



BECOMING

A

SERVANT LEADER

HOW TO LEAD WITH OTHERS IN MIND



SKIP RICHARD



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# 1

## ENTREPRENEURIAL SERVANT LEADERSHIP

*The restaurant is buzzing with conversation. The clinking of glasses and silverware can be heard above the laughter. Scents of barbeque and aromatic flavors permeate the room. Enter a man who moves from table to table, quietly filling the water glasses.*

*Restaurant Attendant (smiling): "You like the mac and cheese?"*

*You (eyes wide open): "Are you kidding? I didn't even know you could do this with macaroni and cheese! Fantastic."*

*Attendant:* "That macaroni is handmade for us by the Martelli family in Tuscany. Just what we wanted. The two-year-old Vermont cheddar cheese is caramelized. We thought the combination was perfect."

*You, thinking, but not saying aloud,* "Who is this guy? What type of water boy knows this stuff?"

*Attendant, interrupting your thoughts:* "Do you want some more bread? You're eating the Roadhouse bread, but you may also want to try the Irish Brown Soda bread tonight."

*You:* "Is it as good as what we're eating now?"

*Attendant:* "Depends on your taste, but it's good. We source the oatmeal from the Creedon family, the same family who makes our Irish stone ground oatmeal.

It makes the flavor and texture. I'll be right back with some for you to taste. Oh, and I'd love to give you a taste of our barbeque tonight."

*You (turning to me, shrugging as he leaves):* "Who is THAT?"

*Me:* "That, my friend, is Ari, the most unusual water boy you will ever meet. He's the owner!"

*You (feigned choking):* "The owner?!"

It's true. We are sitting in a restaurant called [Zingerman's Roadhouse](#) in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Ari Weinzweig is one of the restaurant owners. Most nights, he also fills water glasses at the restaurant. Yes, you read that right. As a partner in a multi-million dollar conglomerate, he personally walks around filling water glasses in order to stay close to the customers.



THE LEADERSHIP  
PERMEATED  
EVERY DISH  
AND  
EVERY STAFF MEMBER.

No wonder Zingerman's has a cult-like following.

No wonder the staff turnover is so low.

No wonder they have won numerous international awards and were even highlighted by *Inc. Magazine* as "The Coolest Small Company in America."

For all of these reasons, when I think about servant leadership, customer service, culture and strategy, I think about Ari Weinzweig and "my" Zingerman's family.

## 5 QUESTIONS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

### HERE ARE FIVE QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- 1. Do you cut corners or do you use the best ingredients you can find?** You may not be running a restaurant, but you still have "ingredients." Make sure they are the best and reflect your desired outcome.
- 2. Do you care about your employees and customers personally?** They know it and your customers will know it.
- 3. Do you lead as a servant or as a dictator?** Ari provides an example as a "water boy." How you do this may be different, but the service ethic is noticeable.
- 4. Do you create memorable experiences?** A memorable customer experience can be online or over the phone. One store is so good at wrapping presents it is memorable and keeps us shopping for gifts.
- 5. Do you give back to the local community?** Servant leaders think about customers, employees, and also the broader community. It is important to give back and serve others in a broad way.

# 2

## WHAT IS A SERVANT LEADER?

At first blush, you may think a [servant leader](#) literally takes on the role of a servant. Taken to an extreme, that definition would look like this:

As you pull into work, the leader meets you at your car, opens your door, and welcomes you to the office. Maybe the leader gets you coffee mid-morning and drops by in the afternoon to see if you need anything. When you need assistance on a project, or maybe just someone to do the grunt work, there your leader is waiting for you.

**NO, THAT ISN'T SERVANT LEADERSHIP.**

Servant leadership is a blend and balance between leader and servant. You don't lose leadership qualities when becoming a servant leader.

Over the years, I have thought a lot about servant leadership. I developed nine characteristics or traits of a servant leader. As I started to share these principles, I could see that each is simple but powerful. I have been asked to speak to various organizations all over the world about these nine qualities.

## 9 QUALITIES OF THE SERVANT LEADER

### *A Servant Leader is One Who:*

1. **Values Diverse Opinions**
2. **Cultivates a Culture of Trust**
3. **Develops Other Leaders**
4. **Helps People with Life Issues**
5. **Encourages**
6. **Sells Instead of Tells**
7. **Thinks YOU, not ME**
8. **Thinks Long-term**
9. **Acts with Humility**

“Never judge someone by the way he looks or a book by the ways it’s covered; for inside those tattered pages, there’s a lot to be discovered.”

-STEPHEN COSGROVE

“We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color.”

-MAYA ANGELOU

## 1. A SERVANT LEADER VALUES DIVERSE OPINIONS

I can still recall a college professor of mine. He was extremely opinionated and only wanted students to reflect his thoughts back to him. Though he gave lip service to the idea that he was helping students develop their own advanced thinking, in truth, he wanted all thinking to be exactly like his. Students who echoed his opinion in essays saw grades soar. Choose to voice a different view and your grade would suffer. The following semester, an opinionated friend of mine was complaining about his first essay grade. I shared with him my view. He decided to try a new tactic, write his second essay to match the professor's opinion and see if his grade improved. What do you think happened?

HE RECEIVED AN A+.

A few years later, I realized that my college professor had a protégé in one of my bosses. She also would dismiss any conversation that did not match her thinking. In this case, I struggled with her because I could not compromise my values and my thinking in order to fit in.

***How do you know if you are in a servant-led organization?***

A servant leader values everyone's contributions and regularly seeks out opinions from a wide group of diverse people. The servant leader recognizes the value that others bring to solving a problem.

If, to succeed, you must echo back the leader's opinion, you are not in a servant-led organization. People are not parrots and should not be treated in a way that forces rote response and behavior. You may not be regularly asked for your opinion, but you should make your opinion known. If you are valued, your voice will be heard. Being heard does not mean that you will get your way. It does mean that you are valued.

## ***Reflection and Discussion***

- 1. Do you encourage debate or is your decision already made before you enter the room?*
- 2. Describe a meeting you were in when opinions were not valued. How did you feel?*
- 3. Do you have someone trusted on your team to tell you honestly if you are valuing other contributors?*

**“To be trusted is a greater compliment than being loved.”**

**-GEORGE MACDONALD**

**“Learning to trust is one of life's most difficult tasks.”**

**-ISAAC WATTS**

## 2. A SERVANT LEADER CULTIVATES A CULTURE OF TRUST.

Recent studies show a decline of trust in the workplace. Some surveys show that the majority of people do not trust the boss. If you ask the boss, she often does not trust the workforce.

Creating a culture of trust is a difficult, never-ending process.

I worked in one organization where, when I started, I could see a complete lack of trust. Managers did not seek to build trust. Instead, the managers were excited about finding new tools to measure, manage, and monitor the employees. Micromanagement was seen as the goal, as the route to success. If there was a problem, no amount of increased supervision was enough.

### Employees worked to avoid managers at all costs.

It's no wonder that, instead of a culture of trust, the employees described a culture of fear.

### Pocket Veto

When I first arrived at the company, I noticed that employees used a tactic I labeled the "pocket veto."

Have you ever heard of a pocket veto?

It's when the United States Congress passes a bill, but the president does not sign it within ten days after Congress adjourns. Effectively, it means that the bill is dead. After all the committee meetings, the bill is passed in the House of Representatives and the Senate, but the bill does not become law.

The president can sign bills into law or he can veto them.

A healthy culture encourages open, robust debate. It allows for alternative opinions.

In the end, it allows everyone to have a say. Then, when the decision is made, everyone gets behind it. There aren't hidden agendas and pocket vetoes. Everyone—even those who may have disagreed—is committed to the same successful path.

Here's what I do when I see them:

**Explain what a pocket veto is.** Often, I've found that knowing what these are helps prevent them.

### ***Ask some questions:***

- 1. Did you have the opportunity to express all of your concerns?*
- 2. Did you agree to the decision?*
- 3. If not, why didn't you speak up?*
- 4. How can we create a culture of trust so you feel comfortable voicing concerns?*

At the next meeting, bring it up.

I'm not talking about embarrassing people. That's counterproductive.

Try something like this: "In our last meeting, we had a discussion about X and we agreed to do Y. We all agreed, but I'm not so sure we really had the robust conversation we needed to have. I don't like to reopen decisions, but in this case, I feel we need to do just that. Would someone summarize the problem and the two solutions we were choosing between?" As a leader, you need to recognize the issue and face it head on. Pocket vetoes are dangerous. You want to give everyone an opportunity to present competing points of view and then move to the decision. If someone consistently pocket vetoes leadership decisions, then ultimately that person will not make it in the organization. He or she will be too miserable, and the organization will not function at its best. I've found that most leaders come around when given a fair opportunity. Eliminate pocket vetoes for the success of your organization and team.

Trust is built on relationship, on experience, on character. It is not built overnight.

Take time to develop relationships, to listen, and to act consistently with your principles in mind.

When you are fortunate to lead within a culture of trust, you will find it one of the most extraordinarily rewarding experiences of your career. If you are in an organization where trust rules the day, you will treasure it. Find yourself back in a culture of distrust and fear, and you will long to recreate the atmosphere of trust.

## ***Reflection and Discussion***

- 1. How would you describe the culture in your organization? Is it one of trust?*
- 2. When a meeting is over, do people talk about the leader behind his or her back?  
Do people follow the direction set in the meeting or ignore it?*
- 3. What's the email culture like? Everyone filing them away "for the record" or copying everyone?*
- 4. How about the blind carbon copy (bcc)? That's a telltale sign of a culture of distrust.*
- 5. Do people encourage openly? Are you supported? Do you regularly help others?*

**“You do not lead by hitting people over the head – that’s assault, not leadership.”**

**-DWIGHT D EISENHOWER**

“To help others develop, start with yourself! When the boss acts like a little god and tells everyone else they need to improve, that behavior can be copied at every level of management. Every level then points out how the level below it needs to change. The end result: No one gets much better.”

**-MARSHALL GOLDSMITH**

### 3. A SERVANT LEADER DEVELOPS OTHER LEADERS.

Servant leaders are not satisfied until others around them are learning, developing, and becoming leaders.

The replication factor is so important. It means teaching others to lead, providing opportunities for growth and demonstrating by example. That means the leader is not always leading but instead is giving up power and deputizing others to lead.

Often it is difficult to cede power and allow others to lead. Often a servant leader finds that it takes more energy to let others try, fail, and learn.

Let's contrast the servant leader with another type of leader—what I like to call the superhuman leader.

#### ***Superhuman Leaders***

- They are able to do almost anything.
- They can solve all sorts of problems.
- They are always working.

But if they are sick, unavailable, or busy with another problem, what happens?

Nothing.

Progress stops. After all, we need to wait for the right decision, right action, right way to act.

This does not create a healthy environment.

I watched one manager operate this way. I think he was afraid of losing his job. Because of this fear, he wanted to be sure that he made every decision and was indispensable. His presence was felt in all meetings. And meetings were regularly canceled if he could not attend.

That was his strategy, too. If he was important to every little issue, then how could the organization do without him?

The people working for him were, for the most part, stuck in a prison. They could not learn, develop, grow, and experience all that was possible.

A servant leader empowers others. A servant leader does not want a culture of micromanagement. A servant leader realizes that the initial investment in teaching pays dividends when the organization has strong leaders at every level.

## ***Reflection and Discussion***

- 1. Do you have a culture developing new leaders at every level?*
- 2. What steps are taken to teach the newer members of the team?*

### 3. *Are people given stretch assignments?*

“Max DePree popularized the idea that leadership is an art. So much of what a leader does cannot be objectively measured. To reduce leadership to a set of algorithms is to remove it from its context; to ignore the complexities, the contradictions, and the possibilities. Artists must deal with uncertainty, contradictions and diversity almost by definition. Leaders need to have this capacity.” -Michael McKinney

## 4. A SERVANT LEADER HELPS PEOPLE WITH LIFE ISSUES

A servant leader cares about the people who work in the organization. That means not only caring about the business issues. Getting to know and understand the people who drive the success of the business is important.

A few years ago, some business authors called people “human capital,” implying that they are an asset similar to equipment or inventory. Treat people like tractors and you will not find a motivated, engaged workforce.

Helping people with life issues implies respect, trust, and a professional association. JD Power said it means not asking them to do anything you would not do yourself.

When you treat others with respect, have high expectations, and hold people accountable, you will develop a high-performance team. If you treat people like machines, you will never have the opportunity to see what they are fully capable of accomplishing.

It's important to offer opportunities for personal development beyond the job. Let's say you run a company program to lose weight, or lower personal debt, or a class on etiquette. None of these may help an immediate corporate need, but each may be important.

The key is to be thinking about how to serve others.

That means you are helping people with skills to live, not only skills to work. It does not mean that you are crossing boundaries into family life, meddling in marriages or relationships, or violating privacy. It means that you are helping employees or associates with their life skills.

When a leader cares like that, it changes the relationship and eventually changes the organizational culture.

## ***Reflection and Discussion***

- 1. Do you help only when it benefits you?*
- 2. How do you help those around you grow and develop?*
- 3. Does your organization spend time helping employees learn about subjects outside of the job?*

“Encouragement to others is something everyone can give. Somebody needs what you have to give. It may not be your money; it may be your time. It may be your listening ear. It may be your arms to encourage. It may be your smile to uplift.”

**-JOEL OSTEEN**

“Correction does much, but encouragement does more.”

-JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

## A SERVANT LEADER ENCOURAGES.

The hallmark of a servant leader is encouragement.

Imagine waking up one morning. You turn off the alarm clock and you see a little note. It's from your spouse.

It says, “You are the best! Thank you for a wonderful weekend. I'm the luckiest person alive to be married to you!”

You check your email and there's a note from someone who works with you. “I just wanted to drop you a note to say that your work on our project made all the difference. You really nailed it.”

You drive to work and someone stops you and says, “I'm glad to see you. Just seeing you makes me feel good. Thanks for all you do for me.”

Rather far-fetched? Can't possibly imagine that scenario, right?

We all need encouragement. We just don't often get it. Even little comments can have a big impact. Children all over the world are just starved for positive reinforcement. A teacher who makes a positive remark doesn't realize its power. I bet everyone reading this can remember something a teacher said whether positive or negative. That need doesn't go away.

What would your day be like today if you started getting comments, emails, tweets, or notes of all kinds all with encouraging messages? Would your performance be different? Of course it would.

Who needs encouragement today? Answer: everyone! It makes a difference.

When someone reads one of my blog posts and leaves a comment, that's a great shot in my arm. When you see something awesome today, let that person know it. You may not realize it, but you are providing the rocket fuel of confidence.

Here's your assignment. Ready?

**1. Write down the names of three people who you want to encourage.**

**2. Think of something specific.** What is it that you admire about the person or something he or she did? Always be absolutely genuine. If it isn't admirable, find something else.

**3. Communicate it—now.** It can be an email, a handwritten note or even a quick phone call. Don't delay. Otherwise, it will just be something you imagine you should do someday.

I'm sure that if you do this every week, you will find it a positive experience. Here are a few things I bet you will find:

- You will start looking for the good in people and situations, making you more positive.
- You will be more motivated.
- You will find that the encouragement comes back to you, too. It may be years later, and you may find it return in different ways.

When you encourage others, you are pushing the first domino over. You will not believe the ripple effects of your effort.

## **Action**

A true servant leader says, "Let's go do it," not, "You go do it."

That's a subtle difference, but it means everything. A servant leader may not be able to participate all the time. But it should not be surprising to people when the leader is involved. A servant leader is part of the process, looking for ways to help and engage.

## ***Reflection and Discussion***

- 1. Does the leader regularly encourage the team? It's okay to hold people accountable, but is the culture best described as encouraging or attacking?*
- 2. Are you able to quickly name three positive comments you got about your work in the last year?*
- 3. What are you doing to encourage others?*
- 4. Do you send positive notes every week to staff members outside your team who make a difference?*

“Not brute force but only persuasion and faith are the kings of this world.”

**-THOMAS CARLYLE**

“A heart can no more be forced to love than a stomach can be forced to digest food by persuasion.”

**-ALFRED NOBEL**

## 6. A SERVANT LEADER SELLS INSTEAD OF TELLS.

In decades past, the leading style of management was authoritarian. Employees received and carried out assignments. Bosses dished out orders in the form of memos. The boss did not try to convince, persuade, or explain his actions.

You were expected to be told what to do, when to do it, and how. You were not expected to question authority.

That type of management has slowly been disappearing in favor of a more participatory style. Persuasive leaders are more effective today (and some would argue anytime).

And that change works well for a servant leader, who does not dictate. A servant leader is the opposite of a dictator. It's a style all about persuading, not commanding.

When recent college graduates are polled, they almost always prefer and demand this type of environment. They want to be involved, to participate, to be at the table. Tell them what to do and they will not stay long. They certainly will not give the company their best effort.

Servant leaders understand that the why is more important than the what and how.

Mission and purpose will engage and inspire. Once the organization understands the why behind a goal, then everyone will rally around the ways to accomplish it. The servant leader focuses on the why so that others can determine the how.

## ***Reflection and Discussion***

- 1. How do you encourage a persuasive management style in your organization?*
- 2. Are most assignments micromanaged or do you give broad parameters and let others decide the best way?*
- 3. Do leaders in your organization spend most time on the why or the how?*

“You can do what I cannot do. I can do what you cannot do.  
Together we can do great things.”

**-MOTHER TERESA**

## **7. A SERVANT LEADER THINKS YOU, NOT ME.**

Read this quality again. My guess is that, as you do, someone comes to mind. Likely it is someone who thinks only about self.

In the recent past, high-profile CEO's fell from their lofty positions in part due to greed and selfishness. Gold shower curtains, extravagant parties, and wasted corporate spending made headlines all over the world.

And this type of selfish leadership is not limited to the corporate world. Pope Francis made headlines in his first year as the leader of the Roman Catholic Church because of his renewed focus on others, on the poor, on those in need. He made it clear that bishops who spend lavishly on self will not be tolerated. His popularity soared as he focused on mission and on others.

If you are not in a management position, you may be reading this and thinking about poor leaders. Do that and miss the power of this point. The time to learn this trait is not when you are in the corner office. If you wait until then, you will never get it. Leadership is not a position. Servant leaders understand that influence through service is more powerful than through position.

There's a selfless quality about a servant leader. Someone who is thinking only, "How does this benefit me?" is disqualified.

Servant leaders who focus on others are all about empowerment.

***Empowerment improves the [customer experience](#).***

The individual employee is not a drone, mindlessly acting as a machine. An empowered employee can make small decisions that end up increasing repeat business and developing loyal customers.

***Empowerment makes employees feel like a part of the business.***

It's subjective, but find a business where employees can act, and you can tell that they are more committed.

***Empowerment enhances job satisfaction.***

It's frustrating to an employee to know what's right but feel powerless to do anything. Giving the employee some decision-making ability will decrease frustration and improve retention.

It's easier to keep a customer than to gain a new one. It's also easier and cheaper to keep a trained employee than to recruit a new one.

Keep your employees longer by getting this right.

## ***Empowerment improves productivity.***

You don't need a big study on this to see it.

Once, I was in the checkout line at a retailer. The scanned price differed from the one in the advertisement. The store's employee knew that it was wrong but was not empowered to do anything. I decided that it was not worth the delay to wait.

If I had stopped the line for a few dollars, how productive would the aisle be? How happy would the customers be behind me in line? Would anyone just walk out and leave their items in a cart? I've seen it happen.

## ***Empowerment raises expectations.***

If someone is empowered, that person has higher expectations. I believe it's those higher expectations that make the real difference. I've seen employees rise to extraordinary levels when the bar is raised. It becomes a catalyst for growth.

## ***Reflection and Discussion***

- 1. Describe your organization's leader. Is he or she a commander, telling others what to do and by when? Or is the leader able to sell the vision and lead by persuasion?*
- 2. How do you encourage the persuasive style of management over dictatorial styles?*

“To have long term success as a coach or in any position of leadership,  
you have to be obsessed in some way.”

**-PAT RILEY**

“Leadership is lifting a person’s vision to high sights, the raising  
of a person’s performance to a higher standard, the building  
of a personality beyond its normal limitations.”

**-PETER DRUCKER**

## 8. A SERVANT LEADER THINKS LONG-TERM.

A servant leader is thinking about the next generation, the next leader, the next opportunity. That means a tradeoff between what’s important today versus tomorrow, and making choices to benefit the future.

Today’s corporations are often focused on the short-term. The need to hit quarterly profit numbers causes myopic thinking.

Entire generations have been thinking short-term, spending beyond their means and putting nations into impossible debt. Short-term thinking is not the focus of a true servant leader who is thinking of the future.

The servant leader considers strategies and actions that will help future leaders build on a solid foundation. That's one of the reasons why a servant leader wants to build skills in the organization. Additionally, helping others with life issues increases loyalty to the organization for the long-term. A servant leader thinks long-term beyond the length of her term. It's not enough to create success in a quarter. The goal is to find a model that creates sustainable success.

Sustainable success always involves other people. An authoritarian, selfish, power-hungry leader does not care about the future.

## ***Reflection and Discussion***

- 1. Is the leader thinking about himself or herself only or about the whole team?*
- 2. What do you do to help others?*

During difficult times when the team is under stress, is your leader missing in action or right in the thick of things?  
"Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less." –C.S. Lewis

## **9. A SERVANT LEADER ACTS WITH HUMILITY.**

The servant leader doesn't wear a title as a way to show who's in charge, doesn't think he's better than everyone else, and acts in a way to care for others. He may, in fact, pick up the trash or clean up a table. Setting an example of service, the servant leader understands that it is not about the leader but about others.

Humility is not shyness. Humility is not a lack of self-confidence. Humility is not quietness.

Humility is a recognition of your own capabilities and need for others. It is not thinking of yourself as better than others or superior. With humility, you understand that you are a small part of something much bigger. Lao-tse said, "The reason why rivers and seas receive the homage of a hundred mountain streams is that they keep below them."

**There is almost nothing more ugly than pride. A humble leader inspires and serves.**

## ***Reflection and Discussion***

- 1. Do you think title conveys special status to look down on others?*
- 2. Do you understand that positional power gives you some influence, but personal power is far more impactful?*
- 3. Does your leader only associate with the top leadership or regularly speak to anyone in the organization?*

# 3

## JESUS AS A SERVANT LEADER

**A**fter most of my talks on servant leadership, I am approached by someone who will tell me that the ultimate servant leader was Jesus. Regardless of your religious views, anyone studying servant leadership should understand the origins of Jesus as a servant leader.

Teaching servant leadership over 2,000 years ago, Jesus said,

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.”

**-MATTHEW 20:26**

The apostle Paul wrote,

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross.”

**-PHILIPPIANS 2:3-8**

He was known to wash the feet of his followers. (John 13:12)

He said that he “came not to be served but to serve.” (Mark 10:45)

These verses and others are why Jesus is cited as the best example of a servant leader.

Mark 9:35 says, "Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, 'Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.'"

WHAT'S CLEAR  
—— IS THAT ——  
JESUS TAUGHT  
THAT GREATNESS  
AND SERVICE  
ARE INTERTWINED.

That's a far cry from today's "me first" society.

On the other hand, I see a new generation of service minded leaders who are giving to communities, searching for purpose, and making every effort to care for those who are less fortunate.

# 4

## SERVANT LEADERSHIP STARTS AT HOME

I was fortunate to learn about servant leadership in the best possible way: in my childhood home. Instead of filling our home with things, my parents filled it with people. Our home was always open. There was always room for one more person at the table. We had countless people live with us of all nationalities, backgrounds, and religions. Some would stay a night, but most would stay months. A few stayed for years. Most of our adopted family members arrived with serious needs and issues from drug addiction to abuse to serious psychiatric needs.

In particular, my mom demonstrated servant leadership at every opportunity. Here are a few lessons on servant leadership that I learned from the unique experience I had growing up:

### **1. *Personal power is more important than positional power.***

As I reflect on my childhood, I cannot think of a single time that my mom used her “[positional](#)” power as parent. But she always used her personal power, her persuasion, and her personality to influence. Anything I learned about how to relate to people started by watching her in action.

Even today, my mom is never interested in titles or your position. She is interested in *you*. What is your story? What are your talents? What are you doing for others?

Leadership is not a position. It radiates from within. Servant leaders focus on the individual, not on a fleeting title.

### **2. *Giving to others will always make you happier than receiving.***

Yes, we’ve all heard that it is better to give than to receive. But why? Mom taught me that happiness is always rooted in service to others. I’ve seen people with depression improve dramatically when they serve others.

Mom was always happy, always singing, always sharing. And that may be because she was always giving—to us, to friends, and to all of the people she met each day. Our house was always full of people in need, and so the opportunity to give was always present. She is still the same way today as she was then.

Servant leaders give of themselves more than they take from others.

### **3. *The spiritual is more important than the temporal.***

Some things are temporary, fleeting, lasting but a moment. Other things are forever. Make sure you are spending time on what matters in the long run. One of the very few rules I can remember was this:

If you needed a place to stay, you were welcome to stay as long as you needed. But, you were required to attend church with the family. There is something powerful about connecting to forces greater than you.

One of the verses she would share with me was Colossians 3:2: “Set your affection on things above, not on things of the earth.”

Here is one story my wife recalls about my mom: Someone was staying in the house and she was learning a new skill for a job: How to cut hair. As I recall, she was somewhat troubled and my mom was counseling her. Mom volunteered to let her practice her newly learned skills. The girl transformed her hair, butchering it on one side. Instead of anger, my mom graciously turned to her in love. As she poured love on this girl, she taught us all what really matters.

Leaders realize what is forever and what is fleeting. Servant leaders do not take offense at every little issue.

#### ***4. The heart is greater than things.***

If you broke something—even something precious to her—she didn’t care much. Sweep it up, throw it out, and it was long forgotten. But, if your heart was broken, she spent as many hours with you as you needed. She would agonize with you. If you were broken in spirit, she would encourage and lift you out of a dark place. She still does.

Servant leaders care about people more than objects.

#### ***5. Connecting with other people is more valuable than living in isolation.***

We are social beings, meant to fellowship with others around us. You should spend time alone reflecting and meditating, but we are here to interact with others. Together, we can do greater things than if we are apart. Each of us is gifted and has potential. If we allow others to shine, we all benefit.

Servant leaders create results by letting others shine.

## **6. You are always more valuable than me.**

To this day, my mom considers others above herself. She focuses on you like a spotlight on a Broadway stage.

She wants to know about you and then tell everyone who will listen about your story and your gifts.

Just a few years ago, I visited my mom in the hospital. Here she was fighting an illness, needing oxygen and 24 hour care. That's the one time you would think that she would understand that she needed to focus on herself.

Why was I not surprised when each nurse came in, off would come the oxygen mask, and my mom would introduce the nurse by name, rattle off family members, and recite all sorts of facts? The medical staff was receiving more than they were giving as they heard her encouragement and her counseling.

Servant leaders always spotlight others.

## **7. There are far more opportunities in the world than there are limitations.**

Her degree was in elementary education and she taught at an inner city school for a time. Her specialty was teaching children to read and other critical life skills. Part of her mission was to make a difference in young lives. Later in life, she returned to teaching as a substitute teacher. Volunteering at a "deprived" school, she quickly became known as the "Skittle Lady" because she was always rewarding students with the candy. She consistently taught that where you start is not where you have to end.

You can be anything you want to be. You can do anything you want to do. You have the ability to create, inspire, and become.

When challenges are discovered, know that you have the talent to dodge them and find a way around them.



**NOTHING CAN STOP YOU IF YOU ARE DETERMINED  
TO MAKE IT TO YOUR DESTINATION.**

Servant leaders consistently focus on possibility over limitation.

## ***8. What goes into your mind is more important than what goes into your body.***

Your diet may be important, but spend more time thinking about your mental diet. If you fill your mind with trash, it will stay there in your subconscious. Mom would often quote Philippians 4:8: “And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.”

Servant leaders fill the mind with noble thoughts. Servant leaders are able to give to others because they take time to fill the mind with the positive.

## ***9. How you live is more important than where you live.***

My parents taught me that the mission field is not a place. It is a life. They originally intended to be missionaries overseas, and both attended seminary. They never moved out of the country, but they became missionaries of a different sort. Giving to others was part of the normal way of life.

Servant leaders realize that the how is more important than the where.

# 5

## THE LEADER AS SERVANT

One of my favorite quotes is by Max DePree. He said, *“The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant.”*

Let’s break down the wisdom in this quote:

### **A SERVANT. A LEADER.**

We’ve learned the nine qualities of the servant leader. The servant leader has characteristics of both a servant and a leader. The characteristics are blended together in a harmonious balance. The result is a servant leader we can all admire.

### **DEFINE REALITY**

Defining reality is a huge part of leadership. You want to follow a leader who is honest about the current situation you face as an organization.

A leader should be optimistic but still realistic. If a company is nearing bankruptcy, you want a leader who understands the gravity of the situation—but not one who is frozen by that reality. You want someone who can navigate through the storm and lead everyone to the best possible outcome.

## ***THANK YOU***

The end of the quote is about gratitude. A servant leader is thankful—for the opportunity, for the people who have worked hard within the company, for the customers, for the contributions everyone makes to further the success of the organization.

## ***IN BETWEEN***

The in-between that Max DePree was referencing is the key.

Defining reality was the appetizer. The thank-you is the dessert. The main item on the leader's menu? The in-between.

I think of the quote about the dash on a tombstone. You're born one year, there's a dash, and then another year. That dash represents that in-between. That dash is your life! Like the leader, it's the in-between that makes all the difference.

As leaders, we often work on the beginning: a new product launch, an organizational announcement, a company acquisition. Whole teams collaborate to start something. At home, it may be the [New Year's resolution](#) or a new goal.

We're equally vigilant about the ending. Winding down an old business or phasing out a service.

IT'S DONE WITH SKILL AND FINESSE.  
BUT, IT'S THAT IN-BETWEEN THAT CAN BE SO TRICKY.  
THAT'S THE DAY-TO-DAY GRIND.  
THE SMALLER DECISIONS, THE LITTLE ACTIONS,  
THE STUFF NO ONE  
REALLY THINKS ABOUT.  
IT'S THAT IN-BETWEEN THAT DEFINES US.  
THAT'S WHERE IT ALL  
**COMES TOGETHER.**

# 6

## DEVELOPING A SERVANT LEADERSHIP TEAM

### **Be an example.**

Yes, this should be obvious. If you want to have a team of servant leaders, then demonstrate it at every step possible.

I have seen whole teams derailed due to a single story circulating among the troops.

If there is a story circulating about the boss that is less than flattering, it can stop progress. One negative experience must be overcome with continued and overwhelming positive experiences.

Servant leaders are not perfect, but they have a mindset that is focused on others.

### ***Give assignments and share responsibility.***

Make the culture a priority. Have the leadership discuss the ideal culture and develop a list of action items. You cannot delegate culture development to Human Resources or a single executive. It is a leadership mindset.

### ***Reward and recognize.***

Find the servant leader stars in your organization. At the next leadership team meeting, start by asking for stories of servant leadership. Highlight them in company communications. Make the servant leaders the stars in the company. Soon, everyone will want to emulate these behaviors.

### ***Remove those who are at odds with your stated values.***

It is always difficult to remove people from the organization. I once made the mistake of keeping someone on my team because of her results even though she was creating problems in the culture. I learned from that lesson. Now I realize that individual results are not enough. Building a servant leadership culture requires you to remove those who are impediments.

You cannot make an exception and allow someone to wreck the culture.

### ***Cultivate gifts.***

Celebrate the uniqueness of each individual. Servant leadership is most effective when individuals are working in an area of strength.

When you know the special skills of each person of the team, you are able to utilize those talents for the whole team.

Servant leadership is not a top down approach where the key is the servant leader at the top. It is an entire organization filled with servant leaders, working together to serve each other.

Too often people approach me and say that the team wants a servant leadership culture, but the leader is not supportive.

I say, "Be the leader. Demonstrate the values. Practice it yourself at every opportunity from home to work."

Don't use the leader as an excuse.

Developing a servant leadership team is not an overnight process, but it can begin today. That process begins with your determination.

With a few disciplines, you can develop a servant leadership team. Ask the question, "How does this help serve others?" Practice at every opportunity. Develop the continued mindset to serve. Surround yourself with others who share the desire to serve each other and the community.



## SERVANT LEADERS SEE THE EXTRAORDINARY IN THE ORDINARY

Every year, I meet incredibly [interesting people](#). You may think I'm thinking of famous people. Yes, famous people can certainly be interesting. Equally interesting, at least to me, are people I meet in everyday life.

For example,

- 1. The barista at the coffee shop who remembers exactly what I want.*
- 2. The guy who waves me into the car wash with the slightest flick of his hand indicating where my tires should point.*

3. *The newly-minted, hilarious college graduate who told me his future: two wives (he says his first marriage won't work out), three kids, a dog, and a dead-end job.*
4. *The lady at the bookstore who smiles when she sees me rearranging the shelves, putting my favorite authors' books face-out.*

## **Be Alert**

Each one of the people crossing my path offers an opportunity to learn. I study people shuffling by at a busy store. *There we go*, I think, as I imagine where they are heading. People are incredibly fascinating.

Sure, some disappoint. You wonder why you work so hard at some friendships when it's clearly a one-way path to nowhere. Then there's family, some family members are truly biological—with blood coursing through their bodies to prove it. Others we adopt, friends who are so true we wouldn't dream of letting them go.

People teach us remarkable lessons if we are open to learning. Criticism we launch at someone else likely has its roots in our own shortcomings.

## **Slow Down**

Today, as you rush through your day, look at those around you a little closer. Slow down just a bit—you don't need to view the text message the minute it chimes. You don't need to check Facebook and Twitter as if you're looking for signs of life in a patient.

Just watch. Listen. Ask some questions.

## **See Beyond**

If you can see beyond the obvious, you can learn some incredible lessons.

You may discover that the barista prides herself on remembering your drink because she's really good at it, and her father always told her she was stupid. She's incredibly bright and works hard to overcome his harsh words. She absorbs your praise faster than your coffee does the cream.

**Lessons: Everyone is hurting in some way. Everyone needs praise. Get comfortable with praising good work.**

You may discover that the car wash guy is the lead singer in an up-and-coming band and has a real shot at making it. His backstage stories are better than a movie. And his writing is better than most professional writers.

**Lessons: Everyone has a hidden talent. Take time to get to know your employees. Often the most needed skills are right in front of you.**

You may learn that the college graduate was influenced by his parents' painful divorce and his insight on relationships beats anything you'd read in a book.

**Lessons: Age doesn't equal wisdom. Learning from mistakes and the failures of others can benefit you more than you realize.**

You may find that the bookstore lady is a book herself, full of knowledge you can tap into. She's actually a retired business executive, filling time. She knows how to incorporate businesses, develop marketing plans, and lead strategic planning.

**Lessons: Often what we see is just the surface. Take time to realize the full abilities of the people around you.**

See these people are anything but ordinary. Everyone has something extraordinary that can change you. A different perspective, a unique experience, a gift. We're all ordinary people, but we are all extraordinary in our own way.

The servant leaders I know are keenly aware that status, position, or wealth does not always translate to wisdom. When you are seeking to serve, you develop a sense of wonder about the people around you. By giving to others and by observing, you realize that you have far more to gain by listening.

SERVANT LEADERS FIND  
THE EXTRAORDINARY  
— IN THE —  
ORDINARY



# THE SERVANT LEADERSHIP JOURNEY

**H**anging in the family room of my childhood home was a needlepoint that my oldest sister carefully crafted. It was a picture of eight owls on a tree limb, and underneath had the words, “There’s always room for one more.” That saying was almost a family mission statement. As I shared earlier, my parents decided to open the family home to anyone who had a need.

Their lifestyle was one of servant leadership in action.

Servant leadership is not found in the boardroom. It is found in the heart.

Some people would live with us for years and became as close as another sibling. Others would stay a night or two, needing help with a problem or a place to sleep. I have many interesting stories and experiences from this unique way to grow up. I learned more about people and perspective than I could have imagined. I learned to respect individuals as they were.

The problem that brought someone to our doorstep didn't define them and neither did their race or religion.

Watching someone leave our home, I would often think about whether she would be successful or be limited by problems.

My parents chose to be servant leaders, giving of their time, resources, and talent. They sacrificed for others in an effort to give back and make a difference. It made an enormous impact on me and on all of us who witnessed this type of love.

The needlepoint hanging in my childhood home applied to our visitors. It also applies to you as an aspiring servant leader. There is always room for one more servant leader. Choose to serve and the world will benefit in ways you cannot even imagine.

Many who read this will not have had the benefits I had growing up to witness this in action. Most who read this have faced enormous challenges.

It's not where you start on your journey that is important. What's important is that you take the first step. Your leadership journey starts with a determined mindset.

I wish you much success on your leadership journey.

As you progress on your journey,  
please join me and the Leadership  
Insights community at:

[www.SkipPrichard.com](http://www.SkipPrichard.com)



# SKIP PRICHARD

is President & CEO of *OCLC*. Based in Dublin, Ohio, OCLC is a global nonprofit computer library service and research organization. Prior to OCLC, Skip was President & CEO of *Ingram Content Group, Inc.* Ingram is one of the largest behind-the-scenes companies in the book business. Before Ingram, Skip was President & CEO of *ProQuest Information & Learning*, a global information services business.

Skip has been featured, interviewed or quoted in various media including the *BBC*, *The New York Times*, *CNN*, *NPR*, *Daily Beast*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Information Today*, *The Book-seller*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Library Journal* and others.

## ABOUT LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS

Leadership Insights is Skip Prichard's personal blog where he shares his ideas and insights on a variety of topics

including leadership and success. He features a number of interviews ranging from news and sports legends to CEOs and bestselling fiction authors.

The goal of the blog is to highlight the ideas that may help someone advance at work or live a better, more impactful life. Skip's aim is to create a spark that may inspire readers to find their own unique gifts and use them.

Please join the conversation at [www.SkipPrichard.com](http://www.SkipPrichard.com).