TDIndustries Among “The 100 Best Companies to Work For in America”

TDIndustries, the Dallas-based company which has been practicing servant-leadership for over 20 years, was recently selected for inclusion as one of “The 100 Best Companies to Work For in America” (Currency/Doubleday, New York, 1993, $27.50 hardback) by best-selling authors Robert Levering and Milton Moskowitz. A number of other Greenleaf Center corporate sponsors were also among the top 100, including Ben & Jerry’s Homemade, Federal Express and Herman Miller.

Jack Lowe, Jr., CEO of TDIndustries and Vice-President of the Greenleaf Center’s Board of Trustees, made the announcement at a January meeting of several hundred of his fellow TDPartners.

“The authors used the same criteria which was successful for their first book, published in 1984,” said Lowe. These included such factors as: pay and benefits; job security; openness and fairness; opportunities for growth; pride in work and company; and camaraderie and friendship.

TDIndustries’ listing in the book prompted coverage in a number of Texas papers, including: The Dallas Morning News, Tyler Morning Telegraph, and the San Antonio Express News.

Started in 1946 by Jack Lowe, Sr., TDIndustries now includes 600 professional, project support, and skilled Partners in Texas, and in several other states.

In their profile of TDIndustries, the authors discuss the longtime influence that Robert K. Greenleaf, and servant-leadership, has had upon the company. Jack Lowe, Sr. stumbled upon The Servant as Leader essay in the early 1970’s and began to distribute copies of it to his employees. They were invited to read through the essay, and then to gather in small groups with Jack Lowe, Sr., in order to discuss the servant-leader concept. The belief that managers should serve their employees became an important value for TDIndustries.

Today, Jack Lowe, Jr. continues to use servant-leadership as the guiding philosophy for TDI. The book’s authors, Levering and Moskowitz note, “Even today, any TDPartner who supervises at least one person must go through training in servant-leadership at TD’s Leadership Institute.” In addition, all new employees continue to receive a copy of The Servant as Leader essay not long after their arrival.

During the 1992 Servant-Leadership Conference, in Indianapolis, Jack Lowe, Jr. was joined by John Hussain of TDIndustries and Ann McGee-Cooper (former Greenleaf Center trustee and author of the best-selling book, You Don’t Have To Go Home From Work Exhausted) to present “Servant-Leadership in Corporate Practice: TDIndustries as a Case Study.”

According to Levering and Moskowitz, “The 100 companies profiled are magnets for people looking for meaningful work. They are models for companies trying to get it right. And they are the market and industry leaders.”

The Greenleaf Center wishes to offer its congratulations to everyone associated with TDIndustries, Ben & Jerry’s Homemade, Federal Express, and the Herman Miller Company.

The Servant as Leader Published in Czech Translation

The end of 1992 brought forth the publication of a Czech translation of The Servant as Leader essay. Pre-Christmas sales of the essay in the Czech Republic were reported to be brisk.

The publication of this edition was made possible through a joint venture between the Greenleaf Center and Faith In Action—an organization based in the city of Zlin, located in what used to be central Czechoslovakia. Faith in Action is a program formed to coordinate and facilitate the efforts of service-based institutions while advocating for the development of volunteer and servant-leadership ideals in the Czech Republic. It was created in 1991, under the guidance of both the American and Czech Conferences of Catholic Bishops and International Liaison of Lay Volunteers in Mission.

The Czech translation of The Servant as Leader experienced strong pre-Christmas sales in this Czech bookstore, and at other locations.

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Guest Column

Servant Leadership:
The Foundation for Total Quality

by Jack Lowe, Jr., C.E.O., TDIndustries

For more than two decades, TDIndustries has used Servant-Leadership to build greater leadership abilities with our supervisory and management people. The results have been tremendously rewarding—for the company and for the people.

As a national air conditioning and plumbing contractor that was founded in 1946, TDIndustries is unique in that we have been employee-owned since 1952. However, despite the benefits of employee ownership, we began to realize in the early 1970’s that many of the people we had promoted to supervisory roles were having difficulties. Too many people who had been strong individual contributors as a plumber, service technician, or a project manager were not having the same success in their new roles as supervisors. Further, those people being supervised had a generally low regard for their supervisors.

In response to this situation, we developed our TDLeadership Training centered around Servant-Leadership. For the past 20 years, every person with supervisory responsibilities participates in an annual program designed to enhance his or her leadership abilities. Our purpose is to help each TDPartner maximize his or her individual capability.

We have measured the results of our efforts. In our most recent annual Partner Opinion Survey, 90.7% agreed with the statement, “My supervisor is fair in dealing with me.”

Not only has Servant-Leadership improved the leadership capability in our company, it has helped us:

- Build extremely high trust levels throughout our company.
- See leadership as teaching and encouraging more than order-giving and disciplining.
- Value diversity and collaboration.

Our success with our TDLeadership Training program laid the foundation for another transformation. Three years ago we committed to Total Quality Management (TQM). Each of the 600 TDPartners has now received at least two days training in the TQM principles, tools and techniques. TQM has taught us:

- How to analyze fundamental processes in our business and,
- How to use team problem solving to improve these processes.

Over 150 TDIndustries teams have worked through significant process improvements that are dramatically changing the way we operate our business. We have greatly increased customer satisfaction while experiencing millions of dollars in cost savings.

And we’re just beginning.

Servant-Leadership built a philosophical framework for trust, personal growth and collaboration. Total Quality Management added the tools and techniques. Together, they are empowering all TDPartners to transform themselves and their company.
Message from the Executive Director

by Larry Spears

Consider what it takes to practice servant-leadership: a willingness to pursue a vision based upon the seeking of fundamental personal and institutional transformation; making a commitment to actively serve and lead others—and allowing others to serve and lead you; opening yourself to the lifelong process of integrating spiritual and vocational activities; taking risks; and lots of hard work. And that’s just for starters.

Given the seemingly daunting task of trying to make “real” servant-leadership principles, even those who are inclined toward the concept might easily become frustrated through not knowing how to put it into practice. This is especially true for those who want to encourage servant-leadership within an institution, but who aren’t in “leadership” positions. Given the obstacles which must be overcome, one might be tempted to say, “Good idea, but it can’t be done.”

And yet, it is being done—successfully, and with increasing frequency—by both individuals and institutions. The cover story in this issue on the inclusion of TDIndustries, and other Greenleaf Center corporate sponsors, among the 100 Best Companies To Work For In America is one of the more visible public affirmations of the servant-leader concept. However, what is even more exciting to me is the knowledge that there are hundreds of institutions—and many tens of thousands of people scattered across the globe—all engaged in an active exploration of this thing we call “servant-leadership.”

The Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership exists to assist people in their understanding and practice of this concept. One important way in which we do this is through providing opportunities for servant-leaders to come together—to share, learn, grow, and to be inspired by one another. We attempt to do this through our various programs and publications, as well as through one-to-one communication.

“Leadership Synergy,” our forthcoming 1993 International Conference on Servant-Leadership, offers you a unique opportunity to come together and spend a weekend with hundreds of other seekers and practitioners as part of the worldwide servant-leader community. The October 15-16 conference will feature numerous sessions geared toward helping you in your own understanding and practice of servant-leadership—along with panel programs; pre-conference offerings; a servant-leadership bookstore; and, major addresses by two notable Greenleaf Center members, M. Scott Peck and Max DePree. When you add to that mix the incredible interaction which can occur through informal conversations, you have a potent combination.

This conference will also incorporate specific sessions geared toward the special interests of servant-leadership as it relates to businesses, not-for-profits, educational institutions, and spiritual and religious interests, among others. It will focus upon both the personal and institutional applications of this concept and model. Servant-leadership represents a maturing approach by individuals and institutions toward work, leadership, and transformation.

I invite you to come and drink deeply from the servant-leadership well. You are certain to leave feeling refreshed, and knowing that servant-leadership is a good idea which can be done. Won’t you plan to join us?
Servant Leader Books in Review

Paths of Change: Strategic Choices for Organizations and Society


Reviewed by Jeff McCollum

(Editor’s Note: This is the first of a series of reviews covering the emerging thinking on leadership and relating it to the core concepts of servant-leadership. Jeff McCollum is a former Education Director at AT&T Consumer Products and a member of the Board of Trustees of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center.)

The central test of a leader is, as Robert Greenleaf wrote: “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?” Leadership, growth and change all imply action. Will McWhinney’s Paths of Change: Strategic Choices for Organizations and Society offers profound insights into the leader’s role of helping organizations and people grow and change.

Central to McWhinney’s argument is the principle that each of us tends to operate from one of four specific “world views”—unitary, sensory, social or mythic. These are systems of beliefs and behavior which characterize each of us. “Changes take place,” McWhinney argues, “when boundaries between the logics of alternative world views are transgressed.” Actions come at the interface of one view of reality and the other.

Action also takes place on one of four levels. To explain the levels, McWhinney employs the metaphor of the chess board. At level one, play is “by the rules” with an object of optimizing personal competence. The rules are set at level two with an objective of solidifying power and structural advantage. At level three, the objective becomes valuing interaction with the environment. This is the level preferred by ethicists, social scientists, and the helping professions. It is concerned with setting of purpose.

Leadership, emergent and inventive, operates at level four, which is concerned with creating meaning and finding opportunities for growth and change on each chess board. It is also where Greenleaf’s “test” is best applied.

The metaphor of the chess board, and the obligation for leaders to find opportunities on all levels, raises implications for practicing servant-leadership—and it is a practice. We must be willing to play on all four levels—from the expertise orientation of level one; to the political realities of level two; to the ethical concerns of level three. Many in the helping professions are most comfortable at level three, where issues tend to be resolved participatively, using the social and sensory world views. In so doing, we tend to become intolerant of those who are good at the power level, which involves the unitary, social and sensory world views (the use of influence)—and the unitary and mythic world views (the use of authority) which deal with changes in the principles that constrain behavior.

The articulation of servant-leadership can be read as a level two change—changing from principles of autocratic leadership (which Greenleaf certainly observed in the AT&T of the ’50’s and ’60’s) to servant-leadership.

At level four, leadership is about improving organizations and whole societies—the last element of Greenleaf’s “test.” This type of change follows one of two “grand paths” in McWhinney’s thinking. One grand path is revitalization, the path of western democratic revolutions. It involves all four world views; is built on principles; and, it is characterized by charismatic leadership. It assumes a certain set of principles—frequently ones that need to be rediscovered by organizational or societal members. Acceptability is developed in the social world view and yields practical results in the world of services and products.

The other grand path is renaissance—the path of death and rebirth. It begins by asking individuals, organizations and societies to evaluate the question of meaning. It evolves through choosing a program of action, and creating a structure that will allow the individual, organization and/or society to affect the sensory, or real, world. It is, as McWhinney argues, “pure action.”

Action is the domain of the servant-leader—the original name for the Greenleaf Center was The Center for Applied Ethics. McWhinney’s book is a thoughtful and provocative excursus into that ground.

Making a Difference: 12 Qualities That Make You a Leader


This book offers a practical, no-nonsense approach to the personal development of leadership skills. Bethel offers separate chapters on the following qualities of leadership, including: commitment to mission; thinking big; being ethical; creating the future; sensitivity; taking risks; decisionmaking; using power wisely; communicating effectively; teambuilding; believing in one’s self; and being committed to others.

The author draws upon The Servant As Leader essay, quoting Greenleaf in several chapters. She makes especially effective use of the servant-as-leader concept in a section on the personal benefits of risk taking: “The better you know yourself, the wiser you become. Awareness of both your limitations and your potential enhances humility. ‘Awareness is not a giver of solace,’ said Robert K. Greenleaf, ‘it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener.’”

Making a Difference is worth reading as a start on answering some of the “how-to” questions of becoming a servant-leader.

—Larry Spears
Gleanings from the Greenleaf Archives

by Don Frick,
Archives Project Associate

Reading Robert K. Greenleaf's essays or seeing one of the available videotapes where he states ideas in crisp, compelling language, one might get the idea that this man, for all his brilliance, was without humor. Not true. Granted, Greenleaf's humor was not of the stand-up comedy kind. It was more subtle, situational, offered in service of a point.

As part of the Archives Project, we have been listening to numerous audiocassettes and viewing dozens of hours of original videotaped interviews with Greenleaf which are not yet available to the general public. In the process, we have noticed flashes of what one R.K. Greenleaf Center board member described as his "wicked humor."

In a sense, the essays are the purest distillation of Robert Greenleaf's thinking, but there is so much more that we have lost with his passing, nuances which are now preserved on video: the half-smile, the rich laugh, the ironic twist.

Often, his humor was at his own expense. When AT&T's Fred Myers asked him about his first job with AT&T in 1926, Greenleaf described it as "a hazing operation" which he was amazed he survived. His first job was to dig postholes near Youngstown, Ohio, and his bosses told him to dig the very first posthole in a swamp! That took time, since the hole kept filling up with water, but forty-one years later, Greenleaf still thought the initiation was worth a long belly laugh.

Perhaps the most consistent, revealing theme in Greenleaf's humor is what I would call "The Humor of the Hidden Agenda." He seemed to delight in arranging situations which would result in learning. In retrospect, the situations were often humorous. As he told Fred Meyers in another interview, "I was outwardly an organizational man. I looked the part. You've got to be able to sneak up on things."

That's exactly what he did when a superior at AT&T once asked if he could participate in a listening seminar Greenleaf was teaching. The seminar was titled, "Talking," because Greenleaf knew that most managers at that time were more interested in talking than in listening, but his real agenda was to teach listening skills. Greenleaf arranged private tutoring sessions with this top manager, who felt it would not be appropriate to be part of the regular group.

To prepare, Greenleaf reviewed all relevant details of six major decisions this manager had recently made. Greenleaf got permission to tape the private session, then began by attacking one of his pupil's decisions, "I gave him hell-to-breakfast," said Greenleaf. "Told him this was a lousy decision, and told him why." The man was outraged, interrupted Greenleaf, and strongly defended his actions.

Greenleaf then rewound the tape and replayed it. He asked the man why he blew up. "Because I wanted to straighten you out!" was the reply. "Do you think this way of 'straightening me out' worked?" asked Greenleaf. "Well, maybe not," was the reply.

The scenario was repeated 4 times. Finally, the manager got Greenleaf's point, which was, "If you want to find out what's eating someone, don't cut them to ribbons." Years later, describing the process to Greenleaf Center trustee Diane Cory, Greenleaf chuckled, "I don't think he learned anything."

The situation was funny, but the humor had a point. Like all great teachers, Greenleaf could call upon his inner Trickster to arrange situations of great learning, but the humor only came into focus with the perspective of the lessons learned. That's not punch-line humor. It is a deep, soul-felt response to the complex richness of the human condition.
Czech Translation
(Continued from page 1)

based in Washington, D.C. Faith in Action’s long range goal is to link all of central and western Europe through a service network.

During the first week of sales, over 500 copies of the Czech translation of The Servant as Leader essay were sold, reported Elizabeth Christie Foju, of Faith in Action. “We have sold copies to Catholic parishes, youth groups, book stores and individuals,” commented Ms. Foju.

The idea for this joint project between Faith in Action and The Greenleaf Center originated from a suggestion made by Greenleaf Center member Fr. Michael Carroll. Fr. Mike is associated with St. Mary’s Catholic High School, located in Menasha, Wisconsin, where he is Chaplain and Coordinator of the Global Outreach Program.

“This is a classic opportunity to apply Bob Greenleaf’s servant-leader concept within a society where there now exists an ethical vacuum,” said Fr. Michael Carroll. “In the Czech Republic we have a great opportunity to work with newly-developing Catholic schools, and to introduce the servant-leader idea in such a way as to help those schools in clarifying their own vision.”

“The Greenleaf Center is pleased to have this newly-established link in central Europe,” commented Larry Spears, executive director of The Greenleaf Center. “This is also another good example of the positive outcomes which have resulted from the Greenleaf Center’s increasing partnerships with other organizations.”

The Czech translation of The Servant as Leader essay marks the third foreign translation published by the Greenleaf Center. Both Spanish and Arabic editions of the first Greenleaf essay are also available through the Center.

Servant-Leader Stories

The Greenleaf Center cordially invites you to consider submitting material for possible inclusion in a new column which will premiere in the summer issue of The Servant Leader. This new column, titled: “Servant-Leader Stories”, is intended to provide our members with an opportunity to share their stories of servant-leadership in action, as found in places of work, worship, school, family, community and elsewhere.

We welcome any written, audio, or videotaped accounts relating the stories of individuals or institutions exhibiting servant-leadership. We hope to share some of these stories through this column, and to use others as part of our other programs and publications.

Please forward your stories, or story-ideas, to the Greenleaf Center. Thanks!