

Servant Leadership

A Paradigm Shift in Leadership

The command and control practices of leadership are no more in vogue. It is the servant attitude of the leader that promises to lead the group successfully.

KBS Kumar

*I slept and dreamt that life was a joy
I awoke and saw that life was service
I acted and behold, service was joy.*

—Rabindranath Tagore

Many would agree to the statement, “to lead is to serve”. It was well said by Rabindranath Tagore, that serving is synonymous with enjoying. To put it in other words, serving is the best means of creating a channel of compatibility with another person. Serving the person is the best way to gain trust from him and thus lead him. This very idea has led to the concept of *Servant Leadership*.

The concept of servant leadership finds its origin in the Bible. The Bible says that the servant leaders first anchor themselves in service to God and stand ready to serve and lead others. It is the desire to enrich and enhance the lives of those being led through unselfish servanthood. It stands against the styles like, authoritarian, top-down, and command and control styles of leadership.

Servant leadership was first used in the organizational context by Robert

Greenleaf. Today, it is bringing a revolution at various workplaces, and has provided the society with an entirely different perception and definition of leadership. As the name suggests, the characteristics of a servant leader are different from other styles of leadership. Kenneth Blanchard, the Leadership Guru and author of *The One Minute Manager* says that “Servant-Leadership is all about making goals clear and then rolling your sleeves up and doing whatever it takes to help your followers.” In that situation, they don’t work for you, but you work for them. Thus, it is different from the “art of getting the things done through others” etc. Today, the concept of servant leadership is being put to use in both profit and non-profit organizations.

The Servant Leader
Servant leadership demands those qualities in a leader that are absent in most of the other styles of leadership. Listening forms one of the most crucial tenets of servant leader. To actively listen is to convey, with body, face, eyes, posture, gestures, that one is really interested in hearing what someone is saying. Research has shown

that many people when engaged in dialog, listen inattentively to others and spend time in rehearsing what they wish to say. Such a tendency defeats the purpose of being a servant leader.

The servant leader must be able to put himself in the follower’s shoes; be empathetic towards the followers. Empathy is a key trait of servant leaders. Without empathy, one can’t build trust. And without trust, one will never be able to get the best effort from his employees. Empathy can be shown by persuasion. The leader who influences by persuasion need not tell the follower what to do. The leader acknowledges his dependency on the follower. Although a manager may have the authority to carry out certain actions without consulting subordinates, it is probably more effective to include them as it gives them the opportunity to express their opinions. By actively soliciting agreement a leader makes a strong appeal to the follower’s esteem.

One of the key elements of the servant leaders is thinking beyond day-to-day realities and communicating the same to the followers. This demands expertise to conceptualize and communicate the problems to the followers effectively.

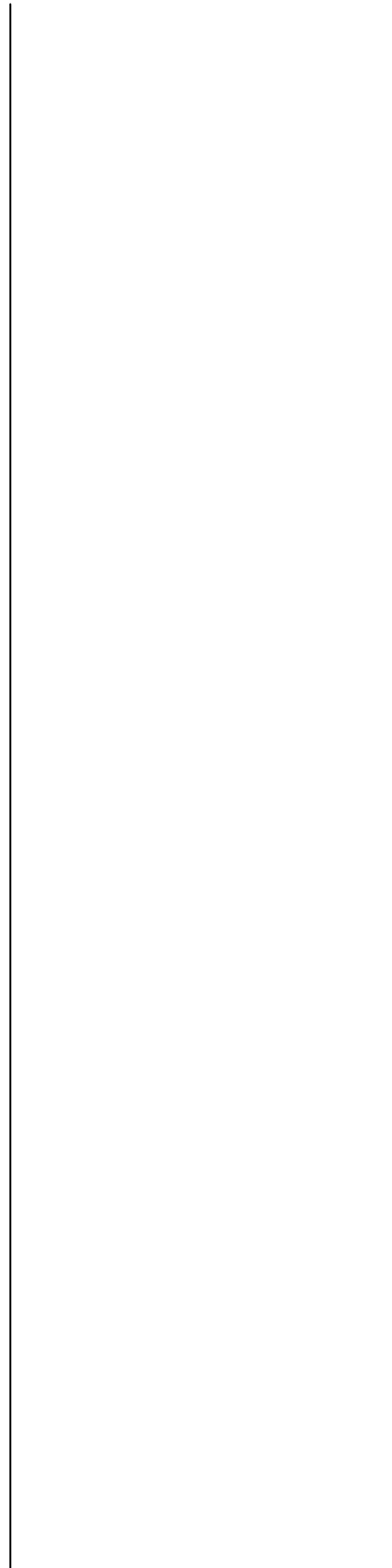
The five C’s of effective communication:

- Collect
- Comprehend
- Categorize
- Convey
- Convince

Every leader must specialize in the process of communication. The first

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What it takes to be a servant leader?

- Do people believe that you are willing to sacrifice your own self-interest for the good of the group?
- Do people believe that you want to hear their ideas and will value them?
- Do people believe that you will understand what is happening in their lives and how it affects them?
- Do people come to you when the chips are down or when something traumatic has happened in their lives?
- Do others believe that you have a strong awareness for what is going on?
- Do others follow your requests because they want to as opposed to because they "have to"?
- Do others communicate their ideas and vision for the organization when you are around?
- Do others have confidence in your ability to anticipate the future and its consequences?
- Do others believe you are preparing the organization to make a positive difference in the world?
- Do people believe that you are committed to helping them develop and grow?
- Do people feel a strong sense of community in the organization that you lead?

Source: www.ianr.edu

task is to collect the information that is to be communicated. Here the leader should avoid the redundancy and the obsolete factors that dampen the crisp in communication.

After collecting the appropriate data, he needs to comprehend the same. This needs understanding the finesse of the issue/data in order to communicate the same to the members effectively. The leader should understand the fact that level at which he delivers the message may not be same at which the employers receive it.

He needs to have a clear idea of the message and the audience before communicating the message and categorize the same in accordance with the requirement and level of understanding of the team members. The message should communicate what it was intended. This results in a synchronized understanding of the state of affairs and thus a flawless performance.

A servant leader is expected to be good at the art of contemplation i.e., he wants to grow himself and routinely reviews his own goals and vision and those of group. At the contemplation stage, the servant leader sees problem with group performance and begins to attribute employee motivation and behavior to leadership style. At this stage, the leader changes his approach to leadership in accordance with the requirements of the followers. Leaders begin acknowledging that the performance of the group is less than desirable and change their leadership style to improve group performance.

Servant leaders are often characterized by a strong sense of stewardship. Stewardship has its roots in medieval times when a 'steward' would be assigned to hone the skills and development of the young prince—to prepare him for his reign. The kingdom had to rely on the steward to teach and hold the prince in trust so that he would be a successful king.

Even today the term stewardship denotes the same. A manager is the steward in an organization and he is responsible for preparing his staff and the company for future challenges. Making a positive difference in the future is characteristic of the stewardship mentality. Those who desire to be excellent servant leaders need to have a natural sense of stewardship.

The Concept Embraced

Servant leadership is increasingly utilized as an efficient tool by consultants working directly with companies in the area of corporate training. Some of the companies that have implemented servant leadership are AT&T and Gulf Oil of Canada, to name a few. A related area of activity has to do with the growing interest in bringing together servant-leadership and Total Quality Management (TQM). Several papers have been recently published discussing the benefits of using both TQM and servant-leadership in the corporate setting. Servant-leadership is being applied to a variety of programs involving Jungian psychology; feminist philosophy; men's awareness groups; etc. In these diverse programs, servant-leadership is viewed as an epitome of success for both personal growth and service to others. Another area where servant-leadership is being applied concerns the education and training of not-for-profit trustees.

With the changing times, there is a need for change in leadership style as well. Corporates and the social organizations have realized the importance of servant leadership and it is proving to be a successful style of leadership. n

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