

The Successful SUPERVISOR

2013

January

Tips from  LifeSolutions

I have been hearing people refer to “servant-leadership” as a management approach. I have no idea what they are talking about, but it sounds a little counterintuitive. How can you be an effective leader and be in the servant role at the same time? Still, I would like to learn more. According to the Indiana Business Journal, “Servant-leadership has emerged as one of the dominant philosophies being discussed in the world today.” And yet, like our intrigued supervisor, most of us are unfamiliar with the concept and have no understanding of how this philosophy might be helpful to us as we strive to be great leaders in our organizations. The next three issues of the Successful Supervisor will explore the concept of servant-leadership and introduce you to the characteristics servant-leaders embody. As always, we are interested in your feedback and/or questions. Please email LifeSolutions at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com or contact an EAP account manager at 1.800.647.3327.

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In Herman Hesse’s last book, *Journey to the East* (1956), we are introduced to the character of Leo. Leo is servant to a group of travelers journeying to the East to join a spiritual order headed by a wise leader. Leo takes care of menial chores like cooking, cleaning, and feeding the animals. He also keeps everyone’s spirits lifted with his joyful stories and songs. But one day Leo disappears, and the group falls apart. Many years later, the narrator of the story meets Leo in a large city and discovers that Leo was, in fact, the wise leader the group had been traveling to find. The one they had known only as a servant had been their leader all along.

The concept of servant-leadership entered modern day dialogue after Robert K. Greenleaf published his 1970 essay, “The Servant as Leader.” Director of Management Research and Development at AT&T for many years and a consultant to some of America’s top companies, Greenleaf had read Hesse and was inspired to create a new way of defining leadership. He offered the following benchmarks for leaders:

- ◆ As a servant-leader, does your leadership enable the people you serve/lead to grow as people? Do they, while being led/served by you, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servant-leaders?
- ◆ What is the effect of your leadership on the least privileged ... will they be benefited or at least not further deprived?

Greenleaf asserted that unless you could answer yes to these two benchmark questions, you could not call yourself a servant-leader.

While the designation of servant-leader is relatively new, the idea has been around since ancient times and is cross-cultural. Consider the following:

From Lao Tse, Tao Te Ching 17:

With the best of leaders,
When the work is done,
The project completed,
the people will say,
“We did it ourselves.”

From Albert Schweitzer:

“One thing I know: the only ones among you who will really be happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.”

And from Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't*:

“Indeed, we debated for a long time on the research team about how to describe the good-to-great leaders. Initially, we penciled in terms like ‘selfless executive’ and ‘servant-leader.’”

So, what *are* the characteristics of a servant-leader? According to Larry Spears, chief executive officer of the Greenleaf Center, the following characteristics are central. **We will discuss them in depth in next month’s Successful Supervisor.**

- ◆ Listening
- ◆ Empathy
- ◆ Healing
- ◆ Awareness of self and others
- ◆ Persuasion vs. “command and control”
- ◆ Conceptualization
- ◆ Foresight
- ◆ Stewardship
- ◆ Commitment to the growth of people
- ◆ Relationship building/community building

Other qualities include:

- ◆ Desire to serve comes first
- ◆ Belief in shared power
- ◆ Focus on inner work and awareness
- ◆ Humility
- ◆ Demands accountability
- ◆ Excites others about the journey
- ◆ Measures the *outcome* of his/her behavior on others

Next month we will continue our exploration of servant-leadership. Until then, call LifeSolutions if you have any questions or would like to schedule a manager consultation.

Nothing in this information is a substitute for following your company policies related to information covered here.

Content taken from the numerous writings of Robert K. Greenleaf and the publications of the Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership.

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