



The Power of Servant Leadership

Robert K. Greenleaf , Larry C. Spears (Editor) , Peter B. Vaill (Foreword by)

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"The Power of Servant Leadership" is a collection of Robert Greenleaf's finest and most mature works and an unexpected sequel to his "Servant Leadership." These pieces were designed to stimulate and inspire people in the practice of a more caring leadership and reflect Greenleaf's continual refinement of his servant-as-leader concept, focusing on issues such as spirit, commitment to vision, and seeing things whole.

The Power of Servant Leadership Details

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From Reader Review The Power of Servant Leadership for online ebook

Francine says

I've read this cover to cover and dropped in for "updates" over many years. This is good philosophy.

Charles Cohen says

The idea of thinking of yourself (as a leader, either by title or activity) as primarily a servant is resonates very strongly for me, and the book lays out this idea very well. The only issue is that it takes WAY too many pages that are used not to introduce new aspects of this philosophy, but just to reiterate it in different forms. Greenleaf could easily have cut out 100 pages, and still made his point. But it's a great theory, and one that I try to embody.

Russell Frazier says

This book challenged my thinking in regard to the role of the seminary and theological education within the church world. I appreciate much of what it says.

I have been exposed to the idea of servant leadership in the past. However, I was rather surprised to understand the implicit connection that the author appears to make between servant leadership and his own pacifistic views. What struck me is that only a pacifist can hold to the theory of servant leadership.

Gregory Johnson says

Outstanding core information of the most insightful prescription for leadership with purpose.

Nick says

This collection of essays has been my introduction to Robert Greenleaf. The material is some of the most important leadership information I have come across since my Marine Corps days. There are a total of 8 essays which range from the origins of the concept of Servant Leadership to Mr. Greenleaf's ideas on how to create Servant Leaders. Captured in the pages of this book is the pith of a leadership philosophy which everyone should be exposed to. The essay entitled Education and Maturity originally presented to a class of freshmen completing their first year of college is astounding. It should be presented to every graduating high school class in the nation. In some of his later essays Mr. Greenleaf discusses his reaction to the rebellious 60s college students. His insight and framing of the issues facing young adults in the 60s's is remarkable and incredibly relevant to today's younger and older generations, and to the Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter movements. Finally his essay entitled Old Age: The Ultimate Test of Spirit provides unique insight to

those in their middle careers on what they should be focusing on now to be ready as they become the older generation. This is a book that every leader should read and read again. It won't be collecting dust on my shelf.

Joy says

Excellent read for anyone in a leadership position, or aspiring to such a position. In much of the book he speaks to young people. It's kind of a popular thing right now to have high school classes on leadership; this would be a great resource for such a class.

I did kind of get bogged down in the chapter on seminaries, although even there he spoke about critical thinking which is important for any individual or organization.

I found the chapter on aging rather interesting.

Overall this was well worth my time and I may revisit some of these essays in the future.

Jasonlyescampbell says

I really like Robert Greenleaf. He writes quite a bit about the church and seminaries, but from an outsider perspective. The last essay about what it means to prepare for old age is really good and when do you get to read an article by an 83 year old person?

Tyler says

Greenleaf had a lot of gems of wisdom in this book, but some essays were better than others. I really enjoyed the essays on the religious leader as servant, the one about E.B. White, and another on Greenleaf's reflections about growing old. I found the seminary as servant and the essay about trustees in seminaries less interesting or helpful.

All in all Greenleaf has a lot of really significant ideas, and servant-leadership is a powerful idea, but I would read Spears, Blanchard, Sipe & Frick and others to get some really helpful elaborations on the groundwork laid by Greenleaf.

Doug Alcorn says

I've not actually read this whole book. I got a little bored with the later parts of the book and that's why I only gave it 4 stars. Most of that was implementation specifics that I didn't feel like applied to me.

The front of this book is fantastic though. I have a cheat sheet of my favorite quotes that I re-read pretty regularly. It's very motivating stuff and helps me get my head in the right place.

Maybe I'll re-read the entire book and see if more of it applies to me than I thought the first time through.

Stephen Achilles says

While it can be a tough read at times this classic on servant leadership this book is the foundation for future authors exploring servant leadership.

Matthew Moes says

The title is a sufficient caption for anyone who is charged with the responsibility of leading. According to a famous statement of the Prophet Muhammad, (peace be upon him), "Each one of you is a shepherd for his flock..." continuing to explain in his own wisely succinct manner that leadership comes in varying degrees and forms. Greenleaf's message is that society is better because of the service its members render to one another. That ethic of service must be emulated in its leaders. Truthfully, this is not just Greenleaf's hypothesis. This is the message of every great faith tradition. Greenleaf expounds on it at length in this collection of essays compiled by Larry C. Spears of the Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership. Greenleaf wrote these essays in what he calls his most productive years, after retiring from his position as director of management research at AT&T. While Greenleaf died in 1990, the Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership continues to propagate the Servant-Leader concept through publications, conferences, and other training opportunities.

This book does not contain the seminal essay on the subject, but there is enough thought-provoking material here to inform the initiate. Many of the essays included in this volume are available individually while more of Greenleaf's writing is accessible in other volumes. Though it is not light reading, it is valuable for community leaders, especially board members and trustees, but really anyone who serves in a leadership role.

I took my time reading the various essays over a period of about six months, reflecting as I did so on my own practices as a Principal at a private Muslim school. Practical experience in leadership has been humbling in that it was far easier as a student to expound upon the virtues of epitomizing a "servant leader" than it is to actually live up to the ideals. Yet, I still hold the concept in esteem. Reading these essays over this length of time offered me the critical reminder, especially at frustrating times, that indeed, true leadership is rendered through service.

For schools, this is also a critical message: Each one of you is a shepherd for his flock. Board members are the shepherds for our institutions. The Imam is shepherd for the community. The Principal is the shepherd for the school. The teachers are shepherds for their students. Parents are the shepherds of their children. The analogy of being a shepherd lends itself well to the servant leader concept. How effective is a shepherd that orders his flock about or coerces the flock through verbal or physical assault? Rather, the shepherd takes care of the flock. He guides its members to water and green pastures. He tends to them and protects them from eminent danger. The difference though, is that in schools, the flocks are not sheep. The shepherd in a school knows that his mission is to foster a new generation of shepherds, not sheep. This next generation will emulate the training and leadership exemplified by the parents, teachers, and the administrative leadership in the school. Much of this is discussed in an address to the faculty of Barnard College in "Education and Maturity". Interestingly, Greenleaf points out that the root of administrator, "administrare", means "to serve".

At times when I am cajoled by those who would have me resort to more of a managerial style, I recall Greenleaf's emphasis on persuasive versus coercive means of getting things done. This too, is instructive for board members and trustees.

According to Greenleaf, "the chair is expendable, the administrator is not". Interesting concept, though in my own experience, both the attitude and the actions are usually the other way around. No wonder that there is such a wide call for imams and principals, while I have yet to see a community doing a nationwide search for board members. The idea is absurd. Board members are drawn from the existing populace as trustees over the institutions that the community collectively builds. In this sense, they can come and go with each new election – perhaps they should, in order to reflect any changes in demographics. However, the professionals they hire must offer the long-term stability the community requires. This stability comes through the mission of the institution. The trustees, as a representative council of the community, establish the mission and then invest their power in the leaders they've chosen to carry it out. Both become servants to the mission. Neither is subservient to the other. Greenleaf offers insights for leadership in both categories.

I also appreciated Greenleaf's discussion of our current lack of leadership nationwide, in his essay "The Leadership Crisis". This is a crisis the American Muslim community faces now too, when our national publications are rife with solicitations for imams, principals, and teachers. It is the burden of our schools to provide a generation of American Muslims who will be adequately trained and socialized to fill this genuine need. In another essay entitled "Have You a Dream Deferred?" Greenleaf discusses the vision and other qualities necessary to lead effectively. A third essay discusses another pertinent idea to Muslims: the importance of religious leadership – not just because it offers a bedrock of morality, but because it inspires. How many Muslims find inspiration at the masjid? Building on this theme, Greenleaf also discusses an idea that will become more relevant to Muslims in the next ten years: the role of seminaries in providing the kind of training for the individual religious leaders who must someday provide that sense of inspiration, direction, and hope. New initiatives such as ISNA's Summer Leadership Institute and Imam Yusuf Zia Kavakci's Suffa Islamic Seminary at the Islamic Association of North Texas will usher in a new wave of institution building among the Muslims of North America. It will be instructive for community leaders to study the ideas of Greenleaf and others who have written extensively on these issues.

There are other gems here too, such as the last two essays of the book, one of which, "My Debt to E.B. White" intrigued me because I knew little about E.B. White other than that he is the author of Charlotte's Web. He actually wrote for The New Yorker for many years, and authored several other children's books. What I enjoyed about Greenleaf's essay on him is the illustration of the way a person's qualities are taught – transmitted, through their work. According to Greenleaf, he is indebted to White for teaching him "to see things whole", another powerful qualifier for leadership and a central component of what Muslim educators are calling "tawhidic" education. Ironically, I recently heard the story of a Muslim teacher who suffered a great deal of hardship from the parents and board members at her school because of her insistence on teaching Charlotte's Web. Their problem was that the main character was a pig – and because of the cultural repugnance of the pig, the lesson of learning "to see things whole" was lost.

The final essay, "Old Age: The Ultimate Test of Spirit" caused me to reflect on the need for Muslims to exemplify their values toward our elders by finding ways to honor them in our Islamic centers and schools by incorporating service from and service to the senior members. Adopting non-Muslim seniors who have been abandoned to nursing homes would seem to be another very progressive form of community outreach. Not for the purpose of proselytizing, but simply to demonstrate a commitment to our values. Greenleaf wrote the essay in his eighties and it is instructive to note that what he considered his own most valuable work occurred after he retired from AT&T. And it is for this work, of consulting and promoting the servant leader concept, that he is now most remembered.

Brindusa Axon says

I appreciate the learnings and stories, but sometimes I got lost in the vast amount of text. There were a few chapters that I decided to skip as I was running out of patience. I'll definitely come back to it, as right now is not 100% relevant.

Al Soto says

Introductory Summary:

The editor of this book is Larry C. Spears who at the time of this writing is the CEO of the Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership since 1990. The foundation for this book is grounded in the person of Robert K. Greenleaf who is the father of Servant Leadership Theory. Back in 1970, he wrote a small essay called "The Servant As Leader", which introduced the term "servant-leadership." That and other writings have influenced an entire generation of management experts and institutional leaders. Bob Greenleaf (1904-1990) spent his first career in management research, development and education at AT&T. After retirement, he began a second career teaching and consulting at institutions ranging from Harvard Business School to the Ford Foundation to scores of churches and not-for-profit institutions. During the tumultuous 1960s, Greenleaf tried to understand why so many young people were in rebellion against America's institutions, especially universities. He concluded that the fault lay with the institutions: they weren't doing a good job of serving; therefore, they were doing a poor job of leading.

In 1970, Greenleaf wrote "The Servant as Leader", a powerful little essay that continues to gain influence today. In it, Greenleaf described some of the characteristics and activities of servant-leaders, providing examples which show that individual efforts, inspired by vision and a servant ethic, can make a substantial difference in the quality of society. Greenleaf said true leaders are chosen by their followers. He discussed the skills necessary to be a servant-leader; the importance of awareness, foresight and listening; and the contrasts between coercive, manipulative, and persuasive power.

This book is a collection of eight essays by Robert Greenleaf, most of which were originally published as separate pamphlets by The Greenleaf Center.[1] The editor makes it clear that as an aid to the reader, the eight essays in this volume are as follows:

"Servant: Retrospect and Prospect"

Greenleaf presents the need in this reflection of how fresh vision is needed that

liberates people with in a variety of institutions and organizations from rigid mind-sets.

"Education and Maturity"

Personal identity and personal significance is developed over the journey of a life time as one grows in understanding of maturity.

“The Leadership Crisis”

The source of the crisis in Greenleaf’s reflection is the definition and limitation of three types of power. Vision is the necessary sail that gives guidance to the effective use of power in the life of an institution or organization.

“Have you a Dream Deferred”

This reflection focuses on the understanding of leadership to place the responsibility for personal growth of people within an institution and organization back onto the people they lead.

“The Servant as Religious Leader”

From the perspective of the organization it is not simply tasks that must get done but in the midst of tasks recognizing the phenomenon of “spirit” we must get people done by leaders holding their own against the forces of destruction and indifference.

“Seminary as Servant”

Greenleaf presents how seminaries can have the courage to present a vision by which they focus on serving society.

“My Debt to E.B. White”

The essay presents how E.B. White’s writings impacted Greenleaf’s thinking over fifty-five years. Two of White’s gifts: “seeing things whole” and “the gift of language to express what he saw – were foundational to his power as a writer.

“Old Age: The Ultimate Test of the Spirit”

In this essay Greenleaf begins to unpack the wisdom that he has developed over a lifetime of experience and reflection. This is a wonderful chapter for anyone who is preparing to transition into midlife.

Points of Discovery and Reflection

This reader has discovered after reading numerous articles and essays written by Greenleaf one must take time to reflect on three questions that will allow the reader to process Greenleaf’s transformative leadership theory. These questions are: How does one understand the need for people to be integrated in their approach to life and work? In essence productivity is the outcome of one’s way of being.[2] In a New York Times article Greenleaf states, “Servant leadership deals with the reality of power in everyday life – its legitimacy, the ethical restraints upon it and the beneficial results that can be attained through the appropriate use of power.”[3] It is refreshing that Greenleaf does not approach the concept of power as being inherently evil which has been made common by some cultural definitions in the flow of the American mindset. For Greenleaf, it is the proper stewardship of power by both leaders and the people that they lead that create a context for the development of healthy maturity and wholeness in their lives that makes a positive impact in society. The second question one must reflect upon relates to “how one views their own sense of personal identity?” If transformation is to occur in the lives that one leads it must be happening in the life of the leader. All ten of the foundational characteristics of servant-leadership theory are grounded on the bedrock of this core truth. Ridged mind-sets in organizations find cannot be hurdled by a leader who is not aware of their own capacity for a ridged mind-set. Thus, this leader will not have the courage to present a vision that is persuades people consider a different path to an issue. The third question that one must reflect upon is, “How does one view other people?” In each one of these essays you as a reader will be constantly challenged to be more committed to the growth and success of those you serve as a leader rather than your own success.

Thoughts for the Journey

One of the criticisms that leadership scholars have levied at servant-leadership theory is that there is not enough empirical research that support the productivity of an organization implementing this approach to leadership. In the past ten years that has changed and what is occurring is that there is some cross-over with this theory along with family systems theory that is making some deep impact into the productivity in industry as well as in the context of globalization. In reading this book I would recommend that you journal your thoughts around the three questions that were presented in the previous section of this summary. This is a great read and this reader highly recommends that you take the time to glean from Robert K. Greenleaf in order to equip you with a different vision for yourself and others on your journey.

[1] The Power of Servant Leadership, (San Francisco, CA: Berrett Koeler, 1998). p 20.

[2] Ibid, p 5.

[3] Ibid, p 5. (Referring to New York Times (October 2, 1990))

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Chris MacLellan says

Just finishing up a class in Servant-Leadership at Gonzaga University abd this was one of the books in our class. My only disappointment is that I did not know about this book prior to taking this class: excellent!

Michael says

I enjoyed this book but it is mostly written in the very straight-forward style of the 60's, so it comes across as pretty dry. However, there is some good stuff in here for the leader who aspires to succeed by taking care of his/her people.
