Servant Leadership – asking questions and delivering good outcomes

Introduction

What is Servant Leadership? We would like to help people to decide what aspects of Servant Leadership may be even more relevant for them today.

When Robert Greenleaf wrote 'Servant Leadership' in 1977, he gave it the subtitle 'A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness' – just as relevant to any reflection on Leadership today.

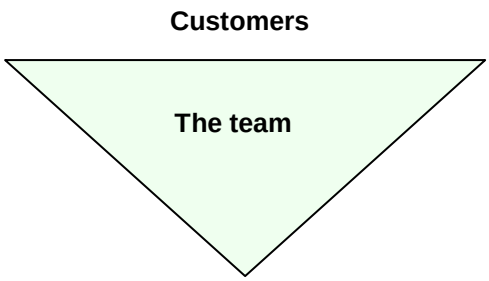
10 Principles of Servant Leadership
Larry Spears – CEO of The Greenleaf Centre

1. Listening intently to others – valuing what they have to say
2. Empathy – recognising people's special and unique spirit
3. Healing – searching for wholeness in the system
4. Awareness – comfortable with the search for what is not known, particularly looking for greater self-awareness
5. Persuasion – convincing, seeking consensus, rarely relying on authority
6. Conceptualisation – understanding what the business model might be
7. foresight – appreciating lessons from the past, the realities of the present and the likely consequences of decisions in the future
8. Stewardship – everyone holds their role in trust for society
9. Commitment to the growth of people – every individual has scope for development, which can be encouraged
10. Building community – replacing feeling of loss from scale with the comfort and energy from local engagement

These might be summarised by saying that a leader has a calling to diminish the 'I' and promote the 'We' – a desire to make a difference for other people by pursuing opportunities which impact positively other peoples' lives – never for their own gain.

Benefits

To what extent might there be benefits to your organisation if the leader is seen as supporting the team with what they need. He/she might increasingly look for continuous development from within, particularly from those who are closest to the customer. Imagine your organisation, turned upside down!



"They serve like we lead."
- Sir John Sainsbury, founder of the supermarket chain.

Jim Collins in "Level 5 Leadership" had another take on Leadership, believing that the most important characteristic identified in his research towards building enduring greatness was a paradoxical combination of personal humility and professional will! So if the leader can have the

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humility to act as if he/she is at the bottom of the hierarchy, what benefits will the stakeholders see?

Engagement	>	People feel valued
Systems Thinking	>	The system is owned by the team
Data	>	Data reflects customer reality
Enquiry	>	It's OK to challenge
Dialogue	>	Debate and discussion often give way to real dialogue
Creativity	>	Ideas can come from anywhere
Improvement	>	Everyone has a stake in it

A year after 9/11 – in the middle of the period of reflection on ethics following Enron and 7 years before the recent financial crisis – Mintzberg, Simons and Basu described a 'Syndrome of Selfishness' – with "five mutually reinforcing misconceptions in economic thinking which have driven a series of disruptive wedges into our socio-economic fabric, distorting our views of corporate and social responsibility."

Their article refers to 5 'Fabrications' – 5 theories of economics and social life which they believe are seriously flawed and which they challenge below .

1. We are all, in essence, Economic Man -
   yet beyond calculation of economic trade-offs lies judgement of short-term gains versus long-term gains to society.
2. Corporations exist to Maximise Shareholder Value -
   yet economic decisions have social consequences.
3. Corporations require Heroic Leaders -
   yet will they be around to pick up the pieces?
4. The Effective Organisation is Lean and Mean -
   yet where is the covenant between loyalty and security?
5. A Rising Tide of Prosperity Lifts all Boats -
   yet increasing wage disparity and strongly growing asset inequalities over the last 20 years suggest otherwise.

Which side of the balance persuades you?

They claim "The calculus of glorified self-interest and the fabrications on which it is based must be challenged". So are they pointing to Servant Leadership again? Their article promotes engagement with a more values-driven view of an organisation and its impact on society. "We can live our lives and manage our enterprises obsessed with getting even more, with keeping score, with constantly calculating and scheming. Or we can open ourselves to another way, by engaging ourselves to engage others so as to restore our sense of balance."

What can I do to change the world?

At one level, not a lot, perhaps! If we plan to leave this place and hand it on to our successors in a worse state than we received it, we can sit back and go with the flow. And if you have read this far, maybe there is the germ of an idea that you can do something! Where might you start?

In the Introduction to "Synchronicity" by Joseph Jaworski, Peter Senge writes "For many years I have told people that although there are a lot of books on leadership, there is only one that serious students have to read – Servant Leadership by Robert Greenleaf…….Greenleaf invites people to consider a domain of leadership grounded in a state of being, not doing. He says that the first and most important choice a leader makes is the choice to serve, without which one's capacity to lead is profoundly limited. That choice is not an action in the normal sense – it's not something you do, but an expression of your being."

Asking yourself the questions opposite and making some small changes to what you do and the way that you do it, day to day, will help. What answers come to mind? What might you do differently? When? We suggest you jot down what comes to mind and reflect on your ideas.

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Delivering outcomes through Stewardship and Servant Leadership
Can you answer the questions?

Do you notice your own behaviours?

1. Short Term, Long Term?
What effect do you want to have? What is the paradox? Is it acknowledged and discussed openly?

2. How important is it for you to be right?
In whose eyes? How else might you behave? Who else has views? Do you really listen actively to them and reflect on your own prejudices?

3. Who really knows what is happening at the customer? Are you aware what is going on in the system, and your part in it?

4. Do you see what contributes to the system as a whole, good and not so good? Do you see the detail? Is it measured? And compared to what? Is the data valid? How quickly will you know if a context assumption is wrong? Who will tell you? Will you be able to react?

5. How committed are you to developing ALL the people?

6. How do you promote good solutions to issues? Do you come up with the answers, or do they come through your team?

7. Do you dream of what might be – and paint pictures of how it might be for others? And how good has your foresight really been in the past?

8. What creates trust in your organisation – your behaviours, or do they trust the network more than you? Do you notice? Would people describe you as empathetic?

9. Are you prepared to show humour and emotion at the right times?
Is the vision truly engaging? Is it realistic? Who created it? Are you trapped by it?

10. Do you feel that you hold your leadership position in trust for others? Do you really want to serve others? Do they see that in you?

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Questioning the ideas

"Lead yourself, lead your superiors, lead your peers, employ good people and free them to do the same. All else is trivia."
Dee Hock

When externally driven change can demand urgent, difficult decisions - which may put the demands of some stakeholders above others - such a view of Leadership can be questioned. "The leader must be prepared to act".

The concepts of 'servant' (Greenleaf 1977) and 'stewardship' (Block 1993) we believe have real value - as a contrast with 'hero' - a metaphor at last coming more under the microscope. And the promotion of the role of 'leader' beyond that of 'manager' also begs some questions. It seems dangerous to divide the two roles, when both need to concentrate on sustaining and developing processes - and the system. So what management model does the leader encourage? Extrinsic or intrinsic rewards? Emergence or bureaucracy? Collective wisdom or hierarchy? Goal setting or an oblique approach where shareholder value is simply a consequence of the higher order goals?

It is so important to keep, and to rely on others to keep, the antennae alert for data which surprise - and encourage reflection on past assumptions. How prepared are we all to question our own assumptions and filters – to recognise the patterns in our behaviours, our own likes and dislikes? Am I prepared to say 'I don't know' or 'I don't understand that - please can you explain your point of view'. Here the concept of 'servant' is really appropriate - servant and steward of the system - which is so much more significant than the temporary powers of the individual.

Conclusion

Leadership is a way of being - a commitment to others - a choice. Most leaders recognise that they are on a journey, often supported or coached by others in what can be a lonely place. The more that they recognise that they can create and be part of a supportive system, the more resources they will find to hand when the going gets tough - as it always does!

"Unselfishness, as far as you are concerned means simply this – you will put first the honour and interests of your country and your regiment; next you will put the safety, well-being and comfort of your men; and last – and last all the time – you will put your own safety, your own comfort". Field Marshall Sir William Slim – Courage and other Broadcasts (1957) – quoted in 'Serve to Lead' - a booklet issued to all officers going through Sandhurst. 'Serve to Lead' is the Motto of RMS Sandhurst.

For 'regiment' read 'your organisation' – for 'men' read 'your team' – for 'your own comfort' read 'your selfishness'.

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