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TOP TEN LESSONS I’VE LEARNED OVER A LIFETIME

—LARRY SPEARS

I was recently invited to give several talks at St. Mary’s University in San Antonio, Texas. Sponsored by the 21st Century Leadership program at St. Mary’s University, for one of the presentations I was invited to speak on the specific theme of the “Top Ten Lessons I’ve Learned Over a Lifetime.” I was grateful to receive this invitation as it encouraged me to think about particular life lessons that have had considerable meaning for me. I found that I had many more than ten, but I managed to whittle the list down to the requested number. Here, in the second volume of The International Journal of Servant-Leadership, I thought I would share these with you, and invite you to engage in the same exercise yourself. You may find coming up with your list to be as thought-provoking as I found my own experience!

1. Be kind to others/Be kind to yourself.

This seems so obvious, so fundamental, and yet it is a life lesson that is sometimes difficult to practice faithfully. Being kind to others is a desirable trait in-and-of-itself. But it can also have the added benefit of encouraging others to be kind in turn. Being kind to yourself is sometimes more challenging than showing kindness to others. While I have generally sought to learn from my own mistakes, I am increasingly convinced that it is just as important to show loving kindness to both yourself and others around you.

2. Seek to understand others and listen carefully to what they have to say.

“Seek first to understand” is one of Stephen Covey’s 7 Habits of
Highly Effective People. It means, in part, placing a greater emphasis upon truly understanding others. Robert K. Greenleaf encouraged us to “listen receptively” to others. That’s a kind of intense listening coupled with a genuine openness to the possibility of being persuaded by what others have to say. Understanding others and listening carefully to others is a fundamental aspect of effective servant-leadership.

3. Avoid making assumptions.

Some years ago I came across the following comment that has stuck with me as being both humorous and quite meaningful: “When we ‘assume,’ we make an ‘ass’ of ‘u’ and ‘me.’” It is difficult for many of us to avoid making assumptions in life. It sometimes seems like it is a part of human nature. However, making assumptions about others nearly always reduces our real understanding and sometimes diminishes ourselves and others. We make assumptions about family, friends, strangers and enemies. Rather than assume we know what someone thinks, I’ve come to learn over time, we’re usually better off asking questions!

4. All things considered, it’s generally best to be cautiously optimistic in life.

In my own experience, it is best to avoid being either overly pessimistic or overly optimistic. I’ve observed that both extremes occasionally seem to trip up people. Being overly optimistic can lead to frequent disappointment. And while pessimists are less likely to be disappointed, they can also miss out on the sheer joy of feeling hopeful. To thine ownself be true—as for me, a cautiously optimistic perspective seems to work best.
5. Recognize and understand your fears, then resolve to grow in your own bravery over time by gradually confronting and overcoming those fears.

Learn to understand what sorts of things scare you, and why. Sometimes people don’t know that they’re even scared of certain things. Sometimes people know they’re scared of something, but don’t know why. And then there are those who know what scares them, along with knowing why. This depth of consciousness can be helpful in avoiding certain negative actions or behaviors. This isn’t easy work. My own single greatest fear has always been the fear of poverty. My father was permanently disabled in his thirties and was unable to work for the last thirty years of his life. Our family barely made ends meet on the Social Security disability check that he received each month. This constant uncertainty touched each of us in our family in different ways. For me, it created a deep fear of not having the money to pay for basic human needs—and is thus something that I continue to address in my own life. And now, a word or two about bravery. Bravery, or courage, isn’t the absence of fear. If anyone exists who is afraid of nothing (and I have yet to meet them), I would have to call that person “fearless.” While most of us are afraid of something, we may be considered brave or courageous when we take action in spite of our fears. Gradually letting go of your fears while growing in your own bravery is a very important life lesson.

6. Live life in a conscientious fashion, holding good values and high ethics.

Seek to act in ways that reflect positive values such as fairness, trust, caring, honesty, commitment to others, and similar ethical and helpful behaviors.
7. **Be an active learner throughout life.**

Stay curious about people and ideas. I have found that determining how we learn best, and then devoting ourselves to expanding our knowledge base and experiences with the end goal of gaining wisdom, is important. Experience has taught me that some combination of gaining deeper knowledge, coupled with learning about some completely new subjects, makes life interesting. From my own life I can tell you that up until a year ago I had never thought much about my own family genealogy. And yet, in recent months I have found it to be an absolutely fascinating endeavor as it combines a number of things that make it exciting for me: solving mysteries, studying history, conducting research, using my imagination. I would say that it doesn’t matter so much what you choose to learn about—just keep learning.

8. **Leading is good. Serving is better. Serving and leading is best of all.**

Robert Greenleaf’s writings have influenced several generations of people. Part of Greenleaf’s great contribution to the world was the simple act of bringing together the words “servant” and “leader” in an innovative hyphenated word, “servant-leader.” In providing us with a name for something that many of us intuitively understand, he has helped to link together many who might otherwise have felt even more isolated in their beliefs and in their workplaces. I believe that leading others can be quite meaningful. Serving others is better yet. But, both serving and leading others—at least for me—is the best. It offers opportunities for wholeness, for making a difference in the world, and for helping to fulfill Bob Greenleaf’s “Best Test” of a servant-leader: Is one healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely oneself to serve others? And what is the impact on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit, or at least, not be further deprived?
9. To the greatest extent possible, insist upon the right to make decisions that affect your own life, and support others in their own quests for those same rights.

We can’t always do whatever it is we think we want to do. And sometimes, what we think we want to do isn’t even something worth doing! Still, I have come to believe that, to the greatest extent possible, we should insist upon having choices and making decisions for ourselves, rather than having decisions forced upon us by others—no matter how well-intentioned. We should also become powerful advocates for allowing others to have those same rights. Yes, we live in an increasingly interdependent world, and we should take very seriously the careful balancing of personal choice with the greater social good. However, as Gordon Livingston says in his excellent book, Too Soon Old, Too Late Smart: Thirty True Things You Need to Know Now: “Nobody likes to be told what to do. It seems too obvious to mention, and yet look how much that passes for intimate communication involves admonitions and instructions.” For me, this is another place where Robert Greenleaf’s ideas have great relevance—particularly around his encouragement of the use of persuasion as much as possible. Instead of telling others what to do, or what to think, I believe the world would be a happier place if we saved our admonitions for ourselves and expected to persuade others (and to be persuaded in turn).

10. Show people they matter to you.

While I’m listing this one last, it is the single greatest lesson that I have learned in my life—and one that I continue to work hard at learning and remembering. Let people know they matter to you. This has a broad range of expressions and includes such things as: showing your love for family, friends, colleagues; sharing your appreciation for others in your life; saying please and thank you frequently. You may even wish to make a point of thanking people whom you have never met, but who have nevertheless had a positive impact on your life. Demonstrate through large and
small ways that you value those who are around you, and let them know they make a real difference in your life.

Thank you for considering the ten ideas I’ve presented here. I hope you find ways for you and those you care about to gather and talk about their ten and your own. What an honor to be in a conversation in which people deepen each other. I have found the authors and articles in the second volume of *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership* very enlightening; they are so enriching to our common humanity. I hope your own discoveries in reading and dialogue bring joy and meaning!

Larry C. Spears
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Senior Advisory Editor, *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership*
THE TRUE PERSON IS LOVELY

—SHANN FERCH

Mediocre people want to be loved.
True people are lovely.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

When my wife and I first read Emerson’s two-part understanding we were caught short, thinking of the implications:

“Wait a minute,” I said. “I want to be loved . . . does that mean I’m mediocre?”

Yes, I had to admit, sometimes it does mean I’m mediocre. When I’m needy or reactive, defensive, self-absorbed, when I live from basic anger or anxiety or fear, I am unable to access an interior devoted to the service of others, God, life, or love.

True people are lovely. Even the very words invoke grace. They harken us toward vulnerability, transparency, humility, surrender, perhaps even submission to love itself—the ultimate expression of legitimate greatness and power. In reading the wonderful work housed in this second volume of The International Journal of Servant-Leadership I was struck by the nuances of what it means to be lovely. The authors here have given us their own deep loveliness and in so doing, they lead us to a more discerning, precise, and fearless understanding of self-responsibility and collective responsibility for our life together. In self-responsibility we recognize and ask forgiveness for how we harmfully impact the heart, mind, and spirit of others. The idea of noticing our own weaknesses and getting away from the desire to name the faults of others is perhaps the deepest healer of the most painful relational systems in our society. What we discover when we
descend into our own interior is a dangerous and pernicious tendency to hold the beloved other (family members, colleagues, humanity) in a dark light. By so doing, we hide ourselves and fail to notice the significant reach of our own shadow in the world. When we return to self-transparency, appropriate vulnerability, and responsibility, inherently we have the soulful life Robert Greenleaf envisioned in servant-leadership. After summoning the courage to surrender, to ask forgiveness and change in ways our beloved ones find meaningful, the act of granting forgiveness becomes fluid and natural. We find our own human evil is connected to the darkness of all humanity, and we forgo the desire “set others straight.” From here, philosophically and relationally, an earned ground develops in which we call on a way of life that reconciles the great rifts, ends power abuses, and heals the heart of the world.

A good test is to note how much time we spend talking about the faults of others. An appreciative measure of health is 9 to 10 encounters of meaningful, sincere, and positive regard for the “other” to every 1 critique—regardless of the perceived level of the “other’s” fault. This is the unconditional forgiveness we see in South Africa, time after time, that eventually breaks the hard-heartedness of the offender and returns him or her whole; it is the echo of People Power from Corazon Aquino and the Philippines, one of the first non-violent revolutions of the modern age; and it is the constant theme in Martin Luther King Jr.’s groundbreaking work to heal the center of American life.

When we are lovely we consider what it means to understand the nature of our own self-weakness or personal darkness in a given system. We begin to embrace our own brokenness. The natural tendency of humanity is to externalize blame for a given communal conflict—but the life of loveliness keeps in mind the deeper truths that heal us. We begin to internalize self-responsibility for system health rather than externalize blame; in this context, in the family as well as in work, and even in the course of nations, resilience and moral power, infused by love, rise to transform the system. We are lifted out of our own self-embeddedness and placed in the
MLK mode of self-transcendence, a way of living that engages the greater purpose of humanity toward healing, freedom, and what he fittingly called “The Beloved Community.”

Everyone can be great because everyone can serve. . . it only takes a heart full of grace. . . a soul generated by love.

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

The authors, researchers, and scholars whose work appears in this journal form a tapestry of servant-leadership revealing the idea of emotional discipline in the center of love. In so doing, they call each of us toward vital responses to human suffering. Such responses are grounded in discernment regarding human conflict, maturity in the face of oppression, and real answers—familial, societal, and global—that rise from the crucible of human potential that is our humanity.

In the dialogues on business, politics, the arts, theology, and all forms of human endeavor found in the following pages, an underlying notion emerges that points toward restorative justice, reconciliation, forgiveness, and servant-leadership. Historically, economics, race and gender, as well as religious and sexual preference have often conferred on a select few in society an undue amount of power. We see this both in the slavery policies in early America and in the Native American genocide systematically conducted over the last few centuries. Atrocities as deeply grievous as the Nazi crimes against humanity are harbored in U.S. history as well. Consider the Sand Creek Massacre barely a hundred years past, in which Cavalry troops killed Cheyenne women and children, disgracing and mutilating their bodies. Today, this shadow extends in subtle and still pernicious forms of economic, race, gender, religious, and sexual oppression. Command and control leadership is another remnant: the idea that in conflict (or even during peace) we consciously or unconsciously establish our own view by dominating or violating the humanity of the “other.” Peggy McIntosh’s work on unveiling white privilege orients us toward thought in critical theory, and Paulo Friere’s critical pedagogy moves us to the hope of greater
understanding and more true living, united in spirit, and free from oppression.

I want to personally thank each author whose work appears here. Their sacrifice and will to see the world whole inspires servant-leadership everywhere. I recently returned from the Philippines doing collaborative work with Filipino leaders on servant-leadership and nation building. A groundswell of care was imparted to me and my family from my Filipino colleagues and their families. Consider the bravery that shines in recent Filipino history: Ninoy Aquino was assassinated 23 years ago under the Marcos regime, and Ninoy’s death became the seed for a revolution that was nonviolent and beautiful and eventually unseated the Marcos dictatorship and led to the democratic election of Cory Aquino (Ninoy’s wife) as President. She and her cabinet wrote love, yes love, directly into their new national constitution. She is now in her 70’s, and it is clear that she and her own “beloved community” preceded and in many ways inspired non-violent revolutions the world over: the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, the fall of Communism, the forgiveness-based revolution in South Africa. And consider in this light Ninoy’s premonition, his own quiet foresight full of love and hope: before he returned to the Philippines from exile in the U.S., some months before he was assassinated and left dead on the tarmac at Manila International Airport, he stated: “The Filipino is worth dying for.”

Because of love, Ninoy Aquino chose to live and even die for his people.

The work in this journal aspires to a lovely way of life, one that requires the dreaming of great dreams, even if such dreams are often attended by seemingly insurmountable losses. In the midst of such losses, the life of the servant as leader is true.

The life of the servant-leader is lovely.

Shann Ferch, Ph.D.
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It was my privilege to see a bit of Robert Frost in his last years and, having a feeling for the man as a person, his poetry has a special meaning for me.

Philip Booth, in a review, said: “Poems like ‘The Demiurge’s Laugh,’ ‘The Road Not Taken,’ ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,’ ‘On a Tree Fallen Across the Road,’ ‘Desert Places,’ ‘Come In,’ and ‘Directive’ map, in sequence, the road Robert Frost took into the dark woods, and record the serial ordeal he survived by surrendering himself to the conflicts such poems dramatize.” Earlier in Chapter IX, “Servant Responsibility in a Bureaucratic Society,” I quoted from “New Hampshire” and “The Night Light” passages which suggest the contrast between the gay and light-hearted conversationalist I knew in face-to-face meeting and the vast inner world of both terror and laughter that he confronted in his poetry.

In a group conversation with him one evening, he digressed on the subject of loyalty. At one point I interjected with: “Robert, that is not the way you have defined loyalty before.” He turned to me with a broad friendly grin and asked softly, “How did I define it?” I replied, “In your talk on Emerson a few years ago, you said, ‘Loyalty is that for the lack of which your gang will shoot you without benefit of trial by jury.’” To this man who had struggled without recognition until he was forty, and then had to move to England to get it, nothing could have pleased him more in his old age than to have an obscure passage like this quoted to him in a shared give-and-take with non-literary people.

After Robert Frost died in 1963 I wrote the following engagement with his poem Directive, partly as an acknowledgment of his influence on me and partly as a sharing with those who are on the search for what I have now come to see as servant-leadership, and who, sooner or later—and in
their own way—come to grips with who they are and where they are on the journey.

Directive

Back out of all this now too much for us,
Back in a time made simple by the loss
Of detail, burned, dissolved, and broken off
Like graveyard marble sculpture in the weather,
There is a house that is no more a house
Upon a farm that is no more a farm
And in a town that is no more a town.
The road there, if you’ll let a guide direct you
Who only has at heart your getting lost,
May seem as if it should have been a quarry—
Great monolithic knees the former town
Long since gave up pretence of keeping covered.
And there’s a story in a book about it:
Besides the wear of iron wagon wheels
The ledges show lines ruled southeast northwest,
The chisel work of an enormous Glacier
That braced his feet against the Arctic Pole.
You must not mind a certain coolness from him
Still said to haunt this side of Panther Mountain.
Nor need you mind the serial ordeal
Of being watched from forty cellar holes
As if by eye pairs out of forty firkins.
As for the woods’ excitement over you
That sends light rustle rushes to their leaves,
Charge that to upstart inexperience.
Where were they all not twenty years ago?
They think too much of having shaded out
A few old pecker-fretted apple trees.
Make yourself up a cheering song of how
Someone’s road home from work this once was,
Who may be just ahead of you on foot
Or creaking with a buggy load of grain.
The height of the adventure is the height
Of country where two village cultures faded
Into each other. Both of them are lost.
And if you’re lost enough to find yourself
By now, pull in your ladder road behind you
And put a sign up CLOSED to all but me.
Then make yourself at home. The only field
Now left’s no bigger than a harness gall.
First there’s the children’s house of make believe,
Some shattered dishes underneath a pine,
The playthings in the playhouse of the children.
Weep for what little things could make them glad.
Then for the house that is no more a house,
But only a belilaced cellar hole,
Now slowly closing like a dent in dough.
This was no playhouse but a house in earnest.
Your destination and your destiny’s
A brook that was the water of the house,
Cold as a spring as yet so near its source,
Too lofty and original to rage.
(We know the valley streams that when aroused
Will leave their tatters hung on barb and thorn.)
I have kept hidden in the instep arch
Of an old cedar at the waterside
A broken drinking goblet like the Grail
Under a spell so the wrong ones can’t find it,
So can’t get saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn’t.
(I stole the goblet from the children’s playhouse.)
Here are your waters and your watering place.
Drink and be whole again beyond confusion.

—Robert Frost

If Robert Frost had a deliberate strategy of influence in mind when he wrote “Directive,” he kept it to himself the one time I heard him asked about its meaning. His answer was, “Read it and read it and read it, and it means what it says to you.” He read this poem in a way that carried the impact of its obviously great importance and meaning to him.
What one gets by reading and reading and reading this poem cannot be predicted. One gets what one is ready for, what one is open to receive. Of course, this is what the poem is about. Our problem is circular: we must understand in order to be able to understand. It has something to do with awareness and symbols.

Awareness, letting something significant and disturbing develop between oneself and a symbol, comes more by being waited upon rather than by being asked. One of the most baffling of life’s experiences is to stand beside one who is aware, one who is looking at a symbol and is deeply moved by it, and, confronting the same symbol, to be unmoved. Oh that we could just be open in the presence of symbols that cry out to speak to us, let our guards down, and take the risks of being moved!

The power of a symbol is measured by its capacity to sustain a flow of significant new meaning. The substance of the symbol may be a painting, a poem or story, allegory, myth, or Scripture, a piece of music, a person, a crack in the sidewalk, or a blade of grass. Whatever or whoever, it produces a confrontation in which much that makes the symbol meaningful comes from the beholder.

The potentiality is both in the symbol and in the beholder. But one does not read old crystallized meaning into a new symbol. One does not even look to an old symbol as the justification for old meaning. All symbols are potential sources of new meaning. Nor is meaning a product of the conscious intent of the creator of the symbol. The poet is sometimes as surprised by new meaning in his own poem as is anyone else. Meaning from an interaction with a symbol is a new creation. It can be new with each opportunity. Taking the opportunity may be the measure of one’s growth.

If one views inward growth as a unique and personal journey, then what one makes of a symbol is to some extent unique and personal. A symbol may say something in common to all beholders, but the real lift and insight is beyond the range of verbal communication. Yet it is important that we try to share our symbolic experiences because, as responsible people, we need the check and guidance of other responsible people. All of us
encounter obstacles to growth. We may find new paths in the accounts of fellow seekers. It is in this spirit of sharing that I offer my experience with “Directive.”

Back out of all this now too much for us,

Those of us who undertake the journey must accept that, simply by living in the contemporary world and making our peace with it as it is, we may be involved in a way that blocks our growth. Primitive people may have suffered much from their environment, but they were not alienated; the Lascaux cave paintings attest to this. They probably did not articulate a theology, but they may have been religious in the basic sense of “bound to the cosmos.” With us, sophistication, rationality, greater mastery of the immediate environment have taken their toll in terms of a tragic separation from the opportunity for religious experience, i.e., growth in the feeling of being bound to the cosmos.

So we must go:

Back out of all this now too much for us,
Back in a time made simple by the loss
Of detail, burned, dissolved, and broken off
Like graveyard marble sculpture in the weather,

To go back, something must be lost. This is the key to the journey: something must be lost in order that something may be found. (May be, but not necessarily found.) And it is not an easy loss! Burned, dissolved, broken off. These are radical, searing losses. But they are the losses we must contemplate if the time made simple, spontaneity, the indispensable condition for progress on the inward journey, is our goal.

What follows in the poem after the time made simple has been achieved—an enigmatic symbolism, something to puzzle over, something that both is and is no more. A transmutation?

There is a house that is no more a house
Upon a farm that is no more a farm
And in a town that is no more a town.

Then we turn to the poem for direction.

The road there, if you’ll let a guide direct you
Who only has at heart your getting lost,

If you’ll let a guide direct you who only has at heart your getting lost! This is a big if; who wants that kind of guide? Don’t we ask for a guide who is certain of the destination, and then only after we are certain that it is a destination we want to go to? No, this is not the kind of guide many of us are looking for. We already feel lost. Why then would we want a guide who only has at heart our getting lost?

This is the ground on which the great religious traditions of the world have always stood. The tradition built around the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the one in which I grew up and which has the greatest symbolic meaning to me now, seems especially emphatic on this point. Jesus seemed only to have at heart our getting lost; he was mostly concerned with what must be taken away rather than with what would be gained. We find clues to what must be lost in such sayings as “Unless you turn and become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,” “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom,” “Cleanse the inside of the cup, that the outside also may be clean,” and “Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

A few general terms describe what will be received: heaven, eternal life, salvation, the kingdom of God. The believers of the literal word know what these terms mean; they have to. But seekers who are responding to symbols don’t know, don’t have to know, wouldn’t be helped by knowing. They are not too interested in meaning as bounded by the vagaries of language. Rather they seek a guide who only has at heart their getting lost.

The road there, if you’ll let a guide direct you
Who only has at heart your getting lost,
May seem as if it should have been a quarry
Great monolithic knees the former town
Long since gave up pretense of keeping covered.

Grotesque dream imagery perhaps?

And there’s a story in a book about it:

Could it be the story of the search for the Holy Grail, that great legend from many ages and cultures in which the object of the search is that symbolic cup which holds the source of spiritual life? In the version that comes to us from Malory, the Knights who search for the Grail largely pursue their missions alone, although they are gathered for the consummation of the search.

Besides the wear of iron wagon wheels
The ledges show lines ruled southeast northwest,
The chisel work of an enormous Glacier
That braced his feet against the Arctic Pole.
You must not mind a certain coolness from him
Still said to haunt this side of Panther Mountain.*

*“Connecticut where I live is full of very real and concrete towns that are no more towns, places in the deep woods which are exactly as described in this poem, from the wagon wheel marks on the ledges uncovered on the old wood roads to the springs and the children’s playhouses and the cellar holes and the trees which have shaded out old apple orchards. I can show you three or four on my own property here. And there is a ghost town a few miles away, lost in deep woods, with at least a hundred and forty cellar holes which watch as you walk through it.” (From a letter from a friend commenting on an early draft of this chapter.)

Along the way, as your guide directs you who only has at heart your getting lost, perhaps you will be chilled to discomfort, but you must not mind.
Nor need you mind the serial ordeal
Of being watched from forty cellar holes
As if by eye pairs out of forty firkins.

These may be the curious eyes from curious places that could add to your discomfort. In “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves” the maid had gone to the shed at night to get oil for her lamp, but all but one of the firkins which presumably contained oil held, in fact, a thief.

As for the woods’ excitement over you
That sends light rustle rushes to their leaves,
Charge that to upstart inexperience.
Where were they all not twenty years ago?
They think too much of having shaded out
A few old pecker-fretted apple trees.

The immature and the superficial may flap their wings in a way that diverts and distorts with a seeming excitement. Pass them by.

Make yourself up a cheering song of how
Someone’s road home from work this once was,
Who may be just ahead of you on foot
Or creaking with a buggy load of grain.

Why would you need to make up a cheering song? Would you by chance be feeling lonely as you get more and more lost? Then you supply your own cheer. You imagine that you are following someone just ahead—a simple person, a workman on foot, or a tender of a small farm—symbolically, people who never had much veneer or from whom much of the veneer has been stripped as it is now being stripped from you. Believing this, the song you make up can really cheer!

The height of the adventure is the height
Of country where two village cultures faded
Into each other. Both of them are lost.
You are now at the height where the artificiality of culture has faded away. You are not constrained. There is no certainty. You are on your own. This is the real adventure.

And if you’re lost enough to find yourself  
By now, pull in your ladder road behind you  
And put a sign up CLOSED to all but me.  
Then make yourself at home.

You must be lost enough before you can find yourself The test, maybe, is: If you can’t find yourself, you’re not lost enough.

Pull in your ladder road behind you—this is interesting symbolism. Could this be echoing Herman Melville in *Moby Dick* when Father Mapple climbed to the pulpit to preach that great allegorical sermon? Ishmael, telling the story, describes how this venerable seafaring-man-turned-chaplain mounted to the pulpit on a rope ladder and then turned around and slowly pulled the ladder up into the pulpit. Said Ishmael, “Thought 1, there must be some sober reason for this thing; furthermore, it must symbolize something unseen. Can it be, then, that by the act of physical isolation, he signifies his spiritual withdrawal for the time, from all outward worldly ties and connection? Yes, for replenished with meat and wine of the word, to the faithful man of God, this pulpit, I see, is a self-contained stronghold—with a perennial well of water within the walls.”

“Put a sign up Closed to all but me. Then make yourself at home.” You have lost some affiliations you once valued. But you welcome the separation. You are alone, and yet you are not alone because you are beginning to feel at home. But there is more, much more.

The only field
Now left’s no bigger than a harness gall.

Is this the farm that is no more a farm?

*First there’s the children’s house of make believe,*
Some shattered dishes underneath a pine,
The playthings in the playhouse of the children.
Weep for what little things could make them glad.

Weep? Why weep? Perhaps because as adults little things no longer make us glad? Or have we lost the capacity to be glad?

Then for the house that is no more a house,
But only a belilaced cellar hole,
Now slowly closing like a dent in dough.
This was no playhouse but a house in earnest.

The thing that man built as his abode is but a hole closing like a dent in dough. How ephemeral are man’s works.

Your destination and your destiny’s
A brook that was the water of the house,

Destination and destiny—two interesting words. They could be synonymous. But if one may choose among many meanings, destination could be the end of the journey and destiny could be the ultimate (therefore unachievable) goal. Paradoxically, at one time one might be at the end and the beginning of one’s journey.

Then water, the great symbol of wholeness. The house, the ephemeral, is gone but the water is here. And it is near its source.

Cold as a spring as yet so near its source
Too lofty and original to rage.
(We know the valley streams that when aroused
Will leave their tatters hung on barb and thorn.)

Cold, near its source, lofty, and original. Nothing old and shopworn here. This is new and fresh. It is not in doctrines and dogmas. It is not substantive and codified. To make the point clear we parenthetically note that we know all about the turbulent contention of historical ideas. But what
is before us now is too lofty and original to rage. It is not the confused and raging torrent of the valley stream after the waters (no longer cold, fresh, and original) have merged from many sources.

This is a painful confrontation for those who cling to the comfort and security of old ways, or who would like to remake the new world into an old image. Look at the past, yes; but don’t expect historical ideas to have cool freshness, to be lofty and original.

This is powerful symbolism. Cold water, near its source, lofty and original. This is the kind of water one would like to drink—a long hearty drink. But who shall drink this water?

I have kept hidden in the instep arch
Of an old cedar at the waterside
A broken drinking goblet like the Grail
Under a spell so the wrong ones can’t find it,
So can’t get saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn’t.
(I stole the goblet from the children’s playhouse.)

The cup, the Grail, that ancient symbol of the quest for wholeness, is a broken goblet from the children’s playhouse. It has the imperfection of the rejected and the discarded. It was once one of those little things that make children glad, the kind of thing for which many adults, immersed in cumber and Martha-like involvements, no longer can be glad.

And it is under a spell so the wrong ones can’t find it, so can’t get saved, as St. Mark says they mustn’t. What an awful injunction! What did St. Mark say?

Is it the fourth chapter of Mark? Jesus had just spoken the parable of the sower as he sat in a boat at the edge of the sea. Having concluded the parable, he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” And when he was alone, those who were about him with the twelve asked him concerning the parables. And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables; so that they
may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again, and be forgiven.”

Here we have the inner and the outer circles. To the inner circle, to those who have the secret of the kingdom, he explains everything. To the outer circle, those who know not the secret, he speaks only through parables so the wrong ones can’t understand it, so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn again, and be forgiven!

Poetry, my friend has said, is a way of writing in parables so the wrong ones won’t understand.

There are several “tests” suggested in other of the Gospel accounts. The one given in this passage in Mark is the most demanding, the most baffling. In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew the test is one of humanity: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me—truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.” And the reward to the righteous who meet this test is “eternal life.” But here, too, the righteous and the unrighteous are separated by the vivid imagery of the sheep and the goats.

In the third chapter of John, in the conversation with Nicodemus, the test is faith: “Whoever believes in him (the Son) will have eternal life.”

The requirement laid down in the fourth chapter of Mark is clearly one of spiritual growth; it is the route of initiation, of ordeal, a journey for which “Directive” is a guide. Could it be that such is requisite to being fully human, to the capacity for faith? Unless one perceives and understands, unless one is aware, can one, in fact, be human and believe?

All of this forces me to view this passage from Mark as symbolism in a particular way. Privately, to the inner circle, he explains everything. To those without he speaks in parables, symbols, symbols with which there must be a searching confrontation and a mutual response.

How, then, may we view Jesus symbolically at this point? I can see
two quite different possibilities and I find them both important. The first is Jesus as the greatest of the avatars, the symbolic consummation in one human being of the total Judaeo-Christian tradition—and what a tough and demanding tradition it is. Here is the one who could, with all gentleness, say to the woman taken in adultery, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.” And who could answer the question “And who is my neighbor?” with the Good Samaritan story. Yet he did not say to the woman that because she was not condemned she was within the circle of those who have the secret of the kingdom and to whom everything is explained. Nor did he imply that the Samaritan was such a person. He was, of course, the great teacher, and when he was speaking in parables he was holding out the opportunity for his hearers to proceed on with the journey. But there is the suggestion that only the complete dedication of the disciple will make it to the inner circle.

The second view is to see Jesus in this passage in Mark as symbolic of an aspect of people’s understanding rather than as people in their entirety. I find this view also necessary because there is something in me that hesitates to accept him as a man who is wilfully condemning the ignorant and the befuddled to eternal darkness.

With this reservation, what then is Jesus at this point in the story? Can he be meaning? Could meaning be what is speaking in this passage? If so, on what terms is meaning available?

To those who are without, who have not lost what must be lost, it will be enigma, confusion—meaning does not come through. To those who are within, who have accepted the guide who only has at heart their getting lost, who have travelled the road of grotesque imagery, the coolness of the Glacier, the curious spying eyes, the flutter of frivolity, the aloneness and self-cheer, and who have reached the height of the adventure where they are lost enough to find themselves—they have joined that group to which all may aspire to whom meaning comes through and is clear beyond confusion. But meaning is a stern taskmaster: one must aspire, one must persevere, one must accept the discipline of dealing thoughtfully with symbols.
“Directive” offers a promise to those who do aspire: when we have gone back out of all this now too much for us, when we are lost enough to find ourselves and have pulled in our ladder road behind us—then we shall have the opportunity to drink of the waters of wholeness.

*Here are your waters and your watering place.*

*Drink and be whole again beyond confusion*

Yes, here is the water to drink and be whole again. Were you once whole? In your childish naiveté perhaps? Possibly in your own uniqueness which you have denied—the opportunity to live in the light of your own inward experience? And what is beyond confusion?

A measure of people’s wholeness will not bring them certainty or tranquility (although brief moments of these delights may be theirs). *Beyond confusion* is the promise. Their state may be moving, developing, uncertain, even dangerous. But they will not be confused because they will be at one with the circumstance, both far and near. In fact, they will be the circumstance; they will no longer be alienated. Rightness, responsibility, courage will define their character. They will be bound to the cosmos. They will be at home in this world as it is, as it always is.

For modern people this is probably not achievable, not wholly, but one can move toward it. Depending upon age, interest and drive, the deepness of the set of attitudes and habit patterns, and other factors (some unknown)—depending on such as these one person will move farther and with greater facility than another.

No one can judge, from where one now stands, how difficult the next step along the road of spiritual growth will be. Those of good works, the upright moral citizens, the pillars in the church may find the next step of staggering proportions. Their seeming opposites—the unsuccessful, the misfit, the unlovely, the rejected—may take the next step with ease. We cannot assume with assurance that we are relatively advantaged or disadvantaged for any stage of the inward journey.

To be on with the journey one must have an attitude toward loss and
being lost, a view of oneself in which powerful symbols like burned, dissolved, broken off—however painful their impact is seen to be—do not appear as senseless or destructive. Rather the losses they suggest are seen as opening the way for new creative acts, for the receiving of priceless gifts. Loss, every loss one’s mind can conceive of, creates a vacuum into which will come (if allowed) something new and fresh and beautiful, something unforeseen—and the greatest of these is love. The source of this attitude toward loss and being lost is faith: faith in the validity of one’s own inward experience; faith in the wisdom of the great events of one’s history, events in which one’s potential for nobility has been tested and refined; faith in doubt, in inquiry, and in the rebirth of wisdom; faith in the possibility of achieving a measure of sainthood on this earth from which flow concerns and responsibility and a sense of rightness in all things. By these means mortals are raised above the possibility of hurt. They will suffer, but they will not be hurt because each loss grants them the opportunity to be greater than before. Loss, by itself, is not tragic. What is tragic is the failure to grasp the opportunity which loss presents. I find these assumptions necessary for the acceptance of “Directive” as a guide

For those who, having followed thus far, would be on with the journey, I submit “Directive” as a dependable guide providing they will let something develop between themselves and the poem, a new level of meaning about the inward journey, something unique and personal for each reader, a continually evolving awareness.

Awareness, below the level of the conscious intellect, I see as infinite and therefore equal in every human being, perhaps in every creature. The blinders which block our conscious access to our own vast awareness are the uncompensated losses we have sustained; and the errors we have acquired from our cultural inheritance, from the undigested residues of our own experience, and from our conscious learning. “Directive” would seem to say: Remove the blinders from your awareness by losing what must be lost, the key to which no one can give you but which your own inward resources rightly cultivated will supply. Then set forth upon your journey
and, if you travel far enough, filling the voids of loss with the noblest choices, you may be given the secret of the kingdom: awe and wonder before the majesty and the mystery of all creation. Then, and only then, will the parables be explained (the drinking of the cold, lofty, original water). I submit this as a hopeful hypothesis when hope is dim. I will bet my life upon it.
SERVANT-LEADERSHIP: CREATING AN ALTERNATIVE FUTURE:
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

—PETER BLOCK

[Technician asks Peter if he needs technology.]

I don’t need any of that, no. No power and no point; I’m a free man.

[Laughter.]

Anyway, thank you.

I like being here, I chose to come like you did, and so it’s an honor for me to be here. I have great respect for you, Larry [looking over to Larry Spears]; somehow you’ve managed to advance things and bring an idea into the world without commercializing it. And in this modern day that’s quite a miracle. Most of the ideas, once they get commercialized, lose their substance. They lose their meaning.

I always felt that once an idea gets popular it’s not useful anymore because then everybody markets it, they change their old binder cover, and whatever was new in the idea is co-opted and lost. So when an idea becomes popular, I have to let go of it and move on to something else. But you’ve held on to the spirit of servant-leadership, you’ve kept it vague and undefinable, which I think is a great strategic advantage. People can come every year to figure out what the hell this is, and by not answering, they’re forced to come the next year. So it’s both a clever marketing strategy and a stance in support of the spirit of it rather than the substance of it. [Laughter.] So thank you for what you’ve created.

Also, Greenleaf was also a model for me, and the model he was is not so much the idea, it’s just that he valued thought, he valued thinking; he
was a reflective human being. As time goes by the ideas matter more to me than the experience.

You say what’s your life about now? It’s about trying to change my mind.

The world doesn’t value that; the world values doing, it wants to know how. How do we do this. Questions of methodology. This culture worships the god of efficiency, the god of productivity. The question everybody has is, “How do you make this work? How long does it take? Cheaper?” All that kind of thing.

And so the thought that the thoughts matter seems important. If there’s something that symbolizes Greenleaf, it’s that he was a thoughtful human being; he knew that an idea would change peoples’ lives without specifying the form and nature and workshop and materials that idea requires. It’s an easy Yes to be invited here. The answer’s always going to be Yes.

So here’s some thoughts about our time together. [Looking to the crowd.] You came here for a reason; so did I. There are a couple of thoughts I want to share with you. The first thought is this:

Change your thinking, change your life.

And that means something to me, so my intention for this hour I have with you is to offer some thoughts that will change my thinking and maybe offer you a way of thinking also.

Also, you come for affirmation. These are fragile thoughts. The world as I see it, gets increasingly commercialized. The conversations about love, about forgiveness, about hospitality and generosity have little place in the public dialogue; they’re contained in small rooms. And so part of the reason to come to this is to say, well, I came for a conversation, a public conversation that in the rest of our lives becomes only a private one.

And so there’s lots of reasons. You also come to be together, to network. I want to kind of pay attention to that; there’s meaning to that. The ideas are useful, but without relationship or connection, they’re not rooted. Consider what I’ve presented: “Change the conversation, change your
thinking, change your life.” And you say, “Well, how do I root that, how do I ground that?” And I think it’s grounded only in community.

So I think, well, what’s the work I’m doing in the world? It’s about the restoration of community, which in this world is quite fragmented. The fact that you’re creating Centennial Community and putting the Greenleaf Center in the middle of that—it’s a fascinating thought. Because most of us have lost our sense of community and connectedness. We’re deeply isolated. It stuns me, thirty-five years into this work, that people are as lonely and isolated as they were when I started back in the ’60s, at the age of eleven. [Laughter.]

You have to imagine your life, and then before you live it, the act of imagination, the act of possibility is what creates the future, but it has to be rooted in community.

So I want to talk about both those things: changing our thinking, and building community. I want us to talk a little about what’s an alternative future. “What’s the nature of transformation?” is the question I keep struggling with. Most of my efforts at transformation have been mostly cosmetic; the questions I’ve always gotten asked are cosmetic ones of “How do we change the performance appraisal system?” and “How do we measure this thing?” I wrote an empowerment book years ago and Pepsi-Cola called me, and if Pepsi-Cola’s here forgive me for what I’m about to say, because I like your product, I like it better than Coke, and if Coca-Cola’s here, forgive me, because I like Coca-Cola also. [Laughter.] All right. So they call and they say, “We like empowerment; it’s become one of our core values. We’ve listed it as one of six values: teamwork, customer, economics... and empowerment. Would you help us know how to measure empowerment? Would you help us include empowerment in our performance appraisal program? Would you help us train for empowerment so we know what it is and we know our people are getting it and all that?” So those are all the signs to me of a cosmetic future. As soon as you start to go right to the practical, you say, well, this thing will pass too.

So the idea of what’s truly enduring is a great question.
What would really transform? My most successful consulting is with Portland Gas & Electric. That’s a place where I spent almost no time and they had huge changes. Most of my clients I spend a huge amount of time with very little change. I think it’s the power of an idea, and also just when it gets embedded in community, something changes. My intent is to both share the ideas and also get us connected.

One core idea is that the nature of assembly is what creates an alternative future. We don’t have much consciousness about assembly. We still meet in rooms like this; we still meet in rooms that are unfriendly to community, they’re unfriendly to aliveness. The walls are blank in most of the rooms in which I work. The walls don’t like that. I’ve been talking to walls lately, and they are very depressed when they have no aliveness on them. Wall says, “I was not put up here not to have access to nature or some art on me.” And so the walls are that way. They have no windows, so if you meet in a room with no windows you’ve just rendered nature obsolete. You say, “That’s okay Nature, we’ll take it from here.” The idea is, how do you bring people together, in an environment, a modern society, a glass and steel building society, and help them inhabit it in a way that brings aliveness into the room? So this to me is the work. It’s one thing to sit in a chair; it’s another to occupy it. This is where I learn from improvisational theater. They say that once you stand in a place, then you occupy that space. You make a decision to occupy the space that you’re in, which is another whole level than just standing there. The other thing improv teaches me is that when you’re handed a line, you accept it. You don’t turn it back; when somebody says you’re in a jungle and there’s a snake four inches from your nose and it’s raining, you don’t say to your improv partner, “I don’t like that one. Could you send me something else?” Which means to me that whatever life hands you, you’ve got to say, well, how do I respond to what’s handed to me, instead of wishing or demanding or hoping that something else comes along.

And so the room matters, and we have to figure out how to occupy this room and for us to occupy a room we have to get connected to each other.
Right now we’re connecting to me. And this is the opening spot of every convening. Everybody could say, “Who called us together and what did you have in mind for us?” And we do it like this and I talk about equality and partnership and empowerment and I’m always four feet above everybody else, standing; you’re sitting. I have a whole stage to roam on, this thing [microphone] comes off so I can move around, and so I have all this space, you have about two square feet, and so the whole issue is always one of land reform, all right? [Laughter.] And so before we can go any further, why worry about your connection with each other? Right now you’re looking at me, which means that the people you came to be with have turned their backs on you. If you think about the opening moment of how we convened, “Oh, I came to be with. . .What did you come for?” When you go home you’ll say, “The great part was the conversations we had in the spaces between presentations.” I always feel these conferences are meaningful conversations interrupted by lectures and small group exercises. And so this is the default culture. This is what the world hands [us]—we don’t complain about it; this is the way it is. You don’t go to Mars and say, “Could I interest you in peace?” There are certain things that are just a fact, and the patriarchal nature of the culture is a fact. Every room we walk into is always organized for patriarchy. It’s organized for presentation and display and PowerPoint and microphones. And so that’s just a fact and every business I know began that way so the default culture is always predictable. I know just what’s going to happen when I walk into most rooms. It would be lined up for order, for efficiency, for amplification of one person to other people listening; so you say well, I came here to turn that around, to invert the world. I’ve been thinking lately, I want to invert my thinking 180 degrees. Not 179 and not 181 but 180 degrees. And so one of the thoughts to invert is, maybe the audience creates the performance. Maybe the listening creates the speaking. Maybe citizens create leaders, maybe employees create bosses, maybe students create teachers and children create parents. Maybe the purpose for problem solving is to build relationship. In this culture we think the purpose of relationships is to problem solve. You hear people say, “Well, we don’t have to like each other to work together,”
which means, “Screw the relationship, as long as we get work done, I don’t care who you are.” All that conventional thinking, that the speaker matters, the performer matters, the teacher matters, that I’m responsible, my parents explain who I became — which is always interesting because then I always wonder who explained what they became, and then we go back but you have to go back to the first amoeba to find cause, and so then we say, well that kind of thinking is the problem. The thought that the person on top is cause, is problematic. We need to invert boss-subordinate, teacher-student, parent-child, speaker-listener, performer-audience. And so the first inversion is to turn that around. Suppose I radically changed the location of cause by 180 degrees? So now we have thought number three and a half.

[Laughter.]

You see if I care about transformation I have to change my mind about where cause resides. And you say well that’s not true, speaker does matter, parent does matter, teacher does matter, performer does matter. I know it matters, but what would happen if I inverted that, where would that take me? It’s not an argument about whether the speaker or the listener is cause, but you say if I treated the listener as cause, where does that take me? Well it takes me down a different path, which right now means you have to get connected to change the nature of listening in this room, because right now we’re organized for a patriarchal experience and the worst thing that could happen is that I would be good at this, and then you’d say “How was your first hour?” “It was great, Peter was great,” and then you’d be in trouble because you’d think that to have a great experience you’d have to have a great speaker. And so I’ve made a commitment to boring, dull, drawn out, and confusing keynote speeches, and I’ve built a reputation for that and I’m not going to give up on that easily. I won’t be talked out of my mediocrity! It took me a long time to even reach this level. We need to do something, so we need to do something to the tables, the tables are round. Most places at least. . . the auditoriums are the most patriarchal, where if you want to move a chair you need a toolbox. These rooms are lined up, usually the fire marshal wants us lined up, if the fire marshal had their way we’d meet outside.
But these rooms are lined up in chairs up and down and in really tight places the chairs are locked to each other because they get lonely and so they need to embrace each other (I’ve personified all objects, including myself in a way), and so you say well we don’t want lines, let’s do round tables, and then the next step would be no tables. So how would you really create a room easy for occupation and habitation? You create just a room with chairs with wheels that swivel, so the wheels mean I came here to move around, I didn’t come here to stay in one place emotionally, spiritually, intellectually. And I need ones that swivel because I want to look in all directions; I don’t want to spend my morning with my friends turning their backs to me.

So that’s all a notion that the way we assemble has enormous impact on who we become, on our spirit. The spirit of servant-leadership values the idea of surrender; it says that the action and the orientation is not where we thought it was, the cause is not where we thought it was. The book *Journey to the East*, I love that book, and every time I get lost I read it again, except when I lose the book. So let’s do something about that. You came by choice, and you say, well what creates an alternative future? To me the qualifying question of transformation is, do you want the future to be distinct from the past? If you say what’s the most powerful question I could ask people in the beginning of anything, it’s did you come for a future distinct from the past? We have funny thoughts about the future and the past; we think we need to honor the past, we think we need to respect the past, remember the past. . . we think we have to learn from the past. The inversion, I would say, is none of those are useful; all of those keep me embedded in the past. If I want to honor or remember or learn from the past, you say, “Let me complete the past. Let me complete it. Let it be there and have it done; then that creates a void and a space for an alternative future.” The only way the future gets created in a distinct way is through invitation. Somebody decides to come up. The fulcrum, the hinging point on alternative futures is whether people are willing to exercise choice or not. And so the idea of bringing people together is to have every moment a choiceful
moment. And you say, “Well what’s the work of transformation or creating a world that works for everybody?” (or whatever language you would have), you say, “Well how do you confront people with their freedom?” And that to me is a powerful thought. It only happens through invitation. I’d rather have two people in the room who chose to be there than a thousand who were sent. And most of the places you work in, in organizations, people are sent. I always ask people, “Are you here by choice?” “How many people were here by choice?” I ask groups, and they all sit there like this, in the middle-aged white male learning position, arms crossed, leaning back, “This too shall pass.” “How many chose to come?” Most places, other than this, nobody moves. Then I say, “How many of you were sent or nominated for this session?” and they all raise their hand like this, and I always wonder why they’re so enthusiastic about their servitude, they could just raise their hand but they’re like this [waves emphatically], “I was sent and I’m proud of it. God forbid I should have chosen my life in any small fashion, like coming to this meeting on my own.” [Laughter.]

And so the idea of invitation is very powerful. What constitutes a powerful invitation? One that says, “Please come, and if you come here’s what’s required of you.” Most invitations are too soft, there are elements of begging: “Please come, it’s going to be great, nothing much will be required of you, it’s not going to take long, we’ll be fast, it’ll be organized, Robert’s Rules of Order, there’ll be food, there’ll be drink, the seats will be comfortable, and if you can come late, come at all, leave early, whatever, please come. God bless you.” A powerful invitation is one that says, “We want you to come! Now if you choose to come, here’s what will be demanded of you. You’ll have to show up. You’ll have to engage with your peers in powerful conversations. You’ll have to leave your interests at the door. We didn’t come together to negotiate; the future’s not created through negotiation, it’s created through imagination. It’s created from a dream, from... a possibility creates an alternative future. So we’re not coming to negotiate. Leave your interests at home. You’re coming to engage in the
primary actions between you and other citizens, you and other people who came. If you’re willing to live by these requirements, please come.”

To me that’s a great invitation because then it gives you some traction with people. When you’re working with the world you need traction, you need leverage. The idea’s powerful but the experience is hard to create. So I like the thought that I only want to be in rooms where people have come through invitation, even if it’s just three of us. And so if you say what’s the strategy, step one is to say “organized by invitation.” You live with the anxiety, especially if you work in communities, which is what I do. . . anxiety that nobody will show up. So it takes you about a year to get up the nerve to make that invitation. In organizations it’s harder. You’re never quite sure when people say they were sent or show up, because when people say, “Please come Friday at two o’clock” in an organization, everybody comes. And if you say, “This is an invitation, don’t come if you don’t want to,” everybody still comes. So when they come you have to give them a second choice, you say, “Okay, thank you for coming, we’re going to take a break in ten minutes, and if you come back after the break then you really want to be here.” The idea is to pay great attention to the nature of the invitation.

So what I would like you to do at these tables is have a conversation. You need to get connected before I can speak. Until you’re connected I can’t talk. My words mean nothing. That’s the thought. If I really believe that the listening creates the speaking, then I have to do something about the listening. You say, “What creates the listening?” Connectedness creates the listening. All learning is social. People cannot learn on their own. They can acquire information, but transformation, any learning that is life-changing, moment-changing, thinking-changing, has to happen in community, in connectedness, knowing that I’m not alone in this place. And every time I walk in the room I walk in alone. Even when you come to this conference sometimes. . . Every time I go to a conference or a workshop, as soon as I get to the door I think, “What am I doing here? I’ve got lots to do, my mind is half behind. Do I really wanna be here?” That’s why the back of the room
fills up first, even in church. People come to experience God and they sit in
the back of the church. Like, “I came to find God, but—maybe not. So I
want to sit in a location where it’s easy to get out.” This is a life stance,
right. How you do the mat in yoga is how you do your life. How you do
every moment of your life is a microcosm of the whole thing. Rooms fill up
in the back first, they fill up in the corners first. . . . so you have to deal with
that in some way. The choreography of assembly is enormously important.
We treat it as an afterthought; mostly we talk about content. We plan a
meeting, we think, what do we want to say, what’s the goal, what’s the
objective; most meetings are organized around problem solving. I’ve
decided to make a commitment to postpone problem solving. This is what
I’m taking a stance for in the world, the postponement of problem solving.
The only useful thing about problem solving is it builds relationship, so I
tolerate some of it. But you say “If I really want an alternative future, if I
came here for the future to be distinct from the past, problem solving can’t
get me there.” In this culture you’re not allowed to leave a meeting without
a list. I’ve been trying that and if you want to make people angry, say,
“Welcome, we’re meeting for two hours and we’re gonna leave here with
no lists and no action plans.” People get very lost. “What is this, some kind
of commie-pinko operation?” or they accuse you of being from California
or at the last resort the “touchy-feely crap” injunction is made: “I don’t
want any of this touchy-feely crap.” [Laughter.] Which means I don’t want
to make contact with anybody, I don’t want to talk about my feelings, and I
want nothing to shift. All of these are kind of the context to say, well,
maybe the way we assemble citizens together has more power than any-
thing we have to say to them. If I really want to replace cause and take it
from here, if I’m interested in land reform and say there has to be a renego-
tiation of the social contract every place you go, be of service, or forgive-
ness or love or surrender is what I showed up for, you always have to
renegotiate the contract, and you renegotiate that by paying careful attention
to the nature of assembly. And the round table, the circle, is a symbol for
that.
So what I’d like you to do is split the table in half, all right, so everybody gets a chance to talk, and I’d like you to share with the people around you: What are you doing here? What’s the transformation that led you to come here? And another interesting open invitational question is Who’s paying a price for your being here? It’s no small thing to come to this, but somebody else is paying a price for that. And I like the thought that somebody else is paying a price for me. Because it ups the ante for me, that means I have to take really serious the fact that I’m here; I can’t just be in the seat and be someplace else, I have to show up and occupy this seat, otherwise I can’t live with the responsibility [that] they paid a price and I found no meaning. And so when you ask the people the question, “Who else is paying a price?” it ups the ante for our being here. It’s designed to induce a certain amount of guilt, which is kind of a Jewish-Italian strategy. . . I thought it was just being a Jew but then every cultural group says, “No, I grew up that way. . .”—So how ‘bout taking about 8 minutes. Find at least two other people. In the choreography of assembly, trios are very effective because they’re unstable; it’s always two against one, which creates a kind of energy, and say, “What’s the shift you came here to experience and who’s paying a price for your being here?” Small group interaction. Do it now. I’ll ring the bell.

Now, let me ask you to stop. If you have any thoughts or comments you want to make, feel free to raise them. We have microphones that float; all you have to lose is the respect of your peers. [Laughter.] Not a big deal. So those are the two opening thoughts. One is a qualifying question. You say how. . . To me servant-leadership, the spirit of that, is a leadership that confronts people with their freedom. To me that’s an act of love. Now I do it in an aggressive, edgy style. So I’m not a role model. That’s a disclaimer. How I am with you is not a role model; I don’t like the role models. So style is irrelevant. I’m off style. Most of the style development for all of us—it’s over. I don’t want to change myself. . . I want to become more of who I am. And so it’s not about style. But the act of love is to confront people with their freedom, is to assemble, lead, in a way that says the
choice resides in all of us. What greater gift can you give somebody than the experience of their own power, the experience that they have the capacity to create the world? Which I kind of believe. When we say, “Let me create an alternative future,” well the act of creating is to say that I’m responsible for the world that I’m in; I’ve helped create this. Most of our public conversation is about blame. If you look at the media, it’s all about how do we find fault with somebody? Who did this? We don’t care what happened, we don’t care about the suffering, we want to know whose fault it was. And so the public conversation is about retribution. To me the idea is that public conversation is the conversation held with more than three people in the room. Whether it’s the media, the large community conversation, or our way of being together is 331 people, I want to change the nature of the public conversation. Well the way you do this is to confront people with the fact they have choice over all these elements, how we come together. Some people say I want to respect the past, I want to honor the past, I want to learn from the past, I’m determined by the past. . . Some people don’t want an alternative future, that’s fine, but then what are we doing together? Find another room to be in; we want to be in a room where the future is waiting to be created. It’s always created out of nothing. There’s a void. Every time you complete the past, every time you figure out well let me create an alternative future, there’s always an empty space. The reason I choose safety is that empty space frightens me. The reason I stay busy, the reason I now have my cell phone wired to my body, implanted in my body, is what would I do? I’ve been thinking lately. . . now when we hold meetings you say, “Why don’t we put the cell phones on silent. Why don’t we turn off the cell phones? Either turn it off or let me answer it.” I’ve done that a couple of times: “Can I answer it?” “Sure.” I answer it and say, “Can’t you leave this person alone? All they want is a couple of days by themselves. Is your grubby little need so central?” (Like I say, this is not a style issue.) [Laughter.] You say, “Well I keep busy, cell phone, lists, Blackberry. . .” Now you see all these guys with their hands below the desk going like this [gestures], I can’t help thinking when they’re doing that it’s got something to do with something more than a Blackberry, but they’re
going like this all the time. . . I’m afraid of the empty space, afraid of my own silence, afraid of the void.

What you’re selling to the world in servant-leadership is allowing people to experience the act of creating something on their own. To create something I have to be willing to tolerate the anxiety that comes with that empty space. Well what do you mean? Every time if you advocate servant-leadership people are gonna want you to define it. They want to find safety even in the midst of adventure. You say, “I’m here to serve you,” and they’ll say, “What do you mean by that, could you define exactly what your role is and what my role is in your service? And what’s expected of me, what do you have in mind for me?” Then my answer for that is to say, “I have nothing in mind for you.” Now people feel abandoned when you do that. They want you to have something in mind; they want their Mommy, they want their mentor, they want their Daddy, that’s what leadership’s all about is an escape from freedom, and they want you there so they can project qualities onto you. And then we collude with it by training people. The water bottle is the symbol of that for me. You can’t go to a meeting without water bottles. I don’t see them here; must be a special meeting. They have nipples on them, if you noticed them, and I say what the hell is this about? [Laughter.] If I’m Lance Armstrong in the Tour de France maybe I want to suck on a water bottle and I need a nipple on it to keep it from spilling. But the path between meetings is usually not that hazardous. And at the end of the day they’re still sucking on ‘em long after the water’s gone. So I think something else is going on here: it’s a wish to be dependent. I say, “Look, I came here to give you choice,” and most people say, “That’s not what I came here for. I came for safety, I came for leadership, I came for comfort, I came for a predictable future. I want you to take the uncertainty out of the future.” That’s the path. And so in some ways you’re pulling all these supports out from people the moment you take servanthood seriously. It’s not that you don’t have to show up. I still have to show up, I’m not giving up the mike, I’m not saying okay we’re all in this together, what’s happening baby. You still have an intention that you’re going to live out, and so you
can say “Here’s the intention I came to live out, now what do you have in mind?”

And so to the question “Peter, what do you have in mind for me?” the answer to that is nothing. I have nothing in mind for you. You are not someone I’m thinking about at night before I go to bed, and if you are it’s not a good thing, okay. Because the night is the hour of the wolf and I don’t have kind thoughts in the hour of the wolf; they’re dark thoughts, and so you don’t want to be in another’s mind between 2:30 and 4:15 at night. You’re supposed to be up then, if you’re choosing adventure you’re supposed to be awake in the middle of the night; lots of us are, I know that, because television programming at that time of night’s gotten better. [Laughter.]

You say, “Well how do I confront people with their freedom?” By getting them connected to each other through powerful questions. The skill of servanthood to me is to get good at questions that no matter how you answer them, you’re guilty. No matter how you answer this question you’re on the hook for being a creator of the future. You’re on the hook for being accountable. You create questions so people will choose accountability. We can’t hold each other accountable. We think we can legislate accountability. We can do performance management, we can have rules of the road that we’re gonna enforce, but people talk about empowerment when all they really want to talk about are boundaries and limits, what will happen to me, we talk about consequences, there’ve got to be consequences; all of these are forms of patriarchy and they have no power. They have no power to create an alternative future. They have no power in the world. The question is, “How do I engage people so they choose to be accountable?” Well, questions do that. There are certain questions that if you start to answer them, you’re in trouble. No matter what you answer, you are responsible for creating an alternative future. The task of servant-leadership, in my mind, is, “Change the conversation, change the future.”

The work is to be a convener of new conversations organized around questions and entailing citizens engaged with each other. All right? And the
questions have to be ones that have embedded in them the notion that choice resides in the world. It doesn’t reside in leaders, it doesn’t reside in the cause. It’s not in the performer, in the parent, in the teacher; cause resides in people’s connectedness to each other, in individuals. Start collecting questions. People ask, “What am I showing up here for?” Well it’s to have a conversation I’ve never had before. “Well what is that conversation?” I mean the subtlety in wanting direction is just phenomenal. So you say, “I don’t know what that conversation is; I came here to be surprised.” All of that to me is part of the work.

The operational expression to me of transformation is to create a future distinct from the past. You say the act of love is to confront people with their freedom through the conversations they have with each other. Most of our organizations and communities are parent-child, boss-subordinate, mayor-citizen conversations — we think that matters. We think the boss-subordinate relationship matters, but I don’t think it does. I’m going to spend the next ten years thinking that maybe the subordinate-to-subordinate, the peer-to-peer relationship is the only thing that counts. I’m going to spend the next ten years of my life fussing over how to have an impact on how peers and citizens deal with each other, and let the bosses be. We put a burden on leaders and bosses that’s unbearable, literally unbearable. We make them the cause of everything. We think bosses are responsible for the emotional well being of their subordinates. If they have a depressed, low-morale team, it’s their fault! I would like to be in a world where the boss comes in and the subordinate says, “I’m depressed. I’m down. Things aren’t going well,” and the boss says, “Far out. Tell me more about it, I’m interested.” And after the conversation they say, “Well lookit, if you’re committed to being depressed let me know how I can support you. If I start to see you cheer up, I’m gonna remind you that you came in today with depression as a goal.” [Laughter.] I’m exaggerating slightly. Maybe people are responsible for their own emotional well being. What would it be like to be in a world where individuals were responsible for their own emotional well being, and we didn’t pretend that the boss was cause and
We didn’t think that the subordinates were waiting every morning for somebody to come in and light their fire. I always have this image of everybody crouched over kindling all over the world, waiting for the boss. “So what are you waiting for?” “I’m waiting for the boss to come in and light my fire, leave me alone.” And so that’s the kind of shift. And so you as leaders become conveners. You become social architects. And you get good at the nature of convening. And so that’s that.

Certain conversations have more power than others. What do you mean, “have a conversation we’ve never had before.” Well certain conversations have no power. Reporting has no power; explanations have no power. All my explanations are fiction. Even my story about myself is fiction. Certain facts happened in my life. I was born. I have evidence of that. My father died when I was 14. That’s true. Most of the rest is fiction. I was abandoned, I felt bad, I was lonely, I was lost; all the explanations I have about my life to me are fiction, they’re stories that I manufactured in order to ease the pain. That’s disturbing in a way, but for me it’s liberating. It means if those stories are fiction, I can make up a new story any time I want. And so explanation treats the story as if it’s true. Let me explain why I feel that way, let me explain what got me here, let me explain my history as a predictor of the future. I want to let go of that. Reporting, explanations, analysis, community studies, summits, all those things have no power. They’re interesting, and they give us something to talk about, but they have no power.

Here are some thoughts about conversations that have the power to create an alternative future. One’s the conversation of possibility. What’s the possibility I came here to live into or to create? Possibilities have to be unreachable. Most of us only set goals. I’ve worshiped too small a god in my life: to be efficient, to be successful. . . the first half of life I just wanted to make a living, have a relationship that I could screw up, have a couple of kids that wouldn’t be too hurt by the fact that my relationships have been a little volatile. . . Carl Jung says that what’s true in the morning is a lie in the afternoon. I love that thought. What’s true in the first half of my life is a
lie in the second half of my life. And so the question of possibility is a great conversation. There’s a conversation of ownership. Take whatever you’re complaining about and say, “What have I helped do to create that situation?” Beautiful question. “What’s my contribution to the problem? What have I helped do?” It means I’m an owner. Whatever I complain about, let me turn that question and say, “How have I created that thing?” So it’s a conversation of ownership. There’s a conversation of commitment. Commitment means, what’s the promise I’m willing to make with no expectation of return? That’s a commitment. Most of the commercial world, most of the living existing world, is organized around barter. What’s in it for me. Entitlement. The cost of patriarchy is entitlement. If you find people entitled, it’s not who they are; it’s their response to a high-control world that has something in mind for them, and their contribution to that is the wish for safety and protection. I want my Mommy, I want my Daddy, I want my boss, I want my mentor, I want my executive coach. You know, anybody who’s anybody’s got their own executive coach now. The dinner table’s getting larger and larger. I’ve got a financial counselor, I have a personal trainer who keeps me fit without my having to exert any effort at all. You can get yoga machines now that will put you into yoga positions where you don’t have to exert any effort. I mean this is the ultimate in arrival toys. I have a yoga machine, I have an SAT coach for my 3-year-old child; as soon as they’re out of the womb, they scream and you get them coaching for college, because everyone knows it’s always more competitive now than it was when I was 4... So there’s all this professionalization of care, professionalization of intuition, professionalization of love. And so you say that commitment is a promise with no expectation of return, that virtue may be its own reward. What a thought that would be. And so that’s a great question: “What’s the promise you’re willing to make with no expectation of return?” Beautiful question.

Now who do I make the promise to? To peers. If you’re in a leadership spot and you want to create choice, engagement among people working for you, then you say let them make promises to each other. Let them sit
in witness of those promises, peers, and say, “Okay, is that enough?” and that shifts the focus from boss-to-subordinate to peer-to-peer.

There’s a conversation of gifts, an incredible conversation. Most of my life is organized around deficiencies. I’m deficiency-minded. I’ve been working on my deficiencies all my life, and I’m unfortunately working on the same deficiencies now as I was 25 years ago. That’s how effective working on deficiencies is. I have a small problem with finishing peoples’ sentences. I don’t know why, but when somebody starts to speak I always think, “I can finish this sentence, if not better than them, quicker than them.” [Laughter.] I don’t know what that’s about; it may have something to do with arrogance, control, self-centeredness. Perhaps; but again, those are just explanations. And so I’ve got this problem, I think I own the periods. I rent out commas, I rent out colons, I am in charge of when this sentence ends, and I have to do it personally. I’ve been working on this for about 25 years with only marginal effectiveness. And so you say well, how effective is deficiency work? What’s that about? Why do we still do that organizationally? Why do we still work on weaknesses, why do we still give lectures on feedback, effective feedback? It’s got to be timed right, they have to be open to listening, it’s got to be specific, concrete, and measurable. It’s not about the person, it’s about the action. We’ve got people making a living on feedback. And mostly the feedback we’re thinking of is our disappointment in others. Why package my disappointment in the label of feedback? People always come to me and say, “Peter, would you like some feedback?” I say, “No!” because I know that they’re mad at me. Nobody expresses love, introduces love, by saying, “Peter, would you like some feedback?”—they just give it to you.

You want to say something? Give that man a mike.

John here: I was afraid we weren’t going to take your invitation. I wondered what might happen if you just let us think for a minute.

Peter Block: That’s a good idea. That never occurred to me. So why don’t we all think for a minute. It’s gonna leave me feeling useless, but I can
handle it. [Very brief pause] Minute up yet? [Laughter.] Thank you, thank you John. [Long pause.]

I like the notion that without a vision the people will perish. What would it be like if I was not only committed to your success, but dependent on it? See for the first 20 years of life cooperation’s called cheating, in school. And for me to succeed someone else has to fail. Because we have the normal curve. So if I got an A or a B somebody had to get a D or an F. And if I’d have been honest I would have gone up to that person that got the D or F and said, “Thank you. I’m a B student, you got the D or F. Because you took the hit, my getting a B was much simpler. I just want you to know your sacrifice did not go unnoticed.” [Laughter.]

I like the notion without a vision the people will perish, but usually that means somebody else’s vision. That’s a funny thing, so why not ask each individual, “What are you here to create? What’s the vision you have?” Now people get nervous: “Suppose we don’t have agreeable, compatible visions,” but I’ve never heard a vision that wasn’t embraceable. I’ve never heard an individual say, “The possibility I’m living into is to walk over people. To succeed at the cost of others.”

What’s caught me lately is the notion that the future is caused by imagination. An imagination of the life causes a leading of the life, rather than the leading of the life causes my way of thinking. And I just know it’s powerful, I never quite know how to get at it. I like the language of possibility. ‘Cause it’s hard. It’s the possibility I’m living into. . .A lot of this stuff I got from Werner Erhard’s stuff with Landmark and EST, you probably recognize it. . . But the idea that if I hold a possibility, or a future, of the way I want the world to be, then I bring that into the room with me every time I show up. I don’t have to work on it. . . it works on me. Now that to me is beautiful. The possibility works on me so I can get off my list, my New Year’s resolutions; I have no faith in my New Year’s resolutions. Lists I make are only things I don’t care about. If I care about something, I don’t have to write it down. And so the idea that I create a possibility and that we’re here to support each other in living out each other’s possibil-
ity. We don’t have to negotiate imagination, we don’t have to negotiate possibility. It works on me. Now how do I activate the imagination? By going public with it. It doesn’t count if it’s not expressed. It’s a daydream if it’s kept silent. And so you say well I bring people together to publicly share their possibility, or the future they want to create, and the act of sharing it brings it into being. It is an action step. We have a small notion of what constitutes action. We think if you don’t build something or tear it down or spend money or save money or order somebody around, you haven’t done anything. “Let’s have a meeting.” “Well I want action!” “Good, we’re going to have action, you’re going to get a new thought out of this meeting. You’re going to be clear as a result of this meeting about the future you’re trying to create.” That’s an action step. And so there’s a lot in the notion if my possibility is the restoration of community, which it is.

The possibility you hold always grows out of your own woundedness. It’s not by accident that this is the world you want to create. It’s out of our woundedness. Now the wound doesn’t go away, but it loses its power. And so only an isolated person would imagine the possibility of community. Some people are born into community; they’re extroverted, they’ve had context, they know where they’re from, they know who they are; they never come up with that as a possibility, because they’re living it. And so it’s another dimension, you say, “What’s the woundedness I have experienced in my life?” And then that’s what I bring into the world, usually the possibilities of that nature. And then I let it work on me. I don’t have to make a list or remind myself, I just have to go public with it. Going public means that two other people have to hear it. As soon as I tell two other people, I’m accountable. If I tell five other people I’m really accountable, and if I stand up in this room and say it, then I’m in real trouble. And the reason is because if you say it to the world you can’t control the response. And so there’s something about the verbalization of possibility that brings it into being, makes it powerful, makes us accountable. And so that’s that thought.

You say, “Let me stop working on deficiencies; what I see is what I get. What I exercise gets stronger. If I keep working on my deficiencies, or
if I think I’m going to help you with your deficiencies, I’m just making
those deficiencies more comfortable and at home in the world.” Even the
thought that I’m going to work on your deficiencies is a colonial act. Every
colonial nation justified their taking over with the notion that “We’re being
helpful to the people we’re colonizing.” Now we do this in small ways in
our organizational life. We want to be helpful. “These are my people!” We
have this funny language. “These people work for me, they’re my people.
And God, I love them! They’re so great! You wouldn’t believe it.” They go
on and on about how beautiful they are. “And I grow people! That’s what I
do!” This is the conventional. . . “I grow people! I prepare the soil, I water
them, and I protect them from the harmful rays of those above, and I’m a
people kind of person.” Well that’s loving, family, parental colonial talk. I
don’t want to be owned by you. I don’t want to be “your people.” I don’t
want you to have something in mind for me, because that’s an act of claim-
ing sovereignty over me. Every time I say I have something in mind for
you, it’s a claiming of sovereignty. You say, “Why do we do these perform-
ance appraisals? Why do we institutionalize that kind of a process?”
Nobody would go home and do it, nobody would say, “Cathy, honey, it’s
time for your performance appraisal.” I wouldn’t do that – well, I’d only do
it once. [Laughter.]

Would you say that “I’m doing this for the good of the family unit. It’s
not something pleasant, but. . .” You don’t suggest to them that they
develop some stretch goals. “Maybe, Cathy and the kids, maybe you could
work on some stretch goals that we would then talk about.” And then we’d
have our family gathering and appraisal. At the end I’d say, “In case of
possible future legal action, would you sign this document?” What is this
about? This is about sovereignty; it’s not about help, it’s not about love, it’s
not about care. My suggestion is if everybody wants to give you a perform-
ance appraisal, just say, “I pass.” “But I have to do it!” “Go ahead and do it,
I don’t have to be there.”

The point is, what would happen if servant-leadership had one simple
intention, which was to bring the gifts of the margin into the center? Suppose it was just that.

Now the beautiful thing about these conversations is, any one will do. If I held any one thing in my life wholeheartedly, I wouldn’t need to do all the other ones. They are all leading to the same center; they’re the same soul, the same love, the same spirit, the same source, whatever language you want to use. And so you say, “Well, suppose my only purpose in leading would be to bring the gifts of the margin into the center. I just love that thought. I have no idea what it means, but I love the thought. And suppose when we come together we agree for the next six months we’re only going to talk about gifts. And we do it in the moment. We do it with each other and say, “You know, here’s the gift I’ve gotten from you in the last ten minutes.” And you teach people to breathe that in. Most people, when they’re given love or given a statement of gifts, exhale. And they begin a story. And so that’s the thought. And then you devise ways of doing that. So the gift conversation has a lot of power to it. Why don’t we end meetings by saying, “What went well in this meeting?” Usually we end meetings by saying, “What can we do better next time?” I think, “Well there’s not going to be a next time. The six of us are not going to meet this way ever again.” And if we do meet this way again we’ll have different outfits on, and everybody knows that clothes are decisive. You get out of this notion of a scarce world. You say servant-leadership is an abundant world. It’s the economist that loves scarcity, and you say, “For that world of commerce it’s great, but why would I let the economists define the nature of our way of being together?” And so there’s just a lot in the gifts conversation.

Let me ask you, why don’t you share with the two other people you talked to, the question that matters most to you right now? It’s another great question. Let me give you a way to set up the questions, all right? Because when you break people into small groups they want to be helpful to each other, and that’s a huge problem. A huge problem, because help is just a subtle form of control. People want to give advice to each other. They want to tell you what they did when they were at your stage of life. They have an
answer for you, and it’s called generosity; for me it’s mostly a conversation stopper. And so whenever you engage people in powerful questions you have to set them up very carefully and tell them, do not help each other. Do not give advice. Do not mask your advice in questions: “Have you thought of this, have you thought of that?” Do not tell them what you did at this stage. Do not ask your daughter when she’s going to get married. This is not helpful. Do not ask your daughter who’s married, “When are you going to have children?” This is not helpful. These are devices. So most of my help is about control. I want you to substitute curiosity for help. Every time you have the instinct to be useful, helpful, to have an answer, to give advice. . . “But people want my advice!” I know, that’s even more pathetic. That’s the problem. You’re not only gonna give advice to the world, but you’re going to find people that act as if they can use it. And so that’s the setup for the question. You say, I want to change the nature of peer-to-peer engagement in a very detailed way. I do that by inoculating people against advice because advice stops the conversation and imbalances our relationship. And you say, “Substitute curiosity.” What does that look like? Ask the other person, “Why does that matter to you? What’s the meaning that that has to you? What’s at stake for you?” In a deeper sense you say, “I came here to serve you by valuing meaning over speed. Meaning over efficiency. Meaning over problem solving.” People say, “I’m a problem solver.” I know you are, but it’s only a part of who you are. You have to inoculate people against the search for the quick answer, by asking them: “What does this mean? Why does it matter to you?” Take about five minutes in a group and ask the question that is important to you. What’s the question I have that’s present for me right at this moment? Could be about your life or about this presentation or lack of presentation or whatever. Do it now. Act as if you understand this assignment, and I want you to feign enthusiasm. [Laughter.]

Now, let me have your attention. Let me give you a taste of the gift conversation. Let me ask you to stop. What I’d like you to do in the next minute is tell those two other people what gift you received from them in
the last five minutes. I like the notion that it’s all a microcosm. How do I change the world by changing the room I’m in at the moment? If I can create the world I want to live in in this room, I’ve done all I can. You say that’s too small, I know that’s too small but that’s all I have to work with, the room I’m in in this moment. Every time we get in the thought of how do we take this to scale you give up the aliveness, you give up the organic nature of living. Even though you’re only together five minutes you know each other much more than you thought, so just take a minute. Now when someone says something nice to you, just say, “Thank you; I like hearing that.” Don’t do your number on it. Don’t tell them that you were lucky that they evoked it in you, or that it’s an issue for you and you’re really happy you worked it through, and it means so much to me that you said that. All those are just talk. Just say, “Thank you, I like hearing that.” Got it? Make it real, and tell the other two people, “Here’s what you did in the last five minutes that touched me in some way.” Got it? Do it now.

My transformation is marked by the shift in my questions. So it’s not that the old ones ever got answered; they just stopped mattering to me. It creates a more human notion of what transformation is. It’s not that something gets answered or resolved forever. It keeps coming back; your life is lived spirally, so you keep coming back to the same issues, just in a deeper way. But in a very short time you say, “What is the question that matters to you?” And then you do the second thing, which is you say, “Here’s what you just did that touched me.”

What’s strange is that we don’t know how we touch each other. I’m blind to my gifts. And I have no way of knowing if you don’t tell me. And every time you tell me, people say, “Oh, you’ve heard this before,” and the answer is “No, I’ve never heard it before.” Every time you hear that you touched another human being it gets to you; in fact, it’s embarrassing. At your age you should be over that. It’s a mindset. To create an alternative future, a new conversation, to change the nature of the room only takes about ten minutes. This notion of time, and how long it takes. How long does it take to go deep? How long does it take for us to touch each other in
some way? Ten minutes? Eight minutes? Twelve minutes? So it’s all a matter of design and intention. And so that to me is very hopeful.

Any thoughts you have before I end with my strong close? [Laughter.] People always wait for me to get dynamic, and I always have to warn them, this is it. I am a role model for how introverts give keynotes. Create space for us all. Any thoughts, things you want to say?

Thank you for being here. Thank you for coming for this conference. The fact that you’re here more than anything gives support to whatever this notion of servant-leadership embodies. Showing up is everything. Thanks for the invitation and all you’ve created, Larry. God bless you and thank you very much.

Larry Spears: Thank you, Peter. You know one of my favorite titles by Bob Greenleaf for one of his articles is “Seeker as Servant,” and for me the talk we just heard and your life’s work is something that evokes the idea of seeking, and the way you serve all of us as a servant. I thank you for that and thank you for coming.

Peter Block’s work is about empowerment, stewardship, chosen accountability, and the reconciliation of community. He is the recipient of the first place 2004 Members’ Choice Award by the Organization Development Network, which recognized *Flawless Consulting* (1999) as the most influential book for OD practitioners over the past 40 years. He helps create workplaces and communities that work for all. His books offer an alternative to the patriarchal beliefs that dominate our culture and his work brings change into the world through consent and connectedness rather than through mandate and force.
SPIRITUAL CAPITAL:
KEYNOTE ADDRESS, 2005 INTERNATIONAL SERVANT-LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE, INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

—Danah Zohar

Good morning, everybody. I’m as happy as you are to be at this conference again. I think it’s my favorite conference. My second favorite is the conference that Peter Senge runs, every November or December, the Soul Conference or the Systems Theory Conference. What’s nice about both of these conferences is that they are more than conferences, they’ve built a community around them and you see old friends and there’s a great spirit of community at the conferences, and that makes them both very special. And the theme of servant-leadership brings out the nicest people.

I’m going to talk this morning about servant-leadership and spiritual capital. I think that servant-leadership is a very profound and transformative idea, and you must agree with me or you wouldn’t be here. But I think it could be more. I think it is the heart of what could be a whole overarching, all-embracing new philosophy of organizations, and particularly business, a philosophy that could help us do what has to be done, which is to reinvent capitalism. Capitalism and servant-leadership just don’t mix—capitalism as we know it. And yet capitalism is a very, very powerful economic system, and we all know that. So I want to turn capitalism on its head today, still calling it capitalism, but giving it a new philosophy to live by. And I call this new philosophy spiritual capital. And I hope to make it clear to you as I talk this morning what that’s all about.

I want to begin with a story from Ovid’s tales of Greek mythology. These Greek myths have a power to them that our writers today just don’t
have. They always manage somehow to say more than the words in them. And I find the myth of a merchant called Aris Kythan, a larger-than-life story, very much to the point of what I want to say.

Aris Kythan was a very wealthy timber merchant. He owned thousands of acres of tree land. But he didn’t have much of a soul. To him a tree was so many cubits of wood, and so many cubits of wood was so many dollars. (I don’t think he called them dollars in those days, but that’s what he would call them if he were around today.) There was one Aris Kythan’s land one particularly special tree beloved by the gods. Birds nested in this tree, fairies and spirits nestled in the tree, and pilgrims came and tied their prayers to branches of the tree. But one day Aris Kythan came upon this tree, and having no soul, he looked at it and thought, “This is one of the best trees I’ve got on my land, this will give me \( x \) cubits of wood and it will make me even wealthier than I am today.” So he took his ax and he chopped down the tree. Of course the tree withered, its branches fell, the tree died, the spirits had to fly away, the birds had to fly away, the prayers blew away in the wind. The gods were very angry with Aris Kythan. So they decided to put a curse on him. The curse was that Aris Kythan would become insatiably hungry. Nothing that he could eat would ever be enough to satisfy his hunger. Once he was afflicted by this curse, Aris Kythan began by eating all of his stores, but he was still hungy. So then he ate his wife and children, and he was still hungry. Left now with no possessions, no stores, no family, there was nothing left for Aris Kythan to eat but himself. I’ll use Ovid’s own words for this, because they have the power of the horror that overcame Aris Kythan. “Of a monster, no longer a man, and so at last the inevitable: he began to savage his own limbs. And there, at the final feast, devoured himself.”

For me Aris Kythan is the ultimate symbol of capitalism and business as we know them today, a monster consuming itself. Capitalism in pursuit of profit is destroying natural resources on which it itself depends. Capitalism as we know it is destroying our global environment. Capitalism as we know it is chewing up the people within it. And it spits them out when it’s
finished with them. Capitalism as we know it all over the world is leading to social and political unrest because of the inequities that follow in its wake, because once again it thinks only of profit, and not of the consequences of its practices. And finally, which is why so many of you are here today, capitalism is causing a crisis of leadership for itself, because many of the best and brightest are leaving business for non-profit organizations, or simply for farming, or crafts—more idealistic ways that they can earn their living and do something good for society. It’s difficult in today’s capitalism and business as we know them to be a servant-leader. Not impossible, and there are wonderful cases that we hear about at this conference, but it is difficult. And those who are servant-leaders within our present system tend to be lonely and isolated, unless they come to Indianapolis the first week in June. The Oxford English Dictionary describes *capital* as wealth, power, advantage, and profit. But capitalism has taken all these words, wealth, power, advantage, and profit, and turned them into totally material terms. Wealth is how manybucks we can put in the bank, power is our power to accumulate more bucks, advantage is our advantage over our competitors, and profit, of course, is our material profit. It’s all about money. In so many of the companies that I have worked for, I meet men and women who express tremendous stress and despair about this. They say that during the weekend, when I’m at home with my family, I go for walks in the country, I play with my kids, I care about the global situation, I worry about the state of American politics, I worry about the state of the world, but when I go into work on Monday morning I have to leave all that outside the door, because work is about making money for the shareholders of my company. This leads to a lot of the stress in business life, and the meaninglessness in business life, that are part of what is chewing up the people who work for business. Capitalism and business as we know them, particularly capitalism, was conceived by the English philosopher Adam Smith. And Smith had a very narrow concept of what it means to be a human being. He said that there were two fundamental things that were true about human beings. First of all, we are economic creatures first and foremost. We are born to truck, barter, and trade. And secondly, we are selfish creatures. We will always
look out for our own best interests. And these are the two primary philosophical assumptions that underlie the capitalist philosophy. And business has taken them up and practices them quite ruthlessly much of the time, again leaving very little space for the servant-leader who would serve higher motives and higher ideals. Wherever I go in the world speaking, and I say that business shouldn’t just be about money, people look at me, shocked, and say, “Well what else is business about? Of course it’s about money.” One conference I went to in Istanbul a few months ago broadened its base just a little bit, and it said that business is about getting customers. But why do you want to get customers? So you make more money; so it came to much the same thing. I have a very different philosophy, based on my commitment to servant-leadership: that business indeed is about wealth creation. Of course it is, it’s about money and making money, but the question is for whom and for what should that money be made? For whom and for what should all those enormous skills and dynamism of the capitalist system be used? My answer to that is that I see business as society’s instrument of wealth creation for the benefit of society as a whole. The taxes that businessmen often try not to pay in fact give us all that we’ve got in our very well-off Western societies. Those business taxes give us good health care systems, good education systems, and a wonderful infrastructure. The United States—well we’ll leave out the education and health because they’re not the best in the world, or at least they’re not freely accessible to everybody, but we certainly have the best infrastructure in this country. I also see the purpose of business as job creation. It keeps the whole economy ticking over; it provides employees with a source of income; it provides all the stakeholders of business with the wealth they need to develop their higher aspirations and values. This is a very noble purpose for business, but one not actually articulated by businessmen themselves. And it’s a pity, because they’re missing the boat. Business is good for society, but we need to raise the motivations and the vision of business so that business becomes an instrument through which servant-leadership can permeate throughout society. The stakeholders of business are not just the employees and the customers and the shareholders. The stakeholders are society as a
whole, future generations, the planet, and life itself. What a noble profession to be in, if only businessmen could realize and aspire to achieving these goals with the wealth that they so successfully create! I believe that the definition of capital interpreted from business and capitalism is too narrow. I believe very strongly that there are three kinds of capital that the wealth of business can amass. The first is, yes, material capital. Bucks, hard stuff. We need it, can’t live without it, society can’t develop without it. But the second kind of capital, which some people in business schools are beginning to talk about, is social capital. The notion of social capital was first introduced by Francis Fukuyama in his book *Trust*, and Fukuyama defines social capital as being measured by the extent to which crime is low in a society, trust is high in a society, illiteracy is low in a society, divorce rates are low in a society, and general sense of well being is high in society. Fukuyama pointed out the obvious: many of our Western societies are not terribly high in social capital. Here in the United States there are millions of Americans without adequate healthcare, and our state education system is a bit of a disaster. The wealth that business is making has not gone into building social capital of the same high standard as the material capital that it is generating. But I’m here to talk about a third kind of a capital, that I call spiritual capital. Spiritual capital is reflected in what we believe in, what we exist for, what we aspire to, and what we take responsibility for. It’s captured in the extent to which our business activities reflect our deepest meanings, our deepest values, our most profound purposes, and again, our most serious responsibilities. I argue in my work that spiritual capital is the bedrock of both social and material capital; that without meanings and values and profound purposes and a sense of responsibility we cannot build a society high in trust, low in divorce, low in litigation, low in illiteracy, etc. And I argue further that without spiritual capital, even our material capital is going to be undermined. That monster will end up consuming itself.

I picture this like a wedding cake, if you want a visual image of it, where the spiritual capital is the big bottom tier of the cake, and social capital the middle tier, and then material capital the little bit at the top. The
importance is on that foundational bottom layer; without it the cake collapses. I also believe that each of these kinds of capital is driven by one of three main kinds of intelligence that human beings have. Material capital uses our IQ, our rational, logical, problem solving thinking. We’re very good at that — it’s what our education system stresses, it’s what society has stressed since the seventeenth century in the Newtonian scientific revolution. Indeed it’s been there in Western culture ever since Aristotle. “The right man is a rational man. Man is a rational animal,” said Aristotle. And our IQ tests, as we know, have always been used throughout the twentieth century to separate the winners from the losers, the high fliers from the guys who are just going to slug along in life. It’s used to select those who will be officers in the army, go on to leadership training programs in management, become the heads of school systems instead of front line teachers, and so on. I’m sure that every one of you here knows that Daniel Goleman greatly widened this base of intelligence thinking when he introduced the concept of emotional intelligence in the mid-1990s. Goleman showed that emotions help us think, that without emotional intelligence we don’t really effectively use our rational intelligence. Emotional intelligence is mirrored by things like trust, empathy with others, emotional self-awareness, emotional self-control, an ability to notice and respond appropriately to the emotions of others. Many of you may work in companies or organizations that have taken on this emotional intelligence work. It’s got really big time throughout the corporate world and through the educational world. There are programs galore all over the globe in emotional intelligence. And emotional intelligence builds social capital. I was very excited when Goleman’s book came out in the mid-‘90s, because I had never been happy with the IQ paradigm. And I was thinking about this whole issue of wealth and wealth creation and the uses of wealth, and these three kinds of capital. But I couldn’t quite at first put my finger on why it was that Goleman’s work left me feeling just slightly dissatisfied. I felt there was more to say. This unease was crystallized for me one night, about a year or two after I’d read Emotional Intelligence, by my five-year-old son. I was putting my son to bed one evening, tucking him in, reading him his story, and out of the blue
came the question, “Mommy, why do I have a life?” I was knocked back, as any parent would be by such a question, and was unable to give him an answer immediately. Within Ivan’s question, “Why do I have a life,” I reflected, there were really four subsidiary questions. The child was asking me, in his own way, “What is a human life, Mommy,” i.e., “What is the meaning of life?” He was asking me, “Mommy, what is my life for?”—i.e., “What is the purpose of my own life?” He was asking me, “Mommy, what should I do with my life?” This was about the vision he was going to have, the aspiration he was going to have as he grew up. And he was also asking me, “Mommy, what kind of a life should I lead, what kind of a man should I be when I grow up?” And that reflected a concern with what values he should adopt. So in this question, “Why do I have a life,” the child was asking about the meaning, the purpose, the vision, and the values that lie behind the human life. None of these were things that the *Emotional Intelligence* book on its own addressed, and I thought, this is what is the missing piece—meaning, purpose, vision, and values. I decided to call this, at the time, spiritual intelligence. Not spiritual in a sense having anything to do with religion; I don’t think you have to believe in God, even, or belong to any religious group to be spiritually intelligent. Unfortunately all too many of us know people who *are* religious who are not very high in spiritual intelligence. There is no necessary correlation. Spiritual intelligence, as I define it, is our need for and access to those deeper meanings, those higher values, those more fundamental purposes in life, and the vision that inspires us to lead lives of greater meaning and value. Spiritual intelligence underlies spiritual capital. It’s the intelligence we must use if we are to formulate and enact a new philosophy for business and capitalism. I chose the word spiritual because it comes from the Latin word *spiritus*. *Spiritus* means the vitalizing principle, that which gives life to an organism, an organization, to any entity. It’s what makes it live and breathe. And there has been a great deal of anthropological and psychological research in these last twenty-five to thirty years that has shown that what makes human life vital, living and breathing, is the fact that we have to have some sense of meaning, vision, purpose, and value to live our lives healthily and happily. It’s what makes
us definitively human. In short, I decided that the way to define the three intelligences is that IQ is about what I think, EQ is about what I feel, but SQ, as I call spiritual intelligence, is about what I am. And that’s the same with servant-leadership. To be a servant-leader, you must be a kind of person. You live servant-leadership. Yes, you think it and you feel it, but it’s no good thinking it and feeling it if you don’t live it. We all know that the servant-leader communicates best to his potential followers by being a walking example of the kind of person he is asking others to be. It’s not something you can fake.

I wrote my first book on spiritual intelligence to outline the basic idea. It was a struggle. People have asked me at this conference, “Which of your books do I buy?” Well I think they’re both pretty good. [Laughter.] But I think the second one is better. The reason is that in the first one I was wrestling with a new idea; I was stretching myself in every dimension of my being; and as one is doing when carving out a new idea, there wasn’t always that crystal-clear clarity of everything falling into place. With the second book, which came four years later and took all of those four years to write, I got clearer about how spiritual intelligence relates to emotional intelligence, and I got clearer about the driving transformative principles of spiritual intelligence and how they relate to this concept of spiritual capital — the capital that, if business were to acquire it and build it, would transform society, business, and capitalism itself, and transform those who work within the large organizations of this world. I looked for the transformative principles. I found twelve. I didn’t just pick them out of the air. My first passion in life was quantum physics, and I spent all my teenage years doing mad scientist experiments in my bedroom, and was inspired. I had lost my faith in Christianity by the age of twelve, and quantum physics stepped in to fill the gap for a few years. I looked to quantum physics as a new language, a new set of metaphors, a new set of images, a new set of ideas that could help me answer the kinds of questions that my five-year-old son was asking: Why do I have a life, what does it mean to be here, what is a human life? Later, because of my passion for physics, I also got interested in chaos
and complexity science. I don’t know how sophisticated you people are about these new sciences, but the new sciences of the twentieth century give us a radically new paradigm for thinking about physical reality. Instead of thinking about discrete atoms that bump into each other and conflict with each other, it talks about patterns of dynamic energy being the basic building blocks of the universe. And these patterns of dynamic energy overlap and combine and self-organize and have power from within; they’re in constant dynamic dialogue with the environment around them, as well as with each other; they thrive on mutations, difference; they have a sense of purpose about them; they are self-organizing in a particular direction that builds ever greater complexity. I did a bit of research and found that, as a complexity scientist or a quantum scientist would define us, we are complex adaptive systems, biologically, without question. All of life is called a complex, adaptive system, because it has these properties of creating more order, more information, being self-organizing, holistic, thriving on mutation, etc. Totally different from the old bleak Newtonian picture that had inspired Adam Smith when he defined the principles of capitalism. Recent neurological research has shown that there is both quantum and complex activity in the brain, particularly when we are thinking creatively. Complex systems are poised at what they call the edge of chaos. Not like the edge of this lectern, but the meeting points between order and disorder, between something being so boring that it loses us completely, or something being so chaotic that we can’t deal with it. And as I said, they’re the point in nature where new order and new information, i.e. where creativity, take place. Ten principles define the behavior of these complex adaptive systems, which we in fact are walking versions of. I felt that these, because of the characteristics they have and the role they play in creativity, were the ten principles that underlie spiritual intelligence. I added two more, drawing from the great spiritual traditions of all the peoples on this planet. I think that these twelve principles, which are conscious complex adaptive systems, are the driving forces that allow us to raise our motivations, to transform ourselves, our institutions, and our business lives, and to become creative in the way that is necessary in these times of ours, which are themselves
poised at the edge of chaos. I want to run through these twelve principles for you as the building blocks of how you create spiritual capital.

I want to begin by saying that it is my opinion and that of others whom I have read, that our society, and business in particular, is driven at present by four negative principles: fear, greed, anger, and self-assertion. Fear, greed, anger, and self-assertion. There is a great deal of fear in business life. Fear of making mistakes, fear of losing money, fear of the anger of the boss, fear of losing one’s job, fear of getting it wrong. There is, behind the entire capitalist system as we know it, nothing but craving, and it drives this whole consumer materialist society. Business is constantly trying not to meet our genuine needs with quality products necessarily, but to create false needs in us where we will crave the products that it spews out. Our teenagers today dress themselves in Nike shoes and, oh, I don’t know what all these various brands are, but someone has written a book, *Brandchildren* I believe, I mean a child these days, a teenager, goes around as a sort of mobile advertising unit. They define themselves in terms of products, spewed out by a consumer-driven, materialist system that has created in them the notion that to be a man today, you wear Nike shoes. And if we’re to get beyond this, to raise our motivations to what I call the first four positive motivations, to move from fear to situational mastery, to move from craving and greed to integrity and self-mastery, to move from anger to cooperation, and to move from self-assertion to exploration, we’ve got to put some kind of energy into the system. You can’t change people’s basic behavior if you don’t change their underlying motivations. Motivations are kind of attracters of energy within the human system, and you can’t change those attracters of energy unless you pump more energy into the system. In my book on spiritual capital I use the image of a pinball machine, where the holes in the pinball machine are the attracters that define particular motivational states: there’s fear, there’s anger, there’s greed, there’s self-assertion, and the balls are falling into them, and if we want to shift those balls out of those holes, we pull back the string and fire a new ball in and then all the balls go like this [makes wild gestures with hands] and they can fall into
new and higher pockets. What is the energy that we shoot into a motivational system to shift those motivations? My answer is, these transformative principles of spiritual intelligence. So if we want to shift organizational culture, we do so by finding ways to embody these twelve principles.

The first transformative principle of spiritual intelligence is self-awareness. Not in the emotional sense—that’s necessary, but it’s not enough for what I’m talking about. I’m talking about awareness that I have a self in the first place, that there’s more to me than my ego coping mechanisms and my ego strategies and my ego cravings and my ego games, that within me lie deeper levels of consciousness that aspire to and are in contact with higher things. So self-awareness is literally awareness of the self—not the ego, but the self, which ultimately connects with the field of consciousness in the universe as a whole. It’s what puts us in touch with the deep stuff. When you are self-aware at that level, you become authentic. You know who you are, and by knowing who you are I mean you know what you live for, what you would die for, what you fight for, what you want to achieve in life, what your values are, what gets you out of bed in the morning, what gets you through the pain that every one of us carries in our complex human lives. You cannot be real, you cannot be effective, if you are not authentic. We all ultimately pick up a fake. Now the fake is not always a nasty, conniving person who’s trying to pull the wool over other people’s eyes; the fake often, more tragically, is just someone who simply has not reached this level of self-awareness and authenticity, but it’s available to every one of us.

The second principle of spiritual intelligence is spontaneity. Spontaneity has a bad reputation sometimes because it’s been translated by many people to mean “do my own thing, let it all hang out, act on whim,” which can be incredibly selfish and incredibly irresponsible, but it’s almost the ethos of the times. All of psychotherapy is about this. Learn to be me (by which they mean my ego); learn to express myself (by which they mean my ego); put my interests first, because that’s what’s authentic. It’s all stuff that’s got turned on its head.
Spontaneity comes from the same Latin word as the words response and responsibility. To be deeply spontaneous first of all requires a great deal of discipline and hard work. It isn’t whim-like at all. It’s more like the spontaneity of the martial arts warrior that requires incredible discipline that gives you a poise, like the poise of the Zen archer or the tightrope walker. And when you have that kind of poise, you are responsive to the moment. Think, later today, when you have a chance to digest today’s session and reflect, how much baggage you bring to each moment and to each meeting in your life. There’s your childhood experience, your prejudices, your assumptions, your fear, your fear of vulnerability, your fear of consequences if you show too much or respond too much. You don’t really meet other people from here [gestures to belly] when you’re carrying all that baggage, and therefore you’re not truly being responsive. Children are. That’s what’s so special about children, or one of the many things that’s special about children. They’re just there, in the moment. They don’t have any baggage, they just want to learn, they just want to meet people, they just want to see what you’re like. And then they explode with these embarrassing comments when they see what they do.

The third word linked to spontaneity, responsibility, means to take responsibility for what I see in that moment. Make it mine, own it, and act on it. We live so much today in a victim society. It’s somebody else’s fault if I smoke cigarettes, so I should sue the tobacco company because those nasty men sell me this poisonous stuff. It’s somebody else’s fault if my gums bleed because I use a new toothbrush, so I sue the toothbrush manufacturer because he hasn’t warned me. There are the most ridiculous examples in the American litigation system of people passing the buck of responsibility. We could go right up the ladder to the top in Washington where we say, “It’s Bush’s fault that America’s not on a healthy path today.” Well who is the American government? We elect them. You have to own your actions, and those actions need to happen spontaneously, from response to the moment, without the baggage.

The third quality of spiritual intelligence is to be vision- and value-led.
This is the aspirational part: to live what you believe in. Which requires in the first instance to know what you believe in, and that’s going to require a lot of reflection. But to live it, to aspire to it, to want to leave the world a better place than you found it, to want to make a difference. That was the answer I gave my poor five-year-old son a few weeks after he asked his question. I said, “Ivan, you’re in this world to leave it a better place than you found it. You’re in this world to make a difference.” The poor child was probably expecting me to say something like, “Oh, we want you to grow up to be a doctor, or “We want you to grow up to be a scientist,” or something like that, but this is what he got. But it is basically what human life is about: to make a difference. It’s what servant-leadership is about. To leave the world, in whatever aspect of it you live, a better place than you found it. And you don’t have to be Mother Teresa or Mahatma Gandhi to do this. You can be a taxi driver, a mother, a father, a cook, a shop floor worker, or a great leader. It’s to make a difference in whatever sphere of the world you operate in. Consuela told so many inspiring stories yesterday of people making that difference for their own children or for their fellows. One human being who lives by vision and values to make a difference changes the world.

The fourth principle of spiritual intelligence is to be holistic. This is a buzz word—these days everything is holistic. I imagine Nike shoes are holistic in their advertising campaigns, but it does have a real meaning. In quantum physics, which is where the sense of holism originally comes from, the great quantum physicist David Bohm said there is no such thing as separation in this universe. Everything is intertwined with, interwoven with, and impacts upon everything else. I am defined in terms of you, you are defined in terms of me. We are in a field of consciousness, a field of meaning. And in energy fields, everything impinges upon, everything is defined in terms of, everything else in the field. What is the meaning of this holism? It means that I know that what I do matters. What I think matters. What I feel matters. If I want to change the world, I change myself first. Transformation begins right here. And there’s nothing unimportant or use-
less about it, and no excuse for saying, “I can’t make a difference in this world because those guys are in charge and they don’t give me the chance...” One person can make one hell of a difference, at least to those around him. It’s like dropping a stone in the water and watching that circle grow. Only in holism, it’s all of a piece. We’re one large system of meaning, consciousness, and value, so what I do can harm society or what I do can help society, but what I do does make a difference.

The next quality of spiritual intelligence is a celebration of diversity. We all talk about tolerance; tolerance is built into the American constitution. Tolerance is a mean concept, in a way, because when I tolerate you I say, “That’s o.k. with me, you be yourself, I’ll let you do it, I’m generous, be different, be yourself.” Celebration of diversity is so much stronger. Celebration of diversity is saying, “Thank God you’re different from me, thank God you rattle my cage, thank God you challenge my assumptions, thank God you make me reconsider my values.” Because when I meet you spontaneously in that moment, I meet your values, I meet your needs, I meet your difference, I respond to it, and it makes me question myself. My definition of man (and by this I mean man and woman, I’m just from an old school that uses old grammar) is that man is the questioning being. The ultimate questioning in this world is self-questioning. And a celebration of diversity is a celebration of the fact that people who are different from me make me question myself. That literally makes me grow new neurons in my brain. When I change my assumptions, when I shift my values, when I question myself, literally, the brain grows new neural connections to cope with the new information. If I don’t, if I spend my time with people who agree with me, if I read newspapers that just ratify my point of view, if I go to business meetings expecting my subordinates to agree with me, my brain shrinks. It doesn’t have anything to thrive on. There’s nothing there to make new neurons develop. So the best companions are the companions that aren’t like myself. The best fellow workers add richness to the mix by being different, by bringing in new ideas, new styles, new visions, new values. One of the things that I loved about my country when I was a young American was its
diversity. It’s one of the things that we’re somewhat losing touch with today, when there are people in America who want us all to believe the same thing and impose that on everybody. Diversity is one of the things that made this country great. Diversity is a fundamental cornerstone of freedom. Everybody has a point of view for some reason; you got it from somewhere. Everybody’s point of view, again this comes from quantum physics in a way I don’t have time to describe, but everybody’s point of view has value. It’s another stone in that pool with the ripples. So as many points of view as I can take in, the larger my brain gets and the more creative I become.

To celebrate diversity, I need another of the principles of spiritual intelligence, and that is compassion. Emotional intelligence talks about empathy. Empathy is my ability to understand another’s feelings. Compassion is a stronger word. Compassion means, from the Latin, “to feel with.” When I am compassionate toward another who is different from me, I literally feel that person’s feelings. That person may be my enemy. That person may belong to Al Qaeda. That person may be someone who took my wife or husband away. There can be awful things about this other person that I’m asking that we have compassion for. Because compassion doesn’t mean giving into. Doesn’t mean being defeated by. Doesn’t mean becoming weak in the face of. Compassion simply means being able to wear my neighbor’s moccasins. To feel his or her feelings, to know where he or she is coming from, and to know that those feelings, from that person’s point of view, have a validity, and I say this even about Al Qaeda, which is a very dangerous thing to say in this country. President Bush described those hijackers as cowards. Not many cowards give up their lives for something they believe in. They were wrong-headed. They did bad, evil things. But I don’t myself believe there is such a thing in this world as an evil human being. There are men and women who do evil things. But there is goodness in every one of us, because there’s a self in every one of us, and ultimately that self is in contact with the basic principles of the universe.

That’s why I personally am against capital punishment. I saw this very profoundly a few years ago when as a journalist I went into a maximum
security prison and spent the morning with “ordinary” maximum security criminals. These were people who had killed people, but only for money. Then I spent the afternoon with sex offenders. These were men who had abused, raped, and in some cases killed children. I was frightened going into the second group. The “nice” prisoners in the morning who only killed people for money told me, “They’re the scum of this establishment. You don’t want to go spend your time with them.”

I walked into this dialogue session in the prison, walked into a room of fifty sex offenders. I was the only woman and there were four guards. I got a blinding headache; all my assumptions and prejudices came to the fore. I saw them as ugly, distorted men. Literally, they looked to me like they had distorted faces. I was terrified and I wanted to flee, but I knew I wouldn’t get my story, so I stayed.

As the two hours of the dialogue session passed, I saw something that changed me profoundly and gave me this notion of compassion. Those men, though they could only express themselves through four-letter words, they hardly had language, all had a center. They said to me—they wanted this woman in the audience to understand them very much—“I’ve done bad things, but I’m not a monster, please understand that.” They’re called monsters. “I belong in here, I should be in here, but there’s more to me than you think.” They came up and wanted to be hugged, and I found by the end of the two hours I could hug them, men who had killed children, because, through compassion, I found myself able to relate to that deep kernel that is in every human being. I wouldn’t let them out. God forbid. But I went away loving them. Not loving what they had done, and not feeling they should be anywhere but where they are, but loving them nonetheless, and they haunted me when I’d left the prison. There are no scum of the earth. There’s scum in this world, without question, but there are no scum of the earth, and when we feel compassion we realize that.

The next quality of spiritual intelligence is to be field independent. This is a psychological term that means to stand against the crowd, be willing to be unpopular, be willing to stand up for what I believe in even if
everybody else says you’re wrong, you’re crazy, we exclude you. It means
to fight for what I do believe in. But this principle requires the next princi-
ple in combination. The next principle is humility. There are a lot of people
walking this earth who stand against the crowd, who make themselves
unpopular, who fight for what they believe in who do enormous harm.
They’re bullheaded, they’re stubborn, they don’t listen. In combination with
humility the whole thing is very different. If I am humble, I question myself
deeply. I listen to others. I listen to why they say I am wrong and I assess
myself: could I be wrong? And only when I have gone through the deepest
process of gut-wrenching self-questioning do I then say, Yes, I’m right to
fight for what I’m fighting for; yes, I stand by what I believe in. If I’m
arrogant, I become a dictator, a monster, someone who doesn’t listen, who
causes a lot of harm. If I question myself, I become a woman of integrity
and authenticity who stands by what I believe in and fights for it no matter
what the consequences.

The next principle is a biggie, and that’s asking fundamental questions.
“Why?” My son’s “Why do I have a life?” was a profoundly emotionally
intelligent question, and perhaps the ultimate question. But this “why” goes
through every aspect of our leadership. Why am I making this product
rather than that product? Why am I using this design process rather than
that process? Why am I treating my workers this way rather than that way?
Why am I distributing my wealth this way rather than that way? Constantly
undermining my own strategies and assumptions with questions. These
questions are subversive. That’s why senior management and senior politi-
cians don’t like them very much — they subvert authority. But I will
remind you that this country was born of revolution and grew great on dis-
sent. This country was the most subversive phenomenon to happen in the
political world when it was founded. Subversion made America. Question-
ing authority, not just for the sake of questioning it, not just for the sake of
raising banners and upsetting people and undermining people, but question-
ing because I deeply question the reason, the value, the vision behind every-
thing, because I want to get to the real heart of things. It becomes a practice.
My definition of man—where Aristotle said “Man is a rational animal,” I think man is a questioning animal. I think it is this questioning that has defined us, and this questioning which is driven by this need to understand, this need for meaning, this need for purpose. When we stop questioning, we stop living human lives. Children ask millions of questions, we know that, they drive us mad with it. Parents tell them, “Please stop barraging me with all these questions.” Teachers tell them, “Stop asking questions, sit down and shut up and listen to what I’m trying to teach you.” When Einstein was an old man he was asked what he most enjoyed about being a famous scientist, and he said, “Well, you know, when I was in school I was always in trouble because I was always asking what the teacher called ‘foolish questions,’ and the teacher was always saying, ‘Albert, be quiet and listen.’ But now that I’m a famous old scientist and everybody respects me I can ask all the foolish questions I want to.” Foolish questions don’t exist! There are no foolish questions! There are no inappropriate questions or wrong questions. Questions have a kind of integral value.

The next principle of spiritual intelligence is to reframe. That means just what it sounds like, to broaden the frame that you look at. Don’t look at what’s just under my nose, but look at what impinges on it and what I impinge on. Look at the bigger picture, both in space and in time. One of the biggest problems of capitalism and business today, and it’s affected life throughout society, as capitalism does, is short-termism. The idea that we look three months down the road when planning our activities—when those shareholder value accounts come in. Businesses don’t take the long view. They aren’t looking five years down the road, ten years down the road. Japanese companies look two hundred years down the road when they run a transformation program. We look three months. You can’t take care of the environment, you can’t take care of your people, you can’t take care of the planet and life and use your best resources and use your creativity if you live in a short segment of time. We’ve got to learn to take the long view.

And the same spatially. To realize what’s outside the window. I
addressed a group of executives from a power company in Britain. I got a little bit fed up with these men, the narrow things they were saying, and I sort of challenged them, I said, “Do you guys know what’s going on outside the window?” You know what they said? They said, “We don’t know what’s going on outside the window and we don’t care. Our job is to take care of our customers’ needs now, our job is to look after our profits now, taking care of society and the environment is the government’s business, it’s not our business.” They didn’t reframe. They just thought of their own immediate needs, their own immediate profits, their shareholder value.

The positive use of adversity is the next principle. We’re all vulnerable; we all carry pain in our lives; every one of us has a story; every one of us has a history. Many of us will be ill and many of us have lost loved ones to death. Every one of us has made a mistake, or many mistakes in my case, and I suspect yours. The positive use of adversity is to see these as growing points, to see them as opportunities. Doesn’t make you feel any better at a funeral. But it’s adversity in life that makes us strong. It’s adversity in life that makes us grow. I had an Irish grandmother when I was a little girl; she raised me. And she used to say to me, “Danah, you must eat a peck of dirt a year,” because I’d complain that the vegetables weren’t very clean sometimes. She literally believed that I should eat this peck of dirt a year because it cleaned out my system. She had some other medical theories that were even wilder than that, but anyway. But a peck of dirt does clean out the system. A peck of dirt makes us stronger. So that pain we bear in life, those mistakes we make in life, those setbacks, those losses, are there for a reason. We’d be such dull people if we didn’t have them. To use them creatively is one of life’s greatest challenges.

And finally, the last principle of spiritual intelligence, which is the one closest to servant-leadership itself, is a sense of vocation. Vocare, the Latin word, means to be called, vocation, a sense of vocation, is to feel called to serve. To feel called to make a difference, to feel called to do something good, to feel called to cook that excellent meal for my family, or to make that quality product for my customers, or that new thing that nobody’s ever
had that’s going to change people’s lives. It’s a sense of mission in life. It’s like the sense of mission that monks used to have when they were called by God to serve. And I do think ultimately when we have a sense of vocation, it is by God whom we are called. Not necessarily the God of any religion, not necessarily a being in the sky—God is whatever I hold most sacred in myself, whatever I most value, whatever I most cherish. When I serve that, then I serve my people, my community, my products, my customers, the planet, and life itself. A sense of vocation, which is what drives the servant-leader, is the ultimate driving force to build spiritual capital. That’s where our passion is, that’s where our commitment is, that’s where our engagement is. In the sense of, “I have to. It has to happen. I dedicate myself to this. I’m going to make this happen.”

There are two things I want to finish with.

I told you I see this as a new philosophy for business and capitalism, and in my book I call the servant-leader a knight. The reason I call him a knight is that I have always been very inspired by the Knights Templar, those medieval monks who served their God through military activity. I’m not lauding the exact purpose of the Knights Templar, but their style and their deep purpose. Unlike the knights who mostly fought in the Crusades who dressed themselves in rich garments and plumes and satin and fought for ladies and wealth, the Knights Templar took vows of chastity and poverty. Their cloaks were simple white cloaks with red crosses on them, they shaved their heads, they eschewed all wealth, though their order was the wealthiest in Christendom. Their purpose was to guard Christian pilgrims wanting to visit the Holy Land. My admiration for the Knights Templar is not to judge whether the Crusades were a good or bad thing; but that men who were men of the world, fighting men, strong, capable men, could give all that up to serve their God—that’s what I admire about them, and that’s why in this book I call the servant-leaders knights.

I’ve written a credo for business knights that I would like to share with you. Indeed I would like to challenge you to adopt this credo. I wish it would become the credo for business. If it did, business would join the
professions. Business would become a vocation rather than a sleazy running after money. Business would become like practicing medicine, practicing teaching, practicing law. It would have codes and standards, ethics and values. I’ll read you this and see what you think of it. It’s called the Credo of the Business Knight.

I believe that global business has the money and the power to make a significant difference in today’s troubled world, and that by making that difference it can help itself as well as others. I envision business raising its sights above the bottom line. I envision business becoming a vocation, like the higher professions. To make this possible, I believe that business must add a moral dimension, becoming more service- and value-oriented, and largely eliminating the assumed natural distinction between private enterprise and public institutions. I envision business taking responsibility for the world in which it operates, and from which it creates its wealth, and I envisage myself becoming one of those business leaders who are servant-leaders—leaders who serve not just stockholders, colleagues, employees, products, and customers, but leaders who also serve the community, the planet, humanity, the future, and life itself.

I would love to see that credo on the wall of every institution of business in this country. I would love every one of you to be willing to take that vow of the knight. Some people say this kind of talk is naive. Some say, “It’s hopeless, there are all those bad guys out there who want to carry on as they have been doing because the profits are so great, the opportunities so prevalent. People aren’t going to change; I try to do this and I’m going to make a fool of myself, I’m going to get undermined, I may lose my job if I talk like this in the company.” I want to finish with something Mother Teresa wrote about just this. It’s about doing something no matter what the consequences are. It’s about doing something because you think it’s right, and because you think it’s worthwhile. It’s called “Do It Anyway.”

She says,

People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway. If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish ulterior
motives. Be kind anyway. If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies. Succeed anyway. If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you. Be honest and frank anyway. What you spend years building, someone may destroy overnight. Build anyway. If you find serenity and happiness, people may be jealous. Be happy anyway. The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow. Do good anyway. Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough; but give the world the best you have anyway. You see, in the final analysis, it is all between you and God; it was never between you and them, anyway.

Thank you very much.

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SERVANT-LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY

—STEPHEN R. COVEY

In this essay, drawn from his keynote speech at the Greenleaf Center’s 1999 conference, Dr. Covey describes what he calls the four roles of leadership—modeling, pathfinding, alignment, and empowerment—using examples and a nautical metaphor. Covey says the true test of leadership is the one that Robert K. Greenleaf described, and that true servant-leadership produces servant-leadership in others. Stephen Covey was a keynote speaker at the Greenleaf Center’s 1996 and 1999 annual international conferences.

I want to say a word about this conference: it’s a beautiful illustration of win-win situations, because servant-leadership is the enabling art to accomplishing any worthy objective. It’s glorious to see these two organizations—The Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership and the National Association for Community Leadership—come together and to see others join together and to let go of the ego investment in words, semantics and agendas, to realize the transcendent agenda that unifies us and the transcendent values of respect and service, servant-leadership, and the enabling values.

My purpose now is to describe what I call “the four roles of leadership.” The first role is simply to be an example, a model: one whose life has credibility with others, has integrity, diligence, humility, the spirit of servant-leadership, of contribution. This is the most fundamental of our roles. Someone asked Albert Schweitzer how kids learn. He said, “Three ways. First, example. Second, example. Third, example.” Nothing is as powerful as example. I don’t care how much or how little you know. When you teach what you yourself are still learning, you also enroll people as a support for
you to help you live it. You give your knowledge to others by trying to live it; yes, it’s hard. You show humility: this modeling is the foundation of true leadership. People who genuinely care and who have this personal integrity merit the confidence of others.

The second role of leadership is pathfinding. That’s the vision role. That’s the role of deciding what your mission is and what your values are, what you’re trying to accomplish. The big mistake most organizations tend to fall into—and in many firms leaders tend to fall into—is to announce to other people what their mission is. Because if there’s no involvement of the people in forming the mission, there’s no commitment from the people. The mission won’t be the operative, powerful, empowering focus it’s intended to be. For true pathfinding, you must always study what the needs of people are. You must try to discern what the value systems are and how you can come up with a strategic plan within those values to meet those needs. That’s essentially what pathfinding involves.

The third role of leadership is alignment. Once you have chosen the words that define what your vision, your mission, your values are, then you have to make sure that all of the structures and systems inside the organization reflect that. This is the toughest part of the pathfinding role. Because once you realize you have to align structures and systems, once you realize you’re not just in some kind of vision workshop for the mental exercise, but that your organizational structures and systems will be governed by your visions and values—I’m telling you, you will start to take seriously the concept of coming up with a proper goal or vision or mission. Unless you institutionalize your values, they won’t happen. All you’ll do is talk about them, about the value of servant-leadership, about the value of community leadership, about cooperation, innovation, diversity—but unless they’re institutionalized, built into the very criteria of structures and systems to support the strategy, the vision, the mission that you’re after, they will not happen. That’s why that alignment role is so vital. You can’t come up with competitive compensation systems and still say you value cooperation. You can’t say you value the long term when you’re totally governed by short
term data. You can’t say you value creativity when march-step conformity is the thing that’s continually enforced. You can’t say you value diversity when really deep in the bowels of recognition systems are prejudices about different kinds of groups or people. But you can get commitment and involvement by many people if your value system is truly exemplified by your organization’s structure and policies. And if your values are based on natural laws or principles that are universal and self-evident, then you institutionalize that moral authority. You’re no longer dependent on the moral authority of a particular individual.

The fourth role of leadership is empowerment, empowering people. The fourth role is essentially the fruit of the first three. When you have a common vision and value system, and you have put into place structures and systems reinforcing that vision, when you have institutionalized that kind of moral authority—it is like lifeblood feeding the culture, the feelings of people, the norms, the mores—feeding it constantly. Now you’re really out of people’s way. You don’t have to be focused on morals. You don’t have to be focused on procedures; you have a few, but relatively few. You can focus instead upon vision and values and release the enormous human creativity, the human ingenuity, the resourcefulness, the intelligence of people to the accomplishment of those purposes. Everything connects together: the quality of the relationships, the common purpose and values. You find that people will organize themselves. They’ll manage themselves. People are drawn to doing their own best thing and accomplishing that worthy purpose, that vision. That’s empowerment!

Let me give you a visual image for each of those roles from a nautical source. The first role, modeling, is an anchor. That means you personally are anchored to the principles of integrity, of service, of contribution, of kindness, of respect, all these most basic principles and values. The second image is the image of a map with the ship going towards its destination. Pathfinding means that ship knows where it’s going. It has a destination. The third image, for alignment, is the steering wheel. When the steering wheel of this big ship is turned, all of the structures and systems, the huge
rudder, the trimtab of the rudder, everything else is geared to responding to the direction that has been given from this wheel. All the parts of the ship are coordinated, everything is focused, aligned. The fourth image, the one of empowerment, is the fully-masted sailing ship. With the sails set up fully, responding to the wind, you have the release of that human potential: everyone cooperates together to take that ship to its destination.

Now I want to introduce one other image: the image of a trimtab. The trimtab is the small rudder on the big rudder of a ship, a small surface, that when you turn it, it turns the larger surface. Sometimes the resistance of the ocean is so strong that you can’t turn the rudder directly. So you turn a small trimtab, which is easier to turn, that gets leverage against the water, and that can enable the rudder to turn, and when the rudder turns you can direct the ship to its destination. I love this image of a trimtab, because every one of us can become a trimtab figure—inside our families, inside our communities, inside our organizations. It doesn’t make any difference what your position is: any person can become a trimtab figure.

People often ask if modeling always comes first. My experience is that there is an element of modeling which comes first; otherwise there’s no credibility. But the highest form of modeling is when you’re carrying out the other three roles. You model when you help people get involved in the process of deciding the destination, the pathfinding role. You are modeling tremendous respect for others when you are willing to align structures and systems that affect you as well as everyone else, and you make yourself accountable. You have essentially modeled integrity. The greatest gift you can give to another person is themselves. You do this when you affirm in people their basic gifts and talents and capacities, their ability to become trimtabs themselves, to become change catalysts. When you do that, you show tremendous reverence for people, you show humility, you show respect, you show caring—that’s modeling.

The true test of leadership is the one that Bob Greenleaf described: you model these four roles of leadership so that others around you are empowered to find their own paths, and they in turn are inspired to help even more
people find their paths. Greenleaf said your servant-leadership produces servant-leadership in others. You don’t just serve, you do it in a way that makes them independent of you and capable and desirous of serving other people. Anyone can be a servant-leader. Any one of us can take initiative ourself; it doesn’t require that we be appointed a leader, but it does require that we operate from moral authority. That’s the great need. The spirit of servant-leadership is the spirit of moral authority. It says, “I’m not into me. I’m into serving you and other people. And I know for me to be a servant, I have to be a model or I’ll lose the spirit of servant. I’ll just want to have ‘the appearance’ of serving so that people will think more of me.” Then they lose the kind of humility Robert Greenleaf spoke about.

You can release tremendous synergy when you empower people, and you can do it most effectively when you come to any situation not with a competitive, win-lose attitude, but with a win-win attitude. It only takes one person to think win-win. Not two. So when you join together with other groups, you have different vocabularies, different kinds of agendas, a different focus and so forth. The natural thing with people is to want to be understood. No: instead seek to understand the other first. That’s the spirit of the servant-leader. I want to understand you. What are your concerns? What are your interests? Why don’t we both win? Now that empowers us both; it releases our potential. The key to empowerment is to listen to other people and to value their differences.

Let me tell you about a colleague I sometimes team-teach with when I’m in South Africa. He’s well known in that country for his successes, and his businesses are prospering. And with the new South African economic reality—with the global economy, the releasing of the sanctions, the dismantling of apartheid—a lot of businesses are really languishing. And businessmen press him. They say, “How did you do this? What are you doing?” He basically starts with a story of playing Monopoly with his son, beating his son in a very competitive game, and then really emotionally piling on, kind of gloating. And his son says to him, “Father, does it matter that much to you? It’s only a game.” And the father at the time was going through
Seven Habits training, writing his personal mission statement, and he said, “What has happened to me? What has my life been based upon?” It was based upon technique, power, training, education, but not principles. So he went deep inside all the rationalizations in his mind and his heart, including apartheid. And he really let it out. He tells businessmen this story. That’s not the story they want to hear. They want to hear techniques. They want to know what program he recommends. He says, “It starts with oneself.” And it does. Starting with himself was the key. He went from power leadership to servant-leadership. He became interested in others, empowering others.

There’s one last point I’d like to make. There are four needs in all people. We must survive in our body: we must live. We must relate to others: we must love. We must grow and develop, use our talents: we must learn. And we must also have value, make a difference: we must leave a legacy. To live, to love, to learn, to leave a legacy. Where these needs overlap, you find that internal motivation, the fire within. If you do not have an outward focus to leave a legacy, the fire will go out in other areas. Did you know that? People will be wanting more for themselves. The culture will divide and people will learn toward their own ends. But when you are making a living, building a family, having good relationships, constantly growing and learning, all with intent to contribute, to serve, the fire goes on. It ignites. If a lit match gets close to another match, it will ignite the other match. It’s the warmth of caring that does it. Then the fire goes on. If I were to take that match and put it to a candle, it would burn for a long period of time. What if I were to translate that candle into an electrical system or something even bigger?

Starting with your own fire, you can create something that will burn bright for many people and last a lifetime—through alignment of structures and systems, through the institutionalization of the principles we have talked about—you can empower others to live, to love, to learn, to leave a legacy. You can be a servant-leader.
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SERVANT-LEADERSHIP AND UNCONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS:  
THE LIVES OF SIX SOUTH AFRICAN PERPETRATORS  

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Servant-leadership practices are becoming increasingly more important as modern humanity makes desperate attempts to heal from the atrocities of war, interpersonal violence, and injustices that destroy the human spirit. Laub (1999) conceptualizes servant leadership in the following way:

Servant-leadership is an understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader. Servant-leadership promotes the valuing and development of people, the building of community, the practice of authenticity, the providing of leadership for the good of those led and the sharing of power and status for the common good of each individual. (p. 83)

The broadening view of servant-leadership embeds holistic leadership practices not only in the corporate boardroom, but in social and political interactions that rely upon, even demand the need for people who are dedicated to making the world a better place for all to live (Ferch, 2005; Howatson-Jones, 2004; Spears & Lawrence, 2004).

The focus of the present study is on research I conducted with six political perpetrators of the apartheid era who were found guilty of gross human rights abuses, were then imprisoned, and finally applied for and received amnesty. It also explores how former South African president Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu modeled servant-leadership principles in negotiating a restorative justice process through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to deal with the atrocities that occurred during the apartheid struggle. The truth hearings gave victims the opportunity to
make public statements regarding the human rights abuses they experienced from state security forces and liberation combatants. It also allowed political perpetrators the opportunity to be truthful and to request amnesty. Finally, the truth hearings created an environment in which victims and political perpetrators could bestow and receive forgiveness.

The idea of servant-leadership is an ancient one and many of its themes are seen in the writings of Holy Scripture. Jesus made it very clear that servant-leadership was not about power, but about serving others. He stated, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (NIV Bible, Mark 10:43). The term “servant-leadership” has its modern origins in a 1970 essay by Robert Greenleaf titled “The Servant as Leader” (Spears, 1998). An executive at AT&T, Greenleaf originally discussed the concept within the context of a corporate or organizational leadership style. Although Greenleaf never actually defined servant-leadership, he identified some central characteristics that describe the servant leader. These characteristics reflect a universal ethic of empathy, forgiveness, honesty, trust, healing, community, and service that goes beyond the corporate world and adapts well to many different types of human environments (Bowman, 2005; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002; Smith, Montagno & Kuzmenko, 2004; Tatum, 1995).

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP, FORGIVENESS, AND THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

An extraordinary example of servant-leadership practices was enacted in the restorative justice process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa. It has been over a decade now since the first democratic elections took place in South Africa on April 27 and 28, 1994. At the time of these elections, South Africa was a deeply divided society tormented by a violent legacy. Hope for a peaceful co-existence amongst the people of South Africa seemed an impossible dream (Burton, 1998).
Apartheid had alienated South Africa from the larger global community; the threat of civil war and racial bloodbath was imminent. The social and political situation in South Africa was at a crisis (Sparks, 1994).

According to Greenleaf (1977), servant leaders are leaders who put other people’s needs, aspirations and interests above their own. The servant-leader’s deliberate choice is to serve others. In one of the most stunning examples of servant-leadership in modern times, Nelson Mandela, upon being released after twenty-seven years of imprisonment, made the deliberate choice to forgive his captors and refused to bring retribution upon his political enemies. As the newly elected president of South Africa, Mandela now had the power to punish those who had injured him, his family, and his people for decades. But being a truly great servant-leader, Mandela put the people’s needs and interests above his own. He committed himself to end the violence, to heal the injustices, and to forgo the settlement of old scores. Mandela’s approach was revolutionary in concept. The nearly overnight regime change from apartheid, or legalized racism, to a democratic society must be credited to the servant-leadership of Nelson Mandela and his fellow leaders within the African National Congress. Through negotiations with the apartheid regime, the National Party, a compromise was reached. The African National Congress, led by Nelson Mandela, wanted to reveal the truth regarding the atrocities that had taken place during the apartheid era, and the National Party wanted amnesty for the people who had perpetrated these violent acts. The establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was the end product of these negotiations (Sparks, 1994). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created by the terms of the National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 in December 1995. The Act focused on six main objectives:


2. To name the people, organizations, and political parties responsible for gross violations of human rights.
3. To provide victims of gross human rights violations a public forum to express themselves in order to regain their human dignity.

4. To make recommendations to the government on how to prevent the future occurrences of human rights violations.

5. To make recommendations to the government regarding reparations and the rehabilitation of victims of human rights violations.

6. To facilitate the granting of amnesty for individual perpetrators of human rights violations. (Lax, unpublished paper)

In 1996 the Commission, chaired by Nobel laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu, began the arduous task of reviewing over 21,000 statements from victims and examining 7,000 applications for amnesty (Terrell, 2004).

Although truth commissions have been conducted in a number of other countries (e.g., Chile, Argentina, Uganda, Sri Lanka), no country has undergone the type of public truth-telling that South Africa underwent during the period of time that the Human Rights Violations Committee conducted their hearings (Villa-Vicencio & Verwoerd, 2000). The hearings were open to the public; they were televised, reported on the radio and in the newspaper. Every revealed secret, every disclosed atrocity, was made known to the public (Krog, 1998). The hearings gave voice to victims who had long been mute about the suffering they had endured during the long siege of apartheid. The permission to speak of their experiences and to share their pain was the beginning of healing for many silent sufferers (Amnesty International, 2003; Byrne, 2004). The Commission recognized that human beings live in a world where both victims and perpetrators must reside together. In the spirit of servant-leadership, the Commission not only empowered victims through giving them the opportunity to speak of their suffering, but gave political perpetrators a means by which they could bridge the crevasse of separation that their violent deeds had created (Tutu, 1999). The hearings gave transgressors against human rights the opportunity to be honest, to be filled with humility, and to come to the fountain of forgiveness where healing could begin. Spears (2004) states, “One of the
great strengths of servant-leadership is the potential for healing one’s self and others. Many people have broken spirits and have suffered from a variety of emotional hurts. Although this is a part of being human, servant-leaders recognize that they have an opportunity to ‘help make whole’ those with whom they come in contact” (p. 33).

The world watched in amazement as the hearings progressed. How could a people so deeply divided risk so much in their truth telling, be so transparent with revelations of torture and brutality, and be so generous in their forgiveness? These are questions not easily answered. Indeed, there are many who challenge the ultimate success of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process. It may take generations before the impact of the Truth and Reconciliation hearings upon South African society completely unfolds. However, even for those who doubt the Commission’s authenticity, there is little question that lives were changed forever, often in undeniably powerful ways, both for those who witnessed these events, and for those who lived the experience of giving and receiving forgiveness.

My Journey to South Africa

Along with the rest of the world, I watched in awe as South Africa demonstrated the servant-leadership principles of empathy, forgiveness, and healing through the Truth and Reconciliation process. Did the receiving of forgiveness transform people, even perpetrators, in becoming healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servant-leaders? The search for the answer to this compelling question led me to South Africa. I chose South Africa primarily to investigate one of the primary principles of servant-leadership, the commitment to establish a sense of community among people. I wanted to see if this principle held true for amnesty recipients – if indeed they experienced a sense of acceptance, and community, even among the people they had deeply injured. Finally, I sought the answer to Greenleaf’s genuine test of a servant-leader. He states, “The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser,
freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?” (1977, 13-14).

*Persons Interviewed*

Six political perpetrators were interviewed for this study. Of these six, five were found guilty of human rights violations, imprisoned, and then given amnesty after appearing before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and giving testimony to their violations. One of the six persons, a former Azanian People’s Liberation Army (armed wing of the Pan African Congress) commander, was never taken to trial and withdrew his application for amnesty. All of these persons were male, ranging from twenty-six to forty-five years of age. Five were black South Africans and former members of the Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA). One man was a white South African and a former police captain with the state security forces. These men each received empathy and forgiveness from their victim or victims, or from family members of their victim or victims. All of the interviews took place in Cape Town, South Africa, during September and October of 2002.

Making contact with political perpetrators was a difficult process. The nature of the violations committed by both state security force personnel and members of the liberation movements were such that most amnesty recipients were unwilling to expose themselves to further external or internal scrutiny. In addition, not all political perpetrators who submitted applications for amnesty to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission expressed a brokenness of pride and spirit, and it was such persons that were needed for the study. Through the cooperative networking of people involved in such organizations as Black Sash, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, Institute of Justice and Reconciliation, and Cape Town Press Club, as well as courageous persons who willingly came forth to assist in this study, political perpetrators who had received empathy and
forgiveness from someone they had injured were located in Pollsmoor Prison, in Gugulethu, in Khayelitsha, in Langa, and in the Kwa-Zulu Natal.

Two of the four perpetrators who received amnesty for the 1994 murder of American Fulbright exchange student Amy Biehl agreed to be interviewed for this study. Although the story of Amy’s death on August 25, 1993, and her parents’ response of forgiveness to the four men tried for her death are well publicized, I have given these men the pseudonyms of Nepi and Khali to give them a semblance of anonymity. Stone is the pseudonym for one of three perpetrators tried for the December 30, 1994, Heidelberg Tavern attack in Observatory, Cape Town. Khaya is the pseudonym for one of three perpetrators responsible for the July 25, 1993, St. James Church massacre in Cape Town. More than 20 people were severely injured in this attack and 11 people were killed. Khaya was found guilty and sentenced to prison, where he applied for and received amnesty during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. In September of 2002 he was again arrested as a suspect in an armored car robbery outside of Cape Town and incarcerated. I interviewed Khaya in Pollsmoor prison, where he awaited trial.

Letlapa Mphahlele (not a pseudonym) was the only political perpetrator I interviewed who did not receive amnesty. He was a commander of the armed wing of the Pan African Congress known as Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA) and gave the orders to attack the Heidelberg Tavern and the St. James Church in Cape Town. On October 21, 2002, I attended the Cape Town Press Club luncheon where Letlapa was invited to give a presentation to launch his new book, *A Child of the Soil*. Ginn Fourie also attended the luncheon. Her daughter Lyndi Fourie, a 23-year-old civil engineering student at the University of Cape Town, was slain in the 1994 Heidelberg Tavern assault. During this public forum, Letlapa revealed that he was the commander who had ordered the attack on the Heidelberg Tavern. He was initially unaware of Mrs. Fourie’s presence, but when he became aware of who she was, he stopped his discourse and apologized for Lyndi’s death. After addressing the press, Letlapa stepped down from the podium.
and went directly to Mrs. Fourie’s table where they embraced. The meeting between Letlapa and Mrs. Fourie was a profoundly moving moment, and through her tears, she said, “My tears are not for my daughter today, but for the realization that the man I thought so long was a monster, has shown me his human side. I am moved by his humanity.”

The final man interviewed for this study was Brian Mitchell (not a pseudonym), a former police station commander in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Midlands, who ordered an attack on a house thought to be an African National Congress (ANC) terrorist cell in the village of Trust Feed on December 3, 1988. The wrong house was attacked and 11 innocent people, primarily women and children, were killed in this massacre. Brian was convicted and sentenced to eleven counts of death for ordering the attack. On April 24, 1994, President de Klerk commuted Brian’s death sentence to 30 years, which opened the way for Brian to make application for amnesty.

Time and again, during the interviews and during the interpretation of these men’s stories, I was struck by the enormity of the psychological pain that we often cause others and ourselves. I was also struck by the realization of how healing the experience of forgiveness can be to both victims and perpetrators. It is through the stories of these six men that greater understanding may be gained regarding the transforming powers of empathy and forgiveness. It is also through their stories that we can see how the practices of servant-leadership can restore community to people deeply separated by violence and brutality.

FINDINGS

The six men interviewed for this study perpetrated violent acts against other people, resulting in serious physical injury, maiming, and in most cases, death of victims. Each man believed at the time that his violence was merited in order to bring about justice and stability in the midst of a chaotic political situation. Initially, these men defended and justified their actions as necessary, but as the amnesty hearings went on, they began to experience confusion, doubt, and a sense of shame for their violent deeds. This
occurred only after experiencing an “awakening” or realization of the humanity of their victims, a concept that Gobodo-Madikizela (2004) discusses in her observations of Eugene de Kock.

Typically, the perpetrator starts off with rationalization, to convince himself of the legitimacy of his acts. . . De Kock knew that what he had done as commander of covert police activity at Vlakplaas was simply beyond what most human beings could understand, it was beyond what he could understand. . . the cloak had now been removed to reveal what had been hidden before, not only from the public eye but from himself as well. This presence of an inner stirring within de Kock is what marks the fundamental difference between him and his former colleagues who appeared before the TRC. (p. 23)

All six men received empathy and forgiveness from family members or loved ones of their victims. However, four developed close, warm relationships with family members of the people they had injured. In the cases of these men, they not only received forgiveness, but they even received an invitation to form a relationship with the very people they had harmed. Such unconditional forgiveness is difficult to grasp, but the invitation to become a member of the inner circle is astounding. Greenleaf (1977) believed that the servant-leader uses every opportunity to serve others and to help them develop to their full potential. Through the bestowment of forgiveness and the invitation to develop an inclusive relationship, these four political perpetrators were given the opportunity to live legitimate lives. These four men expressed a greater feeling of self-forgiveness and hope than the two who did not develop such close relationships with family members of their victims.

The study was conducted using hermeneutic phenomenological methods. Five themes emerged from the interviews: (a) violence harms both victim and perpetrator; (b) denial and arrogance are used to protect the perpetrator from shame; (c) empathy creates an environment whereby the perpetrator can ask for and receive forgiveness; (d) the gift of forgiveness increases the ability to forgive oneself; and (e) forgiveness is a bridge to the
future. The forthcoming section discusses each theme and explores the psychological experience of receiving forgiveness, its implications for healing, as well as for creating opportunities for reconciliation. I must point out that forgiveness, reconciliation, and the opportunity for political perpetrators to live legitimate lives were made possible through South Africa’s decision to follow the practices of servant-leadership as embodied in the principles of restorative justice. Finally, I discuss the role of forgiveness in helping both victims and perpetrators create a more hope-filled future.

*Violence Harms Both Victim and Perpetrator*

It is common for most people to assume that a perpetrator who commits an atrocity has a serious psychological abnormality or dysfunction. They may even describe the person who has committed an atrocity as being evil or somehow inhuman. Gilligan states, “Our horror can lead us to distance ourselves from violence. Many may already have concluded that it is only a few crazy, abnormal, and freakish people who are violent” (1996, p. 30). Social psychologists refer to this as the fundamental attribution error and define it as the “tendency for observers to underestimate situational influence and overestimate dispositional influences upon others’ behaviors” (Myers, 1999, p. 83). Although there is little support for claims that psychopathology, dysfunction or deficiencies constitute useful explanations, the first reaction to an atrocity is often to vilify or demonize the perpetrator (Kressel, 1996; Staub, 1989). Some psychologists believe that this reaction may be a way of protecting ourselves from our own internal fears that we may have the potential to act in such horrific and heinous ways (Gilligan, 1996; Gobodo-Madikizela, 2002). However, labeling perpetrators as “evil” or “inhuman” simply describes the behavior, but does not give us a clear explanation or understanding as to why the person engaged in the violent deed. Gilligan states, “It is easier and less threatening to condemn violence (morally and legally) so that we can punish it, rather than seeking its causes and working to prevent it” (1996, p. 24). Foster supports Gilligan’s views in his study of perpetrators of the apartheid era, stating:
The weight of literature on atrocities finds little evidence to support the notion that severe abnormality is the cause of bad deeds. Even regarding sadism, the general view is that while it cannot be dismissed, only about five percent of all types of perpetrators (serial killers, torturers, rapists) may be classed as sadists and furthermore even this motive is not inherent but gradually acquired over time; a consequence of serial acts of violence. (2000, p. 6)

Foster (2000) also suggests, “Perpetrators may experience severe stress and anxiety along with denial, disassociation, doubling, and other defense mechanisms” (p. 7). Several psychological reports that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reviewed indicated that some amnesty seekers suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of the atrocities they engaged in and witnessed. Other psychologists have indicated the need for further research on the effects of trauma on the psychology of perpetrators within the South African apartheid struggle (Foster, Davis, & Sandler, 1987; Fourie, 2000; Nicholas, 2000; Orr, 1998).

Each of the men interviewed revealed that the memory of the violent acts in which they had engaged created internal cognitive dissonance and pain. Nepi revealed,

I find it too difficult to accept that early in my life I happened to be involved in a murder. I was trying to be more militant but it was very difficult because your soul is not militant, it is not a machine, it is human. Your soul feels, it feels things strongly, it remembers, and the memories, they never leave you. (October 3, 2003, interview)

Stone also revealed, “There is still pain in my heart. Maybe Mrs. Fourie has pain in her heart too. If we talk together, maybe the pain will be less for both of us. This would be a good thing to do. I am ready to talk with her” (October 23, 2003, interview).

Several of the men described the violent memory as a heavy weight that they carried inside them. Brian Mitchell described the horrific scene he
witnessed as a weight that seemed to suffocate him. In his words he describes the situation:

I was in absolute shock as I walked through the house and it became clear that the wrong house had been targeted and innocent people had died. As a police officer I had witnessed a number of violent deeds and death was common. But nothing I had ever seen in my life readied me for that moment. Blood was everywhere and the bodies of women and children lay where they had fallen. I think all sorts of things go through your mind, but once a person has moved beyond disbelief and reality sinks in, then fear descends upon you like a heavy black tarp that makes you feel like you are trapped and unable to breathe. (October 26, 2002, interview)

Khaya also experienced a sense of suffocating weight when he allowed himself to recall the events of the St. James Church massacre. He stated, “I remember the horror of bodies flying in the air from the explosion of the hand grenades. These memories haunt and weigh me down. The weight is inside haunting me. It is like a poison that needs to get out” (September 27, 2002, interview).

Each of the six men revealed intense internal pain, fear, and depression. They described this pain in several ways: “I felt a pain in my heart,” “I felt pressed with a huge weight,” “I felt as if I was being suffocated,” “There was a poison that needed to be released.” Although they attempted to hide that pain and used various emotional fortifications to alleviate the suffering, it persisted. Among the coping strategies these men used were denial, justification, and arrogance. The use of these defenses to protect their ego structure from shame will be discussed in the next section.

Use of Denial and Arrogance as Protection from Shame

Prior to my departure for South Africa to begin this study, I viewed several videotapes of political perpetrators testifying before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Although the Commission had not included remorse or repentance as criteria for amnesty, I was surprised and even
puzzled that the majority of amnesty seekers viewed on the tapes appeared to be untouched by their experiences. Many showed stoic faces that revealed no repentance or remorse. Most justified their actions as simply following orders, or that it was a war and that in war there are casualties. Particularly disturbing was the apparent lack of emotion in several amnesty seekers as they described the torture they had perpetrated on others. From all outward appearance they appeared unbroken, unrepentant, and even arrogant. Gobodo-Madikizela (2004) writes, “Some people when faced with their evil deeds, understand the moral implications of their actions, but to maintain some dignity to protect their sense of identity as respectable human beings, they cling to the belief that what they did was morally correct. One can get a sense that they are struggling with their denial of the truth” (p. 23).

Foster (2000) concurs that this type of psychological stance creates difficulties in attempting to understand perpetrators:

It produces something of a problem for those who constitute a third perspective – observers, social scientists, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – since their efforts to understand perpetrators adopting their detached minimalist styles, comes across as insensitive to victims. (p. 3)

Several of the men interviewed indicated that they experienced anger, frustration, and fear during the Truth and Reconciliation hearings. They felt that they needed to take a defensive, protective stance. If they didn’t divulge the complete truth they would be denied amnesty, yet they were fearful that what they said might betray other comrades. Khaya revealed that he felt sympathy for Dawie Ackerman, a church member who lost his wife during the St. James attack. “I felt sympathy for him because I knew I was the cause of his pain” (September 27, 2002, interview). However, Khaya believed that if he showed that sympathy it would expose his weakness, guilt, and shame to the people at the hearing and to the commissioners. He states, “I was not prepared to make myself appear weak because it would create more shame than I could bear.”
Erikson (1963) gives an insightful understanding of the fear of being shamed in public settings. He says, “Shame supposes that one is completely exposed and conscious of being looked at. One is visible and not ready to be visible, which is why we dream of shame as a situation in which we are stared at in a condition of incomplete dress – with one’s pants down” (pp. 252-253). Gilligan (1996) also touches on this deep internal fear of exposing one’s weakness and the level of shame that it creates when he states,

The family of painful feelings called shame and humiliation, which, when they become overwhelming because a person has no basis for self-respect, can be intolerable, and so devastating as to bring about the collapse of self-esteem and thus the death of the self. (p. 64)

After his amnesty hearing, Khaya asked to have the opportunity to request forgiveness from the people he had injured. He was taken to a small room where about 25 people were sitting in a circle and he was told to go to each one and ask for their forgiveness. He said it was a humiliating experience because it was so public; he was dressed in prison clothes with a chain around his waist that extended to his ankles and up to his wrists. It was difficult to walk, he could only shuffle, and he could only extend both hands, as if begging to shake the hands of the people from whom he sought forgiveness. Khaya felt he had no dignity or self-respect in this situation. He felt threatened and perceived an overwhelming need to protect himself. He said that the “eyes of some of the people had pity, some of the eyes had fear, and some of the eyes still wanted justice” (September 27, 2002, interview).

Five of the six men interviewed spoke of this internal need to maintain a sense of dignity and self-respect in an environment they perceived as extremely hostile to them. They used words such as “protect myself,” “keep my public face,” and “I could not show weakness” to describe the emotions they were experiencing while testifying before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Even when the environment was not hostile or denigrating, it
was difficult to let down their defenses and be open to the kind overtures of their victims.

Nepi described his first encounter with the parents of Amy Biehl when he, along with the other three defendants, was being transported to a conference room. They were in manacles and shackled together when they literally bumped, face-to-face in the corridor, with Linda and Peter Biehl. The couple recognized the defendants and offered to shake hands with them. Nepi said, “They offered to shake hands and all three guys shook, but I couldn’t. I don’t know why, but I told myself I just couldn’t. I shifted to one side, but they did not notice and I bypassed them” (October 3, 2002). At that time he wanted to shake hands, but felt overcome with shame, as it was easier to hold on to his prideful face than to accept their gesture of reconciliation.

At this point in the research several questions emerged. How do we move beyond our fear of the perpetrator and the need to vilify him or her? How do we break through the perpetrator’s defenses, specifically, the need to protect himself or herself from public shame? Finally, what deeds, words, attitudes, or acts facilitate the breaking down of ego defenses, allowing the perpetrator to experience remorse and a brokenness of spirit in response to asking for and receiving forgiveness? Discussion and findings from the investigation of the reciprocal role of empathy between victims and perpetrators in creating an environment in which forgiveness may be sought and received will be discussed in the following section.

Empathy in Asking for and Receiving Forgiveness

If we accept the premise that there may be a deeply human side to perpetrators (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2004) that they cover up with defense mechanisms to protect themselves from shame and humiliation, then there must exist emotional bridges or psychological passageways that perpetrators can safely use in order to ask for and receive forgiveness. Evidence of this came forth as the men revealed their feelings of empathy and connection that arose from being forgiven. Each talked about their feelings of
empathy for their victims as well as receiving empathy from victims or their families. Stone stated, “During the Truth and Reconciliation hearings I felt that I was sharing the pain along with family members of the victims. That day I felt pain for the victims.” Stone also revealed, “I said to myself that I must not be difficult. I must be open to what Mrs. Fourie is feeling so that she can understand what I am feeling – so we can share, person-to-person” (October 23, 2002, interview).

Khali indicated that he initially thought of Amy as just another white person, a “white settler.” However, at the Truth and Reconciliation hearing he had the opportunity to hear Linda and Peter Biehl speak about Amy and suddenly he saw her as a real person, a real woman with parents who loved her just as his parents loved him. Each of the men in this study indicated that as they saw their victims as people — with subjectivity, humanity, and personhood — it was more difficult to maintain a façade of pride, arrogance, or indifference. These men indicated that it was only as they felt empathy with their victims that they were able to ask for and receive forgiveness.

The Gift of Forgiveness and the Ability to Self-Forgive

Hannah Arendt (2000) shares profound insights into the redemptive qualities of forgiveness:

The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility is the faculty of forgiving, and the remedy for unpredictability is contained in the faculty to make and keep promises. The remedies belong together: forgiving relates to the past and serves to undo its deeds, while binding oneself through promises serves to set up in the ocean of future uncertainty, islands of security without which not even continuity, let alone durability of any kind, would ever be possible in the relationship between men. (p. 180)

A primary difficulty in healing interpersonal injuries for both victims and perpetrators lies in finding a way to reconcile the past in order to move
into the future (Borris, 2003; Holloway, 2002). Without forgiveness, both victim and perpetrator are locked together in the past without a pathway to the future. Arendt (2000) states:

Without being forgiven [and] released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victim of its consequences forever, not unlike the sorcerer’s apprentice who lacked the magic formula to break the spell. (p. 181)

Brian Mitchell revealed that upon receiving amnesty he requested the opportunity to return to Trust Feed to ask forgiveness from survivors and family members of his victims. However, the people of Trust Feed rejected his request for forgiveness. Brian spent a year in limbo, deeply depressed and mentally running away from who he was and what he had done. The turning point came when he received a telephone call asking him to return once again to the village and join the community in a day of reconciliation and forgiveness. The son of a woman who had died in the massacre revealed to Brian that in a dream his mother told him, “You must forgive my killer and not seek revenge.” This message brought Brian comfort and to a place where he could forgive himself.

One can pray and ask God to forgive you for what you have done. You can understand why you did certain things, but it seems to haunt you all the time until the stage where the other party comes and accepts your wish for forgiveness. If there is no acceptance from the offended party, forgiveness, self-forgiveness isn’t a reality. (October 26, 2003, interview)

Nepi revealed that without the forgiveness of Linda and Peter Biehl, he could not have forgiven himself. He stated, “I’ve always wanted to be myself, but just couldn’t get there. Linda and Peter were sort of a bridge over the trauma that I, not the militant, killed this lady and ended her life. I somehow have come to forgive myself because I have been forgiven for what I did and I can go on” (October 3, 2002, interview).
The theme of self-forgiveness appeared throughout the conversations with the men in this study. Each wrestled with the overwhelming task of moving his life beyond the violent event. However, the attitude of the public and the larger community was centered on their acts of violence. Even though they were storied as killers, these men believed themselves to be in possession of other dimensions that people were not aware of because the public could not see beyond the stigmatizing label of murderer.

Holloway (2002) speaks movingly of the burden of carrying past transgression around and the difficulty that the perpetrator has in ridding himself or herself of this stigma. He states:

This is the cause of the greatest pain our humanity carries, the fact and remembrance of our own failures, those acts that can never be undone or reversed, which now turn the past into a great weight of regret that we bear everywhere with us and cannot lay down. (p. 32)

The men I interviewed revealed that the act of receiving forgiveness freed them from the public and psychological stigma of being a perpetrator. It lifted their overwhelming sense of guilt in such a way that they could forgive themselves, which they indicated was by far the most difficult barrier to overcome. I must emphasize that for each of these men the journey to self-forgiveness was a long and torturous one filled with doubts and moments of self-loathing. When telling the story of Amy Biehl’s death, Nepi took me to the marble cross in Gugulethu commemorating the place where Amy Biehl died. He spoke about the incident in the third person and when I asked him why, he said, “It is the only way I can talk about Amy’s death without experiencing overwhelming feelings of shame and self-loathing” (October 17, 2002, interview).

The final theme of this study addresses the role of forgiveness, one of the principles of servant-leadership, in constructing the bridge upon which the perpetrator can cross to return to the community of people from which violence has alienated him or her.
Forgiveness as a Bridge to the Future

Holloway (2002) speaks of the difference between conditional forgiveness and pure forgiveness, or what I believe to be unconditional forgiveness. He believes that various aspects of conditional forgiveness, no matter how practical or creative, are structured in such a way that they simply “limit or manage the damage we do to one another whereas pure forgiveness has an intrinsic good, a pure gift with no motive of return” (p. 78). It is this pure forgiveness, or what Enright (1991) also calls forgiveness as love, that when offered may move the perpetrator toward genuine repentance. Enright’s forgiveness as love constructs a bridge by which the transgressor can move from isolation to community and to a future. Holloway supports this idea:

When true [pure] forgiveness happens it is one of the most astonishing and liberating of the human experiences. The tragedy of the many ways we trespass upon each other is that we can damage people so deeply that we rob them of the future by stopping the movement of their lives at the moment of injury, which continues to send out shock-waves of pain that swamp their existence. The real beauty and power of forgiveness is that it can deliver the future to us. (pp. 12-13)

Nepi, Khali, Letlapa Mphelele, and Brian Mitchell developed very close relationships with the people who forgave them. These four men indicated that these relationships made it possible for them to think about the future and gave them a sense of self-respect.

Linda Biehl calls Nepi and Khali her sons, first born and second born. I had the opportunity to interview Linda Biehl while doing my research in Cape Town and observed an interaction she had with Nepi. I had just spent an hour with this remarkable woman and as we came out of her office at the Amy Biehl Foundation, her secretary asked her if she could work in another appointment that afternoon. She told her secretary that she could meet with that person before three o’clock, but not to make any appointments after that. She indicated that she was taking Nepi shopping for a car seat for his
newborn daughter. She looked at me with great concern in her eyes and said, “I’m so worried that Nepi’s daughter have a proper car seat. You know young people these days just don’t have the concern about car safety.” As I was leaving, Nepi came out of the work room and to emphasize this point she said to him, “Nepi, don’t schedule any appointments after 3 o’clock today. You and I are going car seat shopping for that new daughter of yours!” It was an amazing thing to hear from the woman who had lost her own precious daughter at the hands of this young man.

Of the six political perpetrators interviewed for this study, only one did not experience a feeling of acceptance back into the community after receiving forgiveness. In my final conversation in Pollsmoor Prison, Khaya poignantly shared,

> The past is always haunting me. I feel I am not supposed to be here. People think I am a violent person, that I am not a trustful person. I heard them say they forgave me. I think they were sincere, but they wanted justice still. In their voices I could hear this. (September 27, 2002, interview)

CONCLUSION

The findings in this study support the idea that empathy helps facilitate the interpersonal environment conducive to offering and receiving forgiveness. It was found that perceptions about perpetrators—based upon their attitude, personal presentation, and outward appearance—were not always indicative of what they were actually experiencing within. The use of detachment and arrogance by perpetrators, often interpreted as lack of remorse or insensitivity to the victim, may actually be defense mechanisms protecting them from fear, shame, and humiliation.

The findings of this study support the idea that violence harmed both the victim and perpetrator. Although the harm is not always apparent, it was found that the psychological wounds expressed by perpetrators included the feeling of being poisoned by the experience, the feeling of being weighed
down by the memory of the atrocity, and the feeling of pain whenever the event was remembered.

The findings of this study also support the idea that the offering of unconditional forgiveness, or forgiveness as a gift, increases the ability of the perpetrator to self-forgive. Self-forgiveness came only as perpetrators received forgiveness from the person or persons they had harmed.

The findings of this study support the idea that forgiveness is an important interpersonal experience by which perpetrators may be able to move beyond the immobilizing effects of their transgressions toward a future. Without the gift of unconditional forgiveness, the perpetrator, and perhaps even the victim, may remain confined to the injury from which neither may ever recover.

Because of the methodology used in this study, the conclusions cannot necessarily be generalized to all perpetrators and victims. However, this study’s findings do indicate a need to continue seeking understanding of the role of empathy and forgiveness in bringing interpersonal healing for perpetrators and victims. If the importance of these human acts continues to be a significant area of study in interpersonal healing and alleviation of human suffering, it will be necessary to implement tangible and practical applications for promoting the occurrence of empathy and forgiveness.

Finally, the study implies that in an environment where human beings practice the principles of servant-leadership, empathy, forgiveness, and healing, there is hope for redemption in the hearts of some of the most hardened persons, the most unrepentant perpetrators, and hope for the restoration of community. This finding alone is perhaps the most important implication of this study. Such a revelation of hope may be the most useful learning for future researchers interested in studying this phenomenon, and for all those who suffer and have yet to make the decision to seek and receive forgiveness. This hope is centrally found in expressions of lasting and unconditional forgiveness, not bound by the remorse or denial of the perpetrator. Such forgiveness, unconditional and persevering, is integral to the soulful way of life found in those who have been greatly harmed but
have chosen a way of life attuned to the nature of legitimate power and greatness: a life lived for others. Even in the face of grave evil, this study revealed a resilience of human spirit I found uncompromising and filled with mercy. At the outset of my research I was unsure, even questioning the heart of humanity. I can now say a life for others, a servant-led life, exists, heals the world, restores us to one another, and gracefully makes us whole.

**EPILOGUE**

It has been eleven years since South Africa’s first democratic election, and it has been three years since I interviewed the men in this study. In looking at their lives since then, I found that five of the six continue to practice the principles of servant-leadership so beautifully modeled for them in the forgiveness they received from their victims and in the restorative justice process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Only one man, Khaya, has not continued to develop in the same way that the other five men have. I interviewed Khaya in Pollsmoor Prison, where he was awaiting trial for his alleged involvement in a robbery of an armored car in Cape Town. He told me that he wished that he could have gone on with his schooling and that he would have liked to have become an attorney, but life in the township was harsh and brutal – not much better for him or his family now than during the apartheid years. Although he had asked for forgiveness and was granted it by several church members and family of victims who had died in the St. James Church massacre, he did not feel that he had truly been forgiven. Nepi and Khali both work at the Amy Biehl Foundation in Cape Town in direct relationship with Linda Biehl. An unrelenting love has overcome the stolid denial and hardness that accompanied the early years after Amy Biehl’s death. Today, Nepi and Khali, men of Africa who killed Amy Biehl, call Amy’s mother their mother, and she calls them her sons. Together they work to improve the quality of life for families and children living in the townships.

In 2003 Letlapa, the APLA commander who ordered the attack on the
Heidelberg Tavern, which resulted in the death of Ginn Fourie’s daughter Lyndi, extended an invitation to Ginn Fourie to come to a reconciliation ceremony with him in a township outside of Johannesberg. Ginn accepted the invitation and in a moving address publicly acknowledged Letlapa’s request and extended forgiveness to him. During the ceremony in Letlapa’s village, special names in his home language were given to her and to him. The names symbolize a unique greeting so that each time the two meet they can greet one another in this way: Translated, one asks of the other, “Where are you?” The response is, “I am with you.”

Today Ginn and Letlapa speak together internationally in honor of forgiveness and since the reconciliation ceremony they have created the Lyndi Fourie Foundation, which helps political perpetrators and amnesty recipients receive personal counseling and vocational training in order to develop marketable skills to support themselves and their families.

In yet another act of servant-leadership, Ginn Fourie helped Stone, the man who killed her daughter, obtain a commercial-size chainsaw and contracts with the city of Cape Town to cut wood and clear brush. The chainsaw and the contracts enabled Stone, in turn, to be able to hire five additional men to assist him with the brush and wood clearing projects. Prior to this Stone had had no work, no future, and no hope of supporting his family. With Ginn’s help, Stone became a businessman, capable of helping other men support their families as well.

Brian Mitchell, the police captain who ordered the attack on a house in Trust Feed Village where eleven innocent people were killed also continues living the principles of servant-leadership. Brian makes presentations around South Africa and internationally to bring attention to the plight of the Zulu people of Trust Feed. He is committed to restoring the community that he helped destroy during the apartheid struggle. In the attack, Brian’s actions resulted in the death of innocent people, among them women and children. When the people of Trust Feed brought him back for a day of reconciliation and forgiveness, inviting him to live in the village, he felt his soul transformed. “I was dead until that day,” he said. “And after that day I
lived.” Today he continues to work raising funds to construct a community center, hand in hand with those whose family members he had killed.

The lives of these men were redeemed through the restorative justice process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as they were once again reunited with the community of people they had deeply injured. Greenleaf’s genuine test of servant-leadership is compellingly illustrated in the way these men have made deliberate choices to serve. Only a short time ago these men were denounced and vilified for their roles in the devastation of property and human lives. Political amnesty and interpersonal forgiveness gave them a future and another opportunity to live meaningful lives. In turn, the people they serve also have the opportunity to grow as persons and “become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants” (1977, pp. 13-14).

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TOWARD A RESEARCH MODEL OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

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In recent years there has been a shift in the managerial sphere of interest within organisations. Increasingly, managers tend to focus on the creation of sustainable development. This has a positive impact on employees and society as a whole (Spears, 1998; Patterson, 2003). More than ever before, organisations are seeking to recruit leaders who not only manage, but also lead, and lead well, meaning that they show a strong tendency toward the good, the moral well-being of their staff, their customers, and ultimately society (Patterson, 2003). Organisations increasingly focus on what people think, how they behave, and why certain decisions are made. There is a close relation between these aspects on the one hand and human feelings on the other. They prove essential for adequate decision-making (George, 2000). Being interested in people and their feelings turns out to be a prerequisite for good leadership (i.e., making the right decisions).

Within this context, new types of leadership are being developed. New leadership emphasises the importance of interpersonal relations in the leader/follower dynamic, and in the emotions involved (Hartog, Koopman, & Muijen, 1997). These aspects are evident in such types of leadership as charismatic leadership, transformational leadership, and servant-leadership.

This article focuses specifically on servant-leadership. Contrary to other new types of leadership, servant-leadership often remains a very abstract notion, making it difficult to place in the wider concept of leadership theories. Though the concept of servant-leadership was born in the mid-seventies of the last century, lack of clarity sometimes accompanies our understanding of the ways in which servant-leaders distinguish themselves from other types of leaders. Most notably, what is lacking is an inte-
Grated conceptual model that can be tested empirically. This impedes real progress of our understanding of the impact of servant-leadership on organisational performance, quality of work life, and profits.

Our aim is to introduce a research model for servant-leadership by drawing an integral conceptual picture of the servant-leader. Beforehand, it should be said that there is no clear-cut definition of servant-leadership. This sort of vagueness is not uncommon within leadership studies. There seems to be an intuitive notion that we “know” what servant-leadership is. However, in order for the servant-leadership concept to shed its abstractness so that it can be studied, we will outline a model presenting characteristics we see as being essential to a servant-leader.

Servant-leadership is based on the principle that one cannot be a leader, cannot help others develop, if one does not know oneself. The best way to be a leader is to work from one’s own strength (Wilson, 1993). Questions that need to be addressed before the servant-leader will be able to help others answer similar questions include these: Who am I? What are my values and my incentives? What do I want to achieve? Being a servant-leader means going beyond one’s self-interest; the servant-leader is governed by something more important: serving humanity (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). The servant-leader is well aware that other people have needs and wishes that ought to be fulfilled and helps them achieve these (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). This was described by Greenleaf as follows: “The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (Greenleaf in Spears, 1998, p. 1).

When the main focus of leadership behavior is on the people within the organisation, a safe and secure relationship in the leader/follower and follower/leader relationship can be created. Servants that are chosen to be leaders are greatly supported by their employees, because they have committed themselves and are trusted (Greenleaf, 1999, p. 12). The greatness of the servant-leader lies in the fact that servant-leaders are considered servants of employees, customers and society. This makes servant-leadership
unique; the servant-leader focuses on people, whereas leaders in other leadership approaches largely focus on the organisation (Patterson, 2003).

Our full model is depicted in Figure 1 and will be explained in the paragraphs below. The different elements in the model are not necessarily new in and of themselves. They are based on a mixture of existing leadership approaches combined with recent insights derived from exploring optimal individual psychological states within organisations (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). The model articulates a specific combination of these elements, unique for servant-leadership. The model focuses on the motivational aspects of the servant-leader, on what it takes to become a servant-leader (i.e., personal resources), and on the behavior that characterises a servant-leader.

Figure 1: A research model of servant-leadership

MOTIVATIONAL ASPECTS OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

Intrinsic motivation is the inborn tendency to seek innovation and challenges, to improve and practice one’s capabilities, to discover and learn
(Ryan & Deci, 2000). It is the interest in or the pleasure of an activity for the activity itself (Elliot, Faler, McGregor, Campbell, Sedikides, & Harakiewicz, 2000). A servant-leader seeks joy, interest, satisfaction, curiosity, self-expression and/or personal challenge in the tasks he performs (Amabile, 1997). A high intrinsic motivation results in self-determination. Self-determination is a true feeling of choice, being free to do what you have chosen to do (Guay, Vallerand, & Blanchard, 2000).

From self-determination theory the idea can be derived that the fulfilment of one’s own fundamental psychological basic needs is essential to become a servant-leader. These needs include competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Competence refers to the experience of being able to effectively act on and have an impact within one’s environment (Ryan & Brown, 2003). There are two independent dimensions to it (Elliot et al., 2000). The first dimension is perceived competence, the degree to which a person is convinced of performing or having performed an activity adequately. The second dimension is competence valuation, the degree to which a person cares about doing well at an activity. It should be noted that a servant-leader finds the latter highly important, but is also aware of his or her own shortcomings (Greenleaf, 1999).

Autonomy is the experience of one’s will and initiative in one’s own behaviour (Ryan & Brown, 2003). With autonomy, a person’s activities correspond with what the person wants to do (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000). Achievements are best and satisfaction highest when people believe in what they are doing and feel free in performing their tasks (Paloutzian, Emmons, & Keortge, 2003).

Relatedness comprises feelings of connection and belonging. It establishes itself at different levels: relatedness with oneself, with others, and with the universe as a whole (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Garssen, van Dierendonck, & Tromp, 2001). There are several activities that strengthen the feeling of relatedness: discussing meaningful topics, socialising, feeling
understood and appreciated, and carrying out pleasant and enjoyable activities (Reis et al., 2000).

The need for competence can be satisfied by offering optimum challenges and giving relevant feedback (Ryan & Brown, 2003). Autonomy is achieved through informal purposefulness by the leader so that others experience legitimate freedom of choice and feel capable of pursuit and completion of such choice. The need for relatedness is met when the individual experiences warmth, acceptance and care. Fulfilment of these needs can enhance an individual’s intrinsic motivation and result in a sense of self-determination.

PERSONAL RESOURCES

Resources, and personal resources in particular, have been suggested as essential elements for actively creating a world that will provide pleasure and success (Hobfoll, 1989). Personal resources can be defined as personal characteristics that are valued by the individual, or that serve as a means for attainment of personally valued objects, characteristics and conditions. Examples of personal resources important for servant-leadership include inner strength, passion, and intuition.

One feature of a servant-leader is an awareness and expression of inner strength as well as the recognition of the inner strength of others. What is this inner strength? What does it consist of? Inner strength reflects the centre of one’s existence, the core of the self. A servant can become a leader only after having become sufficiently aware of and choosing maturity in the “self.” Inner resources are conceptualised as an individual’s inner strength that results from spiritual well-being. It is the experience of being in harmony, the integration of the inner and the outer self (van Dierendonck, 2005).

The second personal resource is passion. Passion makes a person experience a feeling of new energy while performing a task, which stimulates continued desire to complete the task at hand. An individual who shows passion in work can inspire and motivate others (Schuijt, 1999). Passionate
leaders will try to touch the heart of others in a positive way by addressing the others’ own motivation. Passionate leaders are a source of inspiration to others, because such leaders have a clear-cut vision. They set a target that not only goes beyond everyday tasks, but makes the job a challenge as well (Goleman, Boyatis, & McKee, 2002). In Greenleaf’s words, “At present it is not attainable, it is something to strive for, to approach, to become. This ideal is outlined in such a way that it stirs the imagination and challenges people to work on something even though they do not yet know, something to be proud of while still under way” (Greenleaf, 1999, p. 20).

Intuition is the third personal resource essential for a servant-leader. The key to better personal decision-making (formulating and embracing a particular vision) is acting on feeling leadership. Usually there is a wide gap between the hard facts available and the information someone actually needs. The art of leadership is partly in the ability to bridge that gap through intuition (Greenleaf, 1999; Khatri & Ng, 2000).

Intuitive processes are the result of learning processes and consist of the mass of facts, patterns, concepts, techniques, abstractions and anything else that can be traced back to formal knowledge, derived from our thoughts. Intuition is a feeling for patterns, the ability to distil a general pattern from previous experiences (Greenleaf, 1999). It is the conceptualisation of one’s own thoughts. Intuitive patterns arise from chunking. Chunking is a more efficient way of using one’s memory by combining in one’s memory matters that at first appear unrelated (Gray, 1999). Intuition means being able in a particular situation to use anything you have seen, felt, tasted or experienced before in similar situations (Khatri & Ng, 2000).

To conclude, the intrapersonal basis of servant-leadership lies in satisfying our needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness. Fulfilling these needs results in self-awareness, a passionate attitude in work and trusting one’s intuition. Combined with inner resources, this leads toward a high degree of self-determination to become a servant-leader.
SERVANT-LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOUR

The next step is describing how we can recognise servant-leadership behaviour. The ten characteristics most commonly associated with servant-leadership are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, conviction, conceptualisation, anticipation, stewardship, stimulating personal growth, and building community (Celik, 2002; Russel & Stone, 2002; Spears, 1998). Unfortunately, however, although we intuitively understand these characteristics, they have not been systematically or nominally defined, making a valid and reliable study based on them nearly impossible. They seem to become fuzzy when we attempt to operationalise them for quantitative research. This presents the possibility of operationalising in a different way in order to describe servant-leadership behaviour.

Various authors have, therefore, introduced variations to these characteristics. Based on an extensive literature search, Laub (1999) developed six clusters of servant-leadership characteristics. The personal appreciation cluster comprises the following three categories: believing in people, helping others first, and listening. The personal development cluster includes the following three categories: offering learning possibilities, setting good examples, and encouragement. The team building cluster consists of these categories: relation improvement, cooperation, and appreciating individual differences. The sharing leadership cluster includes the categories of power sharing and status sharing. The leadership cluster comprises the categories of vision, initiative, and clarifying targets. The authenticity cluster includes the categories of being open and available, being a teacher, and preserving integrity.

Russel and Stone (2002) distinguished between nine functional characteristics and eleven additional characteristics of servant-leadership. The functional characteristics include vision, honesty, integrity, trust, service, modelling, pioneering, appreciation of others, and empowerment. The additional characteristics are closely related to these aspects: communication, dignity, competence, stewardship, visibility, influence, conviction, listen-
ing, encouragement, teaching and delegating. Many of the latter are similar to the characteristics described by Spears (1998).

Page and Wong (2000) developed a model that shows many similarities to Laub’s (1999). Their model consists of four clusters: personality, relations, tasks, and processes. Each cluster includes three characteristics: under personality we find integrity, humbleness, and helpfulness; relations includes care for others, empowerment, and development of others; under tasks come having and expressing vision, and setting targets; and leadership processes includes modelling (exemplary behaviour), team building, and shared decision-making.

Like Laub (1999), Sendjaya (2003) carried out an extensive literature search, also resulting in six clusters. The first cluster is voluntary subordination and consists of being a servant and serving. The second cluster is authenticity itself and is composed of helpfulness, security, integrity, vulnerability, and liability. The third cluster is conventional relations and it includes acceptance, equality, availability, and cooperation. In the fourth cluster, morality, we find moral reasoning and moral actions. The fifth cluster is spirituality and consists of religion, feeling of mission, inner awareness, and a holistic mindset. The sixth and last dimension is referred to as transforming impact and comprises vision, trust, setting an example, empowerment, and mentorship. It is interesting to note that Sendjaya is the only author to have included in his model a cluster on the inner life of the individual.

After studying both the servant-leadership literature and the models described above, we strived for dimensions or clusters that both reflect the core of servant-leadership and show a certain level of independence (discriminating and converging validity). The model addresses servant-leadership behaviour at different levels. The first level is the personal strength level. It includes those characteristics that reflect the inner strength of the servant-leader. This is the level where the servant-leader differs most from other leaders. The second level is the interpersonal level, that is, the behaviour of and the relation between the leader and others. The third level is
the organisational level, indicating how a servant-leader can contribute to general well-being and sustainable development.

PERSONAL STRENGTHS

The personal strength level comprises five dimensions. The first one is integrity. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), fulfilment of the three basic needs will not only increase the intrinsic motivation, but will also result in a feeling of integrity and well-being. Integrity is defined as the adherence to a generally perceived moral code (Russel & Stone, 2002). This morality enhances the level of behaviour and ethical aspirations of both the leader and the employee (Sendjaya, 2003). Thus, integrity is interrelated with ethical behaviour (Russel & Stone, 2002). A servant-leader’s integrity manifests itself in various aspects: visibility within the organisation, honesty (Russel & Stone, 2002), and vulnerability (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Patterson, 2003).

The second dimension is authenticity. Being authentic means identifying who we really are (Sendjaya, 2003). For this we need to know ourselves and be ourselves. Authenticity revolves around openness about one’s feelings, convictions and actions. Servant-leaders live their lives in accordance with the values they adhere to (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Argyris (1976) makes a distinction between theories-in-use and theories-in-action. Theories-in-use are implicit assumptions that govern behaviour and indicate how a person observes, thinks and feels about certain topics. They are similar to a person’s motives. Theories-in-action are ideas that serve to explain or anticipate behaviour. When trying to determine how you will act in a given situation, you will draw on theories-in-action. Your actual behaviour depends on the theories-in-use. In many people we find a discrepancy between the theories-in-use and the theories-in-action. In servant-leaders we find theories-in-action to be congruous with theories-in-use (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). It is this aspect that we call authenticity.

The third personal strength is courage. Greenleaf (1999) states that a leader distinguishes himself from others through courage. Servant-leader-
ship is a process in which employees follow without being pressured or manipulated. Courage is pro-active behaviour and reveals itself, for instance, in the form of pioneering (preparing the way). Pioneering is creating new ways, new approaches to old problems, and strong values and convictions that govern a person’s actions (Russel & Stone, 2002), rather than waiting for what is to come (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). A servant-leader takes risks by showing initiative (Greenleaf, 1999). He is the first to take the risk: walking the talk (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Courage is also found in anticipation. Anticipation, or foresight, is a more accurate than average prediction of what is going to happen at a future date (Greenleaf, 1999). It takes courage to anticipate and to make decisions based on that anticipation. Anticipation stems from an individual’s intuition.

The fourth dimension is objectivity. It means a servant-leader must be able to maintain an overview. Here, awareness is highly important: “Awareness provides the ability to distance oneself and to see oneself in the context of one’s own experience amid omnipresent dangers, threats and panic situations. Then one looks at one’s own special assortment of obligations and responsibilities in such a way to be able to distinguish between what is urgent and what is important, and maybe deal with what is important” (Greenleaf, 1999, p. 35).

Servant-leadership implies knowing how to distinguish between matters of greater and of lesser importance and how to focus on the former, which enables the servant-leader to exercise influence (Russel & Stone, 2002). Both awareness and conceptualisation are essential in maintaining an overview. Conceptualisation is important in acting on intuition. Here, however, it has a different meaning than in intuitive processes. Conceptualisation as a personal strength is the ability to address a problem beyond the borders of everyday reality (Fousert, 2003). It is the insight into employees, the organisation and the environment, rather than the conceptualisation of one’s own thoughts. It is an umbrella of conceptual insight offering a clearer framework for decisions (Greenleaf, 1999). In this context a servant-leader uses the concept of meaningfulness. He wants to be clear about his
humanity. To a servant-leader life is not only about reaching goals, but also experiencing meaningfulness through expressing ideas (Frame, 1996). In the past people used to seek meaningfulness in the church and in religion. With the decline in traditional types of religious participation, people have started to look for meaningfulness in other places, such as in organisations (Bell & Taylor, 2001). A servant-leader uses meaningfulness to question his actions. Is he on the right track? Can he really make others grow? Do others truly feel freer and more autonomous? Such a moment of reflection enables a servant-leader to refocus on the most important issues.

The fifth and last personal strength is humility. Humility is the ability to look at one’s own accomplishments and talents in their proper perspective (Patterson, 2003). Servant-leaders dare admit they are not omniscient and can learn from others. One of the aspects of humility is serving, the first and foremost priority of a servant-leader. Serving is not the leader’s fate, but his privilege (Russel & Stone, 2002). Serving is offering time, energy, care and compassion to employees (Patterson, 2003). A second aspect of humility is modesty. A servant-leader retreats into the background when a task has been successfully accomplished and gives his employees credit when due. However, when employees’ performance is less satisfactory, he comes to the fore and assumes responsibility when appropriate for system failure (i.e., failure in helping lead the community toward greater wholeness or efficiency).

INTERPERSONAL LEVEL

The second level of servant-leadership has two dimensions. The first one is empowerment. Empowerment is the process of gaining an influence over events and results that are important to a group (Foster-Fishman, Salem, Chibnall, Legler, & Yapchai, 1998). Empowerment implies the individual knows what is expected of him, what the targets are, and what the individual’s responsibilities are (Blanchard & Miller, 2004; Patterson, 2003). A feeling of empowerment is also experienced by people when the following conditions are met: good education, availability of essential infor-
mation, trust in the leader, help from the leader whenever necessary, making a valuable contribution, and lastly, learning and growing (Russel & Stone, 2002; Blanchard & Miller, 2004). In this context empowerment is synonymous with learning, and with generating and developing the talents of others (Russel & Stone, 2002). Servant-leaders share responsibility and authority with others in order to create a community that is competent, autonomous, and connected.

Empowerment implies that employees are given freedom in deciding which direction they want to steer, and are allowed to make mistakes. A servant-leader must be able to understand the imperfections of his employees (Greenleaf, 1999). A servant-leader believes in the intrinsic value of each individual; servant-leadership is all about recognition, acknowledgment, and realisation of each person’s abilities and what each person can still learn (Fousert, 2003). In addition, the servant-leader has confidence in the invisible potential of each employee. The servant-leader feels employees can achieve certain goals, making his confidence an appreciative self-fulfilling prophecy (Patterson, 2003).

The second interpersonal dimension is emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is “the ability to process emotion-laden information completely and to use it to guide cognitive activities like problem solving and to focus energy on the required behaviours” (George, 2000; Salovey, Mayer, & Caruso, 2002). Emotional intelligence comprises five main themes (Goleman, 2004). The first one is knowing one’s own emotions: recognising a feeling when it arises, also referred to as self-consciousness. The second is regulating one’s emotions: the ability to steer the emotions in the right direction. The third theme is self-motivation: using emotions for a particular purpose. The fourth is recognising the emotions of others, also referred to as empathy. Empathy is the ability to understand and experience the feelings of others (George, 2000). Empathetic people have an eye for subtle social signals that indicate what other people need or want, enabling the felt but unspoken emotions in a person or group to be recognised
Leadership is the art of getting people to work for a common goal. One of the ways to motivate people is by operating on the basis of emotional intelligence. Leaders who possess high emotional intelligence, such as servant-leaders, are better able to profit from positive moods and emotions (George, 2000). High emotional intelligence results in enthusiasm, excitement, optimism, cooperation, and trust on the part of the leader and employees owing to the developing interpersonal relation.

The measure of emotional intelligence can be determined by observing a person’s behaviours. Emotionally intelligent people are good listeners, show empathy, and take care of others. Care offered from within the organisation may stimulate employees to use and develop their skills in the context of their needs and aspirations, and in the service of the community as a whole.

ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL

The third and last level of servant-leadership is the organisational level. Here the servant-leader focuses on the organisation as a whole. This level includes two dimensions, stewardship and conviction.

The first dimension is stewardship. Stewardship is creating opportunities for the personal, the professional, and finally the spiritual growth of others (Gooden, 2002) by making one’s own resources, such as time, information, financial resources, and relationships, available to others (Russel & Stone, 2002). Being a steward, you are responsible for all things entrusted to you (Blanchard & Miller, 2004; Conley & Wagner-Marsh, 1998). The servant-leader is a servant to others and sustains this attitude, whatever the circumstances. This also includes a servant-leader’s function as a role model. The servant-leader’s major impact on the organisation requires the servant-leader to behave ethically and in accordance with the standards and values embedded in the organisational culture. The servant-leader’s role model function is the foundation of the servant-leader’s leadership (Russel
The servant-leader tries to make stewardship manifest through team building.

The second dimension is conviction. This is about sharing wisdom and creating understanding (Russel & Stone, 2002). Understanding convinces people that the road followed by the servant-leader may be the right one (Greenleaf in Spears, 1998). This can be achieved first by presenting convincing arguments in order to impassion people. Second, people may be convinced through a sense of rightness, based on an intuitive feeling (Greenleaf, 1999). A servant-leader will try to convince employees and the organisation as a whole by showing a clear vision and commitment. Such a vision is based on aspects of the intra-personal and interpersonal levels, such as humility, empathy, and commitment to ethical behaviour. Servant-leadership reflects a push model rather than a pull model for realising that vision. Employees are not forced to support that vision, but strive to accomplish the vision voluntarily because they are committed and inspired. This is where a servant-leader differs from other leaders.

CONCLUSION

Thus far servant-leadership has not been widely researched, due to the lack of measuring instruments. The conceptualisation of servant-leadership presented in this article makes future research into this subject possible. Servant-leaders differ from other leaders in that the starting point of their leadership is their self-determined inner strength, working from a base grounded in fulfilled psychological needs, inner resources, intuition, and passion. This is reflected in various characteristics at various levels. On the personal strength level, a servant-leader is characterised by integrity, authenticity, courage, objectivity, and humility. On the interpersonal level, servant-leaders embrace empowerment and emotional intelligence. Characteristics on the organisational level are stewardship and conviction.

Based on this model, a questionnaire has recently been developed (Van Dierendonck & Heeren, 2005), which is being tested in a pilot study for validity and reliability. With a measuring instrument that meets the appro-
appropriate psychometric qualities, it can be established what the effects of servant-leadership are on individuals and organisations. This is essential in order to alert organisations to the necessity of fulfilling the most meaningful needs and wishes of their respective organisational communities. A high quality servant-leadership instrument provides organisations with insight into the positive effects of personal attention for employees.

In closing, servant-leadership is not a trick; it is a way of life that demands great commitment and discipline. We believe servant-leadership is a notion that will draw increasing attention over the years. We hope our model will prove a basis for the application of servant-leadership in science and in the business community.

Dirk van Dierendonck of Erasmus University, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, serves as a member of the editorial board for The International Journal of Servant-Leadership. Both Imke Heeren and Dirk serve the Netherlands with timely and evocative research into the nature of servant-leadership and its implications for individuals, communities, and organisations throughout the world.

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This is a story about serendipity, synergy and synchronicity. Thirty years ago, three lives converged as a result of a chance meeting. Their collective calling gave birth to a vision that has transformed three generations of leaders.

Robert K. Greenleaf rose to a challenge from his economics professor to find ways to transform the dysfunction within large businesses and organizations by working from the inside. He captured the imagination of many with his seminal essay, *The Servant as Leader*. In it, he thoughtfully delineated a practical philosophy of leadership that was dramatically different from the traditional model of the “egocentric” or “boss” paradigm.

Jack Lowe, Sr., a natural servant-leader and founder of an air-conditioning equipment distributor, construction and services company in Dallas, had a vision that a company could be more than a job and a paycheck. He was committed to engaging his employees as partners, practicing servant-leadership to bring mutual trust and a servant’s heart into the act of leadership. He envisioned a leaderful organization in which every person awakened to his or her full potential and responsibilities, both as a leader and a servant of others.

My name is Anne McGee-Cooper and I was a very lucky young teacher with the belief that every life has a gift of unique genius and every person has the potential to learn and transform. When Jack Lowe, Sr. invited me to help create a servant-led company, a company of the sort envisioned by Robert Greenleaf, the result was a 30-year partnership of the
spirit. My life continues to be transformed by these two incredibly inspiring servant-leaders.

Joining me in this journey and writing are my business partners, Duane Trammell and Gary Looper. Duane helped establish Ann McGee-Cooper & Associates in the early ‘80s. Recognized with several top awards as a teacher, he has become my coach and partner. He has special gifts in curriculum design and bringing in the voice of those being served. Gary Looper joined our firm six years ago, bringing unique abilities in facilitation, research and writing. Together we share this story.

THE LEGACY OF A NATURAL SERVANT-LEADER

Jack Lowe, Sr., founder and president of Texas Distributors (now TDIndustries), earned a remarkable level of trust in his relationships that changed the face of Dallas. Because of his extraordinary servant-leadership, alliances formerly thought impossible were created, benefiting the entire city. An outstanding example of this was his capacity to bring racial groups filled with distrust into a shared plan to integrate the Dallas public schools. In his honor, one of the new public schools in Dallas has been named after this man who forged a lasting trust.

In 1970, Greenleaf wrote The Servant as Leader. Jack came across a copy of the essay not long afterwards and liked it so much that he began buying copies by the box and passing them out to Employees,¹ the Dallas school district board, the Dallas Chamber of Commerce, various business friends at his church, and most organizations of influence in Dallas at that time. Greenleaf became curious as to who might be buying his essay in bulk and why. A phone call began a long and deep friendship in which each man drew on his intuitive belief about more respectful and effective ways to grow leadership in all people.

For two years, Jack and Linda Wyatt Smithey (Jack’s executive assistant) met with small groups of Employees in his home to discuss Greenleaf’s essay and how they might apply it in their work together. In a memoir, Smithey wrote, “Harriet Lowe was a great contributor in those
meetings. Here we were in the home of the President, and his wife was making lunch for us. In a lot of ways, he was saying, ‘I really want you here. I want you to be a part of the family, not just the company.’”

Together, they created The People Objective from Linda’s notes collected from these dialogues with every Employee. They noted that their goal was for each and every TD person to feel successful as a person—as a total person—with one’s co-workers, family, friends, community, God and self. Among other things, this means one must feel growth, must feel individually important... and it requires of oneself a high order of responsibility and self-discipline.

If through oversight or neglect or just not caring much, we fail to do what we can to help even one person in this objective, it’s really a bad failure. For this concept to be real, it must be total. There must be no one excluded.

After presenting this to the Employees, they also came up with some “Yardsticks.”

- Be honest.
- Think and act like a manager.
- Help create profits.
- Help create satisfied customers.
- Be understanding and helpful. Put yourself in the other person’s shoes.

Several years later, some of the Employees felt that the company was not following through on the “People Objective” and “Yardsticks.” That’s when Jack’s storied Breakfast Sessions began. Again, with small groups, he met to talk openly about the heart and soul of Texas Distributors. Out of these sessions came an organic list of characteristics that continue to guide the company.
TD Leadership

In his book *The Servant as Leader*, Robert Greenleaf successfully expressed our views of how people can and should work together to grow our company. If our organization is to live up to its Basic Values and Mission, a key ingredient will be the Leadership provided by a very large number of us: simply and plainly defined:

- Leaders are people who have followers. They have earned recognition and respect.
- Leaders are first a servant of those they lead. They are a teacher, a source of information and knowledge, and a standard setter, more than a giver of directions and a disciplinarian.
- Leaders see things through the eyes of their followers. They put themselves in others’ shoes and help them make their dreams come true.
- Leaders do not say, “Get going.” Instead, they say, “Let’s go!” and lead the way. They do not walk behind with a whip; they are out in front with a banner.
- Leaders assume that their followers are working with them. They consider others Partners in the work and see to it that they share in the rewards. They glorify the team spirit!
- Leaders are people builders. They help those around them to grow because the leader realizes that the more strong people an organization has, the stronger it will be.
- Leaders do not hold people down, they lift them up. They reach out their hand to help their followers scale the peaks.
- Leaders have faith in people. They believe in them. They have found that others rise to their expectations.
- Leaders use their heart as well as their head. After they have looked at the facts with their head, they let their heart take a look too.
- Leaders keep their eyes on high goals. They are self-starters. They create plans and set them in motion. They are persons of thought and action—both dreamers and doers.
- Leaders are faced with many hard decisions, including balancing fairness to an individual with fairness to the group. This sometimes requires a “weeding out” of those in the group who, over a period of time, do not measure up to the group needs of dependability, productivity, and safety.
- Leaders have a sense of humor. They are not stuffed shirts. They can laugh at themselves. They have a humble spirit.
- Leaders can be led. They are not interested in having their own way, but in finding the best way. They have an open mind.
Six months before he died, Jack suggested three other ideas that might be added to the company’s list of purposes:

‘To serve God. To serve our fellow man. To build a group of people who work together in friendship and love’ (A Partnership of the Spirit by Ashley Cheshire, p. 133).

That encapsulates the spirit and conviction of an exemplary servant-leader who gave his life for the benefit of Partners at TD and the city of Dallas.

In 1976, I was invited to keynote a national conference for religious educators, chaired by Harriet Lowe, Jack’s wife. Jack attended the conference and saw a connection that led him to invite me to talk with him about the dream he held for his company. He first asked me to read a copy of The Servant as Leader, by Robert K. Greenleaf, and to come back and share my thoughts. When I returned, fascinated and inspired by what I had read, I explained how the tenets of servant-leadership were parallel to what I believed about effective teaching: namely, that the most effective teachers lived what they taught, believed deeply in the unlimited capacity of every student, and used Experiential Learning to make learning fun and engaging. Making it safe to ask questions, explore differences of opinion, and engage in honest dialogue is key to evoking lasting changes in behavior. In addition, many interactive experiences were used as the basis for discovering more effective ways to team and lead.

As a professor at Southern Methodist University, I had founded and directed a research project which became a lab school pioneering highly innovative learning techniques. The Experimental Arts Program was also known for work with students of all ages using Accelerated Learning, highly validated techniques which brought learning to a deeper level, more quickly, with a higher level of retention. I had taught graduate students (all experienced teachers) to use these techniques successfully in situations in which students had experienced frequent failure and, as a result, low self-esteem. By making learning fun, bringing in all the senses, and creating a safe atmosphere in which success became the norm, teachers made it possi-
ble for abstract concepts to be understood and applied, with extraordinary results.

Jack knew that the concepts of servant-leadership were abstract and went against traditional management theory and beliefs. And he realized that craft workers didn’t do well in traditional academic settings. But he thought my non-traditional teaching techniques and a strong belief that everyone could excel might be a great fit for his vision to bring servant-leadership into the lives, hearts, and daily work habits of every manager and Partner at TD.

In the beginning I collaborated with Steve Saunders, a bright young intern who was at that time Jack’s executive assistant. Steve took me to several construction job sites for a first-hand look at the kinds of work environments challenging leaders at TD. Then, together, we began to integrate Steve’s knowledge of the business, Greenleaf’s concepts of servant-leadership, and my experience creating a learning environment in which every student could succeed.

Robert K. Greenleaf: Mentor and Friend

Not long after beginning this partnership, I was invited to Philadelphia to visit Bob and Esther Greenleaf at Crosslands, the Quaker Retirement Community they had moved into. I brought pages of questions that would become a basis for long conversations with Bob (many of which were taped). Over the next ten years, there were several visits, phone calls and letters. I was lucky enough to have Bob as a patient coach, mentor and friend guiding our efforts to more fully understand servant-leadership and ways to bring it into our work with Partners at TD.

Bob was an incredible listener who took my thinking to a deeper level. He built on what I knew and helped me discover the power of silence, reflection and not knowing. I only wish I could have a second go at being a student with Bob. He was so far out in front that only now, three decades later, am I catching up to what he was working to help me discover.
Bob had a keen sense of humor, an intense curiosity, and a gift for asking the kinds of questions that opened new doors of wondering. He frequently baffled and delighted me. Just when I thought I understood where he was leading me, he would surprise me with a totally different idea.

For example, one day we were talking about trust. I had learned from my father to prudently withhold trust until the other person had proven trustworthy. Greenleaf suggested that I might want to rethink this assumption. When a person you trust and admire has faith in you beyond where you are now, that person is giving you a new vision to live into and own. Acting on the capacity to create an expectation of excellence and then trust another to live into it was a new idea to me. And yet, as I reflected on my life, I realized that in more than one instance I had made a significant leap in performance because someone I admired believed in me and I didn’t want to let that person down. Learning to trust first and open the possibility for enhanced performance breaks the negative chain of self-fulfilling prophecy.

On another visit I was talking non-stop, eager to learn as much as I possibly could in the short time we had together. Bob often found other, more creative ways to open new insights, as he did on this day. As I talked he quietly reached out, took my hand and led me outside to a wooden bench in the sunshine, where we sat in a long silence. It was clear that more talking wasn’t appropriate. Then he began to explain that his Quaker background had given him two valuable gifts. The first was, “Don’t speak unless you can improve upon the silence.” I was stunned. What could this mean? For me, silence was an opportunity to fill something empty, or my time to talk. I had never considered that it might have value in and of itself. And just when I was grasping the idea that long periods of silence might open a deeper level of insight, Bob explained the second gift. “When Spirit moves within you, you must give it your voice. These two create a tension within which true dialogue emerges.” We sat for a long while as these thoughts took root. Bob was a thoughtful person who had a gift for saying
a great deal with few words. While I will never fit this description, this conversation helped me begin to discover new options.

Bob was a practical businessman as well as a futurist. Consider his “15 Criteria for Running a Sound, Long-run Business.”

A COMPANY OF BOLD DREAMS

In 1982 Duane Trammell joined me to form a new company, Ann McGee-Cooper & Associates, Inc. Duane had been named Teacher of the Year in Dallas and had formerly been a graduate student studying with me. His creativity as a teacher and tremendous enthusiasm to grow and learn caused him to stand out in a class of highly gifted teachers. Together, we chose to found a new company based on the culture of servant-leadership we found so inspiring at TD. Our vision was to become servant-leaders
who inspired our clients to claim bold dreams through whole-brained balance. Learning to teach through the whole brain was the secret of Accelerated Learning and a process we integrated into everything we designed for TD.

AMCA, Inc. has been privileged over the years to work for a wide variety of clients from business and industry, education, healthcare, public utilities and government agencies. These include Southwest Airlines, the Fluor Corporation, Bechtel, Stone and Webster, Brown and Root, Halliburton, GE, Centex, TXU, the Federal Reserve Bank, Naval Weapons Center, NASA, and the CIA. We have coached national business leaders, government officials and college presidents on servant-leadership, growing learning communities, culture transformation, team-building, team time management and creative problem solving.

A UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP

Most consulting relationships don’t last for thirty years, much less grow into a deeply committed partnership that goes beyond a formal contractual agreement. Over the years TD has found numerous ways to grow and strengthen the small consulting team of futurists that is Ann McGee-Cooper and Associates. And we are committed to go the second and third mile routinely to insure success for TD. Here are some of the unique dimensions that define this highly synergistic partnership:

1. From the very beginning, TD invested in growing AMCA as Partners. It is unusual for a company to reach beyond its Employees and provide training and development opportunities for vendors. Yet we have always been invited to attend all the leadership development and training being provided for TD Partners. This included opportunities to work directly with Stephen Covey, who was teaching from his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*, Dr. Bill Guillory, who taught classes on diversity, and Tom Peters, who gave a presentation on his innovative ideas about getting creativity into business strategy.
There were also classes on quality, continuous performance improvement, Spanish, and many other topics. By growing us, we could not only add more value, but also integrate the curriculums we were designing with all the other skills being taught and practiced.

2. TD’s CEO (or another senior leader) has always personally come to kick off and close the day. We find it remarkable that a top company leader will consistently invest the time to welcome and challenge each class going through servant-leadership development. The shared goal is to make sure that Employees know the learning they are going to experience comes directly from the cultural aspirations of their leaders and Partners. It is not something from outside or “off the shelf.” Toward the end of the day the senior leader would rejoin the class to listen in, provide a vision going forward, and challenge each Partner to live and act as a servant-leader. Only then could a culture of trust, respect, and creating a great place to work become a reality.

In 1980, when Jack Lowe, Jr. earned the CEO role at TD, he continued to espouse his father’s philosophy of servant-leadership: “Bob Greenleaf, in The Servant as Leader, describes a new kind of leadership which puts serving others, including Partners, customers, and community, as the highest priority. This servant-leadership built the trusting relationship which got us through difficult times together and provided the foundation for using the tools of quality to aggressively improve the ways we serve our customers. Servant-leadership builds the trust which allows us to work together successfully as we face a continually changing future.” Earning and maintaining the highest levels of trust are the foundation upon which both Jack and his father did business. One of Jack, Jr.’s special gifts was to build TD as a business. Yet he did so from a primary commitment to servant-leadership.
Even in financial downturns, Jack never wavered in his commitment to grow the people as well as the business.

In January 2005, after several years of careful succession planning, Harold MacDowell became the third CEO at TD. Promoted from within, Harold now opens every class on servant-leadership by sharing his stories of working over the past 20 years to grow his servant-leadership as the foundation for his new role. His message is compelling: “I’m convinced that our collective commitment to servant-leadership will enhance our shared trust that produces strong business results. It is my expectation that each of you will join me in this commitment.” Harold also tells funny, humbling stories of sobering mistakes that have helped him mature as a compassionate leader. Humor and humility are cornerstones of TD’s culture, and in his new role, Harold works hard to connect openly with everyone. Each leader is unique, yet what sets TD apart is their seamless commitment to making trust and trustworthiness the foundation upon which a great business and a great workplace are built.

3. AMCA, Inc. worked closely with top leaders from TD to recruit class sponsors for every class. And what we have learned with TD we have used to strengthen our work with all other clients. From the evaluations and feedback gathered after every class from every participant, we quickly learned that we needed help linking servant-leadership principles back to the workplace. We needed a TD leader in the class who would help reinforce the concepts. That person could also provide specific examples of how and why servant-leadership was a far better and more productive way to do business. Sometimes we had two class sponsors—one from the field and one from the office—to illustrate that there was no area of the company in which servant-leadership was not the preferred way of doing business. This proved to be very successful. Class sponsors not only reinforced all the
servant-leadership skills for managers, but also reminded participants that the company was only as strong as each of them in their maturity and daily performance as servant-leaders.

4. TD leaders are committed to responding to any concern about the behavior of leadership brought forward during the servant-leadership classes. Questions are followed up on by the senior sponsor and/or the People Department. Sometimes a participant asked, “Has my supervisor ever attended this class?” When class sponsors heard this, they knew we all had a lot of work to do getting every manager and supervisor to understand the importance of “walking the talk.” After every class we huddled with the senior sponsor, class sponsor and Jessie McCain, who led the People Department. Our focus was on ways to keep improving the learning and make sure that we were integrating theory with practice. As a direct result of these huddles, an advanced servant-leadership class was added so that all managers could return to renew and continue growing their skills.

5. TD participants proposed a “90-day review.” One of our class sponsors asked the class, “How can we make sure that we don’t let all these great new skills just get forgotten as we all rush back into our work?” One Partner suggested that they reconvene for 90 minutes in 90 days with a promise to be accountable for one new skill or improvement from their Personal Action Plan. The goal was 100% attendance and 100% reporting on at least one new area of improvement. This was so successful that it has become a norm for all the leadership classes at TD.

6. AMCA developed an advanced servant-leadership curriculum with TD. From the beginning the curriculum evolved from a thorough assessment of recommendations from all levels of leaders. Duane Trammell led this research effort. He met with a cross section of supervisors and superintendents from all areas of the business to learn what they thought was most important, as
well as the outcomes they wanted. From these meetings, he collected current success stories to illustrate the learning skills. He then added quotes from current leaders explaining how and why the transformation into servant-leadership was not only a far more successful way of doing business, but also the best path toward creating a great place to work.

We learned that although salaries and benefits are important, how people are treated and a high level of trust are the biggest factors determining loyalty and employee retention. And turnovers are costly. Studies confirmed that when people leave a company, it is typically because they don’t have a good relationship with their supervisors, they don’t feel appreciated or included, or their work isn’t valued. As a result of our research, we established four goals for a curriculum:

(1) Share Greenleaf’s concepts about serving people; (2) Provide practical “how-to’s” of good supervision; (3) Educate about TD’s past and continuing investment in servant-leadership; and (4) Intersperse activities and conversations that would allow TDPartners time to dialogue and reflect on how they were doing on these key management/supervision activities.

To accomplish this, we divided the course into 8 skill areas:

1. Establishing an inspiring leadership philosophy;
2. Directing and coordinating work;
3. Leading a team;
4. Motivating people and improving relationships;
5. Dealing with difficult people;
6. Communicating, planning and organizing;
7. Using diversity as an advantage; and
8. Leading in tough situations; problem solving.

We designed 27 individual skills corresponding to the eight supervisory skill areas. These are not presented as a recipe, but rather as a beginning point from which each Partner can choose
to develop his or her own personal plan for growth. Each participant receives a Personal Action Plan to be filled in during the day. At the end of each of the eight sections, we stop to encourage participants to write down an application to their own work/home life.

Careful thought is given to the recognition of TD’s legacy of servant-leadership practice. Each workbook is filled with pictures of TDPartners on jobsites doing their work. Section-openers contain not only quotes from Greenleaf, but also quotes from TD leaders sharing their philosophy of servant-leadership. To accomplish our last goal of allowing time for Partners to dialogue on how they are doing with servant-leadership as a company, we use short videos, table discussions, reflective imaging and team activities, role play, simulations, and customer problem-solving situations created by TDPartners. Rich dialogue and deep insights come from these interactive experiences.

Without question, the positive momentum of this process comes from the participants. Even though we are charged with designing and leading this process, we always come as students, create our own Personal Action Plan, and are accountable for our growth. The continuing transformation of all parties creates a synergy that grows stronger each year.

7. In 1998, based on the growing number of new Partners who spoke English as a second language, AMCA and TD together invested in getting the curriculum materials translated into Spanish. Now Partners have a choice: if they prefer, they can work from a Spanish rather than an English version of the learning materials. And we sometimes use a translator to make sure the oral parts of a class are understandable to all Partners.

8. We practice win/win/win teaming. When either party is in trouble, the other goes the extra mile. For example, Jack Lowe, Jr. has provided a number of business references and helped
AMCA find Dallas clients and build a strong, local presence. And when TD has been in tight financial situations, AMCA has found ways to keep the classes going on a very tight budget. We have worked hard to keep the class size small so that every Partner gets special attention and has time to have questions explored. TD has always made growing their people a top priority and doesn’t drop their budget for these classes, even when times are tough.

9. As outside interest in servant-leadership grew, AMCA and TD made the classes a lab school for servant-leadership and allowed for a limited number of guests to observe and participate in the classes. These included not only subcontractors working closely with TD, but also school board members, principals, and top leaders of other community non-profit groups such as the YMCA and the Red Cross. Together we teamed with The Greenleaf Center to make our curriculum available world-wide to those interested in making the transformation into servant-leadership.

10. Based on our long-term partnership with TD, AMCA created 14 learning modules to teach servant-leadership so that anyone, anywhere, had access to high quality materials at a very reasonable price. We found creative ways to package the work we have developed together over the past 30 years into modules that could travel and be adapted to any age and any situation.

11. Early in the process, we worked to integrate what we were teaching in servant-leadership into all the other Employee tools such as performance reviews, quality workshops, diversity training, Seven Habits seminars, and so forth. AMCA Partners makes it our business to attend as many of the quarterly business reviews, Friday Forums (a monthly open forum to bring in outside speakers and broaden community and business awareness), celebrations, and other TD events. Our goal is to keep learning their business, to think and act like an owner, to keep searching for
even more effective ways to bring in current business opportunities, and to apply the skills of servant-leadership to all parts of the business.

12. TD leaders made servant-leadership and business results requirements for employment. In the mid ‘90s we had done an audit to make sure all business practices were rewarding a servant-leader’s approach. We didn’t want to inadvertently confuse Employees with classes teaching one set of values and practices while business processes rewarded different standards. Meanwhile, Jack Lowe, Jr. and his leadership team drew a “line in the sand.” From that day forward, every leader within TD would be accountable for performance in both areas. In speech after speech, leaders admitted that previously abusive leadership had been overlooked by some who were good at making the numbers. But going forward, this would no longer be acceptable. If a particular leader was good at one standard, yet rejected, ignored or simply didn’t perform well on the other, then that leader must either make prompt, significant improvement or find employment elsewhere. It took hard work to make this a reality, but it got the attention of everyone and significant changes were made where needed.

13. A partnership between AMCA and TD’s Diversity Committee created four videotapes of skits, using company Partners, that highlighted servant-leadership and non-servant-leadership behaviors in the workplace. In 1999, a soul-searching session of the TD Diversity Committee led to an innovation in AMCA’s servant-leadership classes. The committee found that servant-leadership was more “talk than walk” in critical areas of the business. Leaders on the committee openly shared some of the classic situations in which servant-leadership was still painfully absent. How could we further strengthen our resolve to put servant-lead-
ership into practice in each and every situation? How could we raise the bar?

In one of TD’s regular Friday Forums, founders of The Container Store performed six entertaining skits illustrating their six core values. Even though the skits were “home made” and somewhat impromptu, the impact was terrific. They inspired us to identify nine typical scenarios showing the gap between our ideal and current practice. We recruited teams of Partners to create fun, quick skits to illustrate the differences. With little budget and home video equipment, we recruited top leaders to play the roles of leaders stuck in old, abusive styles, which added to the fun. Original music and even dance numbers were created. Don Frick, who had produced TD’s 50th anniversary tape, produced these into nine short videos to be used at job sites as a starting point to stimulate healthy dialogue about what is and is not servant-leadership and why it is so important within the culture of TD. The impact of these homemade skits has been felt across TD and a number of other companies that have used them.

14. TD and AMCA created the Servant-leadership Learning Community (SLLC).

In January of 1998, when Fortune magazine came out with the first list of “100 Best Companies to Work For in America,” TDIndustries and Southwest Airlines were honored as #5 and #1. Because of our work with both companies, we were inundated with calls from organizations large and small eager to learn more about servant-leadership. Parallel to this, we had also been actively learning and practicing the five disciplines of a learning organization as taught by Peter Senge and his colleagues at M.I.T. And, we had joined SOL (Society for Organizational Learning) to connect internationally with companies working to become learning organizations.

With the encouragement of Jack Lowe, Jr., we formed the SLLC with seven organizations (including TD, Southwest Airlines, the Carrollton Police Department, the Bill Priest Institute for Economic Development,
TEMPO, and Celebration Restaurant) wanting to explore the practice of servant-leadership and the learning organization disciplines. TD generously opened servant-leadership classes as a lab school to the community and members of SLLC. Southwest Airlines served the SLLC as another mature, leaderful culture. Drawing from my 15 years as a member of SWA Culture Committee and joined by several top leaders, we drew from their 35 years of leading with a servant’s heart.

Today, 11 member organizations meet once a quarter on a Friday morning and rotate sites among the members. Our vision is to aspire to practice and improve our collective skills as a learning community centered on servant-leadership. We desire to collectively increase our ability to co-create a future based on relationships of trust and respect as well as a triple bottom line that includes People, profit, and our stewardship of the planet.

Sometimes people make the mistake of thinking that servant-leadership is “soft stuff.” Together we have learned that as hard as the technical business challenges are to “get right,” they are far easier than the people side of the equation. To truly become an effective servant-leader requires courage, persistence, and commitment to the belief that together we can create something far more meaningful and successful than we can by working independently. We salute and thank all our Partners at TD for being our patient and inspiring teachers on this journey. We stand in awe of our good fortune at having been in the right place at the right moment. To have been given the opportunity to be impacted by the extraordinary lives of Bob Greenleaf and Jack Lowe, Sr. is a rare blessing. Equally, to live within the community of TD Partners over these thirty years has transformed everything about us, from our vision as a business to our personal commitment to keep growing our servant-leadership.

Jack Lowe, Jr. said recently, “We’ve been at this thirty years and we have yet to produce even one true servant-leader.” As usual, Jack is disarming with his honesty, humor, and humility. The paradox is that he’s right. We may never achieve the full measure of what it means to be true servant-leaders in every sense of Greenleaf’s transcendent vision. Yet
Greenleaf challenges us to start within (not outside) on our mission to bring lasting change to the world:

“The servant views any problem in the world as in here, inside oneself, not out there. And if a flaw in the world is to be remedied, to the servant, the process of change starts in here, in the servant, not out there.”

To quote another well-known servant-leader, Mahatma Gandhi:

“We must be the change we want to see in the world.”

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NOTE

1. We have adopted Southwest Airlines’ practice of capitalizing “Employee” and TDIndustries’ of capitalizing “Partner” to reflect their respectful terminology.
SOURCES TO CONSIDER

In addition to benefiting from Greenleaf’s essay, we have learned from many books, tapes, videos and speakers. As difficult as it is to highlight just a few, here’s an abbreviated list:


*The Pygmalion Effect* (video). CRM Productions.

A Poetics of Servant-Leadership

—NADINE CHAPMAN

WHITWORTH COLLEGE

One day somebody “identified” me. Beside me, in the queue, there was a woman with blue lips. She had, of course, never heard of me; but she suddenly came out of that trance so common to us all and whispered in my ear (everybody spoke in whispers there): “Can you describe this?” And I said: “Yes, I can.” And then something like the shadow of a smile crossed what had once been her face.

—Akhmatova (1985, p. 87)

Anna Akhmatova places her great elegiac poem, “Requiem,” in the years of the Yezhov terror, during Stalin’s purges, when she spent seventeen months in prison queues, trying to see her son, Lev. Out of great fear, which relegates people to suspicion of one another and a depraved anonymity, comes this face-to-face expression, the giving of oneself in relationship to another. The openness expressed here in speech is not yet a conceptual act based on the will, but an attitude in response to the other person. Akhmatova responds to the woman’s turn to her with the word, spoken and poetic. In so doing, she takes responsibility for her own presence and acknowledges the other, as well as the vulnerability of the woman before her. She then moves to the knowing, moral act of using the word in a particular form. She leads through her poetic response, as a voice for human dignity in the midst of mass terror. As a poet, she fuses this need to speak out with the fullness of language.

Many leadership models address the importance of language and value various creative language forms, especially storytelling, on some practical level. Recognizing that human beings understand their relationship to the

In the essay “An Inward Journey,” reprinted in this second volume of The International Journal of Servant-Leadership, Greenleaf (1977/2002) writes that reading “Directive” with understanding involves awareness, “letting something significant and disturbing develop between oneself and a symbol” (p. 316). He encourages us to risk being moved by symbols that “cry out to speak to us,” for interacting with them offers meaning and the possibility of new creation. It is often the underlying symbol that allows the poet to express something as abstract as the meeting place between human feelings and the universe. Inspiration does come from the impact of the natural world as symbol. Even a tree stump gives something beyond itself in meaning, in transcendence through poetry.

For Greenleaf, the inward journey “Directive” involves “radical, searing losses,” symbolized in the poem as that which is “burned, dissolved, broken off” (p. 327). It also means, according to Frost, following a guide “who only has at heart your getting lost” (p. 318). Yet this is the path of great religious traditions, the path of seekers. Encountering the unknown seems a necessary step to finding oneself. Rather than marking tragedy, such painful losses “are seen as opening the way for new creative acts” (p.
Greenleaf believes that the willingness to grasp the opportunities loss presents requires faith, humanity, and spiritual growth. It can lead to the greatest gift possible: love. Society’s rejected—the misfits and the undesir-able—may move ahead on this road to spiritual growth with more ease than those lauded as upright citizens of good works. Awareness, for Greenleaf, “is infinite and therefore equal in every human being,” but it requires con-
sciousness of uncompensated personal losses and the errors of cultural inheritance (p. 328).

Your destination and your destiny’s
A brook that was the water of the house,
Cold as a spring as yet so near its force
Too lofty and original to rage. (p. 322)

Within Frost’s use of the water, “the great symbol of wholeness,” Greenleaf identifies the need to look at the past, but not for security and comfort (pp. 322-323). Instead, the seeker also risks drinking from the cup of new and fresh ideas.

Here are your waters and your watering place.
Drink and be whole again beyond confusion. (p. 326)

Robert Pinsky (1999), United States Poet Laureate (1997-2000), focuses on a past presented in “Directive” as “mysterious spiritual reality” attained through a journey (p. 70). Pinsky believes that, moving beyond the individual, Frost’s poem suggests that the destiny of a people rests on “the fragile, heroic enterprise of remembering,” the act of historical recovery (p. 70). Here memory serves as the source of wholeness, and Frost challenges us to engage in this cultural work of recovery that helps shape us as a people.

The height of the adventure is the height
Of country where two village cultures faded
Into each other. Both of them are lost. (Greenleaf, 1977/2002, p. 321)
Greenleaf and Pinsky see this memory quest as challenging, but critical to knowing ourselves. Beyond our personal journeys of growth, as responsible people, is the grace of sharing our symbolic experiences with others and receiving their understanding and guidance.

In exploring poetry’s role in leadership theory, Wheatley (1998) and Greenleaf (1977/2002) provide an important doorway. The phenomenological investigations of Levinas (1989a, 1993) and Ricoeur (1976, 1991a, 1991b) further open the view by connecting poetry to ethical response. Meaning level (an aspect of our understanding and our ability to grant it symbolic function) becomes paramount and is accessed through poetry, lyric fiction, metaphor, and imaginative narrative fiction. Ricoeur (1991a) understands poetry “not only in the sense of rhythmic and rhymed forms of language, in the broad sense of the word lyric fiction,” but also as narrative fiction “in the sense that the plot of narrative is a creation of productive imagination which projects a world of its own” (p. 452). The poetic preserves and enlarges language’s capacity for meaningfulness often through the power of figurative speech. Original metaphors the poet creates bring to language the implicit semantics of the symbol and help lead us to symbolic understanding (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 59). Ricoeur (1991a) demonstrates that there is not just an epistemological and political imagination, but a more fundamental linguistic imagination that generates meaning, especially through the power of metaphor (pp. 448-462). As a poet, I am called by the face of the other, by the vulnerability and need shown in the other’s face, to respond from this linguistic depth. Such an ethical relation, the one-for-the-other, comprises the central movement of Levinas’ philosophy (Levinas, 1993, pp. 96-97), and it is the ground from which this essay proceeds. Levinas even prefers the word sanctity or après vous to ethics, where sanctity “is the principle of an ethics whose foundations rest on the priority of the other and on ‘my’ finite responsibility” for her or him (Hansel, 1999, p. 169). In this essay, servant-leadership is explored by describing the initial ethical movement in the poetic response to others found in the work of each of four poets.
Dangerous vitality

Greenleaf (1977/2002) views the servant-leader as one willing to “create dangerously,” a phrase taken from Nobel Prize winner Albert Camus’ last lecture (p. 12, 48). Such a person has some foresight or intuition for the unknowable that comes of listening to others and putting their priorities first (p. 17). Wheatley (1998) finds that the servant-leader gives voice to a story of life that serves the human spirit and nurtures it. It is relational, based on “the nature of life to move toward one another” (p. 349). Servant-leaders “act in service to the great creative desires that each of us carries” and possess the courage to tell the story (pp. 349-350). Servant-leadership begins with the movement toward service, and “then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (Greenleaf, 1977/2002, p. 13). But Greenleaf sees one “limitation on language”: the need for the hearer to make “that leap of imagination that connects the verbal concept to the hearer’s own experience” (p. 18). The leader’s generous and creative response proves critical to the hearer’s leap of imagination and to leadership theory in that it serves “as an indication of the way” (Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, 1971, p. 1588). Such an indication, forged of reflection, awareness, discernment, and inspiration, occurs prior to any model.

The ability to lead entails going in advance—taking a risk for the other person with the willingness to speak out in the fullness of language. Such a position suggests a foundational role for poetry, including lyric fiction, in theories of leadership, especially servant-leadership. This role deserves study for many reasons, notably poetry’s expressions of ethical response and responsibility, transcendence, and semantic innovation as important for new possibilities of thought. The leader often relies on the poet’s figurative language ability to project a sense of vision and moral imagination, to speak and write in depth of a fresh approach, or to propose an altered path. To appreciate these dynamic connections involves unmasking the interrelated nature of ethical movement, poetic language, and thought as they find expression in responsive, responsible leadership.
Connections between servant-leadership theory, Levinas’ transcenden-
tal ethical philosophy, and Ricoeur’s hermeneutic phenomenology, as well
as poetry and literary theory, can form an important nexus of life-philoso-
phy, contemplation, and action. In the following section, key terms that
appear in the essay are defined, showing how terms traditionally associated
with specific disciplines are used in the present context.

GROUNDWORK

A phenomenological starting point, where phenomenological inquiry
begins and philosophical orientation occurs, is “the conviction that a radical
interrogation of meaning requires us to penetrate beneath the established
concepts of empirical, logical or scientific ‘objectification’ (what Husserl
called the ‘natural attitude’) to that concretely ‘lived experience’ of . . .
temporal and historical being-in-the-world” (Kearney, 1984, p. 7).

Hermeneutics. In a general philosophical sense this term implies a theory,
method or approach to interpretation. As Ricoeur (1974) notes,

hermeneutics involves the general problem of comprehension. And,
moreover, no noteworthy interpretation has been formulated which does
not borrow from the modes of comprehension available to a given epoch:
myth, allegory, metaphor analogy, etc. . . in Aristotle, hermeneia is not
limited to allegory but concerns every meaningful discourse. (p. 4)

Ricoeur also insists that “every hermeneutics is thus, explicitly or implicit-
ily, self-understanding by means of understanding others” (p. 17). By
overcoming the distance between the person and the text or signs, the per-
son can “appropriate meaning” to herself or himself (p. 16).

Meaning. In phenomenological approaches to understanding one aims to
explore meanings. Poetic images allow us to read meaning into images,
though “we see some images only to the extent that we first hear them”
(Ricoeur, 1991b, p. 128). Expressive meaning, such as that derived from
poetry, is “meaning obtained from contexts that express, and thus elicit, such things as mood, feeling, emotion, values. . . Expressive meaning may also have cognitive or other kinds of meaning associated with it” (Angeles, 1992, p. 180). For Levinas (1993), the other person gives sense to expression, and it is only by her or him that a phenomenon as a meaning is, of itself, introduced into being (p. 95).

The face. Levinas’ description of “the face” and his references to its “appearance” refer to a dimension of the other person. This term is fundamental to Levinas’ philosophy. With an allusion to Plato’s idea of the Good, Levinas characterizes the face as coming from on high. Some other metaphors he uses characterize “the other as a stranger, as naked (not clothed in the cultural paraphernalia that make us similar), as destitute or marginal, as an orphan or widow” (Peperzak, 1998, pp. 114-115). The focus is not on representation but on vulnerability. Peperzak notes that aside from these negative qualifications,

the only way to express the impact made by the other [the face] in positive terms is to use ethical language: the other reveals a command; to address me (in looking at or speaking to me) is to reveal my being-for-the-other in the sense of serving, respecting, and honoring the other’s “height.” As other—not through any deed or wish or will—the other deserves my devotion or dedication to or responsibility for him or her . . . Here a kind of ought is the only possible correlate of the manifestation of the “being.” My obligation to serve the other coincides with my being what I am as revealed by the other’s presence before me. (p. 115)

Many connections exist between poetry, philosophy, ethics, and leadership, and the ethical movement of language, which knows no boundaries, precedes all such demarcations. Boundaries tend to preserve influence and authority through spheres of power. Drawing from the metaethical philosophy of Levinas, psychologist George Kunz (1998) argues that such a Darwinian approach or thesis “is challenged by the thesis that is beyond any thesis: ethical responsibility” (p. 23). The idealistic myth of individual
freedoms over individual responsibility falls to the call from the weak for "the strong, especially as a community, to protect them," for "conscience is not a private whisper; it is knowing together" (p. 23).

As a writer of poetry, in a heightened way, I may respond to the face of the other person in need. I can never live in some hiding place of inwardness. My words express not only content as knowledge, but the interhuman debt, our vulnerability to one another. I am concerned with language that sees, hears, and touches the particular person. Such concrete, sensory detail avoids abstraction and fights against dehumanization. Of special interest is my unique opportunity for an expressive response that accepts the call for an ethical answer. This is not a disembodied moment, but requires movement of one human being toward another within the contingencies of daily life.

As a fine art, creative writing is praxis. Freire (1993/2001) finds that a "true word" is not only reflection but also praxis, capable of transforming reality (p. 87). Without this dimension, language becomes empty. The oppression of voice eventually leads to resentment, depression, and even rage. The poet’s voice and relations with the world become an invaluable force in society as ethical leadership (Guare, 2001, pp. 82-87). Wheatley’s (1998) new tale for servant-leadership moves from the old mechanistic story of domination and control, which engenders fear, to “autopoiesis—self-creation—from the same root as poetry” (pp. 342, 346). Leadership as the author’s voice crying out through poetry in the literal face of injustice participates in this critical movement.

Poets consistently lead through their art without organizational authority, and Heifetz (1994) finds certain benefits in this type of leadership, including the ability to a) “deviate from the norms of authoritative decision making,” b) “more readily raise questions that disturb,” c) have “more latitude for creative deviance,” and d) live “closer to the detailed experiences of some stakeholders in the situation” (p. 188). Again, the echo of Camus’ voice is heard: create dangerously! In this context, several examples of how the poet’s ethical response and the language of poetry may prove inte-
gral to leadership theory can illuminate the process of poetic leadership and its global range.

FOUR POETS

*The world is not a horse you can bridle,*  
*To be mounted and ridden at your pleasure.*  
——da Todi (1982, p. 181)

Italian poet Jacopone da Todi sent this warning to Pope Boniface VIII while imprisoned from 1278 to 1303 (Peck, 1980, pp. 125-131). Jacopone’s religious poetry is marked by its lack of moderation and by intemperance of language that scandalized conventional critics. He made sport of the corruption around him and railed against the flagrant abuse of ecclesiastical power, especially that of Pope Boniface VIII, who excommunicated Jacopone and sent him to a subterranean cell, where he suffered solitary confinement for almost five years. In his prison poems, “without rival in the literature of his time for their mocking self-scrutiny, an astounding variant of Franciscan humility, Jacopone marked the beginning of a *vita nova* and a new poetry” (Hughes, 1982, p. 57). In his first letter to Boniface, *Lauda* LVI, he says two shields protect him against the Pope’s anathema and excommunication:

*For I have two shields, and unless I lay them aside*  
*No steel can pierce my flesh, per secula infinita*  
*The first shield is on the left, the other on the right.*  
*The one on the left has been proven as hard as diamond,*  
*No weapon can penetrate it:*  
*This shield is my self-hatred, bonded to God’s honor.*  
*The shield on the right is of ruby:*  
*It blazes like fire, flames leaping high:*  
*It is made of ardent love of neighbor.*  
*Step closer and you’ll feel its heat with a rush.*  
*Do what you will, this love will overcome you.*  
——da Todi (1982, p. 178)
As poet and mystic, Jacopone da Todi leads by offering a poetic response to those of his time. Composing his poetry in the familiar Umbrian dialect, considered coarse by the elite of his day, rather than Latin, immediately connected Jacopone to the common people, and this linguistic affinity for them was rewarded with their deep affection (Peck, 1980, pp. 180-181). One prison poem, marked by an ironic realism that voices the poet’s resolve, so captured his near contemporaries that he is pictured in the prison on a fifteenth-century manuscript, and a fifteenth-century mural shows him with a book open to the poem’s first line. His poetry was known widely before the first printed edition appeared in 1490 (Lawrence, 2003, p. 237). He is also a poet of the present age in many ways. As a well-educated young businessman, Jacopone (1230-1306) would have shared in the economic boom that swept through north and central Italy in the last half of the thirteenth century. According to Peck (1980), this period saw a revolution in food processing and marketing, clothing, trade, and public works, such as paved streets and squares, and water and sewer systems (pp. 19-23). In the midst of new wealth and commercial progress with its intense interest in law, money became “the complicated and fascinating new toy of the urban classes” (p. 46). But Jacopone turned away from all this and became a “fool” for God, willing to suffer ridicule and jest, willing to say or do anything as long as he could live in Christ’s love.

As an itinerant preacher and a Friar Minor, his poverty acted as a symbol or pledge for an emptying of self. By discussing the soteriological implications of Jacopone’s radical Franciscan poverty, McKenna (1997) helps the modern reader understand why this poet was willing to suffer ecclesiastical persecution rather than abandon a life of economic destitution. As north and central Italy rapidly moved from a gift economy to a profit economy with “increased reliance on money, which set a more universal and less personal value upon goods and services rendered” (p. 273), Jacopone’s life and poetry cried out for the intensely personal value and allegiance of the gift. Radical Franciscans identified the gift’s value with Christ’s generosity. The economic dilemma of separating the person from
the product is no less critical today, and the need for the poetic response as a true voice of leadership appears no less urgent.

Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, a seventeenth-century Colonial Spanish nun of the Order of Saint Jerome, Mexico, wrote secular and religious poetry, plays, essays, scholarly research, and religious treatises. Her intellectual biography, *Response*, written in 1691, is a major statement of women’s intellectual freedom. The danger the male clergy perceived in a woman so skilled in logic and poetry pervaded her life. In “Primero Sueno” or “First Dream,” Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz (1997) used the Baroque Latin American style as a poetic challenge to traditional concepts of the Catholic Church and women. Merrim (1999) notes that “from the first lines onward,” the poem “associates knowledge with the feminine” (p. 237) and voices Sor Juana’s response to her own persecution and the injustices done to the women around her. With its indomitable will to know, the Soul treasures

*the Spark of the Divine she hears within,*  
*judging that she is nearly free of all*  
*that bind her, keeps her from liberty,*  
*the corporeal chains*  
*that vulgarly restrain and clumsily*  
*impede the soaring intellect that now,*  
*unchecked, measures the vastness of the Sphere.*  

(de la Cruz, 1997, p. 93)

Sor Juana suffered enclosure and silencing for assuming roles that challenged traditional gender systems, but her response to injustice often confused her contemporaries because she fought for women’s rights through the subtlety of poetry (Stavans, 1997, p. xli). Despite the forces against her, this autodidact, writing from within a convent, brilliantly defended women’s learning and intellectual freedom in the New World’s patriarchal, misogynist culture. Sor Juana’s work reveals the important link between creative expression and philosophical inquiry as evidence of developing an activist consciousness within a leadership that serves and heals the world. Many of the goals Sor Juana sought mirror the still unmet desires of
women at the beginning of the twenty-first century, making her dream and its world-image changes for women a still unfolding story of leadership.

Twentieth-century Russian poet Anna Akhmatova lived in poverty and peril throughout the Stalinist period. The government expelled her from the Soviet Writers’ Union because of her belief in the power of poetry to move from ethical address to justice. A premiere example of what Levinas calls the ethical moment occurs in the beginning of “Requiem” when Akhmatova (1985) describes waiting in a queue outside the prison to see her son. A woman turns to her and asks if she can describe this (p. 87). “Requiem” is that famous poetic response. The poem’s narrator later describes the horror of the situation:

Someone should have shown you—little jester,
Little teaser, blue-veined charmer,
Laughing-eyed, lionized, sylvan-princely
Sinner—to what point you would come:
How, the three hundredth in a queue,
You’d stand at the prison gate
And with your hot tears
Burn through the New-Year ice.
How many lives are ending there! Yet it’s
Mute, even the prison-poplar’s
Tongue’s in its cheek as it’s swaying. (p. 90)

In the end, the poet bears witness, not just for the one woman, but for the many silenced by totalitarian force:

I have woven for them a great shroud
Out of the poor words I heard them speak. (p. 95)

Akhmatova does not turn away from the danger in this form of servant-leadership. By connecting the horror of the concrete experience in the here and now with the symbolism of evil through her metaphors, the poet manages to express what remains buried in ordinary language. In the pro-
cess, Akhmatova reinterprets the symbolism of evil for the twentieth century. Her creative language of integrity becomes a moral act of resistance.

Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral, the first Latin American to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, helped organize Mexico’s entire rural education system after the revolution. She accepted the 1945 Prize as “the candidate for women and children” (Tapscott, 2002, p. 236). In her introduction to Poemas de las Madres or The Mothers’ Poems, Mistral (1996) writes about walking on a street in Temuco and seeing a passing man make a crude remark to a poor pregnant woman sitting in a shack’s doorway. At that moment she felt profound solidarity, “the infinite pity of woman for woman” and posed this question: “If the purpose of art is to make everything beautiful, with an immense mercy, why haven’t we purified, for the eyes of the impure, this?” (p. 3). Writing with what she described as almost religious intention, she gave the world The Mothers’ Poems. One of these, “My Prayer,” says,

Like the women who place jars
outside to gather the evening dew, I
place my breasts before God; I give
Him a new name. I call Him The One
Who Fills, and ask Him for the liqueur
of life. My child will arrive thirsty,
looking for this. (p. 13)

Gabriela Mistral’s words give poetic expression to women whose voices gender and poverty severely blunt or deny. Through a new set of metaphors or other types of imaginative language, the poet leads us to an altered experience of the world by making visible what was not seen. The role of mother, a central motif in Mistral’s writing, highlights a vision of women in the public sphere, bonding nature to nation (Marchant, 1999, p. 50). She becomes the voice of the disempowered—indigenous poor women and children—and their desires. Mistral’s view of the poet as servant of the people is reflected by the inscription on her tomb: “What the
soul does for the body so does the poet for her people” (Agosin, 1997, p. 19).

The poet’s role in serving the other person by first responding to the call of the face, and then using language to bear witness, constitutes a critical act of ethical leadership. Leadership that moves from ethical response to a responsive and responsible moral imagination has struck some as being so attuned to unspoken longings and the provocation of thought that those who exercise it do so at a risk. Totalitarian societies strive to silence their great poetic voices, for the poet’s vision, expressed in metaphors and images, has the power to suggest new ways of knowing and feeling. In a counterpoint form of despair, democracies based on capitalism marginalize poetry by trivializing poetic expression. Is there any reason to think that the technological world of power would respond more graciously to a challenge than the world of secular and ecclesiastical greed did in Jacopone da Todi’s time?

Many political entities have considered poetry dangerous or subversive because of its strong resistance to the mere functional or utilitarian use of language (Ricoeur, 1991a, p. 449). The poet who cannot turn away from injustice or from attempts to falsify the original intention of the discourse cries out in the fullness of language. The face of injustice is a specific human face. Servant-leadership theory is founded on such responses.

POETRY AS CENTRAL TO LEADERSHIP THEORY

Ethical leadership and language begin with openness to the other. Peperzak (1991), writing on Levinasian ethics and the turn to hermeneutics, describes how the author presents herself and espouses herself “to the benevolence or violence of readers” over whom she has no power (p. 59). By offering a word, the poet opens herself. This openness does not constitute a message, but an appeal, a call or provocation to which the reader may respond with words of his or her own. Poetry moves out of this exposed, expressive voice, childlike in its lack of self-defense, as it has not yet learned to dissemble or deceive to protect itself. In its orientation toward
the other person, a work of art, such as poetry, may constitute an impulse without guaranteed remuneration. Levinas (1993) describes this generous impulse, moving beyond the same or self in time, as “liturgy” in the Greek sense, for it “designates the exercise of a function which is not totally gratuitous, but requires on the part of him who exercises it a putting out of funds at a loss” (pp. 92-93). Being more attached to the life of the other than one’s own life and giving voice to that relationship is the first value. By offering a word, one “in a sense prays” (Levinas, 1989c, p. 149). Ethical movement dwells in this initial poetic impulse.

This position honors the subject over the object and orients Levinas’ philosophy, which rests on the ethical appeal and responsibility of the human voice. Levinas’ (1989a) call for ethics as first philosophy offers a new depth, orientation, and language perspective to leadership theory. For Levinas, ethics precedes freedom. Responsibility as an obligation to respond to and for the other person “is prior to my own liberty” (Hansel, 1999, p. 171). This is radical servant-leadership, based not on a moral quality, value system, or the highest point in a hierarchy of virtues, but upon speaking out.

The transcendence practiced in poetry, as an initial generous impulse that goes beyond the self in response to the face of the other, is not full of grand plans or actions. It realizes itself as endurance and patience, despite rejection, for “instead of an ascension by means of elitism and originality, it demands a descent to service and devotion” (Peperzak, 1991, p. 63). Such a movement does not preclude the idea of moral freedom and choice, however.

As Reinhold Niebuhr observed, moral imagination is necessarily a responsive and responsible imagination, constituted in dialogue, capable of answering (Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996, p. 151). While moral leadership is cited as a key issue in leadership studies, Mangan (2002) says scholars do not agree on how to define terms like morals and values, which they, nevertheless, find crucial to understanding leaders (p. A10). Polley (2002) argues that servant-leadership as a model “cuts across various leadership
theories and provides a foundational philosophy for theories that emphasize principles congruent with human growth” (p. 125). Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) address differences between servant-leadership and other charismatic, transformational models, and review literature suggesting that servant-leadership exceeds such models by “its recognition of the leader’s social responsibilities to serve those people who are marginalized by a system” (p. 62). Spears (1998) identifies deep awareness as one characteristic of the servant-leader. He notes the servant-leader’s place in understanding issues involving ethics and taking the risk of response (p. 6). Greenleaf (1977/2002) states: “awareness is not a giver of solace—it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener” (p. 28). Ethical leadership as the author’s or leader’s voice crying out through speaking and writing in the literal face of injustice actively participates in this critical movement.

The risk of figurative language the poet uses is real. Metaphor revels in polysemy, giving words multiple meanings that refuse containment. Thompson (2000) finds a leader’s ability to communicate vision is not a matter of “charisma . . . or a way with words,” but is the capacity to use symbol and metaphor to convey layers of meaning beyond that accessible to mere rationality and its word-forms” (p. 191). No researcher should deny the troubling, even volatile nature of such disparate interpretive potential. When Greenleaf (1977/2002) honors Camus and admonishes servant-leaders to create dangerously, he acknowledges such factors. But taking this risk with language seems essential for leadership theory, in part, because “the first danger to our present culture is a kind of reduction of language to communication at the lowest level or to manipulate things and people,” for then language becomes merely instrumental (Ricoeur, 1991a, p. 448). Poetry can challenge the status quo because it has the capacity to create new worlds, new ways of thinking.

Some caution in the linking of language and leadership theory is warranted here. The call for a universal language as a means of cross-cultural communication remains potent in scientific-technological society (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994, p. 88). Newman (1982) dispenses all
notions of one language serving as well as another. If languages are not even equal in adapting scientific symbols, how can they be equal in metaphorical richness, force, musicality, precision of thought? Revelations of objective truth do not cease being subjective, precisely because they are written by a person (p. 215, 218). Wyschogrod (2000) notes that language itself “already refers to the one who hears and the one who speaks.” But the one who speaks does so against a lifeworld, “so one can never summarize all the contexts of language and all the positions in which interlocutors could find themselves” (pp. 153-154). For Ricoeur, the polysemic nature of language, specifically poetic language, rules out all absolute interpretations. He also notes that while scientific language operates more or less directly, literary or poetic language “operates in a more subtle, more indirect manner, inasmuch as the chasm between language and reality has reached much greater depths” (Ricoeur, 1998, p. 86). The images of poetry lead us farther than we know. In saying the image or hearing it, the listener participates in the sound which carries her or him away. In this moment, there is no longer a oneself, but rather a passage beyond self. For Levinas (1989b), such is the captivation or incantation of poetry (p. 133).

While some important thinkers in servant-leadership studies address poetry’s contribution to leadership theory through works of literature and specific creative writers, the foundational role creative language can play in leadership’s conceptual and expressive range, including its vitality, is most often neglected. Therefore, samples of poetry that express a poet’s ethical response to others serve as primary documents for future study. Secondary sources include literary analysis of the historical periods and poetry types by literary scholars.

Key questions emerge from these considerations. How do the poet’s voice and response to another person or persons in oral and/or written creative expression prove valuable, even critical, for servant-leadership theory? What meaning does this reveal? How does poetry take leadership theory beyond the mere functional or utilitarian use of language to make ethical vision and linguistic imagination possible?
CONCLUSION

This essay attempts to describe the meanings the poet and poetry have for leadership theory, especially servant-leadership theory. Such an investigation can add to the field of leadership studies by articulating important links between poetry, ethics, and leadership. From the convergence of Greenleaf, Wheatley, Ricoeur, and Levinas, we begin to build an awareness of servant-leadership theory’s rich and powerful connection with language studies, especially creative language and ethics. This points leadership theory away from the economic profit model and toward a creative synthesis that elevates personal and collective vulnerability, sincerity, authenticity, and responsibility. Many more studies of language and leadership theory are needed.

The profound notion of poetic voice suggests an ethical response to others and demands a radical role and vision of service. Just as the congregation gives meaning to the cantor’s voice through their answering verse, and audience response to the author becomes an integral part of the poem, so the servant-leader relies on the voices and journeys of those he or she serves for vision and guidance. Poetry’s unique ability to speak metaphorically, to point toward the symbolic depth of meaning between people and between people and the natural world, suggests a subtle, important, even dangerous role for the poet’s voice in servant-leadership studies and for the servant-leader’s voice in society.

Knowledge as rational thought will never capture the movement of love, for love begins in faith, believing that love without reward is valuable. Semantic innovation, transcendence and responsibility for the other reside together in the world of the poetic word. But first comes the response to the stranger, the lost one, the disenfranchised person as gift. And this is love, giving oneself in physical and verbal, then written, sound and form. Poet Elizabeth Jennings (1989) writes:
Love is the argument, the lyric moment,
The care for ritual, the need for growth
And cities rise above the misty mountains
Before the sunlight loves them with its gold. (p. 49)

Greenleaf (1997/2002) tells us love can fill the vacuum of loss, every loss we can imagine, but he does not discount suffering on the servant-leadership journey (p. 327). There is a cost for ethical response and for interaction with a symbol that creates new meaning and requires responsibility for the suffering of others. That cost may lead us into the harsh realities of loss, leaving us dissolved, burned, broken off. Yet the cost of servant-leadership inherently also leads us to meaning touched with elegance and loveliness, as well as legitimate power and greatness. In that meaning, in the face of every loss, we discover that not only are we well-loved, we become love.

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EVOLVING LEADERSHIP: SERVANT-LEADERSHIP IN THE POLITICAL WORLD

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An interesting experience about how leadership can work in modern businesses occurred when I was a Member of Congress. It involved legislation entitled the Teamwork of Employees and Management Act (Team Act) that was introduced in Congress at the request of a group of employers. The employers sought to amend the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) to allow teams of their employees to determine terms and conditions of their employment.

The Team Act was opposed by labor unions that argued that the NLRA allows only employers or duly elected labor unions, but not employees, to determine their own terms of employment. The unions were legally correct. Complaints filed by labor organizations with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) had resulted in substantial fines against employers for using “unfair labor practices” by delegating to teams of employees the powers to determine their own terms and conditions of work.

It may be difficult for some to understand how the granting of such rights by employers to employees could be deemed a breach of law, especially when applied within a non-union setting. But the law at its best is imperfect, and its imperfections deepen when Congress and unions are involved in the intense partisan politics of labor law.

In order to avoid these charges, concerned employers appealed to Congress for legislation to amend the NLRA to specifically allow employers operating a non-union business to delegate to teams of their employees enhanced powers to determine the terms and conditions of their employment, including the operation of entire departments, hiring, firing, wage
increases, and so forth. The legislation specifically preserved the traditional right of unions that had been elected by employees to be their exclusive bargaining agent to have the sole right to represent employees in the determination of their terms and conditions of employment.

Of course, unions were not unaware that allowing employees new freedoms to determine their own conditions of work might inhibit votes by employees to be represented exclusively by unions. It was not surprising, therefore, that unions, in general, opposed the legislation. President Clinton sided with labor unions. The majority of Democrats followed the President’s lead, while many Republicans wanted no part of a bill that would threaten their political support by labor unions.

Yet the Team Act narrowly passed in both the House and Senate in the 104th Congress. But it was vetoed by the President. An override of the veto proved to be impossible.

NEW IDEAS OF LEADERSHIP

The employers and employees who supported this legislation believed that it was empowering for teams of employees to have the freedom to determine significant conditions of their employment. And it was here that I first heard of servant-leadership.

I found that servant-leadership was first proposed in the 1960s by Robert Greenleaf. This quiet and erudite Quaker was in a high executive capacity at AT&T corporation for many years, where his specialty was in management research, development and education. He took early retirement in 1964 because he was so taken by the promise of servant-leadership in business. He began his 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. From 1970 until his death in 1990, Greenleaf wrote a remarkable series of essays and books about the viability of servant-leadership in businesses, especially large businesses. These essays are still influencing new generations of people who are interested in regenerating a loss of what Greenleaf felt was an integral part of
early America’s success, that is, its agricultural setting with its strong sense of community, relationships, and connectedness among employers and employees.

The more I learned about Robert Greenleaf, the more I appreciated his ideas about servant-leadership and the importance of business being designed to validate the worth and dignity of employees, and the more I understood why those employers were asking Congress to pass the Team Act. However, I also realized how difficult it was for such new ideas to penetrate political minds, especially in the field of labor law. Congressional leaders on both sides of the aisle are still aware of the historic and vitriolic battles over labor laws fought in the 1930s. And they still engage in those battles as though time has stood still.

Many years of political experience have also taught me that the architects of beneficial changes in society are seldom our political leaders. Usually, the real “legislators” of new and exciting ideas come from the private sector, from contemporary prophets and role models, like Greenleaf, that is, from ordinary people—employers, employees, teachers, artists, poets, writers, lawyers, doctors, scientists, educators—mostly non-political folks from all walks of life.

And during the tumultuous twentieth century, there were exciting examples of people who, like Greenleaf, began to tire of the old and often barbaric rules of command and control business leadership.

The beauty of the Team Act was that bosses who championed this kind of leadership found that their employees felt that their worth and potential were validated when they were granted control of the terms and conditions of their employment. Employees enthusiastically reported that they found this empowering. And what’s more, employers discovered that it was also good for customers, shareholders and business profits.

I learned that Greenleaf (1977) encouraged managers of business to move from traditional direct, command and control and the supervisory approach of leadership to a servant-leadership that requires “the growth of those who do the work as the primary aim of business” (1977, p. 145).
Greenleaf talked about cultural changes in America and observed that “until recently, caring was largely person to person; now most of it is mediated through institutions—often large, complex, powerful, impersonal, not always competent, sometimes corrupt” (1977, p. 49). Greenleaf apparently saw these large and impersonal institutions as a labyrinth of limited-liability rather than of community, that is, as steeped in highly conditional love. That interested me.

Greenleaf reasoned that “if a better society is to be built, one that is more just and more loving, one that provides greater creative opportunity for its people, then the most open course is to raise both the capacity to serve and the very performance as servant of existing major institutions by new regenerative forces operating within them” (1977, p. 49). He agreed that “the usual assumption about the (business) firm is that it is in business to make a profit and serve its customers and that it does things for and to employees to get them to be productive” (1977, p. 145).

He presented the novel idea, however, that the “new ethic requires that growth of those who do the work (the employees) is the primary aim, and the workers then see to it that the customer is served and that the ink on the bottom line is black” (1977, p. 145). He therefore saw businesses moving “from where they are, with the heavy emphasis on production and often greed, to where they need to be, with heavy emphasis on growing people” (1977, p. 143). That, indeed, struck me as revolutionary new thought.

In fact, without the ultimate adoption by business organizations of servant-leadership, Greenleaf saw exploitation of employees, stockholders, investors, customers, and clients, and ultimately disaster for society. Obviously, he was a business prophet ahead of his time, a man who knew the simple power of love. I imagine many people of his day thought him a bit odd. Yet there is an old saying that love makes you free, but first it makes you feel very odd. Greenleaf must have felt very odd at times about his ideas of servant-leadership.
SERVANT-LEADERS, UTOPIAN THOUGHTS?—EARLIER BUSINESS PROPHETS

In 1970 Greenleaf asked himself whether his thoughts about servant-leadership and business entities ultimately embracing concepts of “growing employees” were “utopian” (1977, p. 147). That, of course, was, and still is, the view of the majority of business people. He answered by saying:

I don’t think so. Most of our large American businesses have the capability and the resources to embrace a new ethic like this and act resolutely on its implications. And I believe that among them there are several that have sufficient foresight and creative drive that they will prefer to run ahead of the changing ethic rather than be run over by them. Such is the way that new ethics are made. (1977, p. 147)

Interestingly, in an essay in 1974, Greenleaf mentioned that he had received “the first unequivocal response” from an institution inquiring about how it could become a servant-leader. Greenleaf observed: “This response did not come from where the casual observer might guess—a church, a university, a hospital, a social agency. It came from where I expected it: from a business, a large multinational business” (1977, p. 158).

Here is how Greenleaf referred to servant-leadership in 1970 when there were few adherents to his views:

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant (manager) first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and most difficult to administer, is this: Do those served grow as persons? (emphasis mine) Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived? (1977, p. 13)

That’s a pretty tough challenge for practical business people to accept. But that is always true of the prophet’s message.

Greenleaf writes that the challenges were great also in the seventeenth
century, when an earlier prophet of new business values, George Fox, gave English Quaker business people a new ethic (truthfulness, dependability, fixed prices, no haggling). Fox did it, according to Greenleaf, “because his view of right conduct demanded it, not because it would be more profitable” (1977, p. 143). However, it did, in fact, become practical and more profitable, Greenleaf reports, “because those early Quaker businessmen quickly emerged out of the seamy morass of that day as people who could be trusted. But the new ethic was a radical demand on those people and they must have had apprehensions about it when it was urged upon them” (1977, p. 143).

In 1970, six years after Greenleaf had taken early retirement from business and when he began to publish his thoughts about servant-leadership and how validating the worth and dignity of people would build communities of trust even in big business, his thoughts were scoffed at as being “love and kisses,” not practical, and nothing but unsubstantiated theories. Few people, in or out of business, took his ideas seriously.

They were especially unthinkable in the rough and tumble business and labor markets I remember as a young lawyer in the ’50s. Or in my earliest days of working my way through college, when I labored in the construction trades in the late ’40s as a member of the Building and Construction Trades Council of the American Federation of Labor. Few people in business management in those days talked about love or cultures of trust being an integral part of competitive business organizations. No way! It was a hard-nosed sink or swim, dog-eat-dog, command and control attitude that prevailed in business. Love—especially unconditional love—was something one kept at home, or maybe exercised in church or on special occasions, but it was no part of highly competitive businesses and the rigors of capitalism.

But the consciousness of a free people armed with guarantees of human rights have an unfathomable way of altering our views and advancing humanity in often unobserved and unexpected ways. Greenleaf was a contemporary prophet and one who was far ahead of his time. He began
writing in the 1970s about how America was losing its social values of love and service to others that had been so important in a largely small-town, agricultural America of his early youth. He was not afraid to write and speak passionately, yet softly, about those regenerative values in, of all places, the workplace.

CONTEMPORARY VIEWS OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP IN A GLOBAL ECONOMY

Today, more than three decades after Greenleaf first wrote about servant-leadership, listen to a contemporary analysis of servant-leadership by Dr. Stephen Covey, founder of the nonprofit Institute for Principle-Centered leadership and author of the best-selling book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*:

One of the things that’s driving it (servant-leadership) is the global economy, which absolutely insists on quality at low cost. You’ve got to produce more for less and with greater speed than ever done before. The only way you can do that in a sustained way is through the empowerment of people. And the only way you can get empowerment is through high-trust cultures and through empowerment philosophy that turn bosses into servants and coaches. (in Spears, 1998, Foreword, p. xi)

Covey (1989) also, without apology, zeroes in on those seemingly theoretical words “unconditional love” as the root source of “high trust cultures” needed in business organizations that result in empowerment of employees.

[W]hen we truly love others without condition, without strings, we help them feel secure and safe and validated and affirmed in their essential worth, identity, and integrity. Their natural growth process is encouraged. We make it easier for them to live the laws of life — cooperation, contribution, self-discipline, integrity — and to discover and live true to the highest and best within them. We give them the freedom to act on their own inner imperatives rather than to react to our conditions and limitations. (Covey, 1989, p. 199)
Lest anyone assume that the power of love is too soft and not practical, Covey adds, “This does not mean we become permissive or soft. That itself is a massive withdrawal. We counsel, we plead, we set limits and consequences. But we love regardless” (Covey, 1989, p. 199).

Covey then writes,

When we violate the primary laws of love, when we attach strings and conditions to that gift, we actually encourage others to violate the primary laws of life. We put them in a reactive, defensive position where they feel they have to prove, “I matter as a person, independent of you.” In reality, they aren’t independent. They are counter-dependent, which is another form of dependency and is at the lowest end of the Maturity Continuum. They become reactive, almost enemy-centered, more concerned about defending their “rights” and producing evidence of their individuality than they are about proactively listening to and honoring their own inner imperatives. (Covey, 1989, p. 199)

The advice is good advice not only for employers, but also for teachers, parents—for anyone who has authority over others.

Covey concludes: “The key is to make deposits, constant deposits of unconditional love” (Covey, 1989, p. 199). That, of course, is deemed to be much too theoretical for most observers. But business people today are taking a second look. The world is changing and getting smaller. Leaders, all kinds, are beginning to listen to the prophets and role models who are bringing home the point that building community based on love is an essential in all human organizations because it is a basic law of the cosmos.

Greenleaf (1977) concurs, he agrees with the importance of those words, “unconditional love” and writes,

Love is an indefinable term, and its manifestations are both subtle and infinite. But it begins, I believe, with one absolute condition: unlimited liability. As soon as one’s liability for another is qualified to any degree, love is diminished by that much. (1977, p. 38)

Obviously, neither Covey nor Greenleaf had any problems with uncon-
ditional love being impractical or beyond anyone’s practical abilities. They both found it natural, powerful, pragmatic, and a very real law of human nature, one that could be of immense help to businesses in a world that worries about the effect of global competition.

In other words, effective leadership should recognize the pragmatic and common sense of cultures of trust that validate and empower people rather than demeaning and alienating them. In the view of Greenleaf and Covey, this is not theoretical for business leaders, but the opposite: very practical, necessary, synergistic, a “win-win” for employers, employees, stockholders, customers and society. If it’s really applied there should be no losers—only winners.

The Team Act would have allowed employers and employees to rise above some of the impulses that create so much management-labor discord in America today because it’s good for both management and labor, as well as for profits. Servant-leadership involves new and practical ideas about how the participative universe really operates. It is about de-conditioning the power of love in order to validate the worth of people, that is, of employees and customers.

Admittedly, that may not represent common thoughts about effective labor relationships today. Most employers and labor unions today would say that it is nice theory, but impractical in capitalism.

But then prophets are nothing if not ahead of their time.

THE PREDICTED DISCOMBOBULATION AND EXPLOITATION OF COMMAND AND CONTROL LEADERSHIP

I was impressed by the following words of Covey relative to the potential effect of servant-leadership upon America and upon capitalism.

I believe that the overwhelming majority of the people of this country, with the right kind of servant-leadership at all levels, most importantly at the family level, could heal our country. Otherwise, our social problems will worsen and deepen until eventually they will overwhelm
the economic machinery and this would discombobulate everything. (in Spears, 1998, Foreword, p. xviii)

This prediction comes not from a philosopher or from the halls of academia. Precisely the opposite. It comes from a very practical and respected consultant to free enterprise leaders. And he prophetically warns that a command and control leadership in business will eventually overwhelm our economic machinery with its cyclical episodes of greed and exploitation of employees, investors, and perhaps ultimately our environment.

In the light of the latest economic exploitations, disasters, and business boondoggles that have again befallen business leadership in America, the persistent and seamy side of capitalism, Greenleaf’s and Covey’s words seem prophetic.

When the most recent economic bubble burst in America, business leadership was again faced with an array of embarrassing investigations and charges of civil or criminal wrongdoing. America found that the corporate business leaders of Enron, Tyco, WorldCom, and many other public corporations and their officers, accountants, board members, insiders, financial analysts, investment bankers, and other assorted allies had spun webs of exclusivity, intrigue, crooked accounting, greed, and deceit. The results for employees, stockholders, and America’s economy were devastating. Corrupt corporate cultures in America seem to be endemic to business leadership and free enterprise.

Millions of employees, small investors, and businesses, nation-wide, had been economically devastated. Greed rules the day in Wall Street and in prestigious financial circles and in many a board room. Even the board of the venerable New York Stock Exchange was scored for unconscionable conduct. Capitalism received yet another severe black eye, and as I write this new breaches of law by business leaders and their advisors are emerging.

As a Member of Congress for fourteen years, I have marveled at the number of major economic disasters caused by business leaders that seem
to come along every few years like clockwork to embarrass free enterprise and our nation. And often, some of these disasters, like the Savings and Loan financial crisis, have required the taxpayers of America to bail out big business robber barons and their advisors and cohorts with billions of dollars of taxpayer funds. And the beat goes on.

One thing is for sure: a great many corporate executives, accountants, board members, financial experts, insiders, ad infinitum had contributed a lot, to use Covey’s words, to “overwhelm the economic machinery and to discombobulate everything.” And, of course, as a result Congress is called upon to pass a plethora of new laws to control the selfishness and greed of big business. But we all know that even the best of laws, alone, won’t change these cyclical business disasters that afflict free enterprise and create societies with too great a disparity between the rich and poor. Robber barons have been an embarrassing part of the capitalist system for too long. Ultimately, there has to be a change of consciousness here, not a change of laws, in order to alter the questionable culture of America’s long line of big business manipulators. Without the evolution of new concepts, such as servant-leadership in business affairs, these manipulators will always find ways of getting around the law to greedily discombobulate and exploit the economy and savings of employees and stockholders.

Somehow, the corporate cultures of greed must change. And eventually they will, as they did in the seventeenth century when George Fox, the English Quaker businessman, developed his new ethics of truthfulness, dependability, and fixed prices.

The old concepts of command and control and “power counts” have been descriptive of business leadership for too long. We are in a new millennium. Responsibility, stewardship, and yes, love, are not just nice words. They are practical and a part of any sustained success and progress of human nature. Servant-leadership is something we all ought to be thinking about in business, education, and politics, in making for a better place for the children we so blithely bring into this world. It may be the only way to save democracy, free enterprise and capitalism, and perhaps civilization. It
should be a vital part of the expansion of democracy and of the bill of rights for the people of our world.

WHAT WILL IT TAKE FOR CAPITALISM TO ABANDON TRADITIONAL COMMAND AND CONTROL LEADERSHIP?

For business leaders to ever give up command and control leadership, or at least to begin modifying it, they must at least become convinced that a global economy will insist on high quality products and services delivered to the consumer for less and with greater speed than ever before, and that the only practical way of doing that in a sustained way is through empowerment of employees with high-trust cultures.

In other words, the global economy is going to insist that business leaders must recognize that employees (and stockholders and consumers) are not just cogs in an inert machine. They are living, breathing human beings who must be empowered by being treated with dignity and respect.

This means that business leadership is going to have to be convinced that it is only that kind of practical leadership that can effectively compete long term in what is increasingly a global economy. Globalization has the potential of synergistically benefiting a greater part of mankind. Surely, business leaders realize, better than most of society, that we live in a shrinking world, and people from all nations are becoming aware that we are all interconnected now more than ever before. That cries out for a more loving and compassionate business leadership. Love knows no boundaries.

What damages free trade and globalization in the eyes of many today are international business organizations and their well-connected allies and collaborators who are seen as exploitative. That kind of a business as usual is not only immoral, but also against everyone’s best interests. Economic viability is something all the world is seeking and needs. Only business leaders can give them this. Business leaders don’t have to see this as a win-lose situation. And as the have-nots of this world also become more economically viable, they won’t be un-welcomed crashers of our borders.
Why do so many business and political leaders have so little awareness of this? The universe’s rules for safe conduct in our fragile human existence within time and space are not that difficult to understand. They simply call for the expansion of our love, given as unconditionally as possible in our fragile relationships with others — beyond family, tribe, religion, race, gender, nationality, social class, and so forth.

In the final analysis, this is a participative world, a unified cosmos — in which we all live and work and are united as one. Relationships are important. It’s not going to work, however, if one-half of the people of this world are uneducated, sick, desperately poor, and starving. We all have experienced love. We don’t have to take it by faith. No one has to explain what it is. In our better moments, we know it works. Without it, life is intolerable. Yet most of us apply it, with limits and conditions, within our family, home, religion, economic class or tribes, and assume that love and service in business or other worldly pursuits is too theoretical. Too “touchy-feely,” too impractical, vague, and abstract to be otherwise applied. And thus, we condition the boundaries of our love and reap the grim consequences.

Rabbi Michael Lerner writes:

In a world where two billion people live on an income of two dollars a day, and an average of 30,000 children die every day from diseases related to malnutrition, those who live at the top of the world’s food chain will always live in fear that military prowess will prove inadequate to protect them. (Michael Lerner, Anyone But Bush? Tikkun, March/April, 2004, p. 13)

THE PHILOSOPHY OF LEADERSHIP: IS IT BEGINNING TO CHANGE?

The philosophy of leadership may, however, be changing. There are, at least, hopeful signs. The twentieth century brought with it an unprecedented revolution of democracy and human rights. And many world leaders, including some former tyrants, emerged from that bloody century recogniz-
ing that political command and control leadership had a dismal record of wars, hatred and reciprocal vengeance. Slowly, political leadership of some nations has shown signs that leadership based on command and control is an invitation to disaster.

For instance, it was difficult in the early days of the twentieth century not to notice how a very shy but effective leader, Mohandas Gandhi, was able to champion love, non-violence, forgiveness, and peaceful civil disobedience to unjust laws in successfully leading India to a largely bloodless revolution against England. Gandhi said that one person’s love (1) can negate the hate of millions and (2) could gently shake a nation. At first, no one took such a philosophy of leadership seriously. He admitted that he got those ideas from a manuscript of a book, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, written by Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy in 1893. The book had been smuggled out of Russia into England, where Gandhi, as a young law student, chanced to read it. As a result, Gandhi later actually demonstrated in the twentieth century to an astonished world how the power of one person’s love could indeed gently shake a continent and negate the hate of millions as he led a revolution to free India from English rule with a minimum of bloodshed.

And a youthful Nelson Mandela, one of the liberators of South Africa from apartheid and its first democratically elected President from 1994 to 1999, also developed a servant-leadership that copied the use of love, peaceful civil disobedience, and non-violence because he saw it so effectively used by Gandhi to battle racism and economic deprivation against Indians during Gandhi’s 21-year residency in South Africa.

Gandhi’s demonstration of the practical powers of love, forgiveness, non-violence, and peaceful civil disobedience to unjust laws was also replicated by Martin Luther King Jr. in the successful civil rights revolution in America led by Dr. King in the 1960s.

Later, Lech Walesa, the founder of the Solidarity labor movement in Poland, also copied Gandhi’s tactics of non-violence and peaceful disobedi-
ence against unjust laws in his successful drive for Polish independence from the powerful communist regime in Poland.

The power of leadership based on cultures of love, forgiveness, and non-violence also appeared during the twentieth century in unlikely political leaders who wearied of leadership based on command and control and terrorism. President F.W. de Klerk of South Africa—in the 1990s at a crucial time in South Africa’s history—demonstrated the courage and prophetic vision to announce to a startled world that the best interests of the white community of South Africa would be served by negotiating themselves out of exclusive control of political power. As South Africa’s Bishop Desmond Tutu (1997) put it: “Very few constituencies are likely to take too kindly to candidates for political office who say their platform is to hand over power to their traditional adversaries” (Tutu, p. 38).

And, fortunately, when Nelson Mandela then emerged from 27 years of prison, he amazingly did not demonstrate hatred or revenge, but rather love, non-violence, reconciliation, and forgiveness for his captors. As a result, South Africa joined the growing number of democracies in the twentieth century that guarantee freedom and basic human rights to all of its citizens regardless of race, religion or creed.

After the creation of the South Africa democracy, an equally amazing event occurred. The government of South Africa, headed by Nelson Mandela, created a Truth and Reconciliation Commission chaired by Bishop Desmond Tutu. The TRC was designed to grant forgiveness and amnesty for all acts of terrorism to those on both sides who admitted their guilt during the history of the South African apartheid nightmare.

Obviously, the TRC was a unique response of love and forgiveness by both sides to the bitter terrorism that plagued South Africa for so many years. Who could have predicted democracy followed by this massive act of reciprocal forgiveness by the people of South Africa? Yet, somehow, love and forgiveness championed over vengeance and revenge.

Interestingly, Bishop Tutu, a South African Anglican Bishop, who lived through the many years of struggle in South Africa, also stressed the
power and practicality of love. Tutu states in his book, aptly entitled *No Future Without Forgiveness*, that—

 Forgiveness is not being sentimental. The study of forgiveness has become a growth industry. Whereas previously it was something often dismissed pejoratively as spiritual and religious, now because of the Truth and Re-conciliation Commission in South Africa it is gaining attention as an academic discipline studied by psychologists, philosophers, physicians, and theologians. In the United States there is an international Forgiveness Institute attached to the University of Wisconsin, and the John Templeton Foundation, with others, has started a multimillion-dollar Campaign for Forgiveness Research. (1997, pp. 271-272)

Indeed, forgiveness, like love, is very practical and good for our collective health. Bishop Tutu adds:

 Thus, to forgive is indeed the best form of self interest since anger, resentment, and revenge are corrosive of the *summum bonum*, that greatest good, communal harmony that enhances the humanity and personhood of all in the community. (1997, p. 35).

Indeed, as the title of Tutu’s book states, there can be “no future without forgiveness.”

Surely the metamorphosis of South Africa from a land dominated by terrorists on both sides of the apartheid issue to a democracy is testimony to the practical empowerment of love and forgiveness that has been duly noted by millions of people throughout the world as a very effective form of leadership.

It is interesting too to note that the concept of forgiveness as illustrated by the TRC would appear to clash with the Western, punitive sense of justice. Abraham McLaughlin, a staff writer for the *Christian Science Monitor*, reported on March 18, 2005 that a group of earnest religious leaders from the rural reaches of northern Uganda, home to Africa’s longest-running war, traveled 4,500 miles to the Netherlands to make a passionate plea to the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague.
which went something like this: Stay out of our war. We can handle it ourselves. You’ll only make it worse if you get involved.

McLaughlin writes that “their plea is symbolic of a growing debate over the ICC’s role in Africa, one that’s fundamentally about balancing two vastly different systems of justice in order to boost peace on the continent.”

McLaughlin also reported that the African religious leaders’ pleas have also been seconded recently by Nigeria, which has proposed a “justice-and-reconciliation tribunal to deal with crimes in Darfur, where the UN now says 180,000 people have been killed since Feb. 2003.”

Bishop Tutu also reports that “Freedom and reconciliation also broke out in the 1990s in another most unlikely place: the Berlin Wall fell and the Communist empire began to unravel as a result of Mikhail Gorbachev’s perestroika (openness) and glasnost” (reform) (1997, p. 36).

Gorbachev, another prominent politician of the twentieth century, whose background was in authoritarian leadership, exercised surprising vision and courage when he jolted the “evil empire” known as the Soviet Union, and the rest of the world, with his theories of openness and reform. This is something that would have been impossible under previous Soviet command and control leaders of the Soviet Union. The world owes Gorbachev immense gratitude for his actions that led to the peaceful dissolving of the Soviet Union. According to General Colin Powell, in a speech at Benedictine University, Lisle, Illinois, on April 15, 1998, Gorbachev surprised many people when he announced to Powell and President Reagan that “I have taken away your enemy” —the Soviet Union.

Interestingly, Bishop Tutu states:

It would have been a great deal more difficult for an F.W. de Klerk to have announced his extraordinary and courageous initiatives of February 2, 1990 had there still been a robust and predatory Communist empire (Tutu, 1997, p. 36).

Anwar Sadat, the President of Egypt, and a Muslim, some 20 years ago was another political leader of the twentieth century who unilaterally
decided to forego a leadership based on hate and vengeance to pursue love and forgiveness and a secure peace with Israel. It obviously took a great deal of courage and an expansion of love and forgiveness for Sadat to take that step.

And Yitzhak Rabin, still another politician of the twentieth century, in his later years as the Prime Minister of Israel, took somewhat the same step as Sadat when he determined to lay down a lifetime of killing for a peace that would give Palestinians a homeland and recognize their interests in Jerusalem.

Interestingly, Gandhi, a Hindu, Sadat, a Muslim, and Rabin, a Jew, respectively, were all killed by religious extremists of their own faiths for extending love and forgiveness toward those of another religion. In the name of a religion each of these terrorists who took the lives of these three men exhibited how difficult it is for religious extremists to expand circles of love beyond the conditioned walls of their own orthodoxies and creeds of religious faith.

And Dr. Martin Luther King also was assassinated by a fanatic who could not adjust to unconditional love flowing to and from both the white and black races in America in the 1960s.

Who at the birth of the twentieth century could have predicted the rise of these world leaders who would break with traditional command and control leadership with its hoary traditions of wars, death and vengeance upon vengeance to embrace a new sanity, a new leadership, based on love, nonviolence and forgiveness? Certainly, it opened us to new revelations about effective leadership founded more on serving than being served.

On the other hand, the twentieth century also offered us tragic proof of the continued failures of national leaders who chose to follow the old discredited story of autocratic leadership. V. I. Lenin spoke for many leaders of his time when, after the Russian Revolution of 1917 swept away the ancient Russian monarchy, he said: “Freedom is good, but control is better” (Wheatley, 1999, pp. 24-25). Margaret Wheatley adds, “And our quest for control has been oftentimes as destructive as was his” (Wheatley, 1999, p. 416).
That’s the old story of authoritarian leadership. It has plagued leaders throughout recorded history. In the twentieth century, national leaders like Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, Tojo, and many others opted for dominion, control, force, and vengeance to produce the bloodiest century of mankind’s existence.

One would think that with the dismal failures of command and control leadership over the centuries, especially in the twentieth century, a new sanity in leadership would have to evolve. And, in fact, it does appear that a twilight of the world’s tyrants is slowly taking place. Peter Ford, staff writer for the *Christian Science Monitor*, in an article entitled “The Twilight of the Tyrants,” reports that the last 30 years of history shows that tyrants now go fairly easily when people start to get organized, pointing to leaders such as Slobodan Milosevic, who stepped down as President of Yugoslavia in 2000 without a shot being fired. He also reported that one quarter of the world’s 192 nations are now not free, down from 43% of the countries in 1973, according to a report released recently by Freedom House, a New York-based human rights group that has been measuring political rights worldwide for 30 years (*Christian Science Monitor*, Dec. 19, 2003).

Ford also reports that a growing number of former dictators have been indicted or put on trial, such as Milosevic, Argentine Generals Rafael Videla and Leopoldo Galtieri, Liberian leader Charles Taylor, Chadian dictator Hissan Habre, and Jean Kambanda, a former Rwandan prime minister, who was convicted of genocide.

Clearly, the civilized world today is attempting to communicate a long-overdue message: that a system of world leadership can no longer accept political leaders who believe in command and control leadership.

**COMMAND AND CONTROL LEADERSHIP WITHIN DEMOCRACIES: BENIGN?**

Some might say that the philosophy of leadership of nations is one thing, but command and control economic leadership within the safety of democracy can work comfortably.
The real question, however, is whether command and control leadership can ever fit comfortably with the mature human spirit. Or must we always suffer through the inevitable corruptions of such leadership even in a democracy with its inevitable cycles of economic exploitations under the law? Modern-day robber barons and their inner circles seem always able to rise above the law, even in democracies, to practice their greed and fraud upon the poor and upon an otherwise unsuspecting workforce, investors and society. The question appears to be, as Covey would see it, shall we continue to use command and control leadership that violates the worth and dignity of labor, investors and consumers until our social problems worsen and deepen and eventually overwhelm the economic machinery — and thus discombobulates everything?

A FRESH AND CRITICAL LOOK AT LEADERSHIP

Greenleaf obviously proposed that a fresh and critical look must be taken at the use of power and authority in all types of leadership, within or without a democracy. He envisioned servant-leadership as a new moral principle for all nations, suggesting that even in democracies we don’t have to placidly wait for business leaders to cyclically discombobulate our economy and laws.

Greenleaf (1997) writes,

Great ideas, it has been said, come into the world as gently as doves. Perhaps, then, if we listen attentively, we shall hear, amid the uproar of empires and nations, a faint flutter of wings, the gentle stirring of life and hope. Some will say that this hope lies in a nation, others, in a man, but I believe rather that it is awakened, revived, nourished by millions of solitary individuals whose deeds and works every day negate frontiers and the crudest implications of history. As a result, there shines forth fleetingly the ever-threatened truth that each and every man, on the foundations of his own sufferings and joys, builds for them all. (1977, pp. 11-12)
Thus, we should not think we are alone in this battle for a new moral principle of leadership to which our children might aspire and for which so many gave their lives in the horrendous wars of the twentieth century. There were, of course, millions of such people who lived and suffered during that tumultuous century who gave nourishment and hope to persons who had the courage to be servant-leaders even if people might consider them to be a bit odd. These were people who negated the crudest aspects of that century. They were a part of a renaissance, a new consciousness, that refused to see common women and men as simply replaceable cogs in an insensitive machine. They were mostly unknown contemporary role models; some could be classified as prophets, most of whom are now resting in unmarked graves. But they served for the betterment of humanity.

They believed that people could be kinder and gentler, and were capable of producing great servant-leaders.

These were persons who intuitively lived the idea that most people tend to be the best way that we choose to see them; that one person’s love can, indeed, shake a community, a nation; perhaps, the world; that everyone is our teacher; that everything comes from nothing to those who love; that one person’s love can negate the hate of hundreds, thousands, millions. Service-oriented people are not soft in their principles. They know how to set limits, but they continue to love no matter what. These are the people who will not let anyone reduce their love to hate and vengeance, who realize their love is conditioned each time they judge and criticize their fellow man. They may be an artist, a parent, a teacher, a neighbor, an author, a friend, a mother or father, a grandparent, a poet, a musician, lovers of all types and all kinds, and, occasionally a politician; we all meet a lot of them in our everyday lives. They may be someone we meet just once and never see again. But they have a strong belief in the practical power of love, feeling that the more unconditional their love, the more unconditional their life. *Nobody has to explain to them what love is.*

It is among these people that we find our future servant-leaders. Many have that unfulfilled promise in them. They are the people who lead us, and
we often don’t know we’ve been led. In fact, that is often the mark of the great leader, the servant-leader. These quiet leaders are the ones whose lives teach us that none of us exists separate from others and that we had best be concerned about building relationships of love and service, lest we punish ourselves by the sure consequences of their neglect.

These people are not often our traditional leaders in politics, government, business, entertainment, religion, or education; nor are they the news pundits; but there always seem to be just enough of them within all these ranks to have a disproportionate and positive effect upon society if we stop to hear them. They have a lot of love that flows through them to the world, and you can be assured that, as with beautiful music, there’s always a market for their love and leadership.

THE MAKING OF A SERVANT-LEADER

Robert Greenleaf, himself a relatively unknown prophet of the twentieth century, writes:

The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from the one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. For such it will be a later choice to serve, after leadership is established. The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types and between them are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons, becoming healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived? (Greenleaf, 1977, pp. 13-14)

Clearly, Greenleaf’s definition of a servant-leader, or the “servant-
first,” is quite a challenge. Yet perhaps not as difficult as it may seem to be, for Greenleaf observes:

The person who is servant-first is more likely to persevere and refine a particular hypothesis on what serves another’s highest priority needs than is the person who is leader-first and who later serves out of promptings of conscience or in conformity with normative expectations. My hope for the future rests in part on my belief that among the legions of deprived and unsophisticated people are many true servants who will lead, and that most of them can learn to discriminate among those who presume to serve them and identify the true servants whom they will follow. (1977, p. 14)

Most of us want to be a leader-first. But that’s putting the cart before the horse—at least, in Greenleaf’s view. His message is clear. If one wants to be a great teacher, a great lawyer, a great business leader, a great Member of Congress, or a great anything, one must be a servant-first.

It is possible, of course, for one to be a leader without being a “servant-first.” However, what Greenleaf appears to be saying is that such a leader would initially be just another person who will feel the need to exercise the usual power drives or acquire material possessions. That may bring some success, but it will be more of the same, that is, the exercise of command and control leadership with an emphasis on the use of raw power with people serving them who do not grow as persons, do not become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, or more likely themselves to become servant-leaders, i.e., the “discombobulating” effect upon society Covey refers to.

But there are increasingly leaders-first, who taste its effects, feel its emptiness and then in later years choose to be servant-first, as it apparently worked during the later periods of life, for instance, with Yitzhak Rabin, Anwar Sadat, F.W. de Klerk, Mikhail Gorbachev, and a host of others who found command and control to be neither effective nor fulfilling.
Greenleaf (1977) wrote that “the servant-leader concept emerged after [his] deep involvement with colleges and universities during the period of campus turmoil in the late 1960s and early 1970s” (1977, p. 3). He felt that “our vast educational structure of America devotes very little care to nurturing leaders or to understanding followership and if there is any influence, formal education seems to discourage such pursuits” (1977, p. 4).

In addition, Greenleaf believed that educators were “specious” in believing that leadership preparation is implicit in general education (1977, p. 4) and wondered,

If that is true, how can it be that we are in a crisis of leadership in which vast numbers of “educated” people make such gross errors in choosing whose leadership to follow, and in which there is so little incentive for able and dedicated servants to take the risks of asserting leadership?

He continued:

The conclusion I reach is that educators are avoiding the issue when they refuse to give the same care to the development of servant-leaders as they do to doctors, lawyers, ministers, teachers, engineers, scholars. Even schools of administration give scant attention to servant-leadership. I have spent a great deal of time and energy trying to persuade educators to accept the obligation and I am certain that, generally, they recognize neither the obligation nor the opportunity. Thus far in my experience, they are unpersuadable. An occasional gifted teacher will take some initiative, but the institutions rarely sanction the effort. The outlook for better leadership in our leadership-poor society is not encouraging. (1977, p. 4)

Greenleaf (1977) asks:

Could not many respected teachers at both secondary and college levels have sufficient latitude to speak those few words that might change the course of a life, or give it a new purpose, as Professor Oscar J. Helming did with me? (1977, p. 5)
He went so far as to write, “Alas, we live in the age of the anti-leader” (1977, p. 4).

GREENLEAF ASKS: TO WHOM, THEN, AM I SPEAKING?

Greenleaf (1977) then asks himself, “To whom, then, am I speaking in this collection of articles and essays?” (1977, p. 4) He answers that question by centering on those “legions of persons of good will who could sharpen and clarify their view of the more serving society they would like to live in and help build” (1977, p. 5), and upon “the legions of deprived and unsophisticated people, many of whom are true servants who will lead, and . . . most of them can learn to discriminate among those who presume to serve them and identify the true servants whom they will follow” (1977, p. 14).

Thus, Greenleaf never seemed to give in to pessimism in regard to the eventual rise of the servant-leader—perhaps because he was so optimistic about the potential of young people to be interested in the subject of leadership even if educators were not. He asserted that the “servant-leader potential is latent to some degree in almost every young person” (1977, p. 5).

He also wrote in the 1970s,

I am hopeful for these times, despite the tension and conflict, because more natural servants are trying to see clearly the world as it is and are listening carefully to prophetic voices that are speaking now. They are challenging the pervasive injustice with greater force and taking sharper issue with the wide disparity between the quality of society they know is reasonable and possible with available resources, and, on the other hand the actual performance of the whole range of institutions that exist to serve society (1977, p. 9).

And so Greenleaf noted that “a fresh critical look is being taken at the issues of power and authority and that people are beginning to learn, however, haltingly, to relate to one another in less coercive and more creatively supporting ways” (Greenleaf, 1977, pp. 9-10).
Greenleaf felt that

if a better society is to be built, one that is more just and more loving, one that provides greater creative opportunity for its people, then the most open course is to raise both the capacity to serve and the very performance as servant of existing major institutions by new regenerative forces operating within them. (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 49)

That cannot be achieved by passing new laws. It must be achieved, if at all, by a groundswell of new consciousness that sees all of us as servant to each other and part of one human family.

Is this pie in the sky? I don’t think so.

In Desmond Tutu’s (2005) book *God Has a Dream*, he refers to the African ideal of *ubuntu*, which acknowledges that our private well being is contingent on the health and happiness of those around us. Tutu asks,

Would you let your brothers or sister’s family, your relatives eke out a miserable existence in poverty? Would you let them go hungry? And yet every 3.6 seconds someone dies of hunger and three quarters of these are children under five. (2005, p. 23)

Tutu then writes, “If we could but realize our common humanity, a transfiguration would take place” (2005, p. 24). We are, indeed, all a part of the whole of humanity.

Albert Einstein, the greatest scientist of the 20th century, is credited with saying:

A human being is a part of the whole that we call the universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical illusion of his consciousness. This illusion is a prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for only the few people nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living beings and all of nature. (http://en.wikiquote.org/Albert_Einstein)
John J. Gardner appears to agree when he writes: “Wholeness is our natural state; unrelated separateness is an illusion” (Spears, 1998, p. 117). And Margaret Wheatley adds: “The quantum world has demolished the concept that we are unconnected individuals” (Wheatley, 1999, p. 44).

The business people who introduced me to the Team Act and hence to servant-leadership were attempting to widen the circle of compassion in management and labor relations. Politically speaking, Congress and the President were not ready for this. However, I feel business leaders will increasingly see the value of servant-leadership upon a fragmented world and global market and put it to effective use long before our traditional political or religious leaders comprehend its signal truths.

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SERVANT-LEADERSHIP: A MODEL ALIGNED WITH CHAOS THEORY

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Greenleaf (1977) proposed the true test of servant-leadership as leaders reproducing their inclination to serve in others. However, current servant-leadership models do not clearly demonstrate such generativity. By modifying the Patterson (2003)-Winston (2003) servant-leadership model to demonstrate more clearly the reproduction of the service inclination both in dyadic and in organizational dimensions, this study will contribute to servant-leadership “theory-building” (Lynham, 2002, p. 221). The proposed servant-leadership model, aligned with chaos theory, will give scholars and practitioners a better understanding of the practice and effect of servant-leadership.

The first part of this conceptual study reviews servant-leadership literature and categorizes it as (a) non-model discussions, (b) leader-organization models, and (c) leader-follower models. Non-model writings discuss the practice of servant-leadership without proposing a conceptual model. Leader-organization models illustrate the general way leaders interact with the organization. Leader-follower models propose causal relationships between leader attributes as the leader interacts with individual followers. Because no model addresses both the dyadic and the organizational dimensions, there is a need for model development. The second section reviews chaos theory literature to point out the fractal characteristic of chaotic systems. The fractal characteristic is the reproduction of a basic pattern at increasing scale (Mandelbrot, 1977). The third section compares servant-leadership to chaos theory and proposes a servant-leadership model aligned with chaos theory. The paper concludes with implications for future
research, including testing for the presence of the reproduced service-inclination in followers as the indicator of the presence of servant-leadership.

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP MODELS

Echoing the biblical perspective that “Whoever desires to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever of you desires to be first must be slave of all” (Mark 10:43-44, New King James Version), Greenleaf (1977) indicates that great leaders are servants first. He states that servant-leadership “begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve” (p. 13). The leader then lives out this service inclination through his attitudes and behaviors. Spears (1998) distills several servant-leader attributes from Greenleaf’s writings including (a) listening, (b) empathy, (c) healing, (d) awareness, (e) persuasion, (f) conceptualization, (g) foresight, (h) stewardship, (i) commitment to the growth of others, and (j) ability to build community. Within these attributes, Greenleaf addresses the desired outcome of servant-leadership when he asks, “Do those served grow as persons? Do they while being served become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” (p. 13). Reproduction of the service inclination is the true test of servant-leadership (Errol & Winston, 2005; Laub, 1999). Moreover, reproduction should occur on an organizational scale as Greenleaf states, “The first order of business is to build a group of people who, under the influence of the institution, grow taller and become healthier, stronger, more autonomous” (p. 40).

A literature review reveals three trajectories in the servant-leadership writings since Greenleaf’s (1977) work. These three directions include (a) non-model discussions, (b) leader-organization models, and (c) leader-follower models.

Non-Model Discussions

Most writers of servant-leadership literature do not propose conceptual models of servant-leadership. Authors of these non-model discussions tend
to build on elements of Greenleaf’s (1977) view, including servant-leadership’s (a) value base, (b) leader attributes, or (c) outcomes. Such discussions, though rich and valuable, do not propose clear causal relationships between variables.

Value Base. According to Rinehart (1998), “Leadership models from which we operate are rooted in particular values” (p. 30). Russell (2001) indicates that the personal values of servant-leaders are what distinguish them from other leader types. He focuses on (a) trust, (b) appreciation of others, and (c) empowerment. Additional value themes in the literature include (a) following a guiding purpose (Blunt, 2003), (b) voluntarily submitting (Sendjaya, 2003), (c) being a servant (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002), (d) desiring to help others (Batten, 1997; Spears, 1998), (e) moving from self-interest to service (Block, 1993; Chewning, 2000; Howatson-Jones, 2004; Ndoria, 2004; Tate, 2003), (f) loving followers (Banuta-Gomez, 2004; Whetstone, 2002; Wilson, 1998), (g) focusing on others (Kouzes & Posner, 1993), (h) suspending the need for control (Marquardt, 2000), and (i) creating a culture of self-leadership (Fairholm, 1997). All of these values tend to have in common the leader’s placing the needs of others before his or her own needs. Greenleaf summarizes the core value in the service inclination when he states, “Caring is the essential motive” (p. 243).

Leader Attributes. A leader’s behavioral characteristics emanate from personal values (Errol & Winston, 2005; Maciarello, 2003; Russell, 2001; Snyder, Dowd, & Houghton, 1994). Accordingly, the literature reveals specific characteristics for servant-leaders. Common attributes include (a) authenticity (Autry, 2001; DePree, 1989; Rinehart, 1998; Sendjaya, 2003), (b) listening ability (Hunter, 2004; Keichel, 1993; Kuczynski & Kuczynski, 1995; Pollard, 1996), (c) relational focus (Kouzes & Posner, 1993; Sendjaya, 2003), (d) vulnerability (Autry; DePree; Kuczynski & Kuczynski), (e) vision (Banuta-Gomez, 2004; Howatson-Jones, 2004; Keichel; Kouzes & Posner), (f) dependability (Kouzes & Posner; Pollard), (g) role modeling (Banuta-Gomez; Whetstone, 2002), and (h) use of influence (Sandjaya; Whetstone, 2002).
Outcome. There is some diversity in the literature regarding the outcome of servant-leadership. Bennett (2001) indicates servant-leaders can enhance (a) individual, (b) team, and (c) organizational performance. Similar outcomes include growth in others (Rowe, 2003; Whetstone, 2002) and empowerment (Block, 1993; Bowie, 2000; Hyett, 2003; Lloyd, 1996; Rinehart, 1998; Tate, 2003; Wilson, 1998). Though these perspectives are consistent with service reproduction as promoted by Greenleaf (1977), they do not specify this outcome.

Choi and Mai-Dalton (1998) more clearly specify the desired outcome as reproduction of the service inclination, proposing that sacrificial leadership should bring reciprocation by the followers. Stone, Russell, and Patterson (2003) suggest that the desired outcome is not service to the leader, but service to others. Errol and Winston (2005) suggest that servant-leaders build trust not only between a leader and a follower, but also between followers. Similarly, Page (2004) indicates that servant-leadership leads to interdependence among personnel. Blunt (2003), Buchen (1998), and Howatson-Jones (2004) all assert that servant-leaders help others to become leaders.

Summary. Scholars consistently regard servant-leadership as having a value base that elevates service to followers above the leader’s self-interest. Various leader attributes emerge from this value base. The desired outcome is typically consistent with or specified as a reproduction of the service inclination in the followers. The focus of the reproduced service inclination includes both reciprocal service to the leader and service to other followers, even to the point of producing more leaders. Although this reflects Greenleaf’s (1977) assertion that institutions led by servant-leaders “will grow more leaders faster than any other course available to us” (p. 89), these non-model discussions do not propose clear causal relationships aimed at producing the outcome.

Leader-Organization Models

One set of conceptual models focuses on the general function of ser-
vant-leaders within organizations. Moreover, the writers cite leader attributes, rather than reproduction of the service inclination, as the measure of the presence of servant-leadership. The Russell and Stone (2002) model shown in figure 1 represents this type of approach.

Like the non-model discussions, Russell and Stone (2002) propose that “cognitive characteristics” (p. 153), including values and core beliefs, “incarnate through the functional attributes of servant-leaders” (p. 153). They propose nine functional attributes that indicate the presence of servant-leadership and eleven accompanying attributes that moderate “the level and intensity of the functional attributes” (p. 153). Furthermore, servant-leadership itself is a dependent variable that subsequently functions as an independent variable affecting organizational performance. However, the model gives limited attention to causal relationships between leader attributes, and the outcome is organizational performance rather than reproduced service.

![Figure 1: Russell and Stone (2002) servant-leadership model.](image-url)
Similarly, Wong and Page’s (2003) expanding ring model, shown in figure 2, illustrates servant-leadership that affects organizational processes. Wong and Page’s article mentions service reproduction, but their ring model does not make this outcome explicit. Furthermore, Parolini (2004) builds on Wong and Page’s model with a competing values approach and clarifies the outcome as increased (a) organizational effectiveness, (b) business performance, and (c) financial performance.

Fairholm’s (1997) model also proposes organizational outcomes, including continuous improvement in people and programs. Smith, Montagno, and Kuzmenko (2004) propose that the dual outcomes resulting from servant-leadership include greater success in stable environments but lesser success in turbulent environments. Laub (2003) posits servant-leadership should lead to the good (a) of each individual, (b) of the whole organization, and (c) of those served by the organization. His tabular model proposes the evolution of a servant organization where “the characteristics of servant-leadership are displayed through the organizational culture and are valued and practiced by the leadership and workforce” (p. 3). Although this model is consistent with service reproduction, it does not propose the causal relationships between specific variables that reproduce the service inclination, which makes it like other leader-organization models.

Leader-Follower Models

A second type of conceptual models focuses on the leader-follower relationship. Winston (2004) says Patterson’s (2003) leader-follower model improves on the leader-organization models by showing “the causal relationships between the variables in order to build a process model of servant-leadership” (p. 602). Patterson’s model begins with an agapao love construct as the independent variable. Patterson understands agapao love as “moral love, meaning to do the right thing at the right time and for the right reasons” (p. 12). The leader with agapao love considers each follower’s needs and desires. This appears to be consistent with Greenleaf’s (1977) clarification of the service inclination as caring, and with the general non-
model position that servant-leadership is other-focused. Building from a leader’s love, the Patterson model proposes the mediating relationships between specific leader attributes, including (a) humility, (b) altruism, (c) vision, (d) trust, and (e) empowerment, that all lead to the outcome variable, service.

Patterson (2003) presents humility as a focus on others rather than a focus on self. Altruism is “helping others just for the sake of helping” (p. 17). Patterson’s vision construct involves the leader’s seeing each follower’s potential and helping the follower to reach it. The trust variable describes a leader’s confidence in people and willingness to grant them power. Empowerment represents “giving up control and letting the follow-
ers take charge as needed” (p. 25). Patterson identifies the independent and mediating variables as internal virtues; thus, all of these may rightly be part of the leader’s service inclination. However, love, as the independent variable in the model, represents the core of the service inclination.

Patterson (2003) defines the outcome in her model, service, as choosing deliberate behaviors that elevate others’ interests over self-interests. Thus, outward service acts emanate from and reflect the inner service inclination and its agapao love core. However, Patterson’s discussion only gives limited attention to the reproduction of the service inclination in followers. Moreover, her model does not clearly propose the causal relationships that lead to reproduced service. To improve Patterson’s model, Winston (2003) proposed a circular extension shown in figure 3.

**Figure 3:** Winston (2003) extension to Patterson (2003) servant-leadership model.

By virtue of identifying the next stage in the model as the follower’s love, the extended model better shows reproduction of the service inclination. Winston (2003) states, “The second half of the story occurs when the
leader’s service results in a change in the follower’s sense of love. The follower’s Agapao love results in an increase in both the commitment to the leader and in the follower’s own self-efficacy” (p. 6). Thus, the model suggests that the leader’s agapao love echoes in the follower’s agapao love and that the leader’s service acts reverberate in the follower’s service acts. Winston proposes the set of mediating variables through which the follower’s love materializes as service to the leader, including (a) commitment, (b) self-efficacy, (c) intrinsic motivation, and (d) altruism. Winston defines commitment as “the follower’s level of positive belief toward the leader” (p. 6). Self-efficacy involves the follower’s perceptions of his or her own capabilities. Intrinsic motivation suggests that inner interests and desires regulate the follower’s behavior more than external rewards or punishments. The follower expresses altruism toward the leader by helping solely for the sake of helping. Although the Patterson (2003)-Winston (2003) model better shows service reproduction than previous models, Winston conceived the model as a dyadic spiral between the leader and a follower that grows in “intensity and strength” (p. 6) over time because of maturity. Therefore, it remains unclear from the model how service inclination reproduction occurs on an organization-wide scale.

Summary

Greenleaf (1977) identifies the reproduced service inclination in followers as the true test of servant-leadership. Other scholars concur with this outcome, even suggesting that servant-leaders reproduce themselves on an organization-wide scale. However, the existing models do not clearly demonstrate this outcome. Leader-organization models reflect general leader attributes but do not propose causal relationships. Although leader-follower models clarify proposed causal relationships at a dyadic scale, they do not show service reproduction on an organizational scale. There is need for a model to demonstrate the reproduced service inclination at both leader-follower and leader-organization levels. A review of chaos theory.
literature provides elements that allow “conceptual development” (Lynham, 2002, p. 229) of such a model.

CHAOS THEORY CONSTRUCTS

Prior to the late 1970s, the definition of chaos included the concepts of disorder and randomness (Ferris, 1991; Smith, 1995). However, Lorenz’ (1993) search for a mathematical formula to explain chaotic weather patterns led to redefining chaos as unpredictability and complexity rather than randomness (Batterman, 1993; Gedzelman, 1994; Murphy, 1996; Smith, 2001; Smith, 2002). Accordingly, science now identifies random events as those without cause. In contrast, unpredictable behaviors do have causes, although they are presently unknown (Cartwright, 1991; Singh & Singh, 2002; Stark & Hardy, 2003). Ironically, underlying the view of chaos as unpredictable and complex is a belief that the universe is inherently well-ordered and predictable, that is, it is deterministic (Smith, 2001; Smith, 2002). Although some posit the deterministic causes to be complex (Ian-none, 1995; Smith, 2002), others indicate causality may be quite simple (Lissak, 1997). Batterman (1993) explains that unpredictable events may only appear random to the set of variables used to measure the events. With different measurements, the chaotic system may appear simple and predictable. Smith (1995) identifies three elements in chaotic systems: (a) sensitive initial conditions, (b) self-similarity, and (c) iterative feedback. Wheatley (1994) also discusses a fourth element, the strange attractor. Together, these elements describe the fractal characteristic of chaotic systems. That is, chaotic systems result in unpredictable and amplified reproduction of a basic organizing shape.

Initial Conditions

Prior to the development of chaos theory, the generally held axiom was that a change in an initial condition resulted in a proportional change in the outcome (Firth, 1991; Murphy, 1996; Tetenbaum, 2001). However,
Lorenz (1993) postulated that a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil could lead to a tornado in Texas (Pepper, 2002). The butterfly metaphor suggests that changes in the outcome are not proportional to changes in the initial condition. Rather, very small variances can amplify into unpredictable results (Doherty & Delener, 2001; Firth; Flake, 1998; Hartman, 2003; Murphy; Ravilious, 2004; Seeger, 2002; Smith, 2002; Singh & Singh, 2002; Thietart & Forgues, 1995). Accordingly, in chaotic systems, small initial conditions may evolve to have large-scale effects. For example, the panic of one person yelling “fire” in a crowded theater might escalate to catastrophic effects.

**Self-Similarity**

Part of the evolution of initial conditions occurs because of the self-similarity property that Carr (2004) identifies as a fractal. A fractal is an object whose form is the same regardless of scale (Doherty & Delener, 2001; Mandelbrot, 1977). It is a self-repeating feature (Seeger, 2002; Thietart & Forgues, 1995). Wheatley (1994) states, “Fractal principles have given us valuable insight into how nature creates the shapes we observe. Mountains, rivers, coastlines, vegetables, lungs, circulatory systems...are fractal, replicating a dominant pattern at several smaller levels of scale” (p. 162). Singh and Singh (2002) hypothesize that fractal features can exist in any dimension and anywhere between dimensions. Thus, to continue the theater example, the fractal shape of one person’s panic might first be reproduced in others in the immediate area and then in some across the room or in a balcony.

**Iterative Feedback**

An additional mechanism that allows initial conditions to amplify unpredictably and that allows a fractal shape to reproduce throughout a system is iterative feedback. Wheatley (1994) describes iteration as “information feeding back on itself and changing in the process” (p. 160).
Tetenbaum (1998) states feedback loops are the focus of chaos. The output of each cycle provides the material to begin a new cycle and produce further outcomes (Burns, 2002; Murphy, 1996). With each pass of the feedback loop, small changes, in the form of moderating and mediating influences, introduce variation into the system. Citing Lorenz’ (1993) chaotic weather patterns, Firth (1991) states, “A massive volcanic eruption, or meteor strike, might kick the weather off...structure” (p. 156). Smith (2002) calls these “situational variables” (p. 522), and Doherty and Delener (2001) call them “small changes in the system” (p. 68). Accordingly, in the theater example, people screaming or individuals shoving one another act as modifying influences in the system that amplify the panic with each cycle of growing alarm.

**Strange Attractor**

An attractor is a point or multidimensional pattern which a system tends to move toward (Pepper, 2003; Smith, 2001) or away from (Smith, 2002). Eiser (1997) and Duffy (2000) suggest that initial conditions determine the nature of the attractor. The attractor initiates and reproduces the basic structure of a system (Doherty & Delener, 2001; Murphy, 1996; Smith, 2002; Svyantek & DeShon, 1993). Moreover, a strange attractor is a state that repeats itself closely, but never exactly, giving the attractor a fractal quality, but one modified by iterative feedback (Singh & Singh, 2002; Smith, 2002). Thus, the attractor creates the order within chaos (Thiertart & Forgues, 1995), and chaos never exceeds the boundary of the strange attractor (Wheatley, 1994; Svyantek & DeShon). In the theater example, panic is the initial condition. It is unlikely that as the panic grows, a birthday party will erupt in one corner of the auditorium and a formal dance in another corner. However, Burns (2002) points out that even within the limits of the strange attractor, calculating the pattern grows complex. “After multiple iterations the calculation...becomes...unpredictable” (p. 44). Thus, it is difficult to predict where and at what intensity panic will develop.
Summary and Model

Chaotic systems contain multiple elements, including (a) sensitive initial conditions, (b) self-similarity, (c) iterative feedback, and (d) attractors. These elements describe the fractal characteristic of a chaotic system, which is the unpredictable cyclical reproduction and amplification of initial conditions. Because this can occur in multiple dimensions, a two-dimensional model of chaos is quite limited. However, Singh and Singh (2002) provide a diagram that serves as the basis for a chaotic model shown in figure 4. In the model, the fractal characteristic allows the strange attractor to function as (a) an initial independent variable, (b) the subsequent dependent variable, and (c) the subsequent independent variable (Murphy 1996).

Figure 4: Modified Singh and Singh (2002) chaos model.
SERVANT-LEADERSHIP: A MODEL ALIGNED WITH CHAOS THEORY

Chaos theory is applicable to organizational theory. Singh and Singh (2002) note, “Chaos is the study of unstable aperiodic behavior in deterministic, nonlinear, dynamical (changing) systems” (p. 31). Similarly, Thiertart and Forgues (1995) identify organizations as dynamic, nonlinear systems. Svyantek and DeShon (1993) suggest that organizations are complex systems with attractors. Venkatardi, Rardin, and Benoit (1997) call the fractal cell the basic unit of an organization, and Wheatley (1994) states, “Fractal organizations. . .expect to see similar behaviors show up at every level in the organization because those behaviors were patterned into the organizing principles at the very start” (p. 163). Furthermore, strong comparisons exist between servant-leadership constructs and chaos theory constructs.

Values as Attractor

Greenleaf (1977) suggested servant-leaders begin with the service inclination, and Patterson’s (2003) model shows agapao love as the independent variable. Similarly, chaos theory begins with (a) initial conditions (Smith, 1995), (b) a strange attractor (Murphy, 1996), or (c) the basic fractal shape (Thiertart & Forgues, 1995). An important point of contact is that a psychological construct, like love (Briggs & Peat, 1989; Murphy; Svyantek & DeShon, 1993), or organizational culture (Murphy) may fill the role of a strange attractor.

Influencing Variables

The servant-leader’s attributes emerge from the servant-leader’s values. Non-model and leader-organization writings provide lists of leader characteristics that mark the practice of servant-leadership. Leader-follower models propose the mediating relationships between the attributes that produce service. Likewise, chaos theory posits situational variables that alter the system (Smith, 2002).
**Amplifying Feedback**

The dyadic servant-leadership models of Farling, Stone, and Winston (1999) and Winston (2003) view the leader-follower relationship in an ever-growing spiral as the relationship cyclically adjusts for maturity. Likewise, chaos theory proposes cyclical iterations in (a) fractals (Mandelbrot, 1977), (b) the strange attractor (Murphy, 1996), and (c) the feedback loop (Tetenbaum, 1998).

**Summary and Model**

A comparison of the Patterson (2003)-Winston (2003) servant-leadership model and chaos theory suggests similarities. The loving, caring service inclination of servant-leadership appears to be a strange attractor, beginning as an initial condition and then amplifying as the follower develops agapao love and returns service back to the leader. Further, the proposed mediating variables in the Patterson-Winston model and the belief that maturity is a moderating variable each echo some of the modifying influences of chaos theory. Because of these similarities, this conceptual study posits servant-leadership as aligned with chaos theory and proposes a servant-leadership/chaos theory model.

Starting from the Patterson (2003)-Winston (2003) model, the servant-leadership model in figure 5 shows the leader’s love-based service inclination functioning as a reproduced and amplified initial condition which reflects the fractal characteristic of chaotic systems. Reproduction and amplification of the love-based service inclination finds theoretical support in the non-model discussions of servant-leadership that predict the outcome of servant-leadership as the follower reciprocating service to the leader (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998) and as the follower developing a service inclination toward other followers (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2003). Moreover, Greenleaf (1977) predicts that servant-leadership will reproduce leaders. Accordingly, figure 5 shows the fractal characteristic of reproduction and amplification when service not only feeds back to the leader, but
Figure 5: Servant-leadership/chaos theory model utilizing Patterson (2003)-Winston (2003) model.
Figure 6: Chaotic model of servant-leadership with possible fractal shape iterations.
also emerges as the beginning of a new leader line. Figure 6 takes the fractal shape of the chaotic model of servant-leadership shown in figure 5 to several possible iterations, showing how dyadic relations, when amplified, might begin to have organization-wide effect by involving ever-increasing numbers of organizational members.

CONCLUSION

The chaotic servant-leadership model derives from the Patterson (2003)-Winston (2003) model and shows predicted causal relationships between variables. Additionally, through the inclusion of the fractal characteristic of chaotic systems, it begins to explain the reproduction of the service inclination at both dyadic and organizational scale. Conceptualizing servant-leadership as a form of chaos theory also provides implications for further research:

1. Following Lynham’s (2002) general method of theory-building, the conceptual development in the present study needs to be followed by an empirical phase, including the generation of confirmable hypotheses or other “empirical indicators” (Lynham, p. 232). Accordingly, a case study of an institution led by a reported servant-leader should allow observation of service-inclination reproduction. DeVaus (2002) says about an explanatory case study, “On the basis of a theory we predict that a case with a particular set of characteristics will have a particular outcome” (p. 221). Accordingly, positing servant-leadership as aligned with chaos theory predicts the cyclical presence of the service inclination.

2. Asher (1983) indicates that one must construct reliable and valid indicators in research. Because the service-inclination materializes through leader attributes, these may serve as an indicator of the presence of servant-leadership and, therefore, the service inclination. Patterson’s (2003) leadership attributes include (a) humility, (b) altruism, (c) trust, (d) vision, (e) empowerment, and (f) service. Sendjaya and Sarros’ (2003) servant-leadership scale provides subscales with similar constructs, including (a) humility, (b) moral actions, (c) trust, (d) vision, (e) empowerment, and (f) acts of
service. Their instrument may serve as an effective tool to measure the presence of relevant attributes. Laub’s (1999) Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) may also be effective due to his contention that servant-leader qualities should be evident throughout the organization. Moreover, because Greenleaf (1977) indicates that the true test of servant-leadership is reproduction of the service inclination, an important indicator of the presence of servant-leadership should be the presence of servant-leader attributes, which emerge from the reproduced service inclination, in followers. Looking for the service inclination in followers as supporting the presence of servant-leadership is the most significant research implication of a servant-leadership model aligned with chaos theory. Further, because the model anticipates ongoing iterations and fractal reproductions, the longer the tenure of a servant-leader, the greater the number of followers who should exhibit servant-leader attributes.

3. Singh and Singh (2002) point out that a chaotic system may have both positive and negative feedback. Positive feedback amplifies the system, while negative feedback stabilizes the system. Winston (2003) suggests that growing maturity causes growth in the dyadic spiral, while declining maturity causes a corresponding decline. As part of the ongoing refinement and development of theory-building research (Lynham, 2002), future research might examine whether other relational or organizational features operate as either positive or negative iterative feedback mechanisms.

4. Smith (2002) points out that a chaotic system may have both positive attractors to which the system is drawn and negative attractors from which the system is repelled. Page and Wong’s (2003) opponent process model of servant-leadership suggests that authoritarian hierarchy and egotistical pride are negative attractors for servant-leadership. Future theory development and refinement might discover other variables that serve as negative attractors in the chaotic servant-leadership model. Additionally, research might explore how the system reacts when a leader who possesses negative attractors follows a servant-leader at the helm of an organization.
In summary, current servant-leadership models tend to focus on either the leader-organization dimension or the leader-follower dimension. Extant models also do not clearly demonstrate the reproduction of the service inclination. However, because the true test of servant-leadership is the reproduction of more servant-leaders (Greenleaf, 1977), servant-leadership functioning at the dyadic scale should eventually have organization-wide influence. The addition of chaos theory concepts, particularly a fractal characteristic of reproduction and amplification, allows modification of the Patterson (2003)-Winston (2003) servant-leadership model to show service reproduction at both dyadic and organizational scale. The leader who holds agapao love for her or his followers and serves them provides the organizing principle for a system that can amplify and reproduce servant-leaders. Therefore, the leader who starts with the small initial condition of serving even one person can have an organization-wide effect.

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HOW IS YOUR LEADERSHIP CHANGING?

—MARGARET WHEATLEY

THE BERKANA INSTITUTE

I’m sad to report that in the past few years, ever since uncertainty became our insistent 21st century companion, leadership has taken a great leap backwards to the familiar territory of command and control. Some of this was to be expected, because humans usually default to the known when confronted with the unknown. Some of it was a surprise, because so many organizations had focused on innovation, quality, learning organizations, and human motivation. How did they fail to learn that whenever you impose control on people and situations, you only succeed in turning people into non-creative, shut-down and cynical workers?

THE DESTRUCTIVE IMPACT OF COMMAND AND CONTROL

The dominance of command and control is having devastating impacts. There has been a dramatic increase in worker disengagement, few organizations are succeeding at solving problems, and leaders are being scapegoated and fired.

Most people associate command and control leadership with the military. Years ago, I worked for the U.S. Army Chief of Staff. I, like most people, thought I’d see command and control leadership there. The great irony is that the military learned long ago that, if you want to win, you have to engage the intelligence of everyone involved in the battle. The Army had a visual reminder of this when, years ago, they developed new tanks and armored vehicles that traveled at unprecedented speeds of fifty miles an hour. When first used in battle during the first Gulf War, several times troops took off on their own, speeding across the desert at high speed.
However, according to Army doctrine, tanks and armored vehicles must be accompanied by a third vehicle that literally is called the Command and Control vehicle. This vehicle could only travel at twenty miles an hour. (They corrected this problem.)

For me, this is a familiar image—people in the organization ready and willing to do good work, wanting to contribute their ideas, ready to take responsibility, and leaders holding them back, insisting that they wait for decisions or instructions. The result is dispirited employees and leaders wondering why no one takes responsibility or gets engaged anymore. In these troubled, uncertain times, we don’t need more command and control; we need better means to engage everyone’s intelligence in solving challenges and crises as they arise.

WE KNOW HOW TO CREATE SMART, RESILIENT ORGANIZATIONS

We do know how to create workplaces that are flexible, smart, and resilient. We have known for more than half a century that engaging people and relying on self-managed teams are far more productive than any other forms of organizing. In fact, productivity gains in self-managed work environments are at minimum thirty-five percent higher than in traditionally managed organizations. And workers know this to be true when they insist that they can make smarter decisions than those delivered from on high.

With so much evidence supporting the benefits of participation, why isn’t every organization using self-managed teams to cope with turbulence? Instead, organizations increasingly are cluttered with control mechanisms that paralyze employees and leaders alike. Where have all these policies, procedures, protocols, laws, and regulations come from? And why do we keep creating more, even as we suffer from the terrible consequences of over-control?

Even though worker capacity and motivation are destroyed when leaders choose power over productivity, it appears that bosses would rather be in control than have the organization work well. And this drive for power is supported by the belief that the higher the risk, the more necessary it is to
hold power tightly. What’s so dangerous about this belief is that just the opposite is true. Successful organizations, including the military, have learned that the higher the risk, the more necessary it is to engage everyone’s commitment and intelligence. When leaders hold onto power and refuse to distribute decision-making, they create slow, unwieldy, Byzantine systems that only increase risk and irresponsibility. We never effectively control people or situations by these means; we only succeed in preventing intelligent, fast responses.

The personal impact on leaders’ morale and health is also devastating. When leaders take back power, when they act as heroes and saviors, they end up exhausted, overwhelmed, and deeply stressed. It is simply not possible to solve singlehandedly the organization’s problems; there are just too many of them! One leader who led a high-risk chemical plant spent three years creating a highly motivated, self-organizing workforce. He described it this way: “Instead of just me worrying about the plant, I now have nine hundred people worrying. And coming up with solutions I never could have imagined.”

Sometimes leaders fail to involve staff out of some warped notion of kindness. They don’t include people, they don’t share their worries, because they don’t want to add to their stress. But such well-meaning leaders only create more problems. When leaders fail to engage people in finding solutions to problems that affect them, staff don’t thank the leader for not sharing the burden. Instead, they withdraw, criticize, worry and gossip. They interpret the leader’s exercise of power as a sign that he/she doesn’t trust them or their capacities.

ASSESSING CHANGES IN YOUR LEADERSHIP

With no time to reflect on how they might be changing, with no time to contemplate whether their present leadership is creating an effective and resilient organization, too many leaders drift into command and control, wondering why nothing seems to be working, angry that no one seems motivated any more.
If you are feeling stressed and pressured, please know that this is how most leaders feel these days. Yet it is important that you take time to notice how your own leadership style has changed in response to the pressures of this uncertain time. Otherwise you may end up disappointed and frustrated, leaving a legacy of failure rather than of real results.

SOME QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

Here are questions to help you notice if your leadership is slipping into command and control. If you feel courageous, circulate these questions and talk about them with staff.

1. What’s changed in the way you make decisions? Have you come to rely on the same group of advisors? Do you try to engage those who have a stake in the decision?
2. What’s happening to staff motivation? How does it compare to a few years ago?
3. How often do you find yourself invoking rules, policies or regulations to get staff to do something?
4. How often do you respond to a problem by developing a new policy?
5. What information are you no longer sharing with staff? Where are you more transparent?
6. What’s the level of trust in your organization right now? How does this compare to two to three years ago?
7. When people make mistakes, what happens? Are staff encouraged to learn from their experience? Or is there a search for someone to blame?
8. What’s the level of risk-taking in the organization? How does this compare to two to three years ago?
9. How often have you reorganized in the past few years? What have you learned from that?
10. How’s your personal energy and motivation these days? How does this compare to a few years ago?

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In the early 1980s one of my clients, Harry Bubb [past Chairman and CEO of Pacific Financial Companies], gave me a copy of Robert Greenleaf’s book, Servant-Leadership. Harry and I would subsequently have long conversations about his view of corporate responsibility and leadership development; Greenleaf’s words had struck a resonant chord with both of us. Harry felt that leadership was a fundamental state of mind—as important as any attitude, trait, displayed behavior or result achieved. Back then, I must admit, I did not fully understand his thinking, although I was mesmerized by his enthusiasm and his many ideas. In addition to exploring and learning about leadership and its many dimensions, he felt that effective leadership development had to include facilitating and providing the development candidates with an experience of the leadership state of mind. Unfortunately, unlike the certainty associated with being able to identify and analyze the various tangible dimensions and examples of leadership, the experience of this state could not be mandated or easily choreographed.

In addition to exploring leadership in the corporate and business environment, Harry spoke of exploring and experiencing leadership in other venues, for example the arts (music, painting, dance, etc.), the study of philosophy, the social settings of community and in other cultural societies. He felt that if the candidate could see beyond the various forms in which leadership manifested itself, he or she might be able to become aware of
this state of mind and the spirit of leadership from which every capacity and trait originated.

Harry was the first CEO with whom I had the opportunity to work who had this depth of understanding about leadership. Each of the leaders mentioned in this article shares a similar understanding of this dimension of life . . . an ability to live in the present and to anticipate the future. It is difficult to adequately describe their understanding since their experience of it is such a personal one. But if you have the opportunity to meet and converse with these leaders, you, as I, would be profoundly struck by their common sense, resilience, perspective, vision and sense of contribution.

_Foresight is the “lead” that the leader has. Once leaders lose this lead and events start to force their hand, they are leaders in name only. They are not leading, but are reacting to immediate events, and they probably will not long be leaders._

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 26)

**MY JOURNEY SINCE HARRY**

For over twenty-five years, my professional life had been spent working with leaders who have tried to change and improve their organizations. For the most part, I assumed that we shared a common perspective and understanding about what it took to do this . . . that is, up to a few years ago, when I was once again reminded of those earlier conversations with Harry. Essentially, I understood that our approach was to design and implement a plan—craft a program for change that would effectively teach and reach the widest number of employees in the organization. We wanted to design the infrastructure, procedures and policies of the firm to direct and reinforce the desired behaviors and attitudes. In addition, we wanted participants to learn the new direction and expectations of the company. We wanted to teach them the behaviors and attitudes needed to achieve those new goals and to more effectively deal with the looming challenges facing the organization.
However, a few years ago, I realized that my assumption of what I saw as my role was a few degrees “off center.” In that moment, I became the student, and a small group of my client-executives became my mentors. They helped me view my actions and efforts from a different perspective and through the lens of a different understanding of human design and organizational change. As a result, this new awareness of organizational transformation and leadership development tremendously simplified our organizational change efforts, as well as making them more effective, less stressful, more flexible and ongoing, and more organic.

This is not to say that there were no more challenges or difficult times. . . in fact, far from it. But what I started to notice was how, in both prosperous as well as trying times, these leaders maintained their perspective and their resiliency, their connection with their people, their mission, and the welfare of the company. . . and their integrity with their values and spiritual underpinnings.

MY OLD CONSULTANT ROLE

Fundamentally, before my realization, I saw my role and the role of senior management as being one of leader, teacher and coach. Once the executive officers decided upon the vision, values and strategic direction for the firm, the job became one of educating the rest of the organization and convincing them to follow suit. Our measure of success was a function of how well we could present, teach and reinforce the new direction and cultural expectations that would “win over” the people. It was our job to behaviorally define and interpret this new spirit and vision for the people and to “help” them act accountably in this new paradigm of performance. Within my efforts to convince, support, direct and correct was the basic assumption that I could influence and change how people thought and felt about themselves, about their roles and responsibilities, and about their stance toward the company.

However, I was about to question the philosophical underpinnings of my actions. These questions led to a subtle shift in my attitude toward what
I did, how I supported my clients, and how I went about my job. It also offered me a new perspective that provided me with greater resiliency and fulfillment and enabled me to be more flexible and appropriate in what I was doing.

This paper is the result of my observations and experiences and the dialogues I had with five executives in five different companies. In their own way, they helped me see my efforts through a different lens. These executives are: Harry Bubb, CEO (ret.), Pacific Financial Companies, Newport Beach, California; Jim Hart, CEO, Senn-Delaney Leadership Consulting Group, Long Beach, California; Denny Litos, CEO, Ingham Regional Medical Center, Lansing, Michigan; Dave Roberson, CEO and President, Hitachi Data Systems, Santa Clara, California; and Ric Rudman, COO and EVP (ret.), Electric Power Research Institute, Palo Alto, California.

The reason I wanted to introduce you to these gentlemen is because I freely refer to the lessons that I learned from them throughout this paper. Here, then, are the insights they’ve given me about organizational transformation and transcendent leadership, followed by an introduction to a form of leadership consulting I call Principle-Based Dialogue, that has risen from these insights:

**Realization #1**

*You cannot change how a person thinks and feels without their permission and agreement.* . . . *You cannot make a person think and feel the way that you want them to think and feel without their permission and agreement.*

Ask yourself, can anyone make you think or feel the way that they want you to think and feel without your permission? You can work for a company or a boss where you are not allowed to share your thoughts or ask questions. But does that change what and how you think?

This idea surrounds us, but do we truly understand its implications? For instance, for those who live in the United States, one of the inalienable
rights of every citizen that was recognized by the architects of the Constitution is that of Liberty. The liberty that they wrote of especially applies to freedom of thought. This freedom of thought is at the root of our individual uniqueness and our capacity to choose as we see fit. It is the reason that we can freely interpret and experience events differently from others. Although at times we may take this for granted, notice what happens to us when someone tries to take it away or impose their will on our thinking without our permission.

This freedom of thought was made abundantly clear in Victor Frankl’s book *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Frankl was incarcerated in the most physically horrific and emotionally extreme situation, a Nazi concentration camp during the Second World War. Even the intensity of the event did not guarantee a common perspective or the same mental reaction from every individual in that predicament. His observation of this phenomenon formed the basis of the work that he explored after the war and subsequently wrote about in his book. Frankl implies that there is no magical dimension in any event, situation or person that dictates that everyone who experiences an event would see it absolutely the same way. This meant that there were no events that were universally seen by every person as wonderful or horrendous; and, there were no events that appealed to everyone in the same way. This meant that how an individual reacted to an event was very much a personal phenomenon of choice based on that person’s thinking regarding that event.

The implications of this fact were that my experience of life and the events in my life were very much of my choosing, since the thoughts through which I viewed the event were of my making. Although at times and at certain moments, this was not obvious or evident to me, nonetheless, it was true. No person or event could make me feel or act a certain way unless I chose to agree to do so and/or I chose to give them permission to have that kind of influence over me.

Regardless of my good intentions, this fact flew in the face of my previous assumptions that through my professional efforts I could sculpt
and choreograph the thinking and awareness of others. . . and subsequently, their attitudes and actions. This realization had implications for me in every arena of life. . . as a change agent, as an organizational leader, as a parent and spouse, as a child, and as a sibling. As the recipient of this principle, I could no longer blame others or an event for how I felt or thought. Hearing myself think “They made me feel this way” or “I had no choice” no longer made any sense.

As a coach to executives, I began to notice the number of times my suggestions and designs were based on the assumption that we could make someone think or feel a certain way to enable them to achieve the desired result. I began to wonder: outside of these five executives, how many leaders go through life under the assumption that they can make their people think and feel a certain way? Perhaps, with effort, money and attention, these leaders may be able to control their people’s behavior and performance. . . but can these leaders control how their people think and feel without their people first giving them permission to affect their thinking? How much time and effort, how many resources are spent in this pursuit?

I understood this notion on an intellectual level. But in my conversation with Denny Litos, CEO of Ingham Regional Medical Center, my opinion and approach belied the idea that I was trying to choreograph and manipulate the thinking of the people to achieve a common goal or a healthier perspective. Regardless of the nobility of the purpose of my actions, they were based on a flawed understanding of how we are as human beings. Denny “gently” pointed this out to me. However, my conundrum was. . . if the mark of a leader is someone who gets things done through others, how, then, do they do this if they cannot control their people’s thinking? This becomes especially knotty when we are talking about embracing core values, treating each other more kindly, maintaining goodwill toward difficult people, raising the quality and service of our endeavors, staying focused on the goals, being open to change, and so forth. What was I truly doing in my efforts to support Denny’s desire to create a more values-based, healthy, high-performing organization?
As I observed Denny in a number of management situations, some of which were very harsh and adversarial, I started to get a glimpse of his thinking and consciousness. His understanding of this concept became evident to me through his resulting attitude toward the people in his hospital and toward his organization as a whole. Regardless of the intensity of the situation, he seemed to be weatherproofed against the “slings and arrows” that were being lodged toward him. He also appeared to personally weather quite well the performance-damaging storm of reduced census throughout the industry, low remuneration, and unwieldy regulatory requirements. The answer for me lay in his ability to see and value the dignity and, in most cases, the innocence of his people. One situation in particular stands out for me.

The hospital was in the middle of a heated contract negotiation with their union. Profanity, threats and accusations became a normal part of the conversation. After each exchange, the parties would return to their own area to discuss what was on the table. After one particularly adversarial session, the negotiating management team started to vent their frustrations, judgments and admonitions about the behavior they had just experienced coming from the union. In the midst of all this, Denny mentioned how proud he was to have union people like this working in his organization. It wasn’t a ploy to calm down his management team, as his sentiments were authentic. He went on to say that in the midst of the insults and insinuations, he saw people who were willing to put their own welfare on the line for what they felt was the good of their constituents. They were committed to doing the “right” thing in their minds, even if it meant risking their personal well-being. He did not agree with their tactics or with their attitude, but he was proud of them for their courage and commitment. Through this perspective, he was able to get beyond the obvious to see possibilities that eventually led to a mutually agreeable solution.

*All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant-leaders to show the way, not by*
mass movements, but by each servant-leader demonstrating his own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 39)

Although you can anecdotally share an event, you cannot “teach” the consciousness or understanding that provided the perspective or insight that made such consciousness appropriate and poignant for the given situation. Without that consciousness, at best, you could try to duplicate the actions, but would miss the spirit and authenticity of the process. Through the experience with Denny, though, I started to understand what Denny meant and had a brief glimpse of what he saw. His efforts to create a healthier and more respectful organization were not about convincing people who did not want to be convinced. His efforts were not about coercing people to act in a way that they did not agree with, even if that way was more respectful and collaborative. Instead, his communicating his message over and over again and in many forms was an effort to find those individuals who already resonated with the intent, common sense, and truth of that message. It wasn’t as much an effort of teaching and convincing as it was an effort of discovery, reinforcement, and gaining permission to explore together. In his words, he wanted to find those people in the organization who were already living their lives by these healthy principles... to find the “choir.” He wanted to find those individuals who already live their lives with this perspective and understanding. He wanted to appeal to those who see the common sense of the message and who want to explore it deeper.

Knowing that the more negative or cynical individual is oftentimes louder and more threatening, he wanted to make the organization a safer place for the members of the “choir” to step forward and assume a role of leadership. He wanted to be available to those who wanted counsel and to assist and guide the sincerely interested. But he knew that he could not make the sad and angry folks see life differently if they did not want to see life differently. He understood that because of their thinking, they would view every effort through the lens of anger, distrust, politics and selfishness. Until they could clear up some of their personal biases, his efforts
would be in vain. . . in fact, because they were viewed through these negative filters, his perceived efforts would most likely reinforce the very cynical state of mind that he was trying to diminish.

He was not looking for obedient or non-thinking “corporate soldiers.” He was looking for individuals who could align themselves with the mission, expectations, and values of the hospital. He wanted to awaken the individual healthy leadership within these people and to support their acting from it.

A new moral principle is emerging which holds that the only authority deserving one’s allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader. Those who choose to follow this principle will not casually accept the authority of existing institutions. Rather they will freely respond only to individuals who are chosen as leaders because they are proven and trusted as servants.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 10)

Denny’s faith and hopefulness were founded on his understanding that the people in any organization fall along a continuum. They do not neatly fall into two binary camps, that is, they are not healthy or unhealthy, patient or impatient, hopeful and trusting, or cynical and distrusting. That would be naïve. However, he did see that the vast majority of people are cognizant and respectful of common sense and the feeling of goodwill. They are willing to be in on the journey as long as there is trust and respect.

The elements of his message are the basic realizations described in this paper. The first realization is that every person has an innate freedom of choice regarding how he or she will think and feel. Leadership recognizes this and acts in an appropriate fashion, both respectful and understanding of people. This does not mean that leadership should arbitrarily agree with what people see, nor that they should allow disruptive and disrespectful behaviors to continue, regardless of how many people hold that point of view. Leadership and all who choose to exercise their common sense and
positive relating can find perspective, wisdom, and solace in this understanding. The source of Denny’s apparent confidence, patience, and faith about his people was at the heart of my second realization.

Realization #2

*People have an intrinsic sense of conscience, good will and well-being.*
*At our core is an innate appreciation and desire for peacefulness, contribution, health, kindness and love.*

Inevitably when starting a new program, I will be warned by people about the meanness or harshness of a particular person I am about to meet. This caution is often shared with me for my welfare and to prepare me for an expected unpleasant event. However, in almost every situation, the person I have met has been cordial, respectful and collaborative. “Attila the Hun” fails to appear. After our time together, at the most, these individuals may not agree with the possibility of a healthier environment; but in every situation, they agree with the intent and desire. They may feel that our perspective is naïve or that it is unfounded in reality. But they cannot deny that in their most private moments, they have a deep appreciation for authenticity and goodwill.

In fact, in many cases, if you explore deeply enough, behind every action taken, you will find at its core a sincere desire and motive for greater peacefulness, making a positive contribution, advancing kindness and respect, and so forth. Where we tend to fall short is in the mechanism, decision or behavior taken that is meant to achieve this intention. This would be akin to the boss who constantly.yells, chides and berates people to produce so that they are secure in their jobs. Another example would be the manager who uses shame, guilt and obligation to get his people to feel gratitude and appreciation for their positions. The action or solution may be aberrant and may be a flawed example of the motive or desire, but it does not negate the healthiness of the motive or desire.

Again, this deeper realization came from the time I spent with Denny.
Because this state of health already exists, he felt that our efforts were not to teach anyone goodness or the healthy way of being.

In truth, our efforts were to help awaken and uncover what was already there. Our process was not one of “pouring in” the right answers, but one of bringing forth the common sense and wisdom that were already resident in every person. Instead of teaching, entertaining and convincing our audience, our efforts took on a more dialogic and conversational feeling. There was more time for personal reflection and exploration. Instead of building camps of who “got it” and who didn’t, there was a mutuality of understanding that we are all on a similar journey. At any given time, we just happen to be on different parts on the path moving forward at different speeds. Many of the people saw this journey as a normal and natural way of life that they could easily access. It wasn’t reserved for a chosen few, but was the purview of every person. For these individuals, our efforts were no longer a program that was being implemented, but a way of life that was ongoing and deepening.

However, the reality is that there are a number of disillusioned and upset people. If we are all innately healthy and loving, why is there such discord and anger around us? Once you see this innate aspect of human beings, you can then see the influence of one’s conditioned personal thinking that gets in the way of our natural way of being. If we could allow ourselves to relax this ego and memory-based thought, we would start to hear our own divine wisdom speak. The journey would be to return to being able to trust the healthier thoughts within, as intensely as one had learned to trust the thoughts of disappointment and hurt. As one of my mentors once shared with me:

Your wisdom is always speaking to you . . . but it speaks in whispers. The reason you can’t hear it is because you have a brass band of your personal thinking playing in your mind. The fact that you can’t hear it does not mean that it’s silent. Your job is to quiet down the band so that you can hear this more pleasant, wiser voice.
Knowing this, you can see how we all lose our way at times. However, knowing that lost-ness is innocence, you can weatherproof yourself a little more easily.

Again, Denny displayed this capacity during the labor strike. After everything was said and done and the negotiations had been completed, the one thing that he chose to speak on at his management meeting was the notion of forgiveness—forgiveness not as something that could be demanded of anyone in the room, but as insight and perspective. He said that forgiveness was very much a selfish act of attending to one’s own healthier state of mind; forgiveness keeps one from bitterness and anger. Forgiveness had nothing to do with condoning or pardoning disrespectful or unhealthy acts, but was a state of mind that you returned to once you could see the innocence of thought in others (and yourself). It would be through this state of forgiveness that management could provide the leadership to bring the hospital back to the healing and loving community it needed to be. Because it was so much a part of a personal journey of discovery, Denny understood that it may take some a little more time to reach this state. In addition, he stated that he did not want anyone to act contrary to their feelings out of guilt or obligation and that his words were more for the group’s welfare than for anything to do with the hospital. Their actions had to be authentic and in integrity with their spirit and their heart.

It wasn’t an easy concept to grasp, especially in the midst of all of the leftover angst and accusations. However, the following day, a number of the managers were at the entrances to the hospital welcoming back the striking employees. By some returning employees, these managers’ actions were viewed with skepticism and judgment. From the perspective of many more employees, their actions were very much appreciated and formed the basis for a new relationship.

The servant always accepts and empathizes, never rejects. The servant as leader always empathizes, always accepts the person but sometimes refuses to accept some of the person’s effort or performance as good.
Acceptance of the person, though, requires a tolerance of imperfection. Anybody could lead perfect people—if there are any.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 20)

Being able to see this innate capacity for health does not mean that one is blindly optimistic. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Although this capacity is ever-present, there are moments when we do not display much maturity. Often our personal, ego-based thinking seems to get in the way of our being more open to healthier thoughts. Under the guise of being realistic and pragmatic, we allow doubt, fear and insecurity to govern too much of our decisions and actions. Understanding oneself in order to help gain perspective follows.

Realization #3

Regardless of our ability to notice it, our consciousness and awareness is in a constant state of flux at every moment in our life. Our feelings can be fleeting and changing and, at times, we notice that we live and perceive our lives as an “outside-in” phenomenon, and sometimes as an “inside-out” phenomenon.

All five executives noticed that on certain occasions they and their people felt helpless or victim to the whim of life’s forces. They felt their inner state of well-being or the feelings they experienced as caused by the events happening around them. When the world looks this way, you often hear statements like “He makes me feel this way” or “I had no control of the matter.” At its worst, when individuals see life this way, they are in a constant struggle to change their surroundings, to change how others behave, or to drive to achieve certain results in order to feel a greater sense of control. However, when taking time to reflect, we recognize that our desire to control results in only a fleeting, fragile, even false sense of peace. This is the outside-in life: when we are driven by our surroundings or when we fuse our inner state of mind to events and people around us.

At other times, leaders noticed that their inner state of well-being and
perspective had nothing or very little to do with their surroundings. Rather, quite often, the leaders with whom I work noticed that they had the ability to remain calm and present even in the harshest and most hectic situations. Instead of being reactive, or affected by the events around them in a chaotic way, they brought greater perspective to the situation. Even when others thought they were under “attack,” these leaders brought to the moment compassion and understanding instead of defensiveness, rigidity, or the attempt to control. Instead of reactionary responses that pushed people away, the leaders brought acceptance and collaboration. Instead of an unyielding “party line,” they focused on the spirit they wanted to create. Instead of disengaging from others, they stayed connected and inclusive, able to maintain an ego-detached engagement. They saw life as an inside-out existence and, through their thinking and action, created a mature and compassionate interpretation of life’s events.

With this understanding of how people experience life at any given point in time, these leaders saw their people being at various points on the continuum. They then tried to awaken more and more people to a personal journey of moving from an outside-in existence to an inside-out existence. This is a higher form of accountability, i.e., being accountable for our experience of life versus being victim of the events of life. This is not to say we are accountable for every event that happens, but we can be accountable to our thinking and what we make of the events of life. Commensurately, our actions and responses are often a result of our perceptions and can be more or less appropriate and significant, depending on the quality of our thinking.

A common trait these leaders shared was a healthy attitude toward their performance and how they responded to the various challenges and situations placed before them. Although they acknowledged that there were external events as well as other people who had an influence on what they were able to accomplish, they were not helpless victims of these circumstances. They did not blame others or make excuses for their circumstances or lack of results. They did not make their happiness or fulfillment contingent on others or how things turned out. Rather, the leaders displayed the
ability to recognize and accept the current “reality” and to build on this starting point. The decisions made and the actions taken were founded on a deeper innate sense of fulfillment and contribution.

This stance toward life put leaders on a journey of discovering how they could have a greater and more profound impact and leverage on the world around them. They became ardent students of the laws of contribution, stewardship and service. Each step of the way required a healthy respect for (and comfort with) the more intangible realms of life, such as insights and revelations, vision and inspiration, and values and ethics. Like most of us, these leaders strove to make progressive sense out of life.

This was an especially poignant insight for Jim Hart, CEO of Senn-Delaney Leadership Group. His professional journey has been one of progressively enabling and implementing positive and recursive change both for his organization and for the clients his organization serves. His unfolding understanding has brought him to a shift in mindset and thought process. Be the goal enhanced leadership ability, higher quality, or cultural transformation, to focus only on the objective to be achieved and then to drive to that outcome avoids tapping into the tremendous individual and collective potential of the people in the organization. An overly controlling and one-dimensional approach to change may appear at first to be the easier and most direct course to take. However, those of us who have tried this approach realize that, even if it is initially successful against early metrics, the innovation and flexibility needed to sustain and further real change still remain in the hands of one person or, at best, in the hands of a very small group of leaders. All too often, management begins to notice that once they relax their focus on or efforts toward the desired change, the old cultural inertia re-emerges, and performance and the rate of change slowly wane. There is little, if any, shift in attitude, identity and thinking on the part of those responsible for changing, even as they go through the mandated motions. More energy, effort and resources become necessary to keep the flywheel of change spinning. Eventually, this defeats or marginalizes any intended economy, productivity or innovation.
In speaking with Jim, I learned that he believes the real challenge is not so much to sustain change through external mechanisms and protocols, but to awaken in people their own capacity to personally shift their thinking and mindset in such a way that, to them, it makes sense to act and perform in a new paradigm. As Jim states, “The challenge is not in changing one’s thinking . . . the challenge is in keeping one’s thinking changed.”

The common concept toward which these leaders all lead is the concept of greater accountability. Their understanding of this concept exceeds how this notion is used in normal day-to-day conversations. Because of heightened awareness, these leaders have had an indelible impact on the world around them.

Being accountable has often been used synonymously with being responsible. Accountability has also been construed as having a “no whining,” “make things happen,” and “get on with it” characteristic. Yet a too-quick understanding limits the efficacy of this notion for many leaders. For the executives in this study, accountability is a much “bigger” notion. More than being accountable for one’s performance, how one acts and behaves, or more importantly for one’s attitude, true accountability recognizes the fact that at times one will feel vulnerable, dependent, or victimized, and that this is part of being alive and a result of our thinking. Our capacity to see both the content of our thinking, that is, what we think, as well as the process of thought, that is, that we think, provides the necessary perspective. With this view, we purposefully choose not to spend a tremendous amount of time in poor states of mind.

In addition to being accountable in the world of form (structures, strategies, etc.) and tangible results, accountability also embraces a more spiritual world that precedes the world of form. Accountability rises from the world of positive change, “fresh starts,” transcendent ideas, forgiveness and innocence, inspiration and heightened service. That accountability is a state of mind is one of the “simple truths” with which these leaders live their lives. However, like many “truths,” accountability is difficult to convey to
others. In addition to communicating our understanding to others, this state of mind is demonstrated through insight, action, and behavior.

**Realization #4**

*Life is constantly revealing itself to us on multiple plains and dimensions.*

The effective leader is cognizant and adept in each dimension and does not limit him/herself to only a few of these planes of revelation. In addition to focusing on the performance, results, behaviors and attitudes which are a manifestation of healthy leadership, effective leaders also try to awaken to their own state of wisdom, spirit and common sense from whence these ideas were formed.

The most effective leaders live life simultaneously on many different levels. Their experience of life exists in these many dimensions. They move comfortably and effortlessly from the tangible to the intangible and back again. They apply the same understanding of accountability to each of these levels. As such, they are open to and consider many forms of input upon which to make their decisions and to set their direction. Input includes objective performance and its contributing variables, noticing the obvious as well as the subtle in how people behave and act, sensing others’ biases, prejudices and emotional predilections. . . and being receptive to creative, transcendent thoughts and insights which completely reinvent the life they live.

A simple way of describing these dimensions can be seen in the following diagram of concentric circles. Here are some broad observations of the inter-relationship of the dimensions.
As the leader moves from the outer rings toward the center, the variables of each level become less and less tangible, measurable and definite. The leader is as comfortable working in the tangible world as she or he is maneuvering in the world of ideas, concepts and philosophy. In many ways, such leaders simultaneously see both tangible and intangible... objective and subjective... as being different shades of “form” and reality. Inspiration, compassion and forgiveness are as “real” as the chair you are sitting in at this moment. Conceiving of tangibles and intangibles in a unified way is one reason why these leaders have a strong, if not overly defined, vision directing them. Their relationship with their vision is as though it is already a reality on the physical plane. As they pursue the journey, they apply form to their sense of tomorrow as though it already exists today.

The more adept a leader is at living and operating at the more central
core levels, the more impact and leverage the leader has on the outer rings. For instance, changing one belief often has an impact on multiple attitudes, behaviors and results. Deeper still, a deep insight can often totally alter one’s life and everything in it. Leaders have the capacity to move from the spiritual (principles) through the psychological (beliefs and attitudes) to the behavioral in achieving results . . . and back again.

Starting with the more tangible level, the leaders I worked with were practical and pragmatic stewards of their organizations. Constantly aware of their own results and performance and the real and potential influences on the welfare of the organization, they are accountable for organization-wide results and realize the organization’s performance is a manifestation of variables that fall within their control and influence. They don’t overfocus on events and situations that arise; rather, they focus on how they want to deal with such issues and challenges. They feel that a viable and profitable organization is one of the greatest ways to be of service both to employees and employees’ families, and to the community the organization serves. Through their personhood and deep service, they ensure an ongoing and meaningful contribution.

The leaders I worked with realize very little happens until someone makes a decision and a commitment to do something. In order to achieve what they are charged to achieve in a healthy and perpetuating fashion, they also realize decisions and choices need to be made, and actions need to be taken. Such decisions and behaviors either contribute to or take away from performance. A thought is just a thought until it is converted into action. Without legitimate action steps, leadership is like a sun that never shines . . . tremendous potential but no results.

Continuing the journey inward, leaders realize decisions do not happen in a serendipitous or haphazard way. At times, decisions and actions are based on existing logic . . . a tried and true way of thinking and looking at the world. Existing logic is captured by attitudes toward life, beliefs about how things are (were), dogma and rules we live by, and through the techniques we apply to remind ourselves of the “right” way to do things. This
level is even less tangible than that of decisions, behaviors, and actions, and in some ways, of greater impact because of the wide range of situations to which existing thought patterns apply.

However, with changing times, sometimes the old answers no longer continue to work, or work at the level at which they once did. Instead of stubbornly and doggedly trying to apply yesterday’s logic to today’s issues, leaders display a deep respect for the capacity for innovative insights and revelations. When the leaders I dialogued with found themselves getting bogged down on an issue, they were able to detach, gain perspective, change their thinking about the topic, and subsequently reframe their perceptions. Doing so, they transcended the “old” thinking found at the level of beliefs, memories and dogma. Separating fact from imagination in this way and responding to the facts as much as possible requires not only a different way of doing things, but also the vision, flexibility and consistency to make it a reality. At this level of understanding we find a certain aliveness and freshness in our actions and, commensurately, in the organization.

As leaders, then, we find tremendous value in relaxing our existing thinking, and simply reflecting. Depending on the individual, reflection is accomplished through long morning walks, rounds of golf, free-flowing conversations and dialogue, or just quietness. The moment of insight cannot be called upon at will, but creating the scenario for openness in our minds is a necessity if it is to appear. The reflection activities are not seen as the cause of insight or of relaxation, but when we can suspend our personal thinking and biases, we become more open to the voice of wisdom.

—from one level of consciousness, each of us acts resolutely from moment to moment on a set of assumptions that then govern one’s life. Simultaneously, from another level, the adequacy of these assumptions is examined, in action, with the aim of future revision and improvement. Such a view gives one the perspective that makes it possible for one to live and act in the real world with a clearer conscience.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 26)

At their deepest core, authentic leaders understand and accept the belief that
much of their wisdom and perspective is rooted in their understanding of spiritual principles. Wisdom, goodwill, compassion, vision, and other traits and capabilities are a result of these principles. Leadership capacity does not simply happen in a serendipitous and haphazard fashion. There is source and intelligence behind our capacities. . . there is universal wisdom.

Realization #5

At the root of all of transcendent leadership capabilities and concepts are key Principles that manifest themselves through Thought, Consciousness and the Voice of Wisdom.

I started this article sharing a story about my relationship with Harry Bubb. This was not the only experience I had of Harry’s leadership. During his tenure, he led the cultural and strategic transformation of the corporation from a mutual insurance company to a conglomerate of financial service offerings. Revenue and profits rose exponentially with the organization’s growth. However, in his final years as the CEO and Chairman of the now Pacific Financial Companies, he realized some wide-range and dramatic changes needed to occur in order to put the corporation on sounder footing.

I am sure that, like anyone else, he would have preferred a “hero’s farewell” for all he had captained. However, the two overriding thoughts governing his last two years were to leave a fiscally sound organization positioned for the future and to personally take whatever “heat” was involved in the restructuring instead of leaving it to a successor to bear. This way, the next CEO would be able to continue the corporate journey with a relatively clean slate with the people. Harry led the challenging and often difficult task of restructuring and reorganizing divisions, shedding less profitable operations, downsizing where necessary, and changing divisional leadership when appropriate. When Harry did retire, although there was a great deal of appreciation, recognition and best wishes, he realized those sentiments had been dampened by the activities of the previous two years. However, in talking with him, it was clear that his integrity as a
leader was intact and his conviction toward the organization’s and the people’s legacy was sound. His actions and decisions were in alignment with what he personally felt was “right,” from a vulnerable, not an ego-driven perspective, and his ideas and feelings came not only from his strong values, but also from his developing interpretation of those values through his own insights and understanding of spiritual principles.

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What I have come to understand is that spiritual principles are the source of every facet of leadership and life as we know it. An authentic understanding and experience of spiritual principles enables us to travel the continuum from being able to change our minds to being able to truly forgive. Spiritual principles—grace, ease, compassion, responsibility, forgiveness, love—are gifts enabling us to experience all of life. . . the good and the bad, the peaceful and the troubling, the happy and the sad. Such principles provide us with vision and foresight, courage and compassion, resiliency and perspective, a deeper conscience and morality. They supercharge our efforts and bring to life everything that we’ve ever learned. In fact, as valuable as the content of insights can be to our personal performance and fulfillment, the greater capacity is our ability to have insight and transcendent thoughts. This, too, is a capability born from spiritual principles.

These principles point to a state before “form” and, as such, defy being defined or adequately communicated using the artifacts of form, that is, through words or actions. Words and actions become our primary mechanisms, but remain woefully inadequate in capturing and articulating the simultaneous nature of life and the limitless potential and mystery of existence. Regardless, spiritual principles are the source of our experience of life as we perceive it. They engage us in our capacity to be aware of life through our own level of Consciousness at a given time. They provide the conduit that binds the events of our life, our perception of those events and the subsequent actions we take through Thought. And, through our capacity for insight, spiritual principles provide a source of common sense and tran-
scendent universal *Wisdom*. From this understanding, hope, contribution, fulfillment and possibility are infinite.

Communicated through my own limited grasp, the principles are at the foundation of this entire treatise. Like most of this article, when the topic of leadership is discussed and defined it is predominantly described by the artifacts we see coming from a given state of mind, that is, the traits, characteristics and attributes of a leader, the abilities, capabilities and skills displayed, the results achieved and the challenges overcome. However, to define leadership in this manner merely talks *about* leadership through the form a given style of leadership takes. Defining leadership does not fully capture what leadership is, in that most often we do not include the source of leadership as part of the dialogue. The examples we point toward are merely the echoes of the voice of universal wisdom, once or twice removed from the source.

*The leader needs two intellectual abilities that are usually not formally assessed in an academic way: he needs to have a sense for the unknowable and be able to foresee the unforeseeable. Leaders know some things and foresee some things which those they are presuming to lead do not know or foresee as clearly.*

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 21)

An understanding and consciousness of the principles awakens our leadership capacity. Wisdom is a potential available to everyone. Leaders who lead from wisdom lead in a very natural and normal manner. Their specialness does not come from arrogance, notoriety or one-upmanship, but from being the one of the most “normal” of everyone and living their lives from a profound common sense. Such leaders hold a special place in the hearts and admiration of those around them. For instance, one of the leaders upon whom this article is based is seen as the spiritual hub of the organization and has consistently displayed the uncanny ability to be able to clearly see what the future will bring. Another is held in the highest regard because of his impeccable sense of ethics, his tremendous humility, and his deep and abiding concern for the people in his organization and for the community...
they serve. And yet another is admired because of his ability to attract and
develop leaders of character, vision and impact. These are but three exam-
pies of how their understanding is manifested.

What happens to our values, and therefore to the quality of our civiliza-
tion in the future, will be shaped by the conceptions of individuals that
are born of inspiration. Perhaps only a few will receive this inspiration
(insight) and the rest will learn from them. The very essence of leader-
ship, going out ahead to show the way, derives from more than usual
openness to inspiration. . . .But the leader needs more than inspiration.
. . .A leader initiates, provides the ideas and the structure, and takes the
risk of failure along with the chance of success.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 14)

Although not many people can be or want to be a successful CEO of a large
organization, everyone has the potential to be a leader. In order for this to
occur, I believe there are three basic elements in the development of our
leadership capacity. The first step is to awaken to your own voice of wis-
dom, the spirit, the state of knowing in yourself. The second step is the
manifestation and articulation of your voice—to put into form this formless
spirit. Leadership is a personal choice directed by love, contribution and
gratitude. The third step is to awaken others to their own unique voice.
This, I believe, is the essence of leadership.

One name that does not appear on the list of leaders early in this article
is that of Nancy Nakai, my wife. She is an accomplished professional, a
founding member of several non-profit organizations, has served on numer-
ous women’s advocacy boards and has chaired successful fund raisers. She
does not lead a multimillion-dollar organization with thousands of people
reporting to her. However, I can think of no greater leadership than what
she displayed in the raising of our children and the shepherding of our fam-
ily. For the past 30 years, Nancy has displayed every leadership trait I’ve
described. She has shown courage, hopefulness and determination. She
has held a compelling vision for herself, for our family and for our commu-
nity. She has had to make the tough calls whenever necessary, often alone
because of my travel regimen. She has also been a support when needed, a wonderful teacher and role model, and a consistent voice in the awakening of wisdom and spirit, both in our kids and in me. Her leadership is as poignant and contributing as that of any world or corporate leader. Her vision and choices are governed by her deep and abiding love and gratefulness for life. In short, she has met the criteria of true leadership.

_The leadership of trailblazers . . . is so “situational” that it rarely draws on known models. Rather it seems to be a fresh creative response to here-and-now opportunities. Too much concern with how others did it may be inhibitive._

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 34)

Nancy has been an example to me of the type of leadership the CEOs in this article hope to awaken within their organizations. Once people have awakened into confidence and wisdom, how they manifest leadership is governed by what they love or are grateful for . . . the nurse who loves nursing, the sales person who loves being of service, the professor who loves exploration and revelation, the doctor who loves healing, the researcher who loves the environment, the leader who loves the mission of and people in the organization. In fact, at the heart of every compelling vision is an abiding sense of gratitude, contribution and love. The third step, awakening spirit in others, is the final word.

I became intensely aware of this fact in my conversations with the Greenleaf Center for Servant-leadership. At first I noticed the Center did not have a Center-approved organizational consulting arm which presented an “authorized” definition of servant-leadership. They relied on a number of mechanisms for the dissemination of the message of servant-leadership, including higher education, resource material, the Center itself, corporate client organizations, and their Speakers Bureau. At first, I wondered why there had not been a centralized program or consulting service offering based on the ideas coming from the Center.

I now believe this had occurred by design. The mystery and wisdom
behind servant-leadership is only partially in the content and the words. The real magic is the infinite spirit and consciousness toward which the words point. From the outside looking in, I believe the Center’s mission is to continually develop and communicate as much the spirit of servant-leadership as it is to develop and communicate the message and content coming from that spirit. Imagine you had a leadership academy with the brightest and most profound leadership thinkers and teachers as your agents. Imagine having an instructional group comprised of the likes of Danah Zohar, Margaret Wheatley, Peter Block, Warren Bennis, Ken Blanchard, Stephen Covey, Jim Kouzes, Joseph Jaworski, Peter Senge, and Max Depree. The Center has had the wisdom to nurture and respect the spirit and understanding from which emerged the content of their thoughts and conclusions. Larry Spears, and those who work with him at the Center, saw the common thread that tied it all together and did not try to control how that “thread” became manifest in the world. I believe maturity is not controlling the conclusions, but honoring the state of wisdom and genius from which those conclusions have come to light.

The hope of Principle-Based Dialogue is similar: not to teach the one “right” way through manipulation or coercion, but to awaken in others a lasting understanding of servant-leadership, personally and professionally. Although Principle-Based Dialogue cannot guarantee insight, based on past results, and with the permission of the leader, it can lead one to the threshold where insight is possible. That final step is always the individual’s choice to make.

Early on I made a distinction between wisdom and scholarship; and the former, what works well in practice, has long been my central interest. This is not to denigrate scholarship. It has its place, and there is a subtle interaction between the two, but they are different things. The wise are not necessarily scholars, and the scholars are not necessarily wise.

—Robert K. Greenleaf (1977, p. 1)

There is no mandate to apply or implement the lessons of servant-leadership. Rather, hope exists that the spirit of servant-leadership will be awak-
ened in more and more leaders. I believe this is at the heart of servant-leadership becoming more of a way of life versus something to implement. Once this spirit is ignited, a prescriptive approach becomes unnecessary. But what is the conduit to a servant-leadership state of mind that goes beyond all interpretations and conclusions? Though it’s impossible to actually cause this state to occur, a servant-leadership way of being can open others’ readiness through effective deep listening.

Realization #6

*More valuable than obedient, dutiful and good followers are effective listeners, conscious thinkers and leaders of action.*

One common emphatic statement attributed to the executive leaders in this essay is their ability to bring out the very “best” in their people. This vote of appreciation and confidence was evident in every conversation. Not only did their people enjoy performing at their optimal level, but they were also open to learning and pushing their horizons well beyond the status quo.

A litmus test of this type of effective leadership was articulated by Robert Greenleaf in *Servant-Leadership* (1977, pp. 13-14):

*The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or at least, not be further deprived?*

In my experience, the leaders described in this article share a common perspective—they realize what they can control and what they can influence. In contrast, there are very few people who see the illusion of control for what it truly is. Many people believe tight control and lock-step discipline are the keys to organizational success. In other words, there is one “right” answer and it comes from senior management. All problems and chal-
Challenges can be defined and resolved through this “right” answer, and thus it needs to be obeyed in its most complete definition.

Although I’ve taken an extreme description of this form of leadership, if you accept the fallacy of control, the resulting stance insures anarchy and a scattered laissez-faire attitude rather than alignment and velocity. Knowing what you can change, what you can influence, what you can only awaken, and what you should leave alone requires a level of wisdom that transcends the mechanistic, command and control network of thoughts. In many cases, the only time a leader knows she or he has chosen the right path is “after the fact.” Leadership does not easily lend itself to prescriptively setting a goal and stubbornly driving to that goal.

Leadership requires more listening than telling. In fact, it harkens a heightened form of listening that is deeply discerning, beyond the content of the words and ideas that are being communicated. Listening allows us to be more truly in the moment more of the time. Listening gives the capacity and wisdom to choose the path or opportunities that will lead to the greater good, and away from myopically following a false path previously established.

Only a true natural servant automatically responds to any problem by listening first. . . . It is because true listening builds strength in people. . . . The best test of whether we are communicating at this depth is to ask ourselves first: Are we really listening? Are we listening to the one we want to communicate to? Is our basic attitude, as we approach the confrontation, one of wanting to understand? Remember that great line from the prayer of St. Francis, “Lord, grant that I may not seek so much to be understood as to understand.”

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 17)

Organizationally, this understanding shows up in many ways. For instance, at Hitachi Data Systems (HDS), recognizing the frequent and rapid global changes in technology, regulations, and industry competition, as well as the changes that occur within the larger corporate entity itself, Dave Roberson, President and CEO, realized that tight control was not an
organizational or leadership option. More importantly, over-control was contrary to Dave’s understanding and expectations of life and people. Dave is a purposeful and definite leader of his company and he recruits and hires leaders in their own right. As such, he expects healthy and visionary leadership in return.

He also realized that in order for HDS to stay ahead of all of the changes, both real and projected, he needed a flexible, dynamic, and accountable corporate culture which is committed to being a continually “learning and leading” organization. He needed leaders who could readily tap into their capacity to see emerging opportunities and priorities and to rapidly institute the necessary changes and actions. All this he wanted to occur within the charter and mission of HDS. He and the senior team continue to heighten and expand their understanding of their role and their mission. But the “magic” is not in the actions they take, but in the level of thinking or understanding they share.

Dave is a tremendously incisive and aware listener. Although he has strong opinions and views about how the company can run well, when it’s appropriate he has the ability to set his convictions aside and to listen openly to those around him. This trait is engaged with his people as much as with his clients. He listens intuitively. He notices that quality decisions and actions start with our ability to increase the quality and depth of the intake. In addition, people find that when they are with Dave, their thinking becomes clearer. When they encounter him, they don’t spend tremendous energy being concerned about Dave’s reactions, because his listening-based questions and demeanor evoke their “best” self.

Through the insight of listening, Dave decided that in order to create the “learning and leading” organization, the accountability for “51%” of the learning needed to fall on the learner (the listener) and not the teacher (the broadcaster). Although organizationally HDS consistently seeks out different ideas and perspectives, they never veer very far from this focus. As such, deep listening has become one of the cornerstones for effective leadership at Hitachi. Dave’s team listens to each other with the sincere desire
to personally understand the depth of what is being shared, as well as noticing the feelings attached to a person’s point of view. To listen openly means one has to suspend biases for as long as possible in order to hear the grains of truth the conversation is mutually built upon. Interestingly enough, those who have the ability to listen this way are the most incisive and global in their thinking. Their learning curve is steep, and their capacity for execution is high.

In contrast, in many other organizations, most, if not all, conversations are experienced in people through a filter of prejudices and biases instead of in openness and a sincere desire to learn and develop a new perspective. Prejudices and biases cause us to judge the speaker or the content of what is being shared, severely limiting the amount that can openly be discussed and exchanged.

The biased listener’s discomfort with or confusion about the conversation becomes a barrier to be avoided. This is especially true when a new paradigm or perspective is surfacing. In organizations of biased listeners (or, in effect, non-listeners), the messages tend to get watered down or purposely vague. Because prejudices are a result of what we already know, we limit the ability to explore and consider new ideas and perspectives beyond how we currently see the world. In these organizations, the onus of the learning falls on the speaker’s ability to maneuver around the maze of personal prejudices, any one of which could stop the listening and learning process entirely.

To Dave and his team, the starting point is the ability to listen with curiosity, openness and possibility. This is not to say that feelings of discomfort, confusion and disagreement are ignored. However, through Dave’s leadership, these feelings are viewed not through the lens of “right and wrong,” but more as an indicator that new ideas are being discussed. Difficult feelings are an indicator that the team is expanding the envelope of their thinking and may be entering new territory. By setting up this atmosphere, Dave has created a team that builds decisions on common sense and alignment rather than on a foundation of obligation, disagreement and sepa-
rateness. The decisions and actions occur more quickly and are more in concert with each other. People are more open to new ways of doing things and are equally adept at discerning the appropriate and meaningful actions that should be taken from those that are reactive and trivial.

I hasten to add that this team trait is far from lemming-like “group think.” Rather, the focus is not on obedience or even consensus around content, but on an alignment of understanding. Discussions are disciplined and lively and, through listening, each leader is expected to manifest the lessons and direction in the fashion that best serves his or her organization and maintains authenticity. In this way, Dave has attracted a cadre of strong global leaders around him. With very little difficulty, many of his “direct reports” could successfully run organizations as competent chief executives.

As with all of the leaders highlighted in this essay, I look forward to each of my regular conversations with Dave. I must admit that at times, the intensity of Dave’s listening and his capacity to be truly in the moment can be unnerving when my focus and presence is distracted. However, in every case, within short order, I find myself being drawn into the conversation and entertaining insights and perspectives I would not have previously considered. This realization around listening is but one result of Dave’s journey of insight and common sense. He, like others, has awakened his capacity for insights that transcend the present. The profundity of his decisions and actions is a result of the clarity and wisdom he experiences.

Although my relationships with each of these leaders differ, there is a common thread in each engagement: a relationship I have referred to as Principle-Based Dialogue.

PRINCIPLE-BASED DIALOGUE

The vast majority of people read, study, and listen for relevance. They search for content, for form, for actions that can be taken, and for results that can be achieved. However, their decisions about what is worthy of learning are often based on what they already know, that is, a perspective
based on their existing points of view. How is it possible, then, that anything truly “new” can be learned? In addition, how can one choose the correct decision from the seemingly unlimited options available?

Without the capacity for new insight, one would be destined to “live the same day 365 times a year.” The ability to consistently access the capacity for transcendent thought is the central core of effective leadership. However, throughout this essay, I’ve been pointing to something that cannot be mandated or caused to happen . . . definitely not by an outside influence. At the most, the external influence and the words of explanation used can only get the leadership candidate to the threshold of a transcendent leadership state of mind. The final, all-important step occurs in the candidate.

Once something “new” is discovered and experienced, there is a noticeable shift in how an individual sees the world and the possibilities and opportunities that lie before the individual. Often, it is not something that we plan for or choreograph, but we do notice it after the fact. We notice it in the results that we achieve, in the paths that we have taken, in the decisions we make, in the developing quality of our relationships, in our feelings of contribution and fulfillment and in the increased clarity of our life’s vision.

As one sets out to serve, how can one know that this will be the result? . . . Perhaps one chooses the same hypothesis again and again. But it is always a fresh open choice. And it is always a hypothesis under a shadow of doubt. Faith is the choice of the nobler hypothesis. Not the noblest; one never knows what that is. But the nobler, the best one can see when the choice is made. Since the test of results of one’s actions is usually long delayed, the faith that sustains the choice of the nobler hypothesis is psychological self-insight. This is the most dependable part of the true servant-leaders.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 14)

Many of us have occasionally experienced this phenomenon. In each situation, our effectiveness in whatever we are doing takes a quantum leap.
We have called the state of mind immediately resulting from having a brief glimpse of the spiritual principles as being in flow (Flow, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi), being in the moment (Be Here Now, Ram Dass), or being in the zone. It is the sweet spot in tennis or the sweet shot in golf. It is when we deliver our most inspiring and connecting speeches, that is, speaking without thinking. It occurs when our words fly onto the paper as though our pen had a mind of its own. It occurs in the moment of insight and revelation when creative and transcendent ideas come to the fore. We are there when we are inexplicably moved by a painting or a melody, touched by the grandeur of a sunset, or overwhelmed by the simplicity and beauty of a person’s face, a flower, a star. It occurs when we dance as though no one was looking, and it happens when our decisions and actions are absolutely perfect for the situation and the moment.

However, as mentioned, we usually notice this phenomenon only after the fact . . . after the results are in. Even then, we try to hold on to the moment. Although it is desirable, the more we try to make it a goal or destination to achieve, the more we look for it, the further away it retreats. Knowing this, leaders realize you cannot go forward from a mindset of distraction, worry or busy-ness to enable or achieve being in the zone. If anything, at the least, we need to be able to detach, relax, and go back or return to our innately healthier state of mind: that state of mind that existed before our personal, ego-driven thoughts took hold.

Although noticed and valued by each leader in this essay, this state is especially appreciated and recognized by Ric Rudman, recently retired COO and EVP for the Electric Power Research Institute. His professional reputation is one of creative problem solver, leading-edge visionary, builder of collaborative and consensual relationships, a deeply insightful individual, and an appreciative leader of strong character and ethics. However, he does not set out to be these things. He attributes these capacities to his curiosity about and exploration of being more in the moment. His progressive understanding of this state of being is an evolutionary journey.

Having had the privilege of having numerous discussions with him on
this topic, I noticed his journey of discovery and understanding closely parallels the path described in Realization #4, Diagram One. His awareness and interpretation of a state of being present started with the outer circle of results and actions, moving through past thinking and attitudes toward the more expansive consciousness of insights and principles. His dialogue with me facilitated my own journey of discovery and experience.

Through our conversations, I discovered my initial impression of being in the moment began with my acknowledging the reality of the present situation and acting accordingly. It was a function of my relationship to time and space. With this understanding, to truly display my capacity to be in the moment, I needed to focus on the moment without allowing external distractions to get in the way. If I was at home, I focused on “home and family” things, and if I was in the office, I consciously left the problems of home at home and stayed focused on work. Although it was a neat, predictable and orderly way of living, there were many times when this was not only impractical, but also improbable and unwise. I found myself battling my own thoughts and, in the name of doing things correctly, I was expending immense energy to control my thinking. Living life became predictable, stiff and one-dimensional. More damaging, I found myself judging others who allowed apparent distractions get in their way. This eventually caused a debilitating self-consciousness and criticism of others, leading to the very thing I wanted to avoid, a distracting lack of focus and confusion.

Instead of my focus being governed by timing, locale and situation, my next evolutionary step was to try to have my focus determined by the perceived priority that I put on the issue. However, setting priorities was also somewhat arbitrary and what I did not see was that I was the one who chose the yardstick to determine priority. It became clearer to me that priority was a personal choice and frequently did not lend itself to simple “right or wrong” answers. For instance, for one person it might be obvious that a decision impacting hundreds of people was tremendously more important than attending a birthday party for his child. Or that getting the job done was more important than maintaining a regimen of physical wellbeing.
Once my priorities were set, I thought I should not veer from them regardless of events. Again, this was fine if there was mutual agreement among all involved parties as to the “trumping” priority. However, this definition also had its flaws and limitations. I found myself living in a world overly governed by “either-or” thinking, trying to neatly fit every situation and event into a prescribed mold. This further limited my flexibility and openness to creativity and transcendent insights.

Ric’s realization, a deepener and a healer of mine, was that being in the moment is more than disciplined behavioral actions or myopically narrowing one’s focus. In fact, Ric’s present experience of being in the moment has little to do with time, space or form. Although his ability to effectively deal with the situation and the reality of the moment has everything to do with his ability to be in the moment, being in the moment is a truly expansive and multi-dimensional phenomenon. He sees it as much more a state of mind than anything that you do or focus on. In fact, the very things you notice in the moment are a result of the nature of your state of mind at the time. Your thinking, insights, actions and decisions are the byproduct of this state. A person’s state of being at a given time is both substantive and fragile. In a quality and “present” state, the leader has the capacity to simultaneously and holistically be aware of many forms of input ranging from the tangible and obvious to the intangible and impressive. Here, the leader discovers that being in the moment is an innate state of performance that is awakened when one can relax and quiet one’s personal thoughts, worries and agendas and be more open to insights and intuitive impressions. This state weatherproofs the leader’s capacity regardless of perceived contentiousness, pressure, importance and impact, and the meanings inherent to any person or group of people.

GUIDELINES FOR PRINCIPLE-BASED DIALOGUE

Principle-Based Dialogue can only set the stage. The wisdom and break-through thoughts come from each individual and the collective whole and not from the consultant. The Principle-Based Dialogue consultant acts
primarily as a catalyst to the source, not as the source itself. The Principle-Based Dialogue consultant is first an exceptional listener. This type of listening provides the conduit for insight and healing to occur. As such, for the Principle-Based Dialogue consultant, the starting point in the process is first with oneself.

**Sensitive to State of Mind**

The most effective Principle-Based Dialogue consultants are adept at being sensitive to the state of mind of their client leader as well as to their own state of mind. They first notice their own state of health and, whenever necessary and possible, calm down or make adjustments if they realize they are not at their “best.” This capacity is also extended to the person with whom they are working. Remember, an important part of Principle-Based Dialogue is to impart the experience of health as much as it is to awaken insight. One’s state of being is intuitively taken into consideration or addressed before proceeding and definitely before any improvement suggestions or content (performance-based coaching) is exchanged.

With both Denny and Dave, I’ve been able to see when a vote of confidence or the offer of support becomes much more important than any lesson. I have been in awe at both these leaders’ sensitivity and ability to know when they should be talking, when they should be listening, and when they should be supporting and connecting. They clearly have an understanding of

*healing, with its meaning, “to make whole.” . . . the servant-leader might also acknowledge that his own healing is his motivation. There is something subtle communicated to one who is being served and led if, implicit in the compact between servant-leader and led, is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something they share.*

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 36)
Listening

Most contemporary leadership improvement interventions are what I would call performance-based coaching. The focus of the listening that occurs in this scenario is to understand the problem or challenge and to suggest solutions (the coach’s). The listening is to yield ideas for suggestions. Much of the conversation is spent in clarification, examining various methodologies and exploring numerous “how-to’s” and techniques. Because the wisdom is often provided from the outside-in, the subsequent
focus then becomes one of reinforcement, application and implementation of the suggestions.

Although performance-based coaching does yield results, flexibility and constancy in this approach require on-going effort, attention and energy. Yet even here the direction and consistency is usually provided by leaders who themselves are operating via their insight and perspective—the very dimensions addressed by Principle-Based Dialogue.

The purpose behind Principle-Based Dialogue is not to pour into someone your own knowledge and wisdom. Its desire is to awaken and bring forth the person’s own wisdom and insights. The results are not based on “borrowed knowledge,” but are built upon the new thoughts and awarenesses specific to the person. Leaders are now experiencing the solving of issues and problems from their zone. They are looking at life’s events through the clarity of being totally in the moment and accessing their wisdom. They are making decisions and setting direction from their vision ignited by their flow state.

Listening in performance-based coaching is listening for content and understanding. Listening in Principle-Based Dialogue is listening for less tangible, yet equally impactful dimensions. In this type of relationship, one listens for impressions, feelings of relief and peace, forgiveness and inspiration, new thoughts and break-through moments. These moments are often more subtle and less concrete than those moments found in performance-based coaching. As such, the Principle-Based Dialogue consultant needs to be in a quieter and more centered state of mind in order to notice below-the-surface subtleties.

Connection

In Principle-Based Dialogue, there needs to be a sincere connection between the participants. For some, it is a deep and abiding sense of respect and trust. Often, there is a true affection and admiration for the individual. I feel honored, fortunate and grateful for having the opportunity to work with the people I work with. A foundation of respectful rapport is
crucial, necessary due to the personal and often confidential nature of Principle-Based Dialogue. The Principle-Based Dialogue consultant maintains perspective and connectivity even in rare times when he or she experiences harshness, cynicism and attack. In these situations, the consultant can objectively see her or his own ego-based feelings coming to the forefront, yet see these emotions for what they are, that is, products of their own thinking, thereby enabling them to see through these feelings and act with authenticity, care and integrity.

*Judgment-less*

In the desire to create a totally open and safe environment for the individual, the Principle-Based Dialogue consultant checks personal biases and prejudices at the door. In the moment of Principle-Based Dialogue, the consultant neither condones nor condemns the behavior and thinking occurring in her or his presence. The Principle-Based Dialogue consultant does not impose unrealistic expectations on the client leader or her- or himself by expecting an absolute and constant positive attitude and optimism, a consistently healthy perspective, and never-ending accountability and wisdom. There is the understanding that happy and sad feelings are all a part of life and that there is not one “right” way to do life. The Principle-Based Dialogue consultant can see the “innocence” of the individual, not necessarily the innocence in what they do and say, but the innocence in their thinking, and deeper, in their being. They see thought as the conduit and cause of the individual’s sense of reality, and in turn, the root of their actions and reactions, their way of life. The consultant realizes that “lost-ness” is innocence and that it can be but an event in one’s life and need not be a permanent situation.

Absolute confidentiality is a ground rule for this type of consulting, with one caveat mentioned up front—if the consultant feels that the person with whom he or she is working is about to do harm to themselves, to others and/or to the organization, then the discussion needs to take a different turn. Personally, I will discuss it with the client leader first, but hold
open the door to involve others if I do not feel safe and confident that the client leader’s harmful thoughts are a passing condition. Regardless, even this “ground rule” is rooted in the desire to create an open and safe environment for dialogue.

Agenda-less

As a Principle-Based Dialogue consultant, you must eliminate as many self-serving issues between you and your client as possible. In continuing this journey, I have become acutely aware how much of my thinking is in fact self-serving and “me-based.” Principle-Based Dialogue puts the welfare and health of the individual, and by extension the collective whole, at the forefront of every encounter.

As a consultant, one area I notice is how frequently I exercise my own point of view and prescribed “right” approach upon my clients without their permission. After all, I thought this is why my clients hired me. If my recommendations are not readily accepted, sadly, I find I often move into trying to convince them of my view. I mention other clients and their results, or I bring up their own words and sentiments. In short, when I am not living well, I move rather quickly into performance-based coaching. When my state of mind is aligned with a deeper state of being, whenever I feel this coming over me, I first ask permission to share my thoughts. But I remember that they are just that . . . my thoughts.

In addition, the second voice I need to quiet is the “professional salesman voice.” I realize how this mindset often slowly erodes the openness of the relationship I share with my client leaders. In fact, one mentioned to me how refreshing it was to freely share during our dialogues all the issues and challenges on his plate without fearing being sold a series of workshops and programs to address his concerns. I don’t know if this is a sound business practice, but I am always open for impromptu conversations without feeling the need to translate every minute into a consultative daily rate. Frequently, these conversations end in mutual laughter and a more hopeful sense of the
future . . the very state of mind that is at the foundation of servant-leadership, and through servant-leadership, Principle-Based Dialogue.

Understanding and respecting their “thought” world

Although we have been discussing universal principles, I feel there must be a sincere desire and interest to step into the world of my clients. Again, I don’t know if this is an absolute, but I believe in listening to my clients through the relevance of their situation. Regardless of the company with whom I am working, I try to experience and understand their world as much as possible. Given the amount of time that I have, I realize I will not be an expert in the operational, fiscal and strategic challenges they find themselves facing. However, I should have an understanding of and appreciation for the tasks and challenges that are on their plates as executives. I should also have an understanding that although the challenges may appear similar to other situations, it is my job to find the uniqueness of these issues to the thinking of the individual before me and to the collective thinking of her/his organization. In fact, I find my clients are very willing to help me with this immersion learning process. Denny has invited me to a number of industry strategy sessions, as well as included me in strategic discussions with his senior team. He has asked that I review presentations done by specialized industry experts in healthcare leadership. Dave has included me in presentations and work facilitated by other industry specialists and consulting groups as well. This provides me with a temporal foundation and perspective of the many priorities and issues they face on a daily basis. I’ve found that with this grounding, I can better listen, understand and focus the Principle-Based approach to their situation.

One size fits all . . . one size does not fit all

The common foundation behind Principle-Based Dialogue is to notice, awaken and strengthen one’s state of insight, wisdom and healthy functioning. I see this state as an innate gift that is part of every one of us and is
what makes it universally applicable to everyone. However universal this may be, I find it is crucial to remember that how we manifest this state is unique and individualized, a matter of personal choice.

With this understanding, the Principle-Based Dialogue consultant’s journey is to find the “grains of truth and wisdom” behind each client’s personal actions and thoughts. The consultant looks beyond the obvious behaviors of the person with whom she or he is working and holds lightly, if at all, the personal judgments and biases of the individual.

As much as possible, the Principle-Based Dialogue consultant ideally sidesteps the temptation to turn her or his message into a goal or to establish a binary way of doing life, that is, the “right” state of mind versus the “wrong” state of mind, good moods and bad moods, this strategy versus that strategy, and so forth. For instance, although one is looking for a reflective and peaceful state of mind that is open to possibilities and insight, this relaxed, quiet state does not dictate that people speak more slowly or act more quietly. This does not mean that because one person feels more relaxed after he meditates, that others will as well. This does not mean that the insights that one gets in the shower are better than the insights another gets on walks or still another gets on long motor trips. The “magic” is not in the behavior.

Regardless of the universality of these principles, the Principle-Based Dialogue consultant honors, cherishes and respects the individuality of each person. As much as possible, the consultant looks beyond behaviors and mechanisms to the feelings that come from insights and realizations.

*Acknowledge and respect the boundaries of your capabilities and awareness*

Professionally speaking, although I have been on this journey of learning and discovery for over thirty years, I am an aerospace and aeronautical engineer by education. I have also learned that the vast majority of the people with whom I get to work personally resonate with these messages and start to step onto a path of greater fulfillment, contribution and perspec-
tive. However, there have been a half dozen or so times when the difficulty that appeared before me was well beyond the scope of my capabilities, situation and training. I recognize that my competence has its limits and, in these situations, have recommended that individuals consult professionals who are more capable than I.

On a different level, this also reminds me not to speak beyond what I can see. My consciousness in the moment. In the past, I would present ideas, models and concepts of which I had more of an intellectual understanding than an experiential one. I provided a large menu of ideas whose purpose was to match the needs of the moment with previously learned lessons, concepts and models. As mentioned earlier, I continue to notice that there is a considerable difference between intellectually knowing about a concept and idea, and living life in the moment. I find I am more rigid, judgmental and one-dimensional when I live through and primarily share my intellectual thoughts. There is a constrictive and limiting feeling to these ideas, whereas when I share my impressions from insight, there is an expansive, creative and exploratory feeling to the conversation. There appears to be a depth and profundity to the latter that is missing from the former. When I can listen and speak from personal experience and understanding, I am much more effective.

There is a wealth of experience available on how to achieve this perspective of foresight. Required is that one live a sort of schizoid life. One is always at two levels of consciousness. One is in the real world — concerned, responsible, effective, value oriented. One is also detached, riding above it, seeing today’s events, and seeing oneself deeply involved in today’s events, in the perspective of a long sweep of history and projected into the indefinite future.

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 26)

CONCLUSION

In the effort to create more positive, effective leaders, much of the
Development effort has been focused on teaching the skills, perspectives, attitudes and character traits that past leaders have displayed. Although this is important, equally critical is to acknowledge the state of mind and the “source” from whence these abilities emerge into reality. To merely focus on what has gone before constricts the possibilities of positive leadership. The most effective leaders realize life is expansive and never-ending. This is equally true for the possible horizons of servant-leadership.

In our attempt to make sense of life, we often petrify the lessons of leadership. In extreme cases, we have boiled it down to objective fundamentals which, although easier to communicate and cognitively understand, sacrifice the spirit, the vision, and the wonder true leadership awakens in others.

In Principle-Based Dialogue, leaders pursue a balanced focus on both the journey of leadership exploration and on the specific learning goals and destinations to achieve and master. In its most innocent form, Principle-Based Dialogue awakens the capacity for healthy leadership.

_The healthy society, like the healthy body, is not the one that has taken the most medicine. It is the one in which the internal health building forces are in the best shape._

—Robert Greenleaf (1977, p. 45)

Paul Nakai is the founding partner and principal of Leadership Spirit International, with offices in San Francisco, California, United States of America. Leadership Spirit International is a consulting group specializing in developing and deepening the leadership capacity of executives, in teambuilding and optimizing performance-based relationships, and in shaping organizational culture to more effectively meet organizational objectives. Paul was formerly a Managing Partner and Executive Vice President with the Senn-Delaney Leadership Consulting Group, where he specialized
in executive coaching and leadership development to support and lead intense business challenges such as mergers and acquisitions, shifting corporate cultures, leadership shortages, downturns or upswings in business, and debilitating internal strife. Paul has consulted and led major engagements in healthcare, insurance, financial services, manufacturing, energy, high technology, aerospace, pharmaceuticals, and telecommunications, including crucial engagements at Three Mile Island Nuclear plant and for NASA in response to critical challenges. Through Leadership Spirit International, he is dedicated to servant-leadership in order to assist executives in unleashing the spirit behind their personal leadership as well as unleashing the collective spirit of their organizations.

The International Journal of Servant-Leadership welcomes Paul’s understandings of corporate culture. We look forward to his ongoing editorials, which can be found in each volume of the journal under the section entitled: “Servant-Leadership and the Executive.”
“ONE OF US LOST OUR FRAME OF REFERENCE”: HOW GREENLEAF’S CONCEPTS OF HEALING, BUILDING COMMUNITY, AND EMPATHY DEAL WITH PREJUDICE AND RACISM IN THE FILM CRASH

—KURT TAKAMINE
CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY

In L.A., nobody touches you. We’re always behind this metal and glass. I think we miss that touch so much—that we crash into each other just so we can feel something.

—Detective Graham

Thus begins the opening dialogue of Detective Graham Waters, the main character portrayed by Oscar nominee Don Cheadle. Through his character’s eyes, the audience is introduced to the blatant racism that supposedly occurs in this Southern Californian metropolis. The ugliness of prejudice is dealt with in a non-politically correct and “no-holds barred” approach. The images are often deeply disturbing, and decidedly tragic, but most people will be able to resonate with the honesty of the movie. It is raw, but it is real.

While the setting is Los Angeles, the story could have been situated anywhere in the United States. At first glance, the situations appear to be disparate, unrelated vignettes, but the audience later realizes that the characters’ lives are intimately intertwined. What initially appear as random events emerge into an interrelated, choreographed morality play. The point is clear: people do not exist in a vacuum, and one person’s behaviors can irreversibly affect other lives.

Crash, winner of the Academy Award both for Best Film and for Best
Original Screenplay, examines the stereotypes held by individuals from immensely varied social classes and walks of life, and could have been written in an overstated and sophomoric manner. But it wasn’t. The screenplay was poignant and touching, and one finds commonalities with each of the characters. This is a tribute to the director and co-screenwriter, Paul Haggis. Mr. Haggis also wrote Million Dollar Baby, which likewise forces the viewer to introspectively examine his or her value system. Crash produces the same effect.

Having said this, the stereotypes are extreme. For example, an Asian (Korean) woman is involved in an automotive accident at the onset of the film—all Asians are bad drivers, right? The two African American men are professional car thieves that steal only from European Americans. One of those African American men has a mother who is a heroin addict and is “strung out” most of the time. The Hispanic locksmith has tattoos all over his neck and arms, and the White District Attorney is extremely concerned about his approval rating in the Black community. Stereotypes oftentimes exist because there is some truth to the bias. But there are paradoxes as well.

The White District Attorney thought he pinned a medal on an African American firefighter, when it turns out that the award recipient was an Iraqi American named Osama. The Hispanic locksmith is not a gang-banger, but a hard-working businessman with a wife and a young daughter whom he supports. A successful African American director is assimilated into the “White” culture, yet is reprimanded when one of his actors is not speaking “Black enough.” Some of these scenes elicit nervous laughter from the audience, who often are not sure whether they should laugh or groan.

If one were to view only the first hour and a half of the movie, a depressing realization would set in, confirming that human nature is reprehensible and incorrigible. But something strange occurs in the last fifteen minutes of the movie. Some of the characters begin to change. Without knowing it, the characters begin to display some of Greenleaf’s ten characteristics—particularly healing, building community, and empathy (Spears &
Lawrence, 2002). How and why this transformation begins to occur will be examined in the following sections.

HEALING

With respect to healing, Spears and Lawrence (2002, p. 5) write, “Many people have broken spirits and have suffered from a variety of emotional hurts. Although this is part of being human, servant-leaders recognize that they have an opportunity to ‘help make whole’ those with whom they come in contact.” One of the clearest examples of this emotional healing comes in the characterization of Maria, the maid of the Beverly Hills housewife, Jean, played by Sandra Bullock. Maria is an analog to Leo in Hermann Hesse’s novel, Journey to the East. Maria, like Leo, is indispensable to the people she serves, even if those recipients are unaware of the contributions to the household/expedition. Maria brings order to Jean’s frustrated life.

Jean is upset with the minorities in her life. They are not people; they are seen as commodities that serve her and her family. Jean has been carjacked and thrown to the ground by two African American men with guns, she is frustrated with her Hispanic maid, Maria, and is upset at the gardener (Hispanic?). In fact, Jean says to her girlfriend, “I am angry all the time. . . and I don’t know why.” As she hangs up the phone, she trips and falls down the stairs, and the scene ends with her crumpled body lying prostrate on the landing.

When we see Jean in the next scene, she is in her bedroom, recovering. Jean contacts her husband, district attorney Rick Cabot, and notifies him that she’s okay, thanks to the care of Maria. Maria drove Jean to the hospital, brought her home, and helped Jean upstairs to her bed. Jean then mentions to Rick that her girlfriend could not drive her to the hospital because she was getting a massage. As she hangs up the phone, Maria adjusts the bedroom pillows so that Jean is comfortable, and as Maria does so, Jean hugs Maria and doesn’t let her go. While Jean is still holding on to Maria,
she says to her maid, “You want to hear something funny? . . . You’re the best friend I have.”

While it is not overtly stated in the movie, Maria’s consistent and nonjudgmental service toward Jean has made an impact on Jean’s outlook on Hispanics in particular, and people of color in general. Maria’s servant-leadership (leading the Cabot family, even without their awareness) has begun to break down Jean’s stereotypic barriers to tolerance. This is healing-in-action.

What Jean has experienced is a modification of her *leaps of abstraction*, a term utilized in Chris Argyris’ concept of the *ladder of inference*. In her stereotypic view, Jean began with some “observable” experiences (Hispanics are incompetent, Blacks are carjackers), attaches cultural and personal meaning to these observations (people of color are irredeemable dregs of society), adopts certain beliefs (minorities are untrustworthy non-persons), that ultimately lead to certain actions (treating non-whites as chattel or worse).

The Maria character reconstructs Jean’s way of thinking (or what Peter Senge calls *mental models*). Here is Jean’s new *ladder of inference*. Jean’s observable experience is that Maria is always there when Jean needs her. Jean’s cultural and personal beliefs evolve into trust and respect, and new beliefs are adopted (Maria is the best friend Jean has), which leads to Jean’s heartfelt embracing of and appreciation for Maria’s impact on her life. Did Maria intend to positively impact Jean’s misguided perceptions? Perhaps not. But the fact of the matter is Maria did just that. She has “made whole” the person she has been in contact with, her boss Jean.

Maria is not the only exemplar of servant-leadership in *Crash*. Another unexpected archetype is ironically found in one of the carjackers, Anthony, who will be introduced next.

**BUILDING COMMUNITY AND EMPATHY**

How is it that a carjacker could *build community* in a movie? Anthony
(played by real-life rapper Ludacris) is anti-mainstream society. He believes that busses purposefully have oversized windows to display to the world that only marginalized minorities ride public transportation. Anthony also believes that waitresses (even African American waitresses) won’t wait on a “brother” because brothers don’t tip well (and then he admits that he didn’t tip his waitress). And this African American criminal/pseudo-activist explains that he never steals from a “brother” but only from white people. Anthony lives a life full of hypocritical justifications.

One night changes his life in dramatic fashion. As he’s driving to the “fence” that will purchase the Cabots’ carjacked vehicle, Anthony inadvertently runs over an Asian owner of a white van. Anthony and his partner-in-crime, Peter Waters, load the Asian man in the truck of the SUV, drop him off at a nearby hospital to avoid a murder charge, and then proceed to the illegal auto broker. The auto broker refuses to purchase the SUV because of the incriminating bloodstains in the back of the vehicle. So Anthony and Peter’s escapades are all for naught.

Later in the movie, Anthony returns to the white van, which still has the keys in the door. When Anthony takes this van to the auto broker, the two men discover a group of Asian refugees in the back, padlocked in a cargo hold. The auto broker offers $500 per person, but Anthony refuses and keeps the van. In the next scene, Anthony is in downtown L.A. when he opens the cargo bay doors of the van and tells the Asians to get out. He even gives the last person $40, and tells him to buy everyone some “chop suey.” As Anthony gets back in the driver’s seat, he has a sly smile on his face, clearly pleased with his altruistic act of emancipation.

In a symbolic way, Anthony has just liberated himself from the system of which he is a part. As often occurs with racist and anti-racist statements, the finger pointing goes unfettered, with each faction feeling they have experienced the ultimate wrong. Anthony blamed white society for oppressing him and “his people” through injustice and intolerance. What Anthony experiences in this moment is the humanitarian worth that he gains by refusing to sell these Asians into modern-day slavery and oppression.
He frees himself from his own shackles of cynicism and gives new hope to this newly arrived immigrant group. Anthony has become a catalyst, knowingly or unknowingly, in building a new community.

Greenleaf talks about building community in an institutionalized sense, within corporations, governments, and other large entities. In a sense, however, Anthony is making his impact known. Greenleaf said that what is necessary here is “for enough servant leaders to show the way, not by mass movements, but by each servant-leader demonstrating his own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group” (Spears & Lawrence, 2002, p. 8). Anthony has done just that.

It is clear that Anthony not only experienced aspects of building community, but also demonstrated empathy as well. Anthony could commiserate with the plight of the East Asian refugees in the rear of his newly stolen van. He is sensitive to the disenfranchised, since he believes he has been pressed into a lifestyle that has little hope for the socially oppressed, and could feel the hopelessness in these new (illegal?) immigrants. Anthony didn’t value these enslaved individuals because they had special abilities, could provide him with some reciprocal service, or were unique in some way. He saw them as people, and there is value in that fact alone. At that freeze-framed moment, an African American and a group of Asians communicated without any need for words. Anthony’s acceptance and understanding provide a wonderful functional definition for Greenleaf’s concept of empathy.

CONCLUSION

The power of Crash is that it will cause the viewer to examine the presuppositions, biases, and prejudices that are shared behind closed doors, but never in public. Its social conscious-raising portrayals of European-, Asian-, Middle Eastern-, Hispanic-, African-, and other hyphenated Americans will probably anger some and alienate others, but provoke discussion among the open-minded. And it couldn’t come at a more opportune time.

Bennis (2003, p. 168) writes that “Latinos now represent 12.5 percent
of the population and are expected to outnumber African Americans in the United States by 2005.” Well, the time is now. The face of an integrated America is changing, with different languages, cuisines, temperaments, religions, outlooks, and challenges. Sooner or later, each person will crash into someone with a diverse lifestyle and background. At that time, the servant-leader will be pressed into action to make for a smoother transition.

This movie is rated R for two scenes with strong sexual content, language and some violence.

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