Ten Principles of Servant Leadership

By Robert Greenleaf

1. **Listening** - Traditionally, leaders have been valued for their communication and decision making skills. Servant-leaders must reinforce these important skills by making a deep commitment to listening intently to others. Servant-leaders seek to identify and clarify the will of a group. They seek to listen receptively to what is being said (and not said). Listening also encompasses getting in touch with one's inner voice, and seeking to understand what one's body, spirit, and mind are communicating.

2. **Empathy** - Servant-leaders strive to understand and empathize with others. People need to be accepted and recognized for their special and unique spirit. One must assume the good intentions of coworkers and not reject them as people, even when forced to reject their behavior or performance.

3. **Healing** - Learning to heal is a powerful force for transformation and integration. One of the great strengths of servant-leadership is the potential for healing one's self and others. In "The Servant as Leader", Greenleaf writes, "There is something subtle communicated to one who is being served and led if, implicit in the compact between the servant-leader and led is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something that they have."

4. **Awareness** - General awareness, and especially self-awareness, strengthens the servant-leader. Making a commitment to foster awareness can be scary--one never knows that one may discover! As Greenleaf observed, "Awareness is not a giver of solace - it's just the opposite. It disturbed. They are not seekers of solace. They have their own inner security."

5. **Persuasion** - Servant-leaders rely on persuasion, rather than positional authority in making decisions. Servant-leaders seek to convince others, rather than coerce compliance. This particular element offers one of the clearest distinctions between the traditional authoritarian model and that of servant-leadership. The servant-leader is effective at building consensus within groups.

6. **Conceptualization** - Servant-leaders seek to nurture their abilities to "dream great dreams." The ability to look at a problem (or an organization) from a conceptualizing perspective means that one must think beyond day-to-day realities. Servant-leaders must seek a delicate balance between conceptualization and day-to-day focus.

7. **Foresight** - Foresight is a characteristic that enables servant-leaders to understand lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision in the future. It is deeply rooted in the intuitive mind.

8. **Stewardship** - Robert Greenleaf's view of all institutions was one in which CEO's, staff, directors, and trustees all play significance roles in holding their institutions in trust for the great good of society.

9. **Commitment to the Growth of People** - Servant-leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As such, servant-leaders are deeply committed to a personal, professional, and spiritual growth of each and every individual within the organization.

10. **Building Community** - Servant-leaders are aware that the shift from local communities to large institutions as the primary shaper of human lives has changed our perceptions and has caused a feeling of loss. Servant-leaders seek to identify a means for building community among those who work within a given institution.
Problems with the Servant Leadership Model

Lisa Mooney

Servant leaders can become too emotionally bonded to employees.

Servant leadership is a management model made popular by Robert K. Greenleaf. The central idea behind this business management style is that the leader serves her employees by addressing their needs above herself. This type of leader focuses on the spiritual meaning of her role in the business world. She works to actively listen to, empathize with and solve the problems of the people she guides. However, this type of leadership style can have problems.

1. **Too Internal.** The servant leader can become so immersed in introspection and encouraging employees to look inward for meaning to their work that the company's bottom line can suffer. For example, this leader might spend the majority of business meetings discussing how meaningful work can be for everyone while neglecting to formulate a plan to increases profits. Management needs to be able to look outwardly with an eye to growing the business in order to stay viable.

2. **Parental Issues.** A servant leadership model can resemble a parent-child relationship in which the manager acts to physically and emotionally cater to the employees. This can lead to relationships that are too dependent on emotions to be productive. Leaders Direct says this type of relationship is one in which the manager does so much that the workers don't have to think for themselves. Employees can find their work impaired due to fear of displeasing the manager, who is, in effect, a parental figure. Similarly, a servant leader might find it difficult to "let go" of her workers so they can become mature professionals who make decisions and take responsibility for themselves.

3. **Possible Bullying.** Servant leadership can open the door to bullying. A servant-styled manager makes himself so vulnerable that, unfortunately, unscrupulous individuals can take advantage of him. When a leader is so dedicated to serving his employees, it can make him a target for manipulators. An employee, for instance, might feign not knowing how to perform work tasks and ask the manager to repeatedly demonstrate the duty while he observes. On the other hand, the servant leader could be the manipulative figure, though this goes against the core reasoning of this leadership style. Regent University School of Business and Leadership contends that a servant leader could use the argument that since he helped the employee, the worker should respond by serving him. This is an unethical practice, since servant leadership should encourage employees to reciprocate not by serving him but by paying it forward to others such as customers.

4. **Growth Problems.** Employees can lack motivation when their manager is always present to chip in to help with work, provide all the answers and "baby" them. Unfortunately, this nontraditional approach that diminishes the view of an authoritative figure can negatively impact the progress of employees. The work force under a giving servant leader can become lazy so that they and the company do not experience the growth necessary to keep a small company in business.
What 100 Years of Research Tells Us about Effective Leadership

Ronald E. Riggio, Ph.D. (2009)

What do we actually know about effective leadership? One hundred years of research on the topic has led to some clear answers.

1. **Are leaders made or born?** The answer is both, but more made than born. Leadership is a complex and sophisticated social role. Although certain qualities do predispose some people to attain leadership positions and be better at leading, effective leaders actually hone their skills through experience, conscious self-development, education, and training.

2. **Does leadership training work?** Relatively recent analyses of over 100 years of leadership training and development efforts suggest that most programs do indeed lead to some positive change. Is the change dramatic? Sometimes. Certain crucible, or trigger, events can lead to substantial improvement in leadership ability. For the most part, however, leadership development is a long-term and incremental process.

3. **Are there certain elements that all (or most) great leaders share?** We are quite sure that the theory of transformational leadership represents the very best elements of leadership. Effective leaders tend to be inspirational, visionary, and serve as positive role models for their followers. But the very best leaders also care sincerely about their followers, their well-being and their personal development. Great leaders also empower followers and encourage them to be creative and to take initiative.

4. **Is leadership situation specific?** In other words, if you are a successful leader in one area, such as at work, will you also be a successful leader in the community, or in a different company? Although this question has not been thoroughly researched, it is likely that the same transformational qualities and skills will transfer to other settings. The limitation, of course, is that knowledge of the particular setting, and understanding of its “culture” is required. So, a period of adjustment and learning is needed to allow the leader to use transformational abilities in the new environment.

5. **How early in life does leadership begin to develop?** This is a fascinating question, and one that our current research program is exploring. There has been little longitudinal research on the early “roots” of leadership, but our initial results suggest that the foundation of leadership begins at a very early age. Encouragement from parents and teachers likely plays a very important part, as well as early exposure to a variety of social situations, and novel experiences.

What are the implications for personal leadership development? Leadership is complex, but it can be developed. We know the building blocks of leadership success, and it is clear that devoting time and energy to your personal development pays off.
7 Things Successful Leaders Do Differently

Paula Davis-Laack, J.D., M.A.P.P. (2012)

Over the past year and a half, I’ve had the privilege of coaching, teaching, and talking to thousands of leaders from varied walks of life. What I’ve noticed is that while most are successful on some level, a handful of them have that something extra. Their path hasn’t always been easy, and they’ve encountered numerous challenges, but this select group of leaders thrives both personally and professionally. Here is what they do differently:

1. **They put relationships first.** Successful leaders not only build networks, but they also nurture the connections they make. They make time for their clients and colleagues. They make time for people they mentor. They make time for their personal relationships. It takes a great deal of energy to keep connections thriving, but successful people are willing to put in the time and the effort. I’m reminded of a quote by Robert Martin that illustrates this point: “Taking an interest in what others are thinking and doing is often a much more powerful form of encouragement than praise.”

2. **They know that meaning matters.** In a recent Psychology Today blog post, I talk about the importance of incorporating meaning into your life, your work, and your business ventures. Many entrepreneurs, particularly millennials, are building their businesses around giving back and doing something that will affect the world in some way. Successful leaders know how their life’s work fits into a broader, more significant context.

3. **They use humor.** Successful leaders deal with tough stuff, but they fight back with humor. Early studies of humor and health showed that humor strengthened the immune system, reduced pain, and reduced stress levels. Since humor builds positive emotion, it can also help reduce feelings of anger, depression, and anxiety (McGhee, 2010). Additional research in this area shows that positive emotions predicted increases in both resilience and life satisfaction (Cohn et. al., 2009). What’s interesting is that the more stressful the situation, the more successful leaders tap into the funny side of life.

4. **They lead and live with their strengths.** Research by the Gallup Organization shows that the most effective leaders invest in their strengths, surround themselves with the right people to maximize their team, and understand their followers’ needs (Rath & Conchie, 2008). Successful leaders understand that they cannot be everything to everybody and remain effective; instead, they have a keen awareness of how to leverage their unique blend of strengths, skills, and talents.

5. **They manage pessimistic thinking.** Successful leaders reign in their pessimistic thinking in three ways. First, they focus their time and energy on where they have control. They know when to move on if certain strategies aren’t working or if they don’t have control in a specific area. Second, they know that “this too shall pass.” Successful leaders “embrace the suck” and understand that while the ride might be bumpy at times, it won’t last forever. Finally, great leaders are good at compartmentalizing. They don’t let an adversity in one area of their life seep over into other areas of their life.

6. **They make their own luck.** The concept of “grit”—perseverance and passion for long-term goals, is not new, but recent research has shed interesting light on the concept. Researchers studied an incoming class of cadets at West Point in order to better understand why certain cadets dropped out and others continued along the path of military mastery. What they found is that the group who stayed was not more athletic, well-rounded or smarter—they were grittier; in fact, grit was a better predictor of success for these cadets than IQ or standardized test scores.
Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Successful leaders pursue goals with passion, don’t back down from challenges, don’t allow a failure to define who they are as a person, and simply put, don’t quit.

7. **They manage their energy.** Jim Loehr, co-author of the Harvard Business Review article entitled, "The Making of a Corporate Athlete," describes an ideal performance state as prolonged and sustained high performance over time. Successful leaders become adept at moving between energy expenditure (stress) and energy renewal (recovery). In order to get the energy renewal required to live and work in an ideal performance state, successful leaders know when to refill their tank. Burnout is a potential reality for people in high-stress professions, and successful leaders keep burnout at bay by knowing how and when to take a break.

Joel Baker said it best: “A leader is a person you will follow to a place you wouldn't go by yourself.” What steps can you start taking today to make your leadership style a success?

**The Best Advice on Being a Business Leader**

Paul B. Thornton

Fortune magazine once published an article entitled "The Best Advice I Ever Got". It was a great article that offered wit and wisdom about achieving business success. I liked it so much, that it motivated me to produce my book, *Leadership: Best Advice I Ever Got*, which describes the best advice 136 successful CEOs, coaches, consultants, professors, managers, executives, presidents, politicians, and religious leaders received that most helped them become effective and successful business leaders.

Here is their best advice.

1. **A leader makes things happen.** If you want to make something happen with your life - in school, in your profession or in your community, do it. Perceived obstacles crumble against persistent desire. John Baldoni, Author, Leadership Communication Consultant and Founder of Baldoni Consulting LLC, shared this advice that had come from his father, a physician. He taught him the value of persistence. At the same time, his mother taught him compassion for others. Therefore, persistence for your cause should not be gained at the expense of others. Another bit of leadership wisdom!

2. **Listen and understand the issue, then lead.** Time and time again we have all been told, "God gave us two ears and one mouth for a reason"... or as Stephen Covey said, "Seek to understand, rather than be understood." As a business leader, listening first to the issue, then trying to coach, has been the most valuable advice that Cordia Harrington, President and CEO of Tennessee Bun Company has been given.

3. **A successful business leader can answer the three questions everyone within his or her organization wants answers to.** What the people of an organization want from their leader are answers to the following: "Where are we going?" "How are we going to get there?" "What is my role?" Kevin Nolan, President & Chief Executive Officer of Affinity Health Systems, Inc. believes the more clarity that can be added to the answers to each of the three questions, the better the result.

4. **Successful business leaders need to master the skills that will allow them to work anywhere in today's dynamic business world.** Debbie Kennedy, President, CEO and Founder of Global Dialogue Center and Leadership Solutions Companies, and author of Action Dialogues and Breakthrough once shared this piece of advice
That was instrumental in shaping her direction, future and achievements. She was a young manager at IBM just promoted to her first staff assignment in a regional marketing office. For reasons she can't explain, one of her colleagues named Bookie called her into his office while she was visiting his location. He then began to offer unsolicited advice, advice that now stays fresh in her mind. He mentioned that jobs, missions, titles and organizations would come and go as business is dynamic - meaning it is always changing. He advised her not to focus your goals toward any of these, but instead learn to master the skills that will allow you to work anywhere. He was talking about four skills:

- The ability to develop an idea;
- Effectively plan for its implementation;
- Execute second-to-none;
- Achieve superior results time after time.

With this in mind, Kennedy’s best advice is to seek jobs and opportunities with this in mind. Forget what others do. Work to be known for delivering excellence. It speaks for itself and it opens doors. Paul B. Thornton presents more of the best advice for being a successful business leader that seven top leaders ever received on the next page. Click to continue reading about effective leadership.

5. **An effective business leader has to be curious.** Curiosity is a prerequisite to continuous improvement and even excellence. The person who gave Mary Jean Thornton, Former Executive Vice President & CIO, The Travelers, this advice urged her to study people, processes, and structures. He inspired her to be intellectually curious. He often reminded Thornton that making progress, in part, was based upon thinking. She has learned to apply this notion of intellectual curiosity by thinking about her organization’s future, understanding the present, and knowing and challenging herself to creatively move the people and the organization closer to its vision.

6. **An effective business leader has to listen to both sides of the argument.** The best advice Brian P. Lees, Massachusetts State Senator and Senate Minority Leader, ever received came from his mentor, United States Senator Edward W. Brooke III. He told him to listen to all different kinds of people and ideas. Listening only to those who share your background and opinions can be imprudent. It is important to respect your neighbors’ rights to their own views. Listening to and talking with a variety of people, from professors to police officers, from senior citizens to school children, is essential not only to be a good business leader, but to also be a valuable member within your community.

7. **Prepare, prepare, prepare.** If you fail to prepare, you are preparing to fail. If one has truly prepared and something goes wrong the strength of the rest of what you’ve prepared for usually makes this something easier to handle without crisis and panic. One of the best pieces of advice Dave Hixson, Men’s Varsity Basketball Coach at Amherst College has ever received and continues to use and pass on is this anonymous quote - “Preparation is the science of winning.” Along with this are two expressions from Rick Pitino’s book *Success is a Choice*, which speaks to preparation. Hixson asks his teams every year: “Do you deserve to win?” and “Have you done the work?” This speaks to the importance of preparation toward achieving your final goal. If you haven’t done the work (the preparation), the answer to the second question is an easy “no!”

**One Last Piece of Best Advice.** Great advice on being an effective business leader comes from many sources - parents, other relatives, consultants, bosses, co-workers, mentors, teachers, coaches, and friends. The important point to remember is to stay open, listen to everyone, but also develop your own leadership style.