The Successful SUPERVISOR

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Tips from LifeSolutions

This issue of The Successful Supervisor is the second in a three-part series on "servant-leadership." *As noted last month, servant-leadership is a philosophy being discussed and applied in organizations across the world. Yet, for many of us, it is an unfamiliar and puzzling concept that, at first glance, may seem to make little sense or be of little practical use in today's demanding workplace. The whole idea may seem paradoxical … can you be a strong and effective leader and, at the same time, see your role as serving the people you lead? "Servant" and "leader" usually seem to be at opposite ends of the continuum. This issue will continue to define and explore the concept of servant-leadership and clarify the unique characteristics servant-leaders embody. Content is taken from the numerous writings by Robert K. Greenleaf, the publications of the Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership, and from The Serving Leader: Ken Jennings and John Stahl-Wert, and the Blanchard Family Partnership, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, 2003. As always, we are interested in your feedback and/or questions. Please email EAP at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com or contact an EAP account manager at 1.800.647.3327.*

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"… **Anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's Theory of Relativity to serve … you only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love**." -Rev. Martin Luther King

Servant-leadership is not so much a management style or model as it is a way of life. It is a practice founded on deep commitment to self-awareness, contemplation, and the pursuit of serving the needs of others. It is more a way of being than of doing. Servant-leadership can be distinguished from most leadership models by the following:

- Servant-leadership revolves around a strong moral and ethical compass. Put simply, the driving force is always to "treat people right."
- A related goal is to serve people *for their own good* and not just for the good of the organization or company. People are to be served rather than used.
- The primary concern is always the success and well-being of *all* stakeholders, from the most influential and obvious to the smallest and least powerful. Stakeholders include investors and stockholders, board members, upper leadership, middle management, employees at every level, customers or patients, and the community as a whole.

Ken Jennings and John Stahl-Wert, in their book The Serving Leader, described servant-leadership as the process of "upending the pyramid" … the leader takes his place at the bottom of the pyramid and becomes first by putting others ahead of himself. According to Jennings and Stahl-Wert, the serving leader lets go of ego and sees his purpose as charging up and building the confidence, self-esteem, skills, and knowledge of the employees he serves. Additionally, the servant-leader takes responsibility for identifying and removing obstacles from the paths of the employees he serves. All of this is done while raising the bar and holding employees to high standards and accountability. Those who underperform are coached or moved to a position better suited to their unique skills and talents.

Servant–leaders demonstrate the following:

- **They are listeners.** They not only practice active listening and are attentive to others, they listen from the inside … they are mindful and pay attention to their own inner voices and reactions.
- **They are empathic.** They attempt to enter into the feeling and spirit of the other person and strive to accurately reflect back what the speaker is saying and experiencing.
- **They are healers and committed to the growth of people.** They see their interactions with others as opportunities to help the people they supervise to become more fully and completely themselves. They seek to make others "whole" and encourage the development of full potential. They do everything they can to nurture the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of each individual.
- **They are deeply committed to self-awareness.** Servant-leaders continually examine themselves and the impact of their decisions, actions, and words on others.
- **They rely on persuasion.** Servant-leaders seek to build consensus rather than to coerce compliance. They practice collaboration and shared decision making whenever possible. Curious and non-defensive, they have opinions that are lightly held, and they are always seeking and responding to input and feedback.
- **They conceptualize the big picture**. Servant-leaders see beyond the day-to-day stuff to the bigger mission and goal, and they are able to engage others to follow the path with them.
- **They have foresight.** A form of intuition, this ability enables servant-leaders to assess present realities, learn from the past, and understand how all of this ties into future decisions.
- **They are stewards.** Servant–leaders first and foremost seek to serve others. Leadership then follows.
- **They never stop learning.** They use every experience to increase self-awareness and to deepen their understanding of others.

Would you like to be a servant-leader? Tune in next month when we will focus on listening. Until then, call *Life*Solutions if you have any questions or would like to schedule a manager consultation**.**

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