

LEADERSHIP

Understanding Servant Leadership

A SHORT SIGHTED APPROACH TO ORGANISATIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IS DANGEROUS IN BUSINESS

Corporate Advice



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Traditional leadership and organisational structures assume people at the lower rungs of an organisation are less experienced, less competent and ultimately less capable than those further up the line.

And when you consider how organisations operate, this seems fair enough!

The problem with this belief is that over time, this hierarchical way of leading and structuring organisations often becomes firmly entrenched in the company.

This over time can lead to office politics, personal agendas (often at the expense of others) and a strict 'pecking order' that reinforces positional power.

This way of thinking and organisational structuring has been consistent in organisations for decades and is still widely evident today and is aptly represented in the remuneration structure.

The model, in effect, supports the premise that the employees at the base of the Company, being the most lowly paid, add to the profits (and salaries) of those in the levels above them.

Classic organisational structures look like the pyramid structure. It stands to reason on some level, as it is the people at the organisational helm who carry the most risk and with whom 'the buck stops.'

This in itself is not necessarily the problem. The issue is that often leaders come to believe that those under them are there to serve them, to fulfill their needs and to help them flourish.

This is a short sighted approach to organisational growth and development. It's dangerous in business!

Serving your people

Organisational leaders who share the ideas and profits with their employees, who make them feel valuable, develop them, serve their needs and reward them fairly and who treat them well are those who will secure the ongoing loyalty and commitment of their people.

These aptly named 'Servant Leaders' ensure their followers have the necessary skills, competencies and resources to do their job in an exemplary manner.

It is this approach to people and organisational transformation that makes those companies (not sur-

What would you see in a Servant Leadership based Organisation?

- Leaders constantly look out for the interests of their followers
- Leaders share power with their people, involving them in decision making and asking them for their opinions on important matters
- Leaders value and develop their people, based on their interests and skills gaps
- Leaders focus on building the relationship potential in others
- Leaders over time build a culture of 'servanthood' that works towards empowering people at all levels, resulting in enhanced business performance
- There is a continuous feeling of 'let's work this out together.'
- A key focus on the Vision and Mission
- Creativity and innovation
- Enthusiastic and engaged people

prisingly) highly profitable – and thrive!

Whilst this is a significant paradigm shift from the 'traditional' way of doing business and leading others, the concept of Servant Leadership is not new.

First termed by American Robert Greenleaf, management consultant, writer and teacher, Servant Leadership proposes that the best leaders are servants first.

To truly promote the progression of organisations, communities and people, their focus must be on removing obstacles and challenges in the path of their people, to ensure their (and the organisation's) smooth transition to growth and success.

Servant leadership

Over the last 25 years, Servant Leadership as a philosophy of living and leading has had major impact on a range of areas such as management, religion, organisational development and leadership.

Whilst in many church-based organisations, for example, the idea of serving others and looking after them has been a historical approach, it is gathering renewed momentum according to Greenleaf's

Nine of Fortune 100 Best Companies that use the Servant Leader model include:

1. Starbucks
2. QuickTrip
3. Zappos
4. Marriott International
5. Nordstrom
6. Whole Foods Market
7. Darden Restaurants
8. Wegmans
9. SAS

doctrine and guiding principles.

Greenleaf believed there are ten guiding principles are critical to the effectiveness of Servant Leadership.

When used, Servant Leaders around the globe transform not only organisations, but communities, societies, villages and families.

This, in essence, is why it is regarded as a philosophical and more 'spiritual' way of leading and living. And it works.

Practical applications

It has been well researched and documented that happy employees add to the bottom line.

Creating a workplace culture of support and encouragement, where people are encouraged to grow and learn (even if mistakes are made) are those Companies where people, and profits, soar.

Greenleaf's model of Servant Leadership is especially well suited to empowering employees and giving them active and ongoing participation in their roles and involvement in their work – with key business outcomes being employee satisfaction and increased productivity and profitability.

By seeing themselves as the servant to their peers and employees, the Servant Leader's aim is to fulfill the needs of others by ensuring their development and well-being in order to meet the goals of the individual, team or organisation.

Servant Leadership research

Results support that 'the modeling of Servant Leadership by strategic managers can create organisational cultures in which Servant Leaders develop among lower level managers.' (Journal of Business Inquiry, 2010 pg. 84)

Regarding personal characteristics of Servant Leaders, it appears that the most important are in the areas of wisdom, organisational stewardship (leaders look after everything under them) and altruistic calling (the leader puts the needs of

TEN GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The philosophical approach to Servant Leadership is based on ten guiding principles and according to Greenleaf, is 'for people of all faiths and all institutions, secular and religions.' They are listed in the grid below.

Activity: How do you rate as a Servant Leader?

Consider the table below and see how you rate. Look at the ten principles and score yourself out of ten for each (ten being the highest score.) As a challenge, make a copy of these ten principles for each of your people and get them to score you.

Reflective Activity: What are your two lowest scores? What actions will you take to improve them so that your ability to become a trusted Servant Leader is greatly enhanced?

Guiding Principle	Application in Leadership	Your Score
1. Listening	Servant Leaders make a deep commitment to listen to others and to identify the will and concerns of others. Listening is about tuning into their own inner voice to understand themselves better and what their intuition may be telling them	
2. Empathy	Servant Leaders strive to understand the situations and emotions of others and each is recognised for their unique and special spirit	
3. Builds the community	As shapers of human lives, Servant Leaders seek ways to build the community for those working in organisations by creating and fostering collaboration, teamwork and harmony	
4. Foresight	Foresight is a characteristic that allows Servant Leaders to understand lessons from the past, the realities of the present and the likely consequences of a decision in the future. It is deeply rooted in the intuitive mind	
5. Healing	Leading to heal is a powerful force for transformation. A great strength of Servant Leadership is the potential for healing oneself and others. Servant Leaders help those around them heal from wounds that affect their work and lives and offer support and encouragement	
6. Stewardship	All CEO's staff, directors and trustees play a significant role in holding their institutions in trust for the great good of society. Their role is to look after everything over which they have responsibility	
7. Persuasion	Leaders persuade others by working with people, building consensus and collaborative practice. There is no room for coercion and arrogant positional authority	
8. Awareness	General awareness of things, people and situations around them and self-awareness strengthens the Servant Leader. They know what's going on around them at any time	
9. Conceptualisation	Servant Leaders seek to nurture their abilities to 'dream great dreams'. The ability to look at a problem (or an organisation) from a conceptualising perspective means that they think must think beyond day to day realities. These leaders must seek a balance between conceptualisation and day to day focus	
10. Growth of people	Servant Leaders believe their people are more valuable than being merely workers. They are deeply committed to the professional and spiritual growth of all their people	

others above their own.)

Conclusion

The Servant Leadership model offers favourable alternatives to a range of other leadership models.

This is as it concentrates on leadership behaviours that are both effective by developing those around them and growing the organisations in which they operate.

Current research findings indicate that Servant Leadership is applicable in any organisation and in-

dustry and indeed is positioned to give these companies a competitive edge over others.

What can you do to improve your skills in Servant Leadership so that you lead your employees, families, communities, societies and (even) nations in an exemplary fashion, placing their needs above yours, to achieve the common good?

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