered the telephone and said, “Oh, I was just thinking about you?”

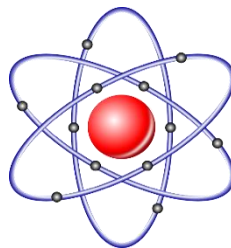
Lessons

- Virtual employees/virtual teams may be connected in unanticipated ways.
- Thoughts and ideas are “quantum property.” We sometimes call this *synchronicity*.
- The impact of relationships transcends time and space.

Why is all this important? These scientific roots are rich with lessons about how to lead, live, and behave in the workplace.

We are connected to people, programs, and the environment, sometimes in ways beyond our awareness. The connections that guide, govern, and move us are often unconscious and imperceptible. Many of the lessons embedded in scientific discovery are intuitive; they are just the right things to do.

There is a business case, a human case, and now a scientific case for a healthy work culture. The lesson of the New Science is that they are inseparable.





MULTIPLICITY

The premise of our being One in metaphysical terms is staggering. We lose none of our individuality, yet are immersed in a breathtaking wholeness. The example is often given of a wave, which is at once itself and part of the ocean. A single wave can be distinguished from others by the way it looks, acts, and moves, but it is the greater body of water to which it belongs that gives it its form and power. Alone, it has little impact. There is both challenge and comfort in being One.

Organizations form One out of many: individuals, groups, teams, departments, etc. In any organization there is rampant variation: individuals are unique to each other; groups and teams are assigned distinct functions; departments are structured differently. None are mirror images of each other, but they all must relate in a coordinated, orderly, and unified way. They must be driven by a common purpose; not in lock-step, but *in alignment*.

An organization is a jigsaw puzzle and the servant leader fits the pieces together. It is a crew team and the servant leader is coxswain. It is a dance and the servant leader is choreographer.

When a leader understands that his role is not to dominate, but to orchestrate, a fresh perspective on teams emerges. Let's consider the orchestra metaphor. The conductor doesn't create the music: he allows it to happen. He opens a space for the excellence of others. He cues the performers; keeps them focused and true to the composition; maintains cadence and synchrony; and directs the melodies and harmonies to intertwine perfectly.

From his position on the dais, the conductor is reminded that it is the multiplicity of instruments and the diversity of sounds that brings life to the work. The sweetness of the strings, the piquancy of the reeds, the authority of the brasses, and the emphasis of the percussion are all necessary. A cello can sing a solo, a flute can lead a passage, and a drum can command attention, but singly, they do not a symphony make.

So how does this translate to the work environment?

Work is accomplished through teams. Teams bring together complementary skills, expertise, and viewpoints. Team members move toward common goals to which they hold each other accountable. They actively help one another to advance the mission.

Successful teams are micro–systems that form productive bonds from within. However, because they also understand that they are part of an integrated macro–system, they reach out, invite in, and provide a welcoming, supportive setting.

The leader influences how the team learns, how they understand their purpose and goals, assures a psychologically “safe” climate, and coaches to successful outcomes. In a servant organization, leaders serve the team members and the members serve each other. Jointly, they serve the institution and the customer.

Teams need the one who manages from his gut as well as his brain; the member who has his head in the clouds as well as the spreadsheets; the participants who are precise, and those who are adaptable.

No organization is comprised only of accountants, or nurses, or mechanics, or techies. If the whole organization were administrators, who would then teach? If the whole team were janitors, who would deliver care? To the servant leader, diversity is just smart. He knows that it is the multiplicity of talents and the diversity of perspectives that bring animation to the work. The knowledge of the seasoned employee, the curiosity of the newcomer, the frame of reference of gender, age, and ethnicity—all bring a richness to the team that makes the end product *finer*.

Servant leaders orchestrate their teams. They are first among equals; generous in sharing information and credit. They sustain the tempo and faithfulness to the mission. They give members a moment in the limelight; an opportunity to serve, create, and grow as servant leaders themselves. They appreciate the indispensability of each part and the perfection of the whole.

Organizations are really a multiplicity; a collection of teams; one body of work. In a servant organization, the work is revered. Teams care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

The servant leader values the synergy of a well-oiled team, where all members share their strengths and count on their peers to balance their weaknesses; where no one needs to be *all* things, because each member brings *something*.



MAGNUM OPUS

*The painter is inspired. "My masterwork!" he exclaims. "My magnum opus!
The canvas must be prepared—a gesso of veteran and novice.
For dimension, an overlay of traditional; an undertone of nouveau.
My palette must be blended—a dab of innocence and two of expertise.
The brushes must be softened—one that feels deeply and another that
thinks hard.*

*Ah, my outline is ready—the clarity of facts, the elegance of figures!
Then to bring my vision to life, a stroke of poetry and one of patois;
And to create a mood, highlights of optimism and pessimism.
For power and intensity, a clash of patience and impulsiveness;
For a dash of complexity, a background of poverty and a prospect of wealth;
And to humanize it, a tint of one who practices mercy and a shade of one
who needs it."*

*As the work nears completion, there are finishing touches:
To add some suspense, one who leads and one who lingers;
For brightness, a hue of wisdom here and a bit of silliness there;
To give depth, one who carries old wounds and one who heals;
And for perspective, one who speaks and another who observes.*

*As the painter steps back to view his creation,
He marvels at the breadth of qualities he has captured within its frame,
And knows that without them, it would be flat, one-dimensional: a parody of
art.*

*Qualities that transcend the medium,
An inspiration of function and beauty,
This is his magnum opus.*





EXCLUSION AND HOMOGENEITY

The case has been made for diversity and inclusion. The benefits are well-documented. Yet in a society dominated by politically-correct thinking, the pendulum may have swung to a precarious extreme. We have become a citizenry that does not tolerate dissent.

Diversity works because it generates variation in thought, attitude, and creative ideas. That variation arises from differences in background, culture, demographics, and lifestyle. *Inclusion* works because it allows the variation to be heard. It gives voice to the individual and power to the group.

For years I opposed gender-specific associations. I disapproved of all-male clubs and applauded men in predominantly female professions and vice versa. Then one day I joined a women's fitness center. I struggled with the exclusivity of it, but soon realized that I felt more comfortable and less self-conscious in that setting. The truth is, I probably would never have signed on to a coed gym.

Studies done on academic performance in single-sex schools (Eisenkopf, et al, 2013; Novotney, 2011) indicate advantages in scholarship and self-confidence in gender-specific education. Some studies, although mixed, indicate a patient's preference for a physician of the same gender. I opt for a female doctor, and an older one at that, when I have the choice.

So is predilection for what is familiar actually exclusion? Maybe not. On one hand, it's important to stretch our consciousness and our comfort zone. On the other hand, we all should be able to make informed and enlightened choices. True inclusion is offering those choices and not barring the door to those who make different choices than we do.

Diversity is a plus in any organization. Understanding other philosophies, cultures, ethnicities, religions, and generations makes it less likely that we will engage in overt or unconscious bias. The multiplicity of insights improves decisions and strengthen teams. We simply do better work from a comprehensive frame of reference.

I worry, however, that in an atmosphere of blistering political correctness, we are actually losing the diversity of thought that efforts over the past decades have fought to win. Just writing this piece feels risky. More and more, we are being encouraged to share the same judgements, subscribe to the same ideologies, and support the same concepts. Less and less are unpopular opinions, unfavored viewpoints, and contradictory positions

accepted in public discourse. Disagreement is a civil liberty; sarcasm, derision, ostracism, and contempt are not and, in fact, mock the very liberty we claim.

Where is the diversity in homogeneous thinking? In capitulating to “thought police”? In silencing competing values? In putting down or writing off perspectives not our own? Bullies can be found on any side of the political divide.

Uniformity—homogeneity—is monotonous and stagnant; it inhibits growth. Tolerance is the very least we should strive for. Better yet, let’s work toward patience, acceptance, and appreciation.

A melting pot is of little value if we lose our uniqueness. I cherish our differences—what makes you, you; and what makes me, me. In the workplace, diversity is celebrating our commonality and capitalizing on our individuality. We are each remarkable in our own right.

We are not called to judge, we are called to love.

STRENGTH LIES IN OUR DIFFERENCES, NOT IN OUR SIMILARITIES.

— STEPHEN COVEY





THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

Over the past five years, I have been a member of at least twenty “communities”. Some were by virtue of my job, some by location, and some out of special interests. We might be members of the academic community, the scientific community, the retirement community, the medical community, the Jewish community, the Veteran community, the Atlanta community, the theater community, the online community, and on and on.

We use the term community loosely. For example, my homeowners association calls itself a community. It is rife with rules and regulations, and in all my time there, I have never felt particularly welcomed. The only common denominator among the members is proximity, and proximity is not enough. So for me, this is not a community, but simply a neighborhood.

My work organization also calls itself a community. In many ways it truly is. I have been supported by and accepted into the group. When individuals are in difficulty, experience major life events, or have reason to rejoice, the community is there. It has common goals and experiences that bind the members together.

My organization, however, has the power to fire me at will, or to make such changes in my work life that it is untenable to stay. It is accountable and responsive to a powerful higher body that is perpetually at loggerheads with the work community, and whose rank supersedes the work community. Therefore, this community will only defend its members to the point where the higher body steps in. When that occurs, and it is often enough, the community disappears, at least until the crisis has passed. Even though it's positive most of the time, it can never feel completely safe. This is a community with strings.

I am also affiliated with a religious community. These are women who are joined by faith and vocation. They have elected to live, eat, work, and worship as a community. I am drawn to them because of that, but I am not one of them. I share their beliefs and their ethic, but I am peripheral to their way of life. I am with them in spirit daily, but in body, almost never. For me, inaccessibility is not an issue, because the deeper connection transcends place. This community is more satisfying than the neighborhood and work communities, yet the sense of belonging will always be by definition second-tier.

Let me tell you about another community. We called it the CREW Community. CREW—Civility, Respect, and Engagement in the Workplace—began as a program to

facilitate more honest, accountable, and rewarding relationships between co-workers and with their supervisors.

The premise was simple; the practice was anything but. Yet the initiative was so effective that more and more work groups gravitated to the training. In the course of ten years or so, thousands of people took part. We sponsored regular refresher sessions because participants clamored to come back together, to reconnect and recommit—a sort of CREW booster shot.

Over time, they developed a sense of community, not based on location—they were spread all over the country, not even based on their jobs—they were at all levels of the hierarchy and in widely-divergent organizations. What they had in common were a goal, a foundation, an experience, an identity, and a commitment.

Despite distance, they reached out to each other for encouragement, information, ideas, and empathy: “I know what you’re going through,” or “I’ve been there and here’s how I handled it.” This is a group that wore the mantle of community lightly and by choice.

So community has many connotations:

- a group of people living in a particular area
- a “band of brothers” we lean on when times are tough; who are there for us when we need love, support, and encouragement
- social, religious, or occupational associates sharing common characteristics or interests
- a body of persons of similar professional pursuits scattered through a larger society, having comparable character, values, and identity
- an attachment or feeling of belonging among like-minded people.

Humans are made to live and work with others; we are social beings intended to exist within communities. Communities are meant to kindle in their members a sense of self-discovery and group connection, embolden them to express their beliefs and opinions in a “judgment-free zone”, and to build relationships with others. They have a tangible impact on individual self-awareness and fulfillment.

Positive experiences with communities allow individuals to feel more connected to their environment and the people in it.

Servant leaders are “born” to community. They hold similar work values and common goals. They foster a feeling of genuine connection among members by providing opportunities for interaction. They set a climate of respect, allowing everyone to feel

heard, knowing that when people speak their minds they are more likely to be bonded to the community.

Servant leader communities are not rule-bound or managed from a pinnacle. Everyone is expected to step up and lead at the suitable time: leadership in community is shared. And they celebrate community traditions—their roots and origins, their philosophy and purpose, their milestones and successes, and their legacies.

A servant leader community is not a crowd, a clique, or a cult. It is not dependent on proximity, structure, or management imprimatur. It offers an uncensored milieu for working out what servant leadership means in our daily lives, with the support and goodwill of fellow travelers. Leaders who smooth the way for community are heroes.

I recall the sentiments of one servant leader community member, “What a relief that I don’t have to do this alone!”

Maybe that sums it up best.





“DO UNTO OTHERS” ... A PARABLE

The Ruler of the Realm had been plagued for months with intractable back pain and reluctantly decided to travel the day’s journey to the Medical Center for help.

After a grueling trek, he parked his carriage (with difficulty) and presented himself to the Admissions window.

He was not recognized for who he was, and was told to have a seat in the waiting room until the clinic staff had time to see him.

It was a busy day and people were working hard, but after an hour his back could not endure the wait and he approached the desk to find out how long it would be.

Frustrated, the clerk called a nurse, remarking in a whispered (but overheard) aside that this was a “problem patient” and would the nurse please take him off the clerk’s hands?!

The Ruler was led to a treatment room where he was poked, prodded, and questioned. Being naïve in the mysteries of medicine, he was somewhat anxious and not at all sure what was expected of him.

In confusion, he blurted out that his discomfort was intolerable and all he wanted was something to relieve the pain. The nurse firmly told him that drugs were not the answer, and put a note in the chart about the Ruler’s “drug-seeking” behavior.

An x-ray was ordered and the ride to Radiology was a nightmare. The transportation aide bumped down the corridors, seemingly unaware of the Ruler’s discomfort, all the while bewailing the latest hospital budget cuts, not something the Ruler wanted to hear at that moment!

His spine was photographed and after a lengthy delay, the radiologist reported that the films showed “hypertrophic changes to T5-T9, with lateral scoliotic tendencies and neural entrapment”; that he was not a candidate for electrical stimulation or laminectomy; that apart from exercise, nothing could be done, and the Ruler would have to learn to live with the pain.

Alarmed and dazed, the Ruler beseeched the physician to explain in language he could understand, but she was already hurrying off to see the next patient.

Some leaflets and a prescription for Physical Therapy were thrust into his hand and he was reminded to stop at the Cashier’s office on the way out.

While leaving, the Ruler became faint and braced himself against the wall for support. For minutes he remained this way until a housekeeper stopped to inquire if he needed assistance. The housekeeper helped the Ruler to the cafeteria for a cup of coffee and, when he had recovered, guided him through the maze of hallways to the parking lot where his carriage was waiting.

Sadly, the Ruler returned to his palace, picking up the painful thread of his existence.

Every Tuesday it was the Ruler's custom to open the doors of the palace and entertain petitions from the citizens of the Realm. Today among the petitioners he was surprised to recognize the Admissions clerk from the Medical Center. The clerk was distraught over the condition of her office, which was cramped, dark, hot, and poorly equipped, causing her much discomfort. Renovation of the office had been postponed due to other construction priorities.

"You, Sir," she said, "have the power to reverse those priorities so I won't have to wait any longer."

"Waiting was not your concern when others were doing the waiting," he responded. "You raised not a finger to welcome me or ameliorate my delay. Your office will be repaired, but you will wait for it to be so." And he dismissed her from his sight.

When the second petitioner entered, the Ruler was shocked to see the clinic nurse who had labeled him as a "drug seeker." The nurse pled eloquently that budget cuts were at the root of the problem, that money was being diverted to other departments, and that the clinic where he worked was not receiving its fair share. He was here to solicit an endowment. The Ruler immediately branded the nurse as a "complainer" and took relish in saying, "Dollars are not the answer," then sent him on his way.

Then the third petitioner presented himself: the radiologist who had no time to answer the Ruler's questions and quiet his fears. The physician was enraged about a new Policy of the Realm which was fraught with royal mumbo-jumbo, and which might have disastrous effects on her practice and remuneration.

"This threatens to create major changes in my established routines and activities," she protested, "but the law is so obscure that I cannot understand what to do about it. As Ruler, you are obliged to make it clear."

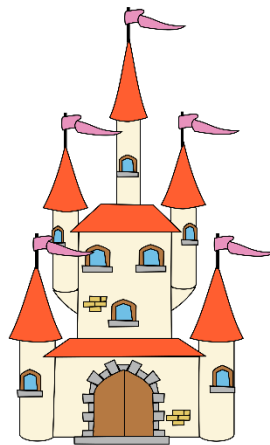
The Ruler's sympathy for the physician was great, but the opportunity to confer a lesson was greater.

“Inability to comprehend and control the changes in one’s own life,” he mused, “is often more tormenting than the change itself. Yes, the new law demands adjustments, but I simply don’t have time to discuss them.” And he called the last petitioner.

The housekeeper was ushered in and bright smiles lit both their faces. The housekeeper opened his mouth to speak, but the Ruler hushed him. “Before you ask, I will tell you that whatever you desire is yours. You alone had compassion for me, though you knew me not. You left your appointed rounds to offer me an arm, some nourishment, and a moment of your time. What is it you wish?”

“I have two requests,” replied the housekeeper. “First, I ask that you not judge our Medical Center harshly, as many fine and caring people work there, and that you would grant the desires of the petitioners who came before me.” The Ruler agreed, and he proceeded to renovate all work spaces, make whole the budget, and rectify all illogical policies.

What was the second wish, you wonder? It was to be sent to school to learn the ancient art of acupuncture, whereupon the housekeeper healed the Ruler’s back pain and received the highest honors of the Realm.





WHO IS YOUR CUSTOMER?

The answer is not always as easy as it sounds. Depending on your business, customers may be accorded a variety of labels: client, consumer, user, patient, partner, member, purchaser, enrollee, subscriber, constituent, or patron.

Some health care and social service agencies reject the word “customer”. Medical professionals, for example, can be uncomfortable with the economic implications of the term, disassociating themselves from the billing and marketing aspects of those industries. Being one of them myself, I understand their position, but the language of the commercial sector is more honest. We can coin the cleverest euphemisms, but a customer by any other name....

“Customer” is not a *four-letter word*. We want businesses to go the extra mile to satisfy us and retain our loyalty; to be served quickly & respectfully; to trust in the quality of the product and the competence of provider; to have our preferences acknowledged and expectations met.

Being a customer is not about the exchange of money; it is about the exercise of choice. Choice is easy to understand when we’re talking about a bank or a drug store, but for many businesses the customer is captive: there is no choice. To my HMO, the utility company, local garbage pick-up, the IRS, my cable provider, the post office, most governmental agencies and monopolies, the concept of customer satisfaction is just *lip service*. Where else would you go? What choice do you have? What is your recourse?

Even when options are limited, the consumer still has freedom to make choices. I can choose to comply with or reject a treatment plan; to support or slam an agency; to make transactions easy or put them through the hoops. I can find ways to cheat and deceive (“captives” often see small deceptions as the *equalizer* against a faceless system). I can stir up discontent, blast them on Facebook, write to my Congressperson, or call the media hotline. All of those are choices.

And what effect does a captive clientele have on staff? Think about the last time you phoned a company with a complaint, were left on hold, repeatedly asked for the same information, transferred to a robot, and finally connected with a real person who did not have an answer or could not solve your problem. *If leadership doesn’t care about service, why should the employees?*

Whatever we call them, when we view people as customers who make choices and deserve service, *we treat them differently*.



CUSTOMER SERVICE, INSIDE OUT

This is where *Humanagement* bleeds into Customer Service. What if we treated each other as well as we treat our external customers? Colleagues, staff, and other departments are internal customers. They are the people who ask for help or a minute of our time; who want to feel welcome and respected. Do we tell them we're glad they're here? Do we understand their needs and likes? Do our actions reassure them of their worth and do we go beyond their basic expectations? We would do all of that for our "customers", so why not each other?

Ask a company that has a reputation for great customer service. Those organizations recognize the value of a stellar customer experience and they know that serving their employees well is a linchpin of that experience. Service—good or bad—rolls downhill. When I see staff who are oblivious to a customer, I infer that leadership is neglectful of staff. When an employee clobbers a patron with officiousness, I conclude that management is imperious. And when I witness a truly caring interaction with a client, it's evident that this institution prizes *heart service*, not *lip service*.

Servant leaders use the tools of *humanagement* to create a culture of service that faces in both directions. They appreciate that good customer service doesn't happen without employees who feel valued, invested, and empowered to deliver it. Leaders who provide that environment send a loud message to staff about expectations of service. Intentional servant leaders reward service, inside and out.

It is up to the leader to set the stage for internal customer service and to model the behavior. Then it becomes every employee's role to serve their teammates. Customer service can be turned inside out by remembering a few simple precepts:

1. Think of co-workers as VIPs! Respect and assistance go a long way.
2. Treat them as you want to be treated. Show an interest, cut people some slack, and forgive them when they disappoint you.
3. View interruptions as opportunities to serve. Your time is precious, so giving a moment of it to help someone makes a statement.
4. Exceed their expectations. Don't just say, "It's in the manual." Take the manual to them. Instead of giving a new employee directions to the Personnel Office, walk with them.
5. Make your internal customers look good. Find ways to support the success of your colleagues.
6. Say thank you, acknowledge good work, notice the small niceties, and express appreciation.

When leaders and individuals become passionate about service, teams and departments are challenged to discover new ways to serve each other. I have found organizations that make this a quest! Here are some innovative examples:

- The HR department that did small errands for clinicians who had to work overtime
- The housekeeping department that used aromatherapy to freshen institutional odors
- The accounting office that offered to assist colleagues with tax preparation
- A food service team who turned a cafeteria meal into a dining experience
- The organization that provided dry-cleaning and package pick-up for staff
- A canteen that delivered lunch orders to employees' desks
- A business center that offered free copying and faxing to co-workers after hours
- A volunteer department that displayed artwork in previously sterile hallways
- The security office that accompanied staff to their cars after dark
- An IT department that furnished simple tech support for employees' home computers

Let your organization be ablaze with service! Intentional servant leaders light the match, fan the flame, and watch it spread. They convert every employee into, as one work group puts it, "a server with fervor"!





WORDS MATTER

Words are powerful tools. They reflect our feelings and influence our behavior. Words shape the way we perceive the people we serve.

Take for example a health care setting. **Patient... Customer... Client... Member..., Resident...,** etc.—each term describes a different relationship between the giver and receiver of care. In a highly competitive environment, patients/customers *make choices*, sometimes based on reputation and clinical “scorecards,” but more often on the quality of relationships and their *experience of care*.

I tell the story of my aunt, a World War II Veteran, who developed bone cancer and underwent several amputations at a VA facility. She was an important role model in my life and I was increasingly distressed by her lack of progress. She had the financial and intellectual resources to seek out the best medical treatment. In desperation I called and pleaded with her to transfer to a private hospital or a university hospital. “You can get care anywhere you choose!”

Her response was sobering: “*I am where I choose to be*. These people understand me and care about me. I would go nowhere else.”

I’ll never know if my aunt received the finest quality of care, but I know *absolutely* that it was her perception that she did. Being the best is not just measured in data or performance metrics, but first and foremost in the estimation of our customers.

Let me add another term to our list: **guest**. The concept of *customer* is tied to satisfaction; the concept of *guest* is linked to hospitality. Ultimately, we are all *guests* in the lives of our customers.

Henri Nouwen offers these insights (paraphrased) on hospitality:

- The term “hospitality” should not be limited to its literal sense of receiving a stranger in our house; it is a fundamental attitude toward fellow human beings.
- Those in the helping professions have to keep reminding themselves that they do not own those in need of care. The danger inherent in the professionalization of healing is that it becomes a way of exercising power instead of offering service.

- People view those who are helping them with fear and apprehension. Doctors, chaplains, psychologists, social workers, etc. are looked up to as if they were endowed with mysterious powers. They accept that these professionals say things that cannot be understood, do things that cannot be questioned, and make decisions about their lives with no explanation.

You may not be a medical professional, but you have the opportunity to be a “healer”. Bankers, lawyers, merchants, teachers, skilled tradespeople, clerks, bosses, technicians, government employees—each of us in a very personal way—are called to be healers, in our thoughts, our actions, and our words.

Words matter. Words have weight. Words repeated become thoughts deep-seated. Words in print become imprinted. True or not, they develop a life of their own, often with devastating results. It is sad when those results are deliberate. It is heartbreaking when they are simply careless. Words can so easily become “weapons of casual destruction”.

Every leader transmits difficult messages from time to time: onerous decisions, disappointing results, and harsh business realities. They must fire, turn down promotions, decline to hire, discipline, and say no. Servant leaders can do unpleasant tasks with grace. Even in the most egregious situations, they demonstrate kindness and concern for the human being.

Servant leaders are healers. They exercise a fundamental attitude of *hospitality*. They are transparent in their language, compassionate, and sensitive to the real-life impact of their messages. They guide staff to better behavior, better performance, and more effective ways of doing things. They offer input and advice that moves employees forward instead of freezing them in place. They guard against tattering the worker’s self-esteem and allow him to save face. They may set limits and parameters, but they always leave a window open.

Understand the force of your words. Use them judiciously. Your words have the power to sink a spirit or make it soar.





THE MISTAKE

*I can call you an idiot; shout at you in rage;
I can criticize and quibble, and watch you disengage.*

*Or I could forgive the error; show you a better way;
Encourage you to learn and live to work another day.*

*I can say you're a disappointment; that your work's not up to par.
I could tell you you're not making it; that you'll never be a star.*

*Or I might acknowledge your potential as a diamond in the rough;
Offer words of encouragement, and suppress words of rebuff.*

*I can add a tinge of sarcasm, employ a mocking tone.
I can spoil your reputation, as a way to boost my own.*

*Or I can think the best of you; not rush to level blame;
Refrain from speaking half-truths that might damage your good name.*

*My language has the power to build up or to demean;
To stroke your ego, flatten it, or anything in-between.*

*My tongue can be a guillotine; my pen can be a sword.
I can wound or I can heal with exactly the right word.*

*It's up to me what I convey; to uplift or to bruise.
No excuses; not by chance; it is always what I choose.*

*Words not lightly spoken, the repercussions weighed;
For the impact on another's soul is a heavy price to be paid.*



SANCTITY OR SERVICE?

The best way to understand servant leadership is to see it in action. So when I speak to groups, I often ask them to name a contemporary or historical character they identify as a servant leader and the attribute that makes them so. I typically hear responses like: Mother Teresa, because she chose to serve; Martin Luther King, for his courage; Gandhi, for his humility; John Kennedy, because he was inspirational; and Florence Nightingale, for her compassion.

Next I ask the group to name a servant leader in their own lives. That is always more challenging. After some moments of struggling in silence, someone might suggest a parent, a clergyperson, or perhaps a teacher. Why, I often wonder, is it harder to find examples of servant leadership in our own experience than in the experience of history? Does the sweeping visibility of the figure on the world stage, the passage of time, or the fuzziness of history sanctify him in some way?

In fact, when we look closely at many of these role models, when we rub off some of the patina of myth, we find chinks and imperfections. Some may have exhibited questionable morals in their personal relationships and others may have used dubious means to achieve their ends. Despite their celebrated contributions to civilization, they had human failings. Despite their human failings, they made celebrated contributions to civilization.

Most of our models of servant leadership were not saints, but they stepped up to serve in ways that shook the world. The people in our lives are doing that too—every day. We may see their flaws more clearly; we may feel their slights more acutely; we may judge them more severely. The limitations and shortcomings of our families, friends, and colleagues are more familiar and personal. But I believe there are servant leaders all around us, if we are only open to their presence.

We are all leaders. None of us is exempted. The world cannot afford to allow anybody to merely watch from the wings. While we may not all be leaders in the classical sense, everyone can claim their small niche for service in accordance with their gifts. Small service is not trivial service. Anyone, in any walk of life, can model a quality of service that inspires others to serve.

You are a guiding light, a North Star. You are invited to shine.

Robert Greenleaf never said servant leaders had to be saints.



TEN TIPS FOR A TROUBLE-FREE TRANSITION

Transitions are a fact of life. We transition from childhood to adulthood, military to Veteran, single to married and perhaps to parenthood, employment to retirement, and life to death. We move to a new home, start school, change jobs, celebrate a promotion, and weather the loss of a loved one.

Transitions are always difficult; bittersweet. There is always a *coming from* and a *going to*; a giving up of one existence and embracing another. Henry Van Dyke says it brilliantly in his poem, “Gone From My Sight”, where he describes watching a ship disappearing into the horizon.

AND JUST AT THE MOMENT WHEN SOMEONE SAYS, “THERE, SHE IS GONE,” THERE ARE OTHER EYES WATCHING HER COMING, AND OTHER VOICES READY TO TAKE UP THE GLAD SHOUT, “HERE SHE COMES!”

- HENRY VAN DYKE



Transition is about people. Seasoned leaders retire and new leaders take their place with the concomitant handoffs of responsibility, accommodation of learning curves, and establishment of trust. Transition is also about ideas—new work models; changes in policies, priorities, directions, and goals; and in reorganizing and restructuring.

Transition is the interstitial space between a known and an unknown state. Transition is hard because it leaves us suspended briefly in the *not knowing*. But it can also be a time of possibility or unfolding, when we stop clutching at what has been and become curious about what will—what can—be.

Sometimes we are responsible for leading change. At other times it's our job to accept and support the change. Whether you are adjusting to a new boss or a new IT system, adapting to a process redesign, or acclimating to an unfamiliar team or

environment, there are some things you can do to make the transition easier and more successful:

1. Communication

Be transparent. Why is this change necessary? What do we hope to accomplish? What will it take and what is expected? What outcomes are we looking for? Be specific about what we're transitioning *to*. Understand that all change is not welcome. If you are asked to support a change you believe is the wrong move or that will have unintended consequences, be honest. "This idea will never work, but they're making us do it," is not helpful. Try instead, "I think we all have some reservations about this new approach, but let's talk about how we can make it work for our customers."

2. Find the hook or "WIIFM" (What's in it for me)

We are all motivated by different things. An academic facility announced that it was planning a hiring freeze. The move motivated fiscal staff, but did not get teachers on board. Educators needed to hear that the freeze was expected to stabilize quality, provide opportunities for overtime, and decrease turnover. *Help people find a reason to support the change.*

3. Create clarity and continuity

Every employee should be able to explain the reason and the plan for change. Walk around and ask—it's a good way to gauge understanding and correct misconceptions. Change is not an on/off switch and transition doesn't happen overnight. Give regular reports on milestones. Talk about them in meetings, post them on message boards, and write about them in newsletters. Dispel the notion that this is just another "flavor of the month". Show how the change will improve organizational health and culture, and link it to other company priorities and initiatives. For example, "Besides saving money, our new process will pay dividends in customer service and enhance the effectiveness of our team."

4. Listen first; invite feedback; grow investment

Supervisor A began a new job by telling staff on Day One what he planned to accomplish in the first year. Supervisor B began by meeting with staff, listening to their concerns, and observing their processes. Supervisor A might have gotten off to a quicker start, but supervisor B is likely to have achieved the same or better results, made fewer mistakes or blunders, and earned the confidence and trust of staff.

An environment that encourages honest feedback saves missteps during transition. When a new informatics center was built, staff complained that the expensive computer equipment would not fit into the planned construction. Managers eventually sought input about the problem, but too late to avoid costly re-work. We can rarely wait until all the data are in to make decisions, but taking time up-front to listen builds investment and averts error. Transition must include “space” for inclusive dialog.

5. Identify cheerleaders and champions

In any transition, there are early adopters. Some of them will be in leadership roles, but many will be informal leaders who, without benefit of position, enjoy the respect of their colleagues. People listen better to those who share common language and concerns. Doctors listen better to other doctors, accountants to other accountants, data techs to other data techs, union members to other union members. Find your champions from within the ranks. They are servant leaders in the best sense.

6. Align the message

There are many layers in organizations; many tiers of staff to reach. It seems like you’re communicating painstakingly, but employees at the front-line still don’t grasp it. You’ve made suggestions to the CEO, with no response. You’re feeling ineffective both up and down the hierarchy. Like an hourglass, organizations tend to constrict in the middle. Supervisors are the gatekeepers of intelligence; the eyes and ears of the organization. Empower them to cut the red tape and shake loose the obstructions.

7. Train and retrain: accommodate learning

Transitions often demand new skills and knowledge. Most companies offer plenty of training, but can’t always ensure that learning has taken place. Be sure to employ varied modalities—on-line and in-person; study and practice. Skill-building is not a one-time event. It needs to be reinforced regularly. Assuming everyone gets it can be a fatal error in judgement.

8. Do it right, don’t just beat the deadline

Delivering a product on time is important to credibility and accountability. A number of years ago, when a pharmaceutical company announced it would be bar-coding its medications, the idea was considered a cutting edge practice. A date was publicized for all its outlets to be up-and-running. The problem was that the equipment necessary to bar-code the medications would not be available to all stores by the starting date.

Despite this, the executives did not reschedule implementation: it had been too well advertised. The upshot was that pharmacy employees were forced to create temporary “work-arounds”, impairing the very safety the new system was meant to ensure. Delivering a sub-standard product to beat a deadline defeats the purpose.

9. Be willing to fine-tune

A new leader inherited a capital improvement project that had been in progress for ten years. The original plans were no longer functional due to technical advances and customer expectations. When the leader advised the Board that the project be updated, she was told that to avoid public embarrassment, it could be retro-fitted after the fact. There are many reasons we don't course-correct, but when new information comes along we need to “Stop the line!” Tweaking, fine-tuning, or course-correction is not a leadership failure: it's an ethical and accountable response.

10. Celebrate

Surviving transition is victory! Everyone has worked hard to bring the change to fruition and your efforts have crystallized. You may also have reaped “secondary gains”—unexpected outcomes—for example in engagement, psychological safety, or teamwork. Don't wait until the final sign-off; celebrate milestones met along the way. *In servant leader organizations, celebration is an attitude, not an event.*

It helps when transition is anchored in a *constant*, for instance in an organizational mission or commitment. That *constant* provides an origin and a destination, a vision and a fulfillment, a purpose and a practice, an ambition and an achievement. In each of those counterparts exists a transition that is ripe with promise. And in each is a choice to serve; to serve better.

Whatever transition you are experiencing, let it be an opportunity to serve; to serve better.



MORAL AUTHORITY

Who is in charge here? For most of us, the answer to that question is the name at the top of the management pyramid. But being in charge and being the leader may be very different things.

Authority is the ability to influence or command thoughts and behavior. The world is conditioned to identify leaders by positional authority. The higher on the career ladder, the greater the authority. Positional authority is based on power. It is often expressed as a “command and control” style. At its worst, it uses people as tools, looks for someone to blame when things go wrong, and maintains an “end justifies the means” philosophy. Positional power demands loyalty.

This is the pattern of power in so many contemporary organizations.

There is another kind of power: moral authority. Moral authority is the capacity to convince others of how the world *should be*. Moral authority is not tied to rank or position, but to service. It is conferred upon someone who is exceptionally respected for their character, conduct, and knowledge.

Leaders with moral authority are coaches, mentors, and guides. When something goes wrong—and it will—they engage in *glitch hunts*, not *witch hunts*. They teach by messaging and modeling, in perfect alignment, and they build communities of support. People with moral authority inspire followership.

Moral authority is one of the distinguishing characteristics of a servant leader. This leader may also be in a formal position of authority, but uses it lightly, relying more on the tenets and tools of moral authority. To reach this point, subordinates and co-workers recognize something beyond position and status; something compelling; a presence that draws them in. They follow this leader not because they *have to*, but because they *choose to*. Allegiance is not demanded, not solicited: it is given unreservedly. And it is reciprocated.

Too often people reject the mantle of leadership because they don’t have the tools and the trimmings. They judge themselves as ill-equipped to handle the responsibility. They think they are not smart enough, or outgoing enough, or credible enough, or strong enough.

Power can scare us or serve us. Not having the tools or the self-image to lead, but coming forward to lead anyway speaks volumes. Servant leaders, those with moral authority, present a different path. They don't disdain power, but they share it. They encourage and seek consensus where possible. They hold people accountable, but set them free to serve.

There is a difference between *service* and *servitude*. Servitude is forced; service is a choice. Servitude denies the determination of one's own course; service is a deliberate decision to serve. Choosing service is very powerful.

Because the leader with moral authority is followed willingly, the hammer of control is put aside. Or perhaps it is put aside because the leader is followed willingly. One of the more corrosive practices of modern organizations is micromanagement. Traditional leaders micromanage in the vain struggle to control. *Control is an illusion*. Coercive control breeds resistance.

I have known many informal leaders who have exerted considerable influence over their colleagues. I have consulted union stewards, front-line employees, even customers—people with no official power, but plenty of clout. They were moral authorities who sensed the tenor of their work area, and merited the trust of their colleagues. Trust is a fundamental facet of moral authority—in both directions. When trust is high; when staff are engaged, developing, and contributing to the organization, good things happen.

Why does the person with moral authority serve? Because service is not a byproduct of leadership: *it is the whole point*.

How does someone know that they're a servant leader? You're not a servant leader unless others see you as one.

Daunting as it may sound, everything the leader says and does leaves a mark. Leadership based solely on positional authority may inflict wounds and leave scars. Leadership based on moral authority creates an indelible imprint. If people regard you as a moral authority, be very grateful. It means they follow you not just for what you do, but for who you are.



A BURDEN MADE LIGHT

It is you I choose to follow.

*Not because you have the right degree
Or a specialized credential;
But because you so inspire me,
Those are quite inconsequential.*

*It's not that you hold the highest post,
That your skill is beyond compare.
It's your character that matters most;
Your deep and authentic care.*

*Your status leaves us all impressed,
But in truth it's hard to find
A boss who makes his staff feel blessed;
Who lifts my heart and mind.*

*You can hold us to a strict account,
You can ask of us many things.
With you there's no obstacle we can't surmount;
Your influence whispers; your leadership sings.*

*Though I submit to bosses up the line,
Their direction often seems hollow;
But you lead the way by making us shine,
So it is you that I choose to follow.*



THE CURRENCY OF POWER

Psychological safety is a significant factor in employee engagement, and there are hard data that connect it to civility, customer satisfaction, quality, and physical safety as well.

Psychological safety is not just a good feeling, it is a product of trust and plays out in critical ways: building effective teams, “stopping the line” when health and well-being are threatened, delivering bad news, suggesting improvements, taking creative risks, etc.

These situations require trust between supervisor and staff, and among colleagues. The absence of psychological safety can result in consequences ranging from personal detachment to organizational crisis.

The hypothetical basis for poor psychological safety is *power differential*. When power is derived from positional authority, someone always has more and someone always has less. The degree of perceived power is directly related to the box on the organizational chart, the number of staff supervised, the budget dollars controlled, or who one knows.

On a recent weekend, I watched two programs that spoke profoundly to me about the true nature of power. The first was *Gandhi*. While educated in England, Gandhi had no standing in his own country, which was under British colonialism, yet he turned the tide for Indian independence. He did this by waging a war where the arms were persistence, persuasion, humility, and non-violence. This unconventional strategy had a profound effect on his persecutors and compatriots alike. When asked why he prevented his followers from retaliating, he answered that “an eye for an eye only makes the whole world blind.”

The second program was a documentary about Father Jerzy Popieluscko, a Polish priest who championed the Solidarity movement during the Communist regime. His growing popularity with the oppressed Polish people put him increasingly at odds with the military and secret police. Like Gandhi, Father Popieluscko’s weapons were love, truth, courage, and a living example. Even after his brutal torture and murder, his adherents honored his teachings of peaceful non-cooperation.

Mohandas Gandhi and Jerzy Popieluscko, like Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malala Yousafzai, and others, understood that their approach was revolutionary in the truest sense. These leaders did not assert positional power, but their power to move, inspire, and transform is indisputable. *Theirs was the power inherent in human dignity.* They did not claim power for themselves: they extended it to allies and adversaries alike.

Many speculate that our traditional hierarchical structures have cultivated in their workers a “learned helplessness.” But anything that is learned can be unlearned.

Equilibrating the power differential is not a matter of hierarchy, it’s a matter of heart. It is unacceptable to remain quiet when something is wrong or when someone has been wronged. It’s counterproductive to engage in divisiveness and reprisal. It’s beneath us to promote bitterness and conflict. Only people who do not recognize—or do not claim—their own intrinsic power, play in that muck. Psychological safety and personal accountability are joined at the hip.

Most of us will not achieve the stature of a Gandhi and our causes are much more modest, but we need the Gandhi’s to remind us of our own potential. How many Gandhi’s are in our midst? How many Mother Teresa’s work alongside us every day? They are all around us if we only have the eyes to see them.

When we encounter the wrong use of power, how do we respond? Do we ignore it, hoping it will go away, give back as good as we get, or confidently and compellingly affirm our own truth?

The power differential may be more artifact than fact. We must not use it as an impediment to being fully who we are. And it shouldn’t prevent us from reaching out to whomever we believe to be on the other end of our own personal power equation. They, too, need our compassion.

People with power are not always servant leaders, but servant leaders are always people of power.





SERVING IS A TEAM SPORT

There is a YouTube video I've used often when teaching about caring for each other. In 2003, during a basketball game between the Trail Blazers and the Dallas Mavericks, Coach Maurice Cheeks aided 13-year-old Natalie Gilbert in singing the national anthem. After Gilbert forgot the words, "at the twilight's last gleaming", Cheeks rushed over to help her and they finished it together, as the entire Rose Garden Arena crowd sang with them. Cheeks and Gilbert received a standing ovation after the song was over.

Cheeks could have left Gilbert hanging—could have stared at his shoes and waited for the debacle to be over. Cheeks was famous; Gilbert was a kid. He walked over to her, put his hand on her shoulder, prompted her, and then shared the burden with her. He turned potential failure into victory for the entire stadium. It occurred to me that Cheeks' definition of TEAM was not just his players and staff; in that moment he made Gilbert and the fans part of the team as well.

Being part of a team at work is serious and satisfying, and to achieve the best outcomes, we need to take joy in the triumphs and avoid the traps.

Team Triumphs

- *Communication.* Some teams are so attuned that they finish each other's sentences or intuit the next move. They develop non-verbal signals and become so perceptive in picking up subtle cues that they know what their colleagues need before they ask.
- *Group identity and role clarity.* A shared purpose can be powerful. Teams that are in sync spend less time in rework. They build trust, security, and solve problems together. They are more likely to learn, grow, and attain excellence, and less likely to get swamped in hierarchy. Multidisciplinary teams appreciate both their complementarity and individuality.
- *Pride and accomplishment.* It just feels good to do a job well. Reward and recognition are the icing on the cake.

Team Traps

- *Competitiveness.* While competition can provide a spark, it automatically separates us from the other teams. If compensation, recognition, or status are dependent on how our team ranks, what's the incentive to collaborate? If there is only one #1 spot, to what lengths will my team go to achieve it? Is being #1 the goal, or is it exceeding expectations and doing the right thing?
- *Exclusion.* Sometimes the cohesiveness of a team rests on keeping others out. Teams need to be constructed with “semi-permeable membranes” that allow an ebb and flow of members and ideas. Staff will come and go; experts/specialists will periodically be tapped; customers and clients will want to be involved. If the team can't inhale and exhale, it's no longer a living organism. Add a dissenter to the mix—someone who will shake things up, toss in “what ifs”, and help keep things fresh.

Effective teams form productive bonds from within, but they also reach out, invite in, and provide a welcoming, supportive environment.

I recently read about a health care organization that was plagued with the hospital-acquired infection *Clostridium difficile* (*C. Diff*). While some research showed that *C. Diff* was caused by excessive use of antibiotics, this medical center was concerned about environmental factors. Were patient rooms properly cleaned? How about instruments and equipment? Was strict hand-washing being observed?

They gathered the team together to search for answers. The usual culprits were there—physicians, nurses, and administrators—to which they added housekeeping staff, sterile supply technicians, and even a patient. The results were astounding. Due to the input of the non-traditional team members, they almost wiped out environmentally-caused *C. Diff* altogether.

Who is on your team? Who are you excluding, because of rank, or status, or simple inattention? What viewpoint is missing? Team is more than a collection of bodies: it is a consciousness.





ALL PEOPLE CONNECTED...

When I recall the times that felt best in my life, I think of my wedding, my children's births, deep sharing with a friend, the soul-fullness of a walk in the woods, playing a pipe organ, and the heartfelt respect of colleagues. Each of these was an instance of *connection*.

My worst memories have to do with family arguments, feeling ignored or rejected, or losing a loved one—times of profound disconnection and separation.

We've seen the stunning consequences of disconnectedness splashed across our nightly news, events that shock and cause us to wonder how things have gotten to such a point. But the seeds of separation are quietly sown every day, and *we are complicit*—when we marginalize different viewpoints, villainize a political party or religious belief, commit careless acts of wounding or retaliation, are judgmental or make negative assumptions, fail to listen, display cynicism and “we/they” attitudes: *anything that excludes, shuts out, or cuts off*.

Our society promotes a culture of separation. We work in “silos.” We take great pains—as individuals, teams, and organizations—to broadcast our uniqueness, what sets us apart, and how we are better than others. In our quest for a competitive edge, the human element can easily be overlooked.

Well-meaning people get caught up in doling out and deflecting zingers and gotchas. We become casualties of accountability, “constructive” criticism, and the pace of change. Over time we acquire a self-protective membrane to help us absorb and tolerate all the small hostilities. We begin to regard the world as a fearful place, and we put up walls to distance ourselves from it and each other.

We need to call a global *time out*, create a sacred space, where we can shed the layers of doubt and defensiveness that accumulate and shield us from the incessant little hurts and violations of the spirit; a moment when “business as usual” becomes “love thy neighbor,” a time in which we can do more than put our differences aside, we can transcend them.

Quantum physics tells us that perception is a mirror: *what we look upon is our state of mind reflected outward*, and that *separation is an illusion*. Our fondest recollections and greatest accomplishments are born in connection.

The events and terrors of this world should press us to contemplate what is really meaningful in life, which, for me, can be understood in three words: *gratitude, compassion and peace*.

GRATITUDE...

- For recognizing the value of family, friends and faith
- For opportunities to bring light, love and unity; to heal bodies, minds and relationships
- For lessons gently learned
- For work that is vocation and not just a job, and the colleagues that make it so
- For what comforts, chafes, and challenges us on our journey

COMPASSION...

- Not “feeling sorry for” or “finding excuses for,” but “entering into with”
- It’s the difference between judging someone and walking in their shoes. How do we enter into a person’s pain, anger or fear, homelessness, isolation or vulnerability?
- And if compassion is not just a mental exercise, what action do we then take?

We should resolve never to let policy, prejudice, or public opinion get in the way of practicing compassion. *Practice makes perfect*.

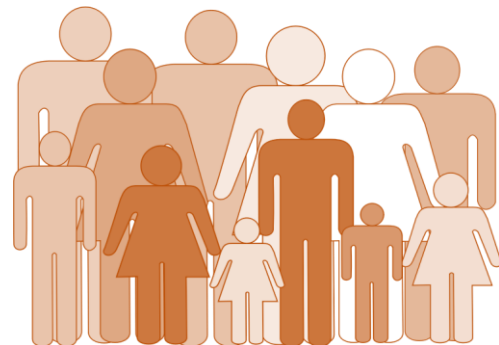
PEACE...

We who are leaders engage in actions that are sometimes heroic, although most of what we do each day seems so ordinary and routine.

We forget that doing small things with great love raises them to the level of heroism.

My deepest wish for each of us is that...

*We experience gratitude,
We practice compassion,
We live peace.*





THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY

*Gazing at a darkened glass I see
Conflict and chaos everywhere;
An ominous world staring back at me;
Malice aplenty, no mercy to spare.*

*Politics in sheer upheaval,
Morality in stark decay,
Religions battling good and evil,
Civilization in disarray.*

*Messages that are meant to frighten;
What is real and what's illusion?
Anxieties and worries heighten,
Leaving us in grim confusion.*

*Which path brings darkness; which brings light?
Which belief should I be heeding?
There is no wrong, there is no right,
And shades of gray are too misleading.*

*How do I illumine what is obscure?
Which leader should I follow and which eschew?
Beset with misgivings, how can I be sure
Which prophet is false and which is true?*

*So I turn from the glass and see face to face,
In a moment of startling clarity,
That the world is not such a menacing place.
It's exactly as I create it to be.*

*The turmoil fades, the focus clears;
To a questing soul this simple truth will yield:
The wisdom of life choices soon appears,
If in them love's reflection is revealed.*

This way lies peace.



THE MITOSIS OF MISSION

Organizations are complicated entities. Companies start out with straightforward missions. Before long, they undergo a “cellular mitosis”: functions and systems splitting off and multiplying, each concentrating on a different piece of the mission.

Somewhere along the line, one cell goes off track and a program is created to correct the misstep. The organization begins to imagine yet more new programs that can monitor functions and systems and keep them in order.

Some of the programs are beautifully innovative and generate great enthusiasm. As the organizational “cells” proliferate, those programs become increasingly essential to keep them aligned with each other and true to the original mission.

That effort requires oversight. Metrics are established and data are gathered so the organization can prove that the programs are efficient and effective; that all the “cells” are still doing what they set out to do.

I love the way organizations grow and work. I am proud of what many have accomplished. It’s exciting to watch the *busyness* and sophistication of their operations.

That said, let me tell you what I really think.

I often envision life as an artichoke or an onion. There is a sweet spot—a simple truth—at the core, yet we spend a lifetime adding layer upon layer of complexity until that truth is obscured. We are misled into thinking that complexity is the normal state. It is not.

I am drawn to the words *agape* (Greek) and *caritas* (Latin) which are so rich with meaning: altruistic love, compassionate love, unconditional love, love of one’s fellow man, passionate commitment to the well-being of others.

Love is the simple truth at the core of complexity.

Love is not a word many of us are comfortable using in the workplace. But what if...?

...we labor over performance measures, yet if we focused on always doing the right thing, would performance measures be automatically met?

...we construct elaborate customer service programs, but if our every action were motivated by agape/caritas, would customer service just happen; would it become the “new normal”? What if the perfect customer experience stemmed from an intrinsic drive to serve, instead of an extrinsic force to compel service?

...if our work flowed from love, what kind of relationships would we create? How would we treat each other, our environment? How would we use our resources, human and financial? How accountable would we be for the quality and ethics of our actions?

...would each of us instinctively do the right thing? Would we even need performance standards or performance appraisals? Policies and procedures? Costly techniques of measurement and safety?

I wonder if the strategies we develop, the systems we build, the checks and balances we accumulate, ultimately serve to distract us from the simplicity of love.

Practically speaking, no one wants to be perceived as naïve or unrealistic. We live and work in a world that demands and generates complexity. That train has left the station. We may feel the web of complexity holding us ever tighter as we try to extricate ourselves. And so we are tempted to stop struggling....

Yet amid the inevitable complexity, let's not lose sight of that simple truth which, in the last analysis, connects all things.





THE FINE LINE BETWEEN DROWNING AND WALKING ON WATER

Every season of the year presents a stimulus for reflection: the new beginnings of spring, summer break, getting back into the routines of fall, and the quiet turning inward of winter.

Whichever suits you best, choose a time to recharge, recommit, and reconnect. We need to attend to our own wellness, equilibrium, and inner peace in order to be effective leaders, co-workers, and caregivers. And make no mistake: all of us—in our own unique ways—are caregivers.

I call this *“the fine line between drowning and walking on water.”*

We’re all subject to personal, professional, and societal stressors. We juggle many roles: dedicated employee, devoted spouse/parent/child, student and volunteer, community and club member. We’re conditioned to expect superhuman performance of ourselves and everyone around us, and we feel let down when those expectations aren’t met.

Conflict between competing demands requires us to find some stability—where we can go with the flow, keep our heads above the surface, even when we’re swimming against the current.

Wellness is harmony among all our dimensions. It is the *integrity of wholeness*. We are physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and relational beings. The workplace is enriched by our multi-dimensional presence.

I want nothing less than *all* the gifts you bring.

Each dimension is inextricably linked and we cannot neatly separate them, although there is often pressure to do so:

- It’s difficult to enjoy a social event when you’re anxious about bills
- You can’t park a family crisis at the door, even though we’re told it’s unprofessional to bring problems to work

- Performance is bound to suffer if we can't get along with co-workers
- It's hard to be engaged in a workplace whose values conflict with yours
- It's tough to maintain a "service first" mentality when you're worried about the latest round of budget cuts
- Vacation is unlikely to be a time of renewal if the smartphone is always on

The *fine line* is decidedly personal. In my journey, I've found a few guideposts to help me stay on course. Maybe some of them will help you as well.

ASSERTIVENESS: not to be confused with aggressiveness! Holding to my "true north" while respecting the rights of others. Practicing honesty, honor, authenticity, and trust. Being able to say "No" while delighting in saying "Yes." For me (and for most introverts), *every day* is an exercise in assertiveness.

SYSTEMS THINKING: accepting that everything is connected to everything else. Nothing I do or think or say is in a vacuum; will not affect something or someone, somewhere (the Butterfly Effect).

There are three choices for **CONFLICT RESOLUTION:** *fight, flight, or look at it in a different light.* Quantum physics demonstrates that we see things the way we expect to see them. How we handle conflict is truly our choice.

Instead of lamenting what was left undone today, **CONGRATULATE YOURSELF** for what was. Develop an aptitude for joy!

SUPPORT RATHER THAN COMPETE: do I build people up or tear them down? Forge partnerships or sabotage them? Most of us operate from a scarcity mindset: if someone gains, someone has to lose. Budgets may work that way, but the universe doesn't.

PRIORITIZE family, personal, and professional obligations carefully. We may not have the luxury of a 40-hour week, but workaholism is just another *cheap thrill*.

VIEW THINGS FROM AN ON LOAN PERSPECTIVE: I'm a steward of my work, my home, my family, and my resources. They are mine for a while, to take care of and

make the most of. If I use all my energy trying to hold on to things, I'll have none left to enjoy them.

REAL POWER has little to do with position, status, or control. **Power is the capacity generated by relationships.**

Without a spiritual **GROUNDING**, the next wave will knock us off balance. While the circumstances of our lives may change, the values and ethics within which we operate do not.

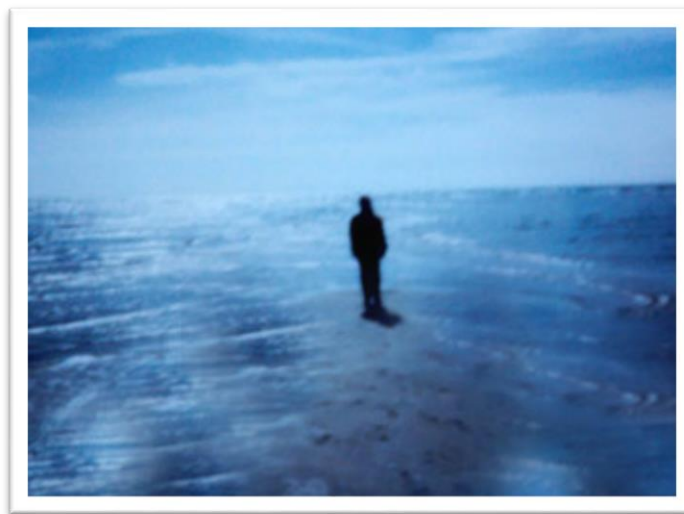
YOUR ATTITUDE IS SHOWING! We teach others continuously about accountability, service, kindness, and balance—not by what we say and do, but by *who we are* and how others *experience* us.

Leaders are people in service to others. We ceaselessly give of ourselves, but we cannot give what we do not have.

The choice is *not* between drowning and walking on water: we can elect instead to be whole, healthy, integrated human beings. We are each in charge of our own journey.

Holistically healthy individuals produce healthy organizations.

Walking on water is an abnormal state.





YOU CAN'T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU NEED

One of the unique challenges of servant leadership is the call to address others' priority needs. This does not mean that the leader must be all things to all people. It does, however, correspond with a focus on serving followers for their own good, not just the good of the organization.

I have seen some extraordinary examples. In one noteworthy case, a company halted production for a month to comply with a regulation, temporarily laying off employees. The leaders, concerned about their workers who lived from paycheck to paycheck, decided to keep open the company store throughout the period. They added items such as baby products and over-the-counter medications to their stock—things that employees might need—and they allowed them to purchase goods on credit for the duration of the work stoppage.

In many contemporary businesses, it is more about what the manager needs than what the employee needs. In fact, meeting the latter often goes a long way toward satisfying the former. Workers are more inclined to be fully engaged and loyal to an organization when their personal goals are also being attended to.

The job itself offers many tangibles that go toward realizing peoples' priority needs: a fair wage and benefit package being the most significant. Leaders aren't leading if they give away the shop, but they're also not leading if they don't look out for the needs of their people.

Needs are as varied as the people in an organization. Some require a little time or undivided attention. Others, a stimulating assignment, a word of appreciation, a smile, a sabbatical, more responsibility, an afternoon off to watch a kid's baseball game, or a moment of respite during personal crisis.

There are employees who seek public acknowledgement and those who need to be left alone to do their jobs. There are those who need instruction and direction, and others who need autonomy to do their best work. *Needs motivate behavior.*

I consider a cadre of staff I once supervised, and how diverse their needs were. One was motivated by an inner drive to excel; one by a quiet, undemanding environment; another by a steady climb up the management hierarchy. One needed a flexible schedule to accommodate for a school commitment; another a workspace adapted for physical

disability. One employee wanted opportunities to teach and mentor; another to develop data and computer systems. One was motivated by simple recognition, and one by social interaction.

One of the obstacles to meeting people's needs is discovering what they are. Leaders are obliged to find out what motivates without being intrusive. They are challenged to know their employees well enough to understand what galvanizes them, what gratifies them, and what defeats them. The leader's job is to pay attention and follow the cues. And when in doubt, *the leader asks*.

A word of caution for leaders: the goal is not to be needed—it is to not be needed. Though it is rewarding to know that staff and colleagues need us, it can be habit-forming. It fuels our sense of pride and fosters dependence. The mark of a good leader is that the workplace functions smoothly in her absence. A servant leader's ultimate success is to encourage others to be leaders themselves.

In my experience, what employees need most from their organizations has to do with the climate of the workplace, the merit of the task, and the values of the leader. They long for an environment that is humanized—a *humenvironment*: one that is dignified, healthy, respectful, and conducive to the work. They need assurance that the job, however menial or repetitive, has worth; that they are making a contribution.

Perhaps what employees desire most, however, is a boss who is competent, compassionate, ethical and honest; who expects excellence and inspires growth. I am surprised at how many yearn purely for kindness; for gentleness.

People are insulted and demeaned wherever they go: they don't need to be demeaned in their jobs. They are roughed up by the events of the day: they don't need rough treatment at work. They are ill-used and exploited in every walk of life: they don't need to be ill-used by their leaders. Work associates are reasonable—they don't often ask for things we can't give them.

People only need what they don't have. Tangible or ethereal, material or attitudinal; a word, a touch, a little independence, a bit of tolerance, an opportunity, some praise, an ounce of human charity. As servant leaders, we can replenish what is lacking. It is only up to us whether we give from what we can spare, or give unreservedly from our abundance.



SEEING INTO THE SOUL

*He lurked around the fringes,
Watching for his opportunity.
When the woman edged close, he struck out
And snatched her coat,
Before she even knew it was gone.*

*He loped away with his prize,
But she pursued, and as he slipped in a wet patch
She caught him.
Yet rather than pummel him or raise the alarm,
She said, "Here, take my hat as well."*

*Wary, he took the hat
From her outstretched hand, and fled.
But again she followed,
And as he tripped on an unseen protrusion,
Brought him down and forced her shoes upon him.*

*Now wary, he cried, "I have no need
Of your shoes or your hat, or,
If truth be told, your coat. I will not take them!"*

*"In that you are correct", she responded.
"You take a coat when what you really need is forgiveness.
You take a hat when what would comfort you is understanding.
You take a pair of shoes when what you crave
Is a sense of your own worth.*

*By freely relinquishing my coat, hat, and shoes,
I offer you what you truly need."
And she gave him her hand.
And he took it.*



HARMONY OR CACOPHONY?

Environments are like music: they can be melodious or discordant; harmonious or like fingernails on a chalkboard. Loud is ok; harsh is not. Offbeat is interesting; off-key is not. Animated works; frenzied doesn't.

Environments can vary greatly and still be within the boundaries of "healthy and happy". They are innocuous enough that we tend to forget they are there. The environments we do notice are those that fall outside the margins, to the organization's benefit or detriment.

I remember a nursing home where the environment seemed to collapse in on the people there. Residents were lined up in hallways and dayrooms. A TV provided some background noise to ramblings of incoherent patients, but no one was watching. Rooms were painted gray; there were few decorations or wall hangings. An odor of urine mixed with disinfectant lingered everywhere. For residents, this environment dulled the senses and inhibited connection. For the staff, it prompted detachment and neglect. The tone was cheerless and hopeless.

At the other end of the spectrum was a lingerie shop where customers walked out of the mall-way and into an experience. Soft classical music and a lightly perfumed fragrance greeted them. There was an immediate note of pampering.

As it often does, the environment and the service combined to enhance the impression. Merchandise was displayed invitingly. The shop always seemed full, but never crowded; the clerks were always present, but never pushy. This store had its own sense of space and time. Purchases were wrapped in scented tissue and secured with a gold seal. Patrons lingered because they didn't want to leave; they were in no rush to return to the rat race of the mall.

Then there's the complementary medicine clinic that served lemonade in the waiting room. On one wall was an aquarium, on another an undersea mural, and on another a water feature. The colors and the movement were stimulating, and the steady trickling of the water was soothing. Lights were low, but sufficient, and there was a faint aroma of incense. A clinic therapy dog settled down in one corner of the room waiting to be petted.

This office provided alternative treatments and so was used to meeting clients' holistic needs, but the difference from the usual doctor's office was staggering. These

services were not covered by insurance, but people who came here for care were happy to pay out of pocket.

From the employee standpoint, the company that has an *intentionally* inviting work environment does the best at recruiting, retaining, and satisfying their staff. Take a particular office park which accommodated many employers from doctors and lawyers to government agencies and merchants.

The facility was located on a tract of land just beyond the city limits. Outside were pastures housing an array of animals including a herd of bison. Parking was plentiful and free. Offices were well-appointed and cared for, and relaxing common areas were sprinkled throughout the buildings. Amenities abounded: cafes and snack bars, day care and elder care, a chapel, a post office, and a fitness center. Occupants could look at paintings, buy handmade jewelry, or have their car detailed. In this environment, workers had their personal and professional needs met without having to leave the grounds.

From a *business* perspective, the right environment induces commerce. People *want* to patronize companies that make them feel respected and valued.

From a *service* perspective, the right environment induces caring. People appreciate an environment that dignifies their circumstances.

From an *employment* perspective, healthy environments are inviting, fulfilling, and growth-enhancing, exactly what a servant organization should be.

Indifferent environments weary our bodies and discourage our minds; toxic environments wither our spirits; but *humenvironments* feed our souls.





VIOLENCE BY ANY OTHER NAME

- An unhappy taxpayer shoots up city hall.
- A resentful customer drives his car into a shopping mall.
- An angry patient bombs his clinic.

- A surgeon throws a scalpel across the operating room.
- A disgruntled employee lets the air out of his boss's tires.
- A manager chews out an employee in front of a customer.

- A supervisor finds out he has been fired by reading it in the newspaper.
- A union president deliberately omits competitors from important emails.
- An employee notices that colleagues stop talking when she walks by.

Question: Which of these would you classify as workplace violence?

Answer: All of the above

No one would think twice about labeling the first group of behaviors as violent. They are appalling and sadly all too frequent in contemporary society. The horror of these offenses cannot be overstated. This is violence of the first magnitude.

Then what about the next group of behaviors? Many of us would acknowledge them as outrageous and unprofessional, but do we recognize them as violent? These behaviors may leave the body intact, but they do violence to the psyche.

And the third group of behaviors? Unfortunate and regrettable, but haven't we all been there? If you did not identify these as violent, think again. They do violence to the spirit.

Acts of terror have no parallel—they stand alone. Mercifully, most of us will not experience this level of violence personally.

Acts of verbal, mental, and emotional violence may seem trifling by comparison, but if we fail to recognize them as violence, we allow the seeds of hostility to grow. These

are the petty slights, attacks, and aggressions that you and I endure every day. Their effects may not be physically apparent, but they result in casualties and inflict wounds. They are called *exclusionary behaviors*:

- Being ignored or excluded by co-workers
- Not included in decisions that affect you
- Not given the information necessary to do your job
- Others are slow to respond to your emails and phone calls
- You experience in-groups or elitism

Over time, many of these behaviors have come to be tolerated as “just the way things are”. We are humiliated when a leader reprimands us publicly and we are indignant when we see a co-worker treated that way, but how likely are we to speak up? We excuse the physician who has technical genius, but a poor bedside manner; the public official who is honest, but puts citizens through unnecessary hoops; and the front-line worker who bullies his peers.

When I hear staff say this is par for the course or simply the nature of the work, I am mortified! Somehow violence has become the “new normal”.

Violence is an aberrant attempt to restore the balance of power. Servant leadership may or may not have any impact on the madness of violence in a mixed-up world, but it can absolutely impact the pervasive emotional assaults that have become an acceptable part of work life.

Because servant leaders share power, there is no need to seize it. Because they listen and encourage input, disruptions are not required in order to be heard. Because they tap the potential of all employees, each employee feels special. Because servant leaders are trustworthy, there is no need to prevaricate. Because everyone is offered a seat at the table, elitism is pointless.

These small violences can do great damage even though it's not immediately visible, and can leave scars for a lifetime. In the long run, a black eye hurts less than a bruised heart or a battered self-image. Label them for what they are—not part and parcel of the job, but gratuitous violence. We cannot afford to turn a blind eye or allow it to pass without comment. When servant leaders engage in assertive, respectful dialog, they begin to teach that the small violences are no longer acceptable. And since we are all leaders regardless of where we fall in the organizational hierarchy, it is up to each of us to do just that.

VIOLENCE, WHETHER SPIRITUAL OR PHYSICAL, IS A QUEST FOR IDENTITY. THE LESS IDENTITY, THE MORE VIOLENCE.

- MARSHALL MCLUHAN



WEARING OUR CULTURE ON OUR SLEEVE

The term “culture” is used a lot these days. Organizational culture is the environment we share by virtue of working in the same system.

Culture is the personality of the organization. It is the composite values, principles, customs, and behaviors that have become the norm with time and repetition. It’s how things are *really* done.

There is a feel to an office or work unit that embraces customer service; stress and tension between co-workers can be sensed; there’s a certain vibe when staff are proud of their performance and another when they just want the workday to be over.

Some places feel welcoming to visitors; others are more closed. Some convey an aura of arrogance or paternalism, others a mood of partnership. It’s easy to pick up whether people are fearful or they’re comfortable having fun on the job.

There are many indicators of a positive organizational culture: being greeted with a smile, stray trash is picked up, an absence of long waiting lines, a visitor who’s lost is helped, staff from other departments call each other by name, accessibility of administrative offices, easy collaboration between disciplines, visible display of performance data.

Culture encompasses the attitudes, actions, and atmosphere at work, and determines how we are perceived outside the walls of our workplace.

Culture is a big tent:

- In a culture of resistance, new ideas are challenged, despite their logic
- In a culture of accountability, we trust each other’s judgment
- In an ethical culture, we do the right thing, even when no one is looking
- In a culture of service, relationships come first, even on a bad day
- In a rigid culture, we live by rules, not common sense or compassion
- In a culture of excellence, we continually reinvent
- In a team culture, people seek out different points of view

- In a culture of silence, information is withheld
- In a we–they culture, allegiances are formed by creating a common enemy
- In a culture of servant leadership, supervisors eliminate barriers and get out of the way

In which of these cultures would you rather work?

In healthy organizations, culture is deliberate and planned; in others, it's allowed to “metastasize” on its own. But there is *always* a culture. And while managers set the cultural tone, we're all leaders in influencing and improving the culture.

The state of our cultural health can be experienced and it can be measured. A flourishing organizational culture wraps itself around the concrete tasks of the workday, the problems and grievances, the “difficult” client or customer, the contrary co-worker, the achievements and successes. It gently shapes how we perceive them and how we choose to handle them.

Culture cannot be concealed. It manifests in all our relationships, in our decisions, policies and choices, in what we reward and what we tolerate, in our generosity of spirit. At its essence, culture reveals the *heart of the organization*.





AN OPEN LETTER...

TO: Leadership Development Graduates
FROM: Your Corporate Director
RE: Managing Upward

Congratulations on completing your training! As the company's newest class of prospective leaders, you have learned how to manage personnel, processes, and expectations. You'll come to understand that as you move up the career ladder, you will also have to learn how to manage your boss! I've been asked to give some helpful hints in that regard: what do I expect of our leaders? Here are some highpoints, in language this group might appreciate:

"Do What You Say, Say What You Mean, One Thing Leads to Another"

- Find the right level of communication: keep me posted; no surprises, but I don't need all the details; tell me what I need to know when I need to know it.
- Contribute in meetings: don't save your criticisms or your bright ideas for hallway conversations.
- "Your attitude is showing!" Staff know when you're genuine and when you're blowing smoke: how you really feel about things. If you convey a message with a wink and a nod, they'll take the cue.

"We Are Family"

- Let me be part of your creative process: toss out your thoughts, offer suggestions; let me help you see things with fresh eyes. Tell me your triumphs as well as your troubles.
- Never be afraid to say you don't know something or that you need assistance. Mistakes/problems happen: I'm more interested in seeing how you manage them. Be honest, even when it's painful. Trust is the most important bond we'll have.
- "We're Corporate and we're here to help you!" Corporate is not the enemy. Don't withhold information or use Corporate as a *common enemy* to win favor with your staff. No matter how far up the chain of command you go, you're always the cream filling in somebody's OREO.

"R-E-S-P-E-C-T"

- Kindness is not for wimps. Disagree candidly, constructively, and respectfully. Be generous in giving the benefit of the doubt. Tell me when I'm doing something stupid—and when I've done something well.
- Loyalty is important, but it's not blind. Having the *difficult conversations* is sometimes the most compassionate thing you can do.
- Err on the side of inclusivity.

“Going Out Of My Head”

- Don’t sing me the “Gimme my Fair Share” refrain (a variation of the “It’s Not in my Job Description” chorus). Another department’s resource needs may be more critical at the moment. Support your own unit AND the organization as a whole. Pick up that trash, answer that phone, and fix that customer problem. If you see something that needs to be done, do it!
- The Lowest Common Denominator approach: “Why should I meet my performance goals/budget, etc. if my counterparts don’t?” Satisfy your responsibilities whether or not others do.
- If we agree to something, do it—don’t wait for it to go away (or me to forget!) If you can’t fulfill an agreement, let’s negotiate.

“Taking Care of Business”

- I don’t want to mediate disputes with your colleagues—take the initiative. Work out systems issues, collaborate, and find creative possibilities together. Don’t bring me problems without prospective solutions.
- Take control of your own environment. Meet deadlines. Make sure reports/briefs/responses, etc. are complete and service–friendly. Assure accuracy and truthfulness of what you say and write. Learn from your mistakes and don’t repeat them. Don’t give away your control cheaply, and then resent when I get into your business. Don’t make me micromanage.
- Be a healthy role model. I don’t give points for being a workaholic.

“You Are the Sunshine of My Life”

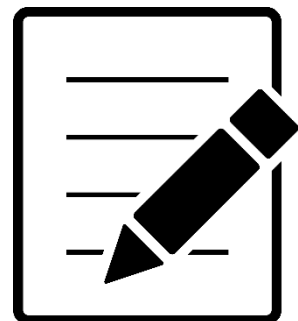
- Avoid group think on one hand and parochial think on the other. Think “systems” and expect all your staff to be engaged systems thinkers. Improving our work IS our work. All things ARE connected.
- Be able to say no, but delight in saying yes.
- Control is an illusion! Use your authority lightly. Remember that any power you have is “on loan” from the people who give it to you. The highest calling of a Leader is to be a Servant.

You are the future of our organization. Be good stewards—we’re in your hands!

Congratulations and Best Wishes,

Adrienne Marshall

Director





GOVERNANCE

Perhaps my most interesting—and frustrating—experience with a Governing Board was my first. The setting was a small, rural town where everybody knew everybody, and where being on the Board was a status symbol. As a result, the line between administration and governance was sometimes shockingly blurred.

Trustees would enter into contracts for snow removal, lawn care, garbage disposal, etc., on behalf of the facility without even consulting the CEO, because they knew the contractor or could negotiate a good price.

At social gatherings, townspeople would complain about their service at the facility or the quality of the food and, over cocktails, the Trustee would commit to having the offender sacked first thing Monday morning. Or a disgruntled employee would demand redress for a disciplinary action and the Trustee would pressure the CEO to remove the supervisor. Worse yet, they would request a nephew or neighbor be hired into a position for which they had no qualifications.

Other Board members would appear in the Personnel Office and peruse staff files, or insist on reviewing purchase orders. I watched several CEO's come and go, each exasperated by Board relationships.

Then it was my turn. As second in command, I was called on to fill a long-term Acting CEO stint. I dreaded my first Board meeting and gave a great deal of thought to how I could modify the harmful behavior, knowing I would have to do it at the outset or forever hold my peace.

I decided to take an interactive approach to the problem, one that was not confrontational, but illustrative. And so I crafted a Monopoly-type game board, complete with familiar situations and options for handling them. For example, a "Cocktail Party" square would pose a scenario and, depending on the Trustee's answer, could result in his moving forward or forfeiting spaces. Some squares spelled out the ideal response, modeling positive reinforcement. Others mirrored actual events that hadn't turned out so well, "sending" the Trustee to the County Commissioner's Office (the equivalent of "go to jail; do not pass go...").

You may think this was a simplistic way to proceed or a precarious position to take, and you would be right. But I followed the path I had chosen and presented the game, which I named "On the Spot", at the next Board meeting. I introduced it as *Board*

education and prefaced it with remarks about finding the optimal role for Trustees and having thorny conversations in a safe place.

As we proceeded around the game board, some members winced and some members smiled. In most I saw a spark of epiphany: *they got it*. Perhaps because the approach was open, unsophisticated, and non-threatening, or perhaps because they recognized the risk I took, the result exceeded my expectations.

Board education soon became a regular part of every meeting. As I gave them more information than less, their questions and qualms dwindled. Inappropriate use of Trustee influence became largely a thing of the past, and when it did crop up, we talked about it. The proper role of the Board, its function as steward, and its responsibility to elevate service as an institution became the focus.

**THE ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO RAISE BOTH THE
INSTITUTION'S CAPACITY TO SERVE AND ITS
PERFORMANCE AS SERVANT.**

- ROBERT GREENLEAF

Since then I have experienced many brands of governance: corporate Boards, religious Boards, government Boards, and non-profit Boards—from both sides of the board room table. Some have been successful and some adversarial.

What I do know is that, in whatever setting, governance is formidable and not just in the fiduciary sense. Certainly we are all aware of Boards that are destructive, corrupt, or self-serving. Optimistically, they are the exception, with many more acting nobly and competently in service to the organization and everyone it reaches. Effective Boards set the stage; secure the purpose, the philosophy, and the plan; and safeguard the organization's mission and values from the 30,000 foot perspective.

The best relationship between CEO and Board is often a dance, each challenging and supporting, provoking and inspiring, and keeping the other honest. Boards are only as virtuous as the people who sit on them and organizations are only as relevant as their commitment to serve. Jointly and severally *they are leadership*.





THE FLIP SIDE OF LEADERSHIP

It has been stated and reiterated that *we are all leaders*; that no one gets a pass. Now I'm saying that *we're all followers*. So which will it be?

The truth is, it is not an either/or proposition. We are often simultaneously leaders and followers. Much as we can be both the child of our parents and the parent of our children, we are concurrently followers and leaders. If we work for a company, there is always someone to whom we are subordinate. Regardless of where one sits on the organizational chart, everyone has a boss. No matter how high we rise in the hierarchy, someone is always above us.

I may be a supervisor, but I report to a department head. If I am a department head, my boss may be the CEO. The CEO reports to a Board of Directors, and the Board is ultimately responsible to the customer or stockholders. In life, we are constantly moving forward and retreating; serving or being served; instructing or listening; the expert or the apprentice. The cycle of leading and following is unending.

The question is, is what we are following *worthy* of being followed? Do we follow trustingly, or do we follow blindly?

I am fascinated by the saying, "You might think you're the leader, but you are following something." We choose who and what to follow, and we can follow many things at once. We follow the values of our parents and the dictates of our bosses; a particular religion or no religion; the tenets of a certain philosophy; and the principles of a specific leadership style. We can follow a sports team, a lifestyle, or a political party.

We follow the policies of our organizations, the ethics of our occupational disciplines, and the standards of our chosen careers. We follow the economic and social trends that test our skills of foresight. We follow our instincts and our intuition. We follow the needs, expectations, aspirations, and ideas of our colleagues, families, and friends. Servant leaders pay attention to others in this way in order to better serve them. Understanding what we're following can offer insight into how we lead, why we lead, and toward what we are leading.

Consciously or unconsciously, what and whom we choose to follow is molded by our beliefs. Our beliefs undergird our work and our decisions. Someone once said, "Beware the danger of an unrecognized belief." We can ignore or suppress our beliefs for a time, but they eventually bubble up and declare themselves. None of us can function in a state of "values dissonance" for long without damaging ourselves or impairing the workplace.

Deeply held beliefs are spiritual in that they lay bare our souls and go to the heart of who we are. When our beliefs are threatened, so is our very being. Beliefs can sabotage our leadership or they can make it sing. Have you ever felt a calling to *follow*? If so, it is likely that the person or the path to which you were called was in alignment with your beliefs.

People in authority can command us to obey, submit, or conform in one guise or another, but they cannot order us to follow. Followership comes from the heart. It is to be engaged in a way of life; to act in accordance with a belief system.

Work is a compact or a covenant between the employee and the workplace. The servant follower owes loyalty, but not mindless deference, to the leader. While it's the leader's obligation to provide the resources needed to do the job, it's the servant follower's duty to be a good steward of those resources.

The servant leader gives opportunities for creativity and growth, but the servant follower must take advantage of them. If the employee wishes to be listened to, he must offer thoughtful opinions and helpful feedback. If he desires the respect of the organization, he should represent the organization respectfully. If he wants to be a contributor to the effort, he has to commit himself to it.

This employee follows in order to serve. Nothing is above his pay grade or outside his job description. He can take responsibility, risk candor, and share in the joy of accomplishment. He follows confidently, knowing that he will sometimes also be asked to step up and lead. To follow with enthusiasm, perspicacity, and moral courage is a virtue. Servant followership is intrinsic and inspired.

Servant leaders grasp the interdependence of leading and following. They appreciate that responsible followership is inherent in the act of leadership. Servant leaders have both the humility and the vision to concede this.

We all receive many invitations to follow in our lifetime. Ensuring that we RSVP to the right one is perhaps the most important decision we can make.





THE DANCE OF LEADERSHIP

*The leader follows, the follower leads;
The child becomes parent, the parent recedes.
The one who is served serves others in turn;
The one who teaches has more to learn.
Hidden wounds of the healer revealed,
Can only be soothed by one who is healed.
The novice is trained by the seasoned pro,
Who sees that he, too, has far to go.
Someone advances and someone retreats;
Someone commences and another completes.
It may be the player who plucks the strings,
But it's the cello itself that sings.
Sunrise ascends as sunset wanes;
One person loses, another one gains.
The naïve worker is suddenly wise,
And management sees through employees' eyes.
The tempo, the rhythm, the movement depends
On forwards and backwards, beginnings and ends.
In the cycle of ebb and flow, empty and fill,
The dance of leadership never stands still.*





SWEET DREAMS

Let me share a personal experience that may resonate with you or not: this is an exercise in vulnerability! I am gifted at building relationships with almost anybody. The operative word here is *almost*. Despite my best efforts, there are a handful of people over my career who have seemed impossible and relationships that have seemed hopeless. Those situations make me crazy. I find, however, that if I can't handle them consciously, they are sometimes handled for me subconsciously. This is called *dreamwork*. I don't plan it and I don't expect it, but some very dark relationships have been brought to the light in this unusual manner.

Charles was a union president who appeared to be collegial, but blocked every issue. He was a nice man, but amused by thwarting management, shutting down any progress with a smile on his face. Charles pushed all my buttons. I sensed rationality in there somewhere, but could never get past the crusty exterior.

Then I had a dream. Charles and I were in a small chapel. He was sitting in a pew on one side of the aisle and I was opposite him on the other side of the aisle. We did not engage and remained there for a while not saying anything and both frustrated. Finally Charles said, "I'm going to move to the back and let you speak to my twin sister, Charity." A woman I had not noticed before came into view. She looked like a female version of Charles. The barriers broke. There was an instant rapport and we talked until we reached resolution.

Dreamwork: The chapel provided a neutral, yet inspirational setting. It was no accident that we found ourselves on opposite sides of the aisle: labor and management are often described that way. When I was unable to see the humanity in Charles, he brought forward his higher self—*Charity*, as fate would have it. By altering my perspective, by seeing Charles' other side, I was able to reach across the aisle and pull down the wall between us.

Outcome: Miraculously, our relationship improved after that. Though Charles had not had the dream experience himself, my change of heart alone was enough to shift the mood.

In another example, a situation with a family member was unbearable. We had not communicated in a very long time. She had caused me great pain and I was struggling with forgiveness. Then I had a dream. She was elevated on a platform, posed like a

Buddha and surrounded by an aura. Many people were bowing to her, and I was one of them.

Dreamwork: In life I had been looking down on my relative; in the dream I was looking up to her. She was no longer the malicious person I dreaded, but an embodiment of goodness. The crowd and I were bowing to that *goodness* in her.

Outcome: The outward relationship has not changed, but the inward one has. Until our issues are resolved on a physical plane, I will continue to greet her in spirit every day.

And here is one more: Bess was a manager whom I mentored and promoted until she became one of my “impossibles”. She began to manipulate her staff, shaping her organization in ruthless ways. With employees on the verge of mutiny, I terminated Bess from her position. She promptly filed a wrongful discharge action against me. Until it was settled, I was required to keep her at work. The environment was tense and the forced interaction was intolerable.

Dreamwork: I was with colleagues at a banquet. The atmosphere was festive and relaxed. I was sitting at one of the many round tables with friends when I saw Bess approach. I had not known she was at the event and immediately grew apprehensive. She circled my table several times, staring ominously. Then she came up behind me and, as I waited for a blow, she bent over and kissed my cheek. As my friends looked on, Bess smiled graciously and walked away.

Outcome: That week Bess dropped her complaint and quietly resigned. We parted without animus.

Our minds work overtime to put things right. It is said that the people who give us the most trouble are our greatest teachers. If a relationship seems impossible, we just haven't viewed it from the right angle. If we are exasperated with “problem people”, we haven't asked the right questions:

1. Who are you really?
2. What do you need?
3. What can you teach me?

If we remain open, the answers will come. Awake or in dreams, deliberately or incidentally, willingly or not, the universe is programmed for us to learn and grow. And if we don't get it quite right this time, the opportunity to do better will surely come around again.





LEGACY

Several years ago I took part in a program where we were encouraged to write our own **Legacy Statements**. These statements were intensely personal, a kind of introspective GPS reading, and meant to be private. But throughout this book I've shared many of my deepest thoughts. I see no reason to stop now...

*For many years I've carried an unspoken conviction,
A persistent refrain,
An unrelenting thread
Moving quietly through the tasks and challenges of my leadership:
A belief in the genuine power of service,
The untapped potential of each worker,
The razor-thin margin dividing accountability and trust,
The primacy of collaboration over competition,
The linkage of engaged staff, esteemed customer, and organizational
excellence.
This is for me the fine line between drowning and walking on water.*

*But on occasion
The stars align,
Intentions converge,
And the time is clearly right to give voice to those ideas.*

*In an edgy, evolving environment of metrics and technology,
Hierarchy and politics,
My organization has given me that voice, nurtured that passion,
Allowed the space to shape a culture-centered approach—
Part philosophy,
Part physics,
Part pragmatism—
To the business of caring.*

*For me, this work has reinforced certain truths:
That the carrot is mightier than the stick;
That people who are beaten into submission carry wounds;
That the inherent chaos of our jobs must be securely bracketed
Between an unambiguous mission*

*And an uncompromising corporate character;
That the “soft skills” are really the “hard skills;”
That justice and respect drive out fear,
And that, where fear resides, growth is not possible;
That there is wisdom in living and modeling a balanced life,
In being able to say “no” while delighting in saying “yes!”
That what we do is truly important, but how we do it is even more so.*

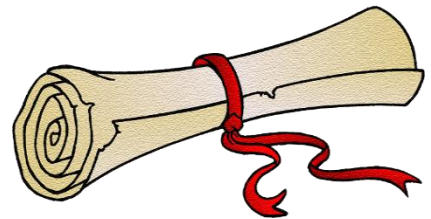
*I would like to think that I’ve helped to raise this awareness,
Stimulate this discourse,
By weaving it into the fabric of my leadership.
I’ve been permitted to create, cultivate, and persevere on the notion
That all things are connected,
That we’re all made of the same cosmic “stuff,”
That while we dance to the tunes of metrics, mandates, and bottom lines,
What we’ll ultimately be judged on is the quality and compassion of our
relationships.*

*We are only as good as the people we lead:
If we’re singing solo, we’ve lost the chorus.*

*Some call that Servant Leadership.
Some call it Tao.
I call it common sense.
In human organizations, the means justify the ends.*

*My legacy is neither flashy nor splashy;
Not a tangible accomplishment,
Enterprising project,
Or cutting edge development.
My legacy is passed on to those who resonate with it,
And those who don’t yet know that they do.*

*I leave a theme,
A thread,
A slow, soft, steady drumbeat.*





THE LEADER AS SHEPHERD

Leaders are the shepherds of the workplace. They tend, guard, guide, and watch over carefully. They serve as coach, counsellor, mentor, and navigator.

Bring to mind the image of an English fox hunt. The hounds are racing as a pack across the terrain; the horses are in pursuit. The huntsman leads the riders in the thrill of the chase. Now and again, a hound picks up the scent of deer and wanders off. The whipper-in, an outrider on the fringes of the group, is alert to the straying hound and herds him back to the pack.

Or think about a sheepdog, who performs the same function. He cajoles and warns, and drives the errant sheep back into the flock.

It seems antithetical to common wisdom that 99% of the pack or the flock is not good enough. When do we expect anything to be at 100%? And yet in the example above, even one lost lamb is worth searching for. Everything stops until that one is regained.

Quantum physics tells us we are all one. At the subatomic level, I am you and you are me, and we are all each other. There is no space between us. We are not just *like* each other: we are *in fact* each other. And if that is the case, leaving some of us at the wayside just won't do. Because we are in fact *One*, 99% simply doesn't cut it.

That can be hard for us to fathom. As a leader I have many people reporting to me. They can't all be star employees. There have to be a few I wouldn't mind losing; who aren't worth herculean effort. I am expected to rate, rank, and even fire those who don't fit the mold. Right?

Yes, leaders are required to make hard decisions, but they cannot be made cavalierly: they demand gravitas. Servant leaders go the extra mile to ensure employees are successful.

Servant leadership is not a 50/50 proposition, but 100/100. Servant leaders meet employees where they are and develop them from there. Some leaders I know offer "safe passage" to staff members who are irrevocably failing, helping them to find a more conducive environment. It takes creative thinking, a big-picture view, and unremitting love. Decisions don't only affect the individual: they effect the team and the organization as a whole.

Going after the stray sheep can be arduous and thankless, yet the leader undertakes to bring them all in. That one isolated employee may be the missing piece of the puzzle, the elusive key to the problem, the absent note in the chord, the overlooked step in the dance. We're not there until we're ALL there.

In the servant organization, there is no one at the bottom of a pecking order; no one left outside. Everyone is in the club. We care for one another with abandon. For what, after all, is the higher purpose of work, and who are we all but companions on the journey?





I HAVE CALLED YOU BY NAME

I have always been fascinated by the power of a name.

Do you remember the 1980-ish mystery series, “Murder She Wrote”? In perpetual reruns since then, the title character, Jessica Fletcher, has a knack for calling everyone by name—bellmen, cocktail party waiters, parking garage attendants. Somehow she knows all their names and uses them generously. And how they all respond! As if they were people used to blending into the woodwork who were no longer invisible! I watch with fascination the effect it has on their eagerness to serve, going out of their way to do a special favor or look after her.

I think of so many other examples. My colleague Kasey teaches large numbers of employees at a time and remembers every one by name, a talent I envy. Not my forte, I have learned to look at name tags, ask and write it down, or come up with mnemonics. This doesn’t come naturally to me; it requires *intention*.

Then there is the elderly man at church who has intermittent memory problems. During a recent service I reached out to him at the appointed time to say, “Peace be with you, Roger.” It was pure joy when he responded, “And also with you, *Linda*.” At long last he spoke my name.

When I was in nursing school many years ago, we were taught not to call a patient “the gallbladder in room 230”, but to say the patient’s name. In those days, it was a sign of respect to use the person’s last name or title. Several of my colleagues continue to address me as Mrs. Belton for this reason, even after years of working together.

I was known by my surname for years as a mark of professionalism and position. I’ll never forget the shock when, interviewing for a job in a remote corner of the country, I was addressed by my first name. It seemed entirely too familiar, but as I became ensconced there, I grew to appreciate the closer connection it engendered. The name our parents give us—or for some, the name we choose for ourselves—reflects more intimately *who we are*.

In “A Nobler Side of Leadership: The Art of Humanagement,” I used names to credit colleagues for a thought or a phrase that found its way into the material. A “Thank you, _____” asterisked at the bottom of a page noted their contribution to my work. This

was not a formal citation, but an affectionate recognition; and an attempt to be a servant leader while writing about servant leadership.

So what does any of this have to do with the everyday realities of corporate life? Servant leaders need all the help they can get. Remaining in the “ivory towers” of our offices or our minds, putting space between “us” and “them”, or staying professionally and positionally aloof, creates a distance that is hard to bridge. Titles are legitimate expressions of esteem as long as we don’t hide behind them, don’t create artificial barriers of rank, and as long as they don’t separate us from one another.

How many people do you have regular interaction with and don’t know their names? Do you know the name of the woman who cleans your office, the messenger who delivers your mail, or the fellow who cashes you out in the cafeteria line?

I overlooked the power of that for many years, but now I make a point of finding out and addressing by name those with whom I intersect, even for a moment: the restaurant server, the post office clerk, the assistant at the golf course, the checker at the market, the man who sits in the pew next to me, the new employee down the hall... The results are remarkable: a link, a bond, an incentive, an inspiration—an instant if momentary recognition of a fellow traveler.

The ring of a name is sweet. It says, “You are worth remembering.” It beckons us to a deeper connection. It summons us to personal and profound service. You are invited to *listen* to that voice, and to *be* that voice. If you didn’t also believe that, you would never have picked up this book.

Whether it is you who are being called or you who are reaching out to call others, the message is, “This is no accident. This is not a fluke. This is *intentional*. You have been called by name.





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Linda W. Belton served as a Senior Executive in the Veterans Health Administration for 20 years, as Director, Veterans Integrated Service Network, leading a region of VA hospitals and clinics in the Midwest, and as VA's first Director of Organizational Health. Prior to her work in VA, she was appointed by the Governor of Wisconsin to lead the State Hospital system, and held executive leadership positions at a variety of private sector health care organizations.

Linda earned an R.N. from Jameson School of Nursing, a B.S. from the University of the State of New York, and an M.S. from Columbia Pacific University. She was a Johnson Fellow at Harvard University's JFK School of Government (Senior Executives in State and Local Government), and

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Belton served on the Board of Trustees of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, is a Fellow in the American College of Healthcare Executives, and a lay Associate of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother (SSM). She has received three Presidential Rank awards for her professional contributions.

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