Servant Leader Stories

Evolution in Ann Arbor: A Case Study of the University of Michigan Housing Facilities Department

by Don Frick
Archives Project Associate

If servant-leadership describes deep archetypal themes, perhaps we should not be surprised when we run across people who have developed similar ideas on their own, or when groups seeking to implement these ideas create eerily similar organizational charts—interconnected circles that look like mandalas. Yet, learning about the University of Michigan’s Housing Facilities Department is surprising.

The Housing Facilities Department is responsible for cleaning, maintaining and renewing a building inventory that encompasses 4.2 million square feet of floorspace and houses over 16,000 residents. The department has 250 employees and a yearly budget of $20 million for operations, utilities and building renewal. Since 1991, the department’s uppermost management team has worked to transform their traditional pyramidal structure into a circular one, collapsing the top three levels of management into a single, self-governing council which operates solely through consensus decision-making. Based on the outstanding success of their surprisingly simple model, the Council is now working to introduce participative and team-based approaches at the lower departmental levels. All of this is being accomplished within a larger, traditional university and organizational culture and structure!

As Director of the department, George SanFacon is held solely accountable by higher administration for performance of the Council and enterprise. However, as one of seven Council members, George is only one voice among the others in their consensus-based system. The arrangement looks very much like Peter Block’s accountability without control, and truly does embody Robert Greenleaf’s first among equals concept.

George began working full-time at the age of 16, and has worked as a factory assembler, security guard, mechanic, painter, short order cook and aerospace engineer, among others.

Throughout that career he saw the same nagging problem: “Wherever I found myself, it seemed that people were disenfranchised from one another as a community in the workplace. They were typically treated as means rather than ends, thereby limiting what the organization and community could ultimately produce.”

George therefore took a chance, and in 1991 offered his management team an opportunity to create a more egalitarian and community-based framework. They took him up on this offer and now have a fully operational, self-governing “Council” which manages and directs (Continued on page 5)

Left to right, seated: Vicky Hueter, Ken Davis and Jeff Schroeder; standing: George SanFacon, Roy Christian, Mike Easter and Joe Kennedy.

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Plan Ahead!

The 1994 International Conference on Servant-Leadership

Servant-Leadership: A Celebration of 30 Years in Practice
October 6-8, 1994 • Indianapolis, Indiana

Major Servant-Leadership Addresses by Peter Block, author of Stewardship and The Empowered Manager and Ann McGee-Cooper, author of You Don’t Have To Go Home From Work Exhausted! and Time Management for Unmanageable People. Plus, two dozen concurrent sessions on the application and practice of servant-leadership; pre-conference workshops; share-sessions; special interest groups; a servant-leadership bookstore; and much, much more.
Guest Column

Postcards from Bob Greenleaf

by Bill Bottum

S
ome of Greenleaf’s unpublished writings, which have been recently uncovered by the Archives Project, have inspired me to go back in my own memory to search out unrecorded conversations with Bob Greenleaf—in the hope that many others might do the same. I’ll never forget the excitement when, in April of 1981, a friend gave me the first four essays which Bob had written on servant-leadership. I asked my secretary to start an immediate search for Greenleaf, since so many of my heroes had died before I got a chance to talk with them face-to-face. She found Bob in the Crosslands Quaker Retirement Center, near Philadelphia. It was then that I learned that really great people are not hard to see and spend time with if you are interested in their work and their mission.

On the telephone Bob Greenleaf set May 29, 1981 as the date I could come to visit him. We talked for five hours non-stop! It was really a mountain-top inspirational experience for me. On almost every subject we discussed, Bob threw new perspective and fresh creative insights onto a variety of subjects. This started right off the bat with Bob saying that he disagreed with my writings on Gandhi as an example of the Fifth Beatitude principle. Greenleaf said Gandhi had actually been coercive, rather than persuasive. He said persuasion is much more effective and longer-lasting because it brings about change which is voluntary. The persuader, said Greenleaf, approaches the relationship with clean hands—and the one being persuaded takes the final intuitive step alone.

Bob felt it unfortunate that special circumstances had made it necessary for Jesus to use coercive power with the money-changers in the temple. Our world today, he said, suffers from the sanction which this one incident gives to coercion. Greenleaf’s preferred example of the tremendous power of persuasion was that of Quaker John Woolman’s great influence for abolition by persuading early American Friends, one-by-one, to give up slavery.

Bob Greenleaf got to an amazing depth of friendship with people on the first visit. He trusted me with a loan of a lot of his papers and books, some of which were irreplaceable. I remember how concerned I was that something would happen to them before I could return them. His friends were an eclectic and heterogeneous lot all over the world. He had a deep spiritual bond with Gerald Heard and Aldous Huxley. Bob and RKGC Chairman Jim Tatum had a weekly telephone conversation right up until Bob’s death. Fred Meyers of AT&T and RKGC trustee Diane Cory had a special soul-level relationship with Bob. The largest single group responding to Bob’s message of servant-leadership were Catholic nuns like Sister Joel Read, President of Alverno College. None were closer to Bob than the two Jack Lowes’ (TDL Industries) from the business world. Former Greenleaf Center Director Dick Broholm and others are currently working on an extension of Dick’s talks with Greenleaf (and also with Jitsuo Morikawa, Andy’s father) on a “Theology of Institutions.” Bob Lynn, former VP for Lilly Endowment, helped Greenleaf gain the vision of what could be done by seminars in promoting servant-leadership.

How Bob could have made such a deep impact on so many of us (both known and unknown) is a wonderful mystery! Among my most favorite treasures are those little postcard-sized handwritten notes from him with such wisdom packed on them. Some of you reading this reflection may have your own unique gems pertaining to Bob Greenleaf. If so, I urge you to search your own personal archives and to share these priceless nuggets with the Greenleaf Center.

(Bill Bottum is chairman of the Townsend and Bottum Family of Companies, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and a Greenleaf Center trustee.)
Message from the Executive Director

by Larry Spears

"Walking your talk" has become an over-used phrase in recent years—and yet it has an undeniable meaning for those of us who seek authenticity in living out our ideals of servant-leadership. As I enter my fifth year as executive director I feel increasingly called to move ever-closer toward aligning my own actions (my walk) with my beliefs (my talk).

In terms of my own evolution as a servant-leader/manager, I believe that I have travelled some distance from where I began; however, I can also sense that I have a long way to go in my own personal journey. One of the nicer things about being a part of the Greenleaf Center is that I can always count on my colleagues (staff, trustees and members) for their love, patience and understanding—even in the midst of vigorous disagreement on critical issues like balancing budgets!

I would like to share with you a brief list of some of the different activities which we now practice as a staff as part of our own living experience with servant-leadership. While a number of these suggestions are quite simple, we have found their cumulative impact to be most meaningful:

• Eighteen months ago we began with the simple act of rotating facilitation duties at our weekly staff meetings. We now rotate chairing and facilitation responsibilities among all ten of us on staff. This has proven to be a helpful way of sharing power and responsibilities among all staff members.

• As an emphatic believer in the idea that “knowledge is power,” I am now sharing with all staff members copies of most relevant correspondence between the board and myself. This increased level of knowledge has proven helpful on a number of occasions and has stimulated initiative and follow-up on the part of both staff and board.

• We have held community-building sessions aimed at deepening our understanding and caring for one another. Our goal is to increasingly function as a team committed to servant-leadership, continuous quality improvement, and as a learning organization.

• In addition to growing as a community, we are also seeking to learn and grow in our knowledge of issues relating to servant-leadership. This has led to a series of staff-organized learning sessions. RKGC staff members have facilitated discussions on a broad range of topics which have some bearing upon servant-leadership. We have spent time as a group learning about issues like: consensus-building; leadership styles; right brain/left brain thinking; program evaluation; and the Myers-Briggs typologies.

Each of these sessions has been quite powerful for us as a staff.

• Something new for us has been the establishment of an annual staff retreat. Our last retreat involved a day spent largely in reflection upon issues which may impede our working together effectively.

• RKGC trustees and staff have also recently been engaged in separate and combined visioning processes for the institution. This team approach has proven to be powerful in stimulating our efforts toward institutional excellence.

I hold to the belief that major paradigm shifts are often brought about through a series of small changes. If that is true, then it becomes a realistic possibility that we can improve the quality of our institutions, and our relationships, through the accumulation of many small changes. Servant-leadership invites each of us to look for opportunities to both lead and to serve others, and thereby to create those small, but positive changes which may lead to a major shift in how our institutions function.

At the Greenleaf Center we are fond of talking about the road to servant-leadership as being a life-long journey. I believe that our own internal evolution as a staff—one which seeks to operate out of the servant-leader model—is still in its early stages of development. I am excited to think about the wonderful things which await our staff, trustees and members in our shared journey along the road to servant-leadership.

Who is the Servant-Leader?

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. . . . 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; 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?"
— from The Servant as Leader by Robert K. Greenleaf

The Greenleaf Center’s Mission

“The Center's mission is to fundamentally improve the quality of all institutions through a new approach to leadership, structure, and decisionmaking. Servant-leadership emphasizes increased service to others; a holistic approach to work; promoting a sense of community; and the sharing of power in decisionmaking.”

The Greenleaf Center’s Goals

1. To help deepen an understanding of the original ideas of Robert K. Greenleaf and the principles of servant-leadership, via the preservation and promotion of his writings.

2. To nurture colleagues and institutions by providing a focal point, and opportunities to share thoughts and ideas on servant-leadership.

3. To produce and publish new resources by others on servant-leadership.

4. To connect servant-leaders in a network of learning.

Originally founded in 1964 as the Center for Applied Ethics, Inc., the Center was renamed the Robert K. Greenleaf Center in 1985. The Center is an international, not-for-profit institution headquartered in Indianapolis, Indiana.
Servant Leader Books in Review

**Complexity: The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos**

by M. Mitchell Waldrop, Touchstone (Simon and Schuster), 1993, $12 (paperback).

Reviewed by Jeff McCollum

*(From time to time, reviews of books relating to the idea of servant-leadership are included in *The Servant Leader*. This review is written by Jeff McCollum, a member of the Greenleaf Center’s Board of Trustees who is a teacher and consultant. He was formerly Education Director for AT&T Consumer Products.)*

Natural systems fall into one of three states: stable, chaotic, and a transitional state between the two—the edge of chaos—which pulses with life, learning, discovery, self-organization, adaptation and increasing complexity. Complexity is about the scientists, connected in a kaleidoscopic network called the Santa Fe Institute, who are working to understand and explicate the edge of chaos.

Their work is intriguing on four levels: the science itself, the nature of the collaborative and interdisciplinary dialogue that is producing the science; the implications of the science on our understanding of organizations and, the implications of a deeper understanding of organization on leadership. The science is about the movement away from linear, perfectly-rational, Newtonian, machine-age metaphors and toward biological ones. It is being produced by a collaboration of particle physicists, economists, biologists and computer scientists seeking to understand their science in a holistic way, and to share their unique “Weltanschauung” with each other. In so doing, they are discovering that there is more in common among the “hard” sciences than they would have believed arguing from the arcana of each discipline and that the “fuzzy” sciences like economics and psychology are also relevant and helpful. Their willingness to engage in dialogue has produced astounding insights and a personal experience that is exhilarating and growthful.

Organization exists in each of these “sciences”—the biologist studies one form, the economist another, the physicist yet another. As an observer of institutions, Bob Greenleaf studied another form of organization—human organization. He talked about a theology of institutions. So do the scientists of the Santa Fe Institute, who emerge as scientist-philosopher-ethicist.

Doyne Farmer, pioneering scientific inquiry into “artificial life,” is quoted by Mitchell: “Now in science, we can never even attempt to make a frontal assault on questions like [the purpose of life]. But by addressing a different question—like, Why is there an inexorable growth in complexity?—we may be able to learn something fundamental about life that suggests its purpose ....”

Stuart Kauffman, eminent biologist from the University of Pennsylvania, echoes Greenleaf’s “test” of a leader with his comment, “... if each individual in the various organizations is allowed a little more freedom to march to a different drummer, then everyone will benefit. The deeply-frozen system will become a little more fluid.”

Some organizations, some economies, some cultures adapt and survive. Some don’t. Mitchell quotes Murray Gell-Mann, a Nobel laureate in particle physics who is now passionately consumed by determining what is required for the “sustainability” of life on the planet. “We need cross-cultural ferment. Of particular importance may be discoveries about how our culture can restrain the appetite for material goods and substitute more spiritual appetites.”

There is a “Tao of complexity,” Mitchell concludes, which suggests a new set of roles for leaders—roles that align with the principles of servant-leadership. First of all, recognize that successful, adaptive systems exercise control from the bottom-up through autonomous “agents.” Control cannot be exercised top down. You “observe, observe, observe. Where you can make a move, you make a move.” Observation, action with courage. Well-timed intervention. The leader acts as a part of her organization, not apart from it. Leadership is an endogenous variable. And it comes from anywhere in the system.

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**Welcome to Our New Members**

by Marcia Newman, Director of Membership

This spring has been particularly beautiful in Indiana. Early rainfall has given way to several weeks of gorgeous spring days of color. Seeds and buds laying dormant all winter have begun to push forth into fullness and beauty. So it is with planting seeds of servant-leadership. If carefully watered and tended, they will break forth with personal joy and meaning in due time. Thank you to all who have shared in seed sowing, watering and tending, through your constant support, which results in wonderful interest in the Center and new membership growth!

We are pleased to welcome the following new members who have joined us since January 1:

- Susan L. Albers
- Rev. Ed Andrade
- Patrick Barrett
- George & Carol Bauer
- Barb Baylor
- Gary Baylor
- The Rev. John Q. Beckwith III
- Byron Bellows
- Mr. & Mrs. Robert Bellows
- Mike Biddinger
- Lenys Ann Biga
- Stephen Biga
- Rev. Thomas G. Bourque TCR
- James R. Boyd
- Tess Bradley
- Charles Carpenter
- John Darrow
- F. Peter Dean
- Blaine Dennison
- Donna DeRenzis
- Marianne Dunlap
- Timothy Durkin
- Lora M. Farr
- Karen S. Fortman
- Dr. Gwca A. Fountain
- William Goulding
- Dr. John Guilfoyle
- Rev. D. Michael Hackbrett
- Gary Hallock
- Bill Harriss
- Bill Harrison, Ph.D.
- Dennis Hatch
- Valerie J. Hayes
- John D. Holt
- William H. Hadnutt III
- Acharn Pracha Hutnanwat
- Grace Ingersoll
- James H. Johnson
- Arlen Kangas
- Matt Kayhoe
- Nancy Keefer
- W. Scott King
- Barbara Kollci
- Steve Kulhavy
- Nancy Leon
- Nancy Lorenzo-Oberfell
- Sue Mallory
- Ronnie Manlin
- Terry Marks
- Harry Messey
- Bruce A. Maza
- Susanne McAllister
- Emily Gantz McKay
- Dian Menendez
- Shirley Mietlicki
- Nicole Miller
- Jannice Moore
- Beth Mose
- John Myers
- Sr. Mary Pat Nelon OP
- Allen Olson
- Sue Overstreet
- Carol Parker
- Dr. K. Bradley Paxton
- Madeleine Pellerin RNC, MSN
- Lisa Quinlan
- Kathleen P. Randall
- Jeff Reber
- Sr. Ann Marie Rimmer
- Jim Robertson
- Oliver E. Rodgers
- Lillian Royal Rose
- T.J. Schmitz
- Virden Seybold
- Gary Stains
- Mark Stewart
- Dr. Robert Tener
- Andy Vasquez
- John Watson
- Jack Will
- Samuel H. Wrightson, Jr.
University of Michigan  
(Continued from page 1)

the enterprise. Within the Council, individual managers report to the group as a whole instead of a single individual, as is traditional. This extraordinary arrangement has enabled the group to move from a climate of fear and individuality to one of mutual caring and shared destiny, the essence of a true community.

The framework was developed experientially; issues and details were worked out as the team encountered them in the new arrangement. The process has been challenging in terms of both mechanics and skills for the team members. Many of the more difficult developmental and interpersonal processes were facilitated by an outside consultant. To capture their learnings and understandings, the group has developed a Council Handbook which includes sections on decision-making, autonomy and authority, personal responsibility, performance, reporting relationships and accountability, insights, and a history of their developmental process. [Editor's Note: Copies of the handbook are available at no cost by contacting George at 313/633-3175 or FAX: 313/633-2313.]

George was happy to share insights and advice based upon the team’s experience. Here is a sampling:

"Be patient. It takes at least a full year for people to believe that the leadership is really sincere, and to test that sincerity within the framework. When it comes to establishing trust, paper and words are meaningless. Only experience over time allows people to let go of their skepticism and come to believe that this isn't just another management fad."

"If the leader or person accountable is not interested in growing as a person, forget it. You'll be found out and exposed; an open framework like this makes it impossible to mask duplicity and dishonesty behind a veil of power and position. On the other hand, if you want to grow and are willing to make yourself vulnerable it's terrific. Difficult issues can become exciting opportunities for personal growth."

"Use an outside consultant for facilitating major development sessions. To maximize trust for the endeavor, have the lower level peers select the consultant and be the primary contacts."

"Remember: Life is a series of close approximations. What we create doesn't have to be perfect—just better than what already exists."

[Editor's Note: The Greenleaf Center invites you to submit material for possible inclusion in Servant Leader Stories. This occasional feature seeks 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.]

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**Demonstrate Your Commitment to Servant Leadership — Become a Member or Give a Gift Membership**

The Robert K. Greenleaf Center invites you to join with us as a sponsor and member. Your tax-deductible contribution entitles you to receive our quarterly newsletter: discounts on lectures, workshops and conferences; welcoming essays; 10% discount when ordering literature; and, notification concerning other significant servant-leader publications and symposia. Most importantly, your support will enable the Robert K. Greenleaf Center to continue to carry forward our important educational work in servant-leadership.

Please enroll me as a member of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center in the category which I have circled below:

- [ ] $25  Student
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- [ ] $100 - $199  Professional (Membership benefits for total of two people.)
- [ ] $200 - $249  Corporate/Institutional Sponsor (Membership benefits for total of four people.)
- [ ] $250 - $499  Friend of the Center (Membership benefits for total of four people and choice of Greenleaf notecards or totebag.)
- [ ] $500 - $999  Sustaining (Membership benefits for total of eight and bonus choice of audio tape.)
- [ ] $1,000 and up  Patron (Membership for total of ten people and bonus choice of videotape.)

I am enclosing my check for $___________, made payable to the Robert K. Greenleaf Center.

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1100 West 42nd St., Suite 321
Indianapolis, IN 46208
PHONE: (317)925-2677
FAX: (317)925-0466

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On the Road with the Robert K. Greenleaf Center

Greenleaf Center personnel have been involved in the following programs and outreach activities in recent months:

January
Isabel Lopez facilitated a one-day workshop at Eureka College in Eureka, Illinois.

Richard Smith conducted a workshop for 120 Volunteers of America participants in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Robert Sigmon facilitated a one-day workshop for Kellogg Community College in Battle Creek, Michigan.

Isabel Lopez gave an address on servant-leadership to a U.S. Department of Agriculture conference in Denver, Colorado.

February
Larry Spears gave the keynote address at the annual conference of the Association of College Honor Societies, in Indianapolis. His talk was titled, “Servant Leadership and the Honoring of Excellence.” Richard Smith also did a separate presentation on servant-leadership at this conference.

Robert Sigmon facilitated a one-day workshop for the Baptist Healthcare Corporation in Louisville, Kentucky.

March
Marcia Newman met with Greenleaf Center members in the Boston area in conjunction with attending the annual conference of the National Society for Fund Raising Executives.

Kelly Tobe and Larry Spears participated in a grassroots leadership conference held in Ypsilanti, Michigan and sponsored by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Richard Smith did a presentation for faculty members at Franklin College in Franklin, Indiana.

Jim Robinson represented the Greenleaf Center at a seminar sponsored by The Institute for Servant Leadership in Hendersonville, North Carolina.

Marcia Newman did a presentation for a meeting of principals at Butler University in Indianapolis. She also spoke to a leadership group associated with the United Way of Central Indiana.

Don Frick, Larry Spears and Bill Bottum met with representatives of the Sisters of St. Joseph Health System and the University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Richard Smith did a presentation for the Daughters of Charity Health System in St. Louis, Missouri.

Marcia Newman, Richard Smith and Kelly Tobe appeared on Dateline: Bloomington, a local television interview program hosted by Greenleaf Center member Susanne McAlister.

April
Jim Robinson made a presentation on servant-leadership at the annual conference of the Association of Lutheran Development Executives, in Indianapolis. Robert Sigmon also facilitated a one-day workshop for participants at this conference.

Grace Barnes, RKGC Workshop Program Evaluator, conducted a servant-leadership program titled, “Exploring the Paradox from Servant Learning to Servant-Leadership Practice,” for students and staff members at Eastern College in St. Davids, Pennsylvania.

She also spoke at the Central Baptist Church in Wayne, Pa., on “How to Develop a Structure for Churches Incorporating Servant-Leadership.”

Richard Smith conducted a one-day workshop for 75 executives and managers on “Team-Building and Servant-Leadership” for Friends Services for the Aging, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Marcia Newman spoke at a meeting of the Rotary Club in Anderson, Indiana.

Richard Smith conducted a one-day workshop on “Servant-Leadership as a Foundation for Organizational Change” for employees of Eli Lilly and Company in Indianapolis.

Jackie Green facilitated a one-day workshop for Gulf Coast Community College in Panama City, Florida.

Richard Smith worked with the primus council at Schneider Engineering Corporation in Indianapolis, giving a presentation on “Consensus Decision Making.”

Kelly Tobe did a presentation for a group of community leaders in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Richard Smith conducted a one-day, regional workshop in Indianapolis: “Servant-Leadership: An Emerging Model.”

Jack Lowe, Jr., CEO of TDI Industries and RKGC Trustee, hosted a group of visiting faculty, administrators, and staff at his company from McMurry University’s Servant-Leadership Center of the Southwest.

The Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership offers a wide array of specially-tailored programs and speakers. Contact us if you are interested in our providing servant-leadership programming for your group or conference.