

## Servant Leadership In Action by Ken Blanchard

In the preface Ken Blanchard states the following:

When I hear people say “It’s lonely at the top.” To me, if it’s lonely at the top, it means nobody is following you. If that’s true, you’d better get off the top and go where the people are—and then, in my terms, bring them to the top with you.” He goes on to suggest when you become a leader, you give up your right to think of yourself first. Servant leadership, the subject of the book, is a behavioural model about always putting others first.

### **What Is Servant Leadership?**

The general perception of a leader is someone who would decide what to do, when to do it, where to do it, and how to do it, someone with a visionary or strategic role. Servant leaders retain this leadership aspect but complement it with an implementation, or operational role.

The traditional hierarchical pyramid with a sole leader at the top, remains effective for the leadership aspect of servant leadership where people look to their organizational leaders for vision. However, most organizations and leaders get into trouble in the implementation phase of the leadership process.

With self-serving leaders at the helm, the traditional hierarchical pyramid is kept alive and well. When that happens, who do people think they work for? The people above them. The minute you think you work for the person above you for implementation, you are assuming that person—your boss—is responsible and your job is being responsive to that boss.

As a result, all the energy of the organization is moving up the hierarchy, away from customers and the frontline folks who are closest to the action. Servant leaders correct this situation by turning the traditional hierarchical pyramid upside down when it comes to implementation. As a result, you, the leader, work for your people. This one change, although it seems minor, makes a major difference.

The difference is between who is responsible and who is responsive. When you turn the organizational pyramid upside down, rather than your people being responsive to you, they become responsible: responsible to those at the top of the inverted pyramid, the customer.

## **Ten Characteristics of Servant Leaders**

Within the essays, ten characteristics of Servant Leaders emerge.

1 - Listening The servant leader seeks to identify the will of a group and helps to clarify that will by listening receptively to what is being said and not said. Listening, coupled with periods of reflection - hearing one's own inner voice - is essential to the growth and well-being of the servant leader.

2 - Empathy People deserve to be accepted and recognized for their special and unique spirits. Servant Leaders assume the good intentions of staff, co-workers and colleagues and does not reject them as people, even when they may be forced to refuse to accept certain behaviours or performance.

3 - Healing One of the great strengths of servant leadership is the potential for healing one's self and one's relationship to others. Although this is a part of being human, servant leaders recognize that they have an opportunity to help make whole those with whom they come in contact.

4 - Awareness General awareness, and especially self-awareness, strengthens the servant leader. Awareness helps one in understanding issues involving ethics, power, and values. It lends itself to being able to view most situations from a more integrated, holistic position.

5 - Persuasion The servant leader seeks to convince others, rather than coerce compliance. The servant leader is effective at building consensus within groups. This emphasis on persuasion over coercion.

6 - Conceptualization The ability to look at a problem or an organization from a conceptualizing perspective requires consideration beyond day-to-day realities. The leader who wishes to be a servant leader must stretch his or her thinking to encompass broader-based conceptual thinking. Servant leaders are called to seek a delicate balance between conceptual thinking and a day-to-day operational approach.

7 - Foresight Foresight is a characteristic that enables the servant leader to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future, deeply rooted within the intuitive mind.

8 - Stewardship Servant leadership assumes a commitment to serving the needs of others: a commitment to the growth of people. The servant leader recognizes the tremendous responsibility to do everything in his or her power to nurture the personal and professional growth of employees and colleagues.

9 - Building community The servant leader seeks to identify some means for building community among those who work within his or her institution. Servant leadership suggests that true community can be created among those who work together.

10 - Trust The practices of servant leadership and trust are inextricably linked. Servant leaders both serve first and trust first. Leadership is the by-product with positional authority - an afterthought. Trust and servant leadership share another similarity in that both are built on intent. Intent—your motive, your agenda—may be intangible and invisible. But don't think for a moment that it is hidden. People sense your intent in everything you say and do.

### **The Trust Litmus Test**

So, are you a Servant Leader? How close are you to matching the profile? Think about the people you lead. What is the level and quality of trust? If you are an authentic servant leader, you have enormous trust. If you lead as a servant, you'll know it—because you will be surrounded by high-trust relationships and a high-trust team.

Extending trust to others doesn't have to be an exercise in blind gullibility. It is a risk to extend trust to others. Many leaders have advanced their careers by minimizing risk. They say, "I want it done right, so I do it myself." This orientation is exhausting, unsustainable, and incapable of delivering the endless innovation, energy, and engagement of an organization that has been electrified by trust. People want to be trusted. It's the most compelling form of human motivation. The servant leader understands this and seeks something greater, inspiring trust not only in the organization, but potentially in all of society as well.

Trust is the litmus test. Ask yourself (or your staff) the following questions and seek honest answers:

1. What is the level of trust I share with my relationships, my team, my stakeholders?
2. What is my real intent? Is it truly to serve others, or is it to serve myself?

3. What are some opportunities for declaring my real intent to others?
4. What are some ways in which I can deliberately demonstrate my intent to serve through my behaviors?

This self-diagnostic lets you identify where you are on the Servant Leadership path.

### **Servant Leaders Create a Great Place to Work for All**

The best workplaces know they must create an outstanding culture for everyone, no matter who they are or what they do for the organization. These companies have employees across the board who consistently trust their leaders, take pride in their work, and enjoy their colleagues—the three core elements of a great workplace. They cultivate servant leaders who create cultures where all people feel trusted, empowered, supported, and treated fairly.

In these companies, leaders relinquish the autocratic, command-and-control ways that dominated business cultures in the twentieth century. Through a shift to servant leadership, lower-ranked employees experience more passion about work, collaborate more, and engage in innovation behaviors that propel success in the business. Leaders in these organizations establish trusting relationships with decentralized power. They know people need significant control over their jobs to reach their full potential. There's no room for micromanagement.

Beyond providing employees with autonomy in their day-to-day tasks, servant leaders at these companies actively seek their people's input and feedback on matters ranging from team projects to organizational strategy. In addition, servant leaders, reflected in these organizations treat all people fairly. They know that fairness is at the heart of the employee experience. It is central to trusting relationships, serves as a foundation for empowering employees to make decisions, and is crucial to people feeling genuinely cared for.

### **Servant Leaders Celebrate Others**

People thrive when they are recognized for their contributions to an organization's success. A team's continued engagement in the execution of an organizational vision is directly influenced by the leader's ability to celebrate them in meaningful ways.

Servant leaders understand the impact celebration has on the health of their organization. They make celebration a high priority in their leadership and are always looking for new ways to acknowledge their team's success.

Servant leaders understand that when the team experiences a win, they must pause to celebrate that win before they can expect the team to move on to the next goal.

Within the essays can be found five benefits of celebration.

1 - Celebration Demonstrates You Value Your Team Celebrating your people demonstrates that you value them, and you acknowledge their part in making the victory possible. Simply put, your people need to feel valued and affirmed by their leader.

2 - Celebration Reinforces Core Organizational Values The things you celebrate as a leader send a clear message to your team about what you deem to be important qualities of a successful team player. Servant leaders are always mindful that they must live out these core values first. You cannot expect your team to share your stated values if your actions do not reflect these values.

3 - Celebration Builds Team Morale Celebration increases team members' morale when they get to enjoy victories together. Celebration is a high motivator because everyone enjoys the thrill of victory and wants to experience it as often as possible! A servant leader also tries to regularly celebrate the contributions of the unsung heroes on the team. It takes an entire team—each person functioning within their own skill set and giving their best at every level—to create a win. Accordingly, it's important that you acknowledge everyone's position and participation, not just the people on the front lines.

4 - Celebration Increases Retention and Productivity People are more productive in positive surroundings. Celebration creates an environment where people want to work to meet the organization's goals. Simply stated, what gets celebrated gets done! The more you affirm your team, the more productive they are.

#### 5 - Celebration Is a Great Recruiting Tool

People like to have a good time. If celebration is externally visible and an organisation supports those who aid success, the organisation becomes an attractive place to work.

## **Servant Leadership and the Parable of the Good Samaritan**

How you see people determines how you serve people. And most of us tend toward the extremes: we see people as either a problem to be avoided or a person to be loved. The parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates this.

Our traveler in this story encountered three different types of people.

First, the robbers. They beat him, robbed him, and completely exploited him. While most of us would never even consider doing anything like this, sometimes we're still tempted to see people as commodities, resources, or obstacles rather than flesh-and-blood human beings.

The second group our victim encountered were the priests. These religious leaders didn't rob the man, beat him, or exploit him. They simply avoided him altogether. They were too busy doing what they saw as more important spiritual work to stop and help someone in need. From time to time, we all think the best way to handle a situation is to avoid it altogether. Maybe we think someone else will do it. Maybe we think someone else is doing it.

The last person the victim encountered, the Good Samaritan, was the only one who saw him through the eyes of a servant leader. He didn't see a victim to exploit or a problem to avoid. He saw a person to be respected. And that's why he served.

What you see when you look at someone determines how you serve. Many of us say we want to respect others—but we see, feel, and move on. Servant leaders remember that someone with a chip on their shoulder may have scars on their back—so their approach is not judgment but respectful action.