

Ten Characteristics of a Servant Leader

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Ten Characteristics of a Servant Leader:

1. Listening

Listening is quite different from merely hearing. Hearing is passive.

Listening is active. It is an act of will. Listening requires a commitment. The servant leader listens to identify the will of the person or a group so as to make effective decisions - decisions that will be followed upon by voluntary and creative action.

- * How well do you listen?
- * In your leadership, do you take care to make sure that everyone is heard from?
- * Do you ask questions to get other people's ideas?
- * Do you summarize and reflect back what you've heard?

2. Empathy

Empathy is not the same as sympathy. A leader who is empathetic not only feels or expresses concerns for others, which is sympathy, but actually identifies with the concerns of others, so as to better understand and lead.

All people need to be accepted and recognized for their special talents and unique spirits. Knowing this, the servant leader assumes the good intentions of co-workers and accepts them all as good people of value and worth.

- * Do you, as you lead, consciously and consistently recognize the efforts of your co-workers?
- * Do co-workers feel you understand what they put into their work? What their frustrations/needs are? Can they experiment or try something new with their jobs?
- * Do they feel they can safely admit to and learn from their mistakes and, not out of fear, feel the need to attempt to remedy mistakes?
- * For that matter, do you as a leader admit to your own mistakes? Are you open to constructive criticism yourself?

3. Healing

This characteristic is especially important when it comes to working relationships. The servant leader knows that we have all been wounded by life and that there are opportunities the servant leader will have to help restore a person to wholeness, in both individuals and groups. Try to give unconditionally whatever a person needs in the

moment. The point is to do something, however small, and show you care through your actions.

As you lead, look to see if there are wounds that need tending - like conflicts between co-workers, or problems at home. This does not mean that you take on the stress of other people's problems. That is neither helpful or healthy. Rather, the servant leader will try to be a non-anxious presence recognizing and naming the problem and being willing to help people to resolve conflicts on their own.

4. Awareness

Awareness can be defined as the ability to see things as they really are. This involves awareness of self as well as awareness of situation. Making a commitment to foster awareness can be scary. You never know what you may discover. Awareness is not a giver of solace—just the opposite. It is a disturber. An awakener. Awareness is powerful. It leads to knowledge, and knowledge is power. And, yet, when people are kept in the dark, their performance suffers. Even when painful, the results of sharing knowledge are invariably and inevitably positive.

Awareness has its own rewards. The leader does not hoard. The more he does for others, the more he has for himself. The more he gives to others, his own bounty increases.

5. Persuasion

While coercion may bring short-term results, it is through persuasion that lasting and positive change is achieved. Seeking to convince rather than pulling rank is one of the clearest distinctions between authoritarian leadership and servant leadership.

Persuasion is an honest and healthy process whereby the leader takes the risk of going out ahead to show the way. Others follow voluntarily, persuaded that the leader's path is the right way and probably better than they could devise for themselves. Along the way, both leader and follower respect the integrity and allow the autonomy of the other.

* Think about how you have come to accept new ideas or try new ways of doing things.

* Think about how others have helped you grow. Has it been the result of coercion or manipulation, or were you genuinely persuaded?

6. Conceptualization

The ability to look at a problem with the mission of the organization from the perspective of conceptualization means thinking beyond day-to-day concerns. Many people who find themselves in positions of leadership are consumed with the need to achieve short-term operational goals, putting out fires - reacting instead of acting.

It would be unrealistic, if not unfair, to suggest that servant leaders should be above and beyond the stuff of day-to-day operations. The servant leader, nevertheless, strives to keep the vision, the mission, and the long-term goals of the organization always in mind. Through the practice of conceptualization, the servant leader sees the patterns created by the details, the art that comes as the result of the brush strokes.

No project exists in isolation. It is always part of a larger vision. Although conceptualization may appear to be an individual effort, the servant leader will also encourage others to conceptualize as well - to restate the corporate vision in their own terms, to dream their own dreams, and to add their own insights and interpretations.

7. Foresight

Coming out of awareness and closely related to the experience of conceptualization, foresight is the ability to view the likely outcome of a given situation. Foresight is a fluid process, combining an understanding of lessons learned in the past, the realities of the present, and the consequences in the future.

Foresight takes the past, together with the present, and projects the two of them forward. It acknowledges that future events don't just come out of nowhere, but are somehow related to things in the past and the present.

8. Stewardship

How we use and take care of what has been placed in our trust is what stewardship is all about. In the broadest sense, all human beings are stewards. We are all stewards of our planet and of its resources. We have been entrusted with the care of the earth. The earth, in turn, supports us and gives us life. This understanding affects our attitude towards how we use what the earth has provided. The same is true of our people, our organizations, and our institutions. As leaders, especially as servant leaders, we recognize that we are stewards. We have been entrusted with that which, ultimately, belongs to others. Whether it's the talents of our co-workers, the resources of our corporations, or the ideals of our institutions. We must honor that trust by being good stewards.

9. Commitment to the Growth of People

Servant leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value and treat them accordingly. Therefore, the servant leader will do everything that is within his or her power to nurture the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of co-workers. In practice, this means such actions as providing resources and opportunities for continuing education, taking personal and respectful interest in the ideas and suggestions of everyone, encouraging co-worker involvement in decision making, and actively assisting laid-off co-workers to find other employment - to name just a few.

Although it is true that each person is individually responsible for personal growth, leadership in this area can be vital.

10. Building Community

More and more these days, people are aware of the lack of, and the need for, the sense and support of community. The servant leader recognizes that our moves toward larger and larger organizations and institutions has led, to some extent, to this current situation. The servant leader also recognizes that creative and supportive community-building can take place within these very same organizations and institutions. When building community happens, the effects will not only be seen within but will extend far beyond.

Servant leadership promotes opportunities for corporate successes because people work and live best in a community where they genuinely serve each other's needs. Working together, while respecting the dignity of each individual, while providing service to the world, whether through our products or our works, is the stuff of building community.

Conclusions and Reflections

Making the commitment to become a servant leader is not only desirable, but also possible. Each one of us has at least some of the ten leader characteristics already within us. The first step is to:

- * Recognize those existing characteristics. Name them and claim them as your own. Honor their presence by practicing them more and more.
- * Identify those other servant leadership characteristics which you would like to develop further, and then get to work!

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