

# VENTURING MAGAZINE

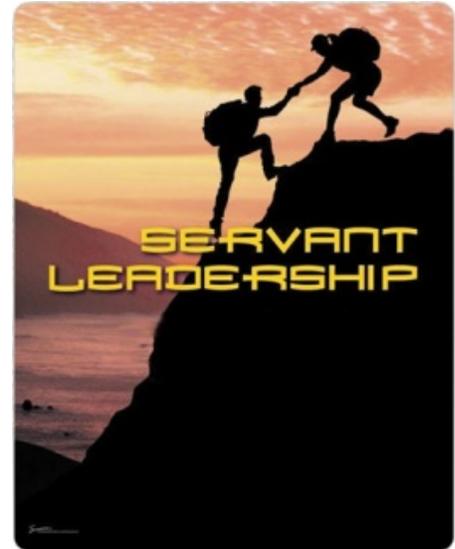
LeaderThoughts #3 by Michael Brown

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## Servant Leadership

What is it? Do you know? A lot of people in the BSA have heard the term, but do they really understand what it means? Or is it just the latest buzz word?

While the basic concept of servant leadership has been around for a long time, the modern usage of it started in 1970 with the publication of an essay entitled "The Servant as Leader" by Robert Greenleaf, who is considered the modern originator of the concept. From that concept he further developed it and others have also come along, including Larry Spears, Stephen Covey, Ken Blanchard, Max De Pree and others who have added and expanded on it.



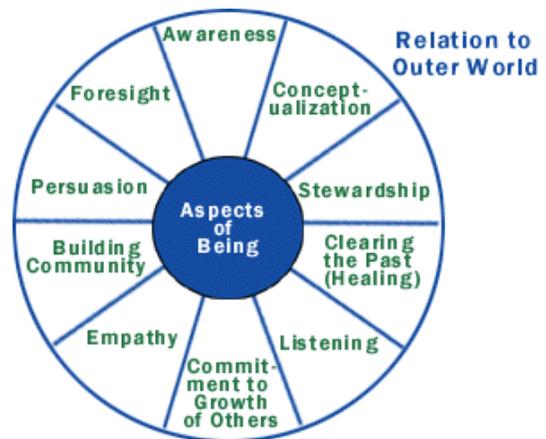
But what is it? Let's look at Greenleaf's own words. The servant leader is one who is servant first. He serves those he leads by being their leader, but in a different way. "It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead... The difference manifest itself in the care taken by the servant- first to make sure that other people's highest-priority needs are being served. The best test is: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?"

A very different way to look at leadership and the relations between the leader and follower. This can be contrasted with the other way, which may be called "leader first" or "self-serving leader", where the leader's needs are most important, and the followers are there just to meet the leader's needs.

For me, a good example of the servant leader is the kind of leader we should see in scouting, who steps up to be a leader (doesn't matter the level) not for their own glory or power, but because they want what is best for others in the program. Among the youth, it's those who want what is best for their peers, for adults it's those who want what is best for the youth. They also want to help those they work with develop as leaders. We see this in large groups, where the load is broken up into smaller parts, handled by others, who can be leaders in their own right and develop themselves. Contrast that with the leader who is in it for themselves, for their glory (say title, awards, knots), and sees others who DO want to lead (hopefully for the RIGHT reasons) as threats to their position and works to keep them out of the group, rather than to bring them onboard. Read that quote again.

While a simple concept, servant leadership has a lot to it. In its development, 10 characteristics have been found (from Larry Spears):

1. Listening
2. Empathy
3. Healing
4. Awareness
5. Persuasion
6. Conceptualization
7. Foresight
8. Stewardship
9. Commitment to the growth of people
10. Building community



And just learning and understand these characteristics takes some time. As I said, a simple concept, but there is a lot more to it, under the surface.

I'm actually pretty unimpressed with how the BSA has dealt with servant leadership as compared to other groups. The term gets tossed around without really delving into what it truly means and implies. And there is little attempt to incorporate the concept into our organization culture, unlike other groups who have adopted it. Youth are introduced to the concept in a 10-15 minute discussion in the Introduction to Leadership courses. How can you have a discussion on such an important concept when the participants and most likely the discussion leader really don't understand it? Contrast that with Alpha Phi Omega, which has made servant leadership the core underlying concept of their whole leadership development program. They spend 45 minutes in their core course going over servant leadership and the 10 characteristics, tying in other leadership skills to several of them. Further, their LD presenters are encouraged to read and learn what servant leadership is.

Even in this basic article I can only scratch the surface, but hopefully point people to further works to read. This is an important concept and one that will be revisited in the future.

As noted, Robert Greenleaf created the modern servant leadership movement. He followed up that first essay with others such as "The Institute as Servant", "Trustees as Servants", "Spirituality as Leadership" and more. He established an organization to develop the concept, which is now the Robert Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership ([www.greenleaf.org](http://www.greenleaf.org)), and it hold conferences and publishes his and other works. Two slightly different collections of his basic works people might want to look at are "Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness" and the shorter "The Servant-Leader Within" [each have many of the same works, btw]

Other writers have also created servant leadership works. One is Larry Spears who for years was the executive director of the Center, and now runs his own group ([www.spearscenter.org](http://www.spearscenter.org)). He has authored and edited many works on the subject. Four collections he has edited with the Center are "Focus on Leadership", "Insights on Leadership", "Reflections on Leadership" and "Practicing Servant-Leadership". The last work has a great introductory essay that explains servant leadership and the 10 principles. A shortened version of this essay may be found on-line here:

[www.sullivanadvisorygroup.com/docs/articles/Practicing Servant Leadership.pdf](http://www.sullivanadvisorygroup.com/docs/articles/Practicing_Servant_Leadership.pdf)

Another great introductory presentation on servant leadership:

[www.modernservantleader.com/preso/ServantLeadership\\_Introduction.pdf](http://www.modernservantleader.com/preso/ServantLeadership_Introduction.pdf)

The Greenleaf Center has published several small booklets. One that I think is probably the best introductory work is "The Case for Servant Leadership", which may be purchased from them. "The Case for Servant Leadership" was written to be a basic introduction to servant leadership. While several would recommend reading Greenleaf's initial article on servant leadership to begin, that work doesn't delve into the full aspects of servant leadership that has been worked out since it was written. There are some other articles that are good introductions, and some of the other books out there on servant leadership are good introductions, but no short, comprehensive work.

This work fills that gap. The book was written by Kent Keith, who is the CEO of the Greenleaf Center. I found it to be a good read, and touched on some aspects I hadn't considered.

The book has five chapters. You have an introductory one that explains the basic concept of servant leadership. Then you learn who is a servant leader. Another chapter covers the concept of power and servant leadership. The ideas brought forth here are very important, and one that all should be familiar with. Next we cover 7 aspects of servant leadership. And finally, we learn of the meaningful lives of servant leaders.

Some videos that are helpful are:

- Larry Spears on Servant Leadership from Dateline NBC:  
[http://www.youtube.com/v/mDVDXPo0ytM?version=3&hl=en\\_US&rel=0](http://www.youtube.com/v/mDVDXPo0ytM?version=3&hl=en_US&rel=0)
- Greenleaf Center:  
[http://www.youtube.com/v/tnCCs1aoiMo?version=3&hl=en\\_US&rel=0](http://www.youtube.com/v/tnCCs1aoiMo?version=3&hl=en_US&rel=0)
- Tom Peters on Servant Leadership:  
[http://www.youtube.com/v/BHIKRmEaC6Y?version=3&hl=en\\_US&rel=0](http://www.youtube.com/v/BHIKRmEaC6Y?version=3&hl=en_US&rel=0)