Helping to Rekindle the Fires

by Richard W. Smith
Program Director

Two Roads diverged in a wood, and I, I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.
—Robert Frost

During the past two years as a Greenleaf Center staff member, I have had the privilege of working with many people who are choosing to take the less traveled road. Although they work in many different settings and environments they have much in common. They are seekers who are working from an internal model rather than an external model—that is, their development and motivations come from within, rather than as a result of reacting to external forces. They are aware of a deep hunger for connectedness and are committed to building close and effective relationships with others.

These seekers are also committed to creating organizations that liberate people and provide an environment that is health-building. They are accepting Robert Greenleaf’s invitation and challenge to lead from serving, to persuade more than coerce, to build community where they are, and to use power ethically. They are learning how to be on a journey without a destination and how to live with ambiguity and many right answers rather than simply seeking the “clearest path.”

In Robert Graves’ terms, they are learning to have a clearer understanding of their confusion. As I travel, people often ask me how other organizations are living out their own less traveled roads. Let me share with you some of what I’ve experienced over the past two years.

One of the powerful experiences I have each year occurs during our annual conference. It is during our time together that we directly experience the absence of barriers. Our conference has become, for many, their yearly opportunity to speak and connect with a broad range of people from richly diverse institutions. If you haven’t yet had the opportunity to experience the power of this gathering I invite you to join us this coming October 19-21, here in Indianapolis.

A second powerful experience I encounter, almost weekly, occurs during the workshops offered by The

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Servant-Leader Stories

Servant-Leadership in Brazil

by Don Frick
Publishing Project Associate

Andres Christian Nacht is an articulate, graceful man who studied as an engineer in England and worked in both France and England for eleven years. He returned to his native Brazil in 1969 to eventually succeed his father as President of Mills Equipamentos, an international firm that erected and dismantles scaffolding for events ranging from Rio’s Festival to huge rock concerts. After reading Tom Peters’ In Search of Excellence, Mr. Nacht suggested his company explore “participatory management,” a style which presaged ideas he read about in Robert Greenleaf’s Servant-Leadership some years later. The Mills journey has not always been smooth, but it sure has been interesting!

What follows are comments made by Nacht during an interview conducted recently at the Greenleaf Center:

“In Brazil, the predominant culture is very authoritarian, paternalistic and macho. Your status is tied to the amount of top-down power you can exert. My father was one of those autocratic controllers. I’m not. In fact, I even resist drawing up organizational charts. A Jackson Pollock painting hangs behind my desk. When people come in, I say, ‘That’s my idea of structure and my idea of communication.’ Tom Peters authorized me to be more assertive in doing things I always wanted to do to give people real participation in their organizations.

“In 1983 and ’84 our company was at rock bottom. We had lost money the last two years; but more than that, we had lost our vision. In 1986 we did a major participatory planning event. There was no grand theory or final plan behind it. We just did it. The results were reflected in many ways. Financially, we went from $8 million in 1986 to $60 million in 1990. But, we still had a lot to learn.

“In 1990 we did another planning event, where the idea was to empower the second and third levels of management—give them authority to make final

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Rekindling
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Greenleaf Center. Whether the workshop is a half-day or a multi-day event, the participants provide each other with powerful ways of connecting. The workshop materials are simply tools; the participants bring their need to connect and their willingness to look at themselves and their relationships. These times together allow people to keep the internal passions blazing; and for some, they allow others to rekindle the fires of “what matters to them.” As David Whyte, a poet and one of our 1995 conference presenters, writes: “Always this energy smothers inside — when it remains until the body fills with dense smoke.”

I experience people who come to the workshops filled with dense smoke and leave with a rekindling of their fire and passion — and with a commitment to themselves and others to continue to care for their own fires and to help others care for their fires. This challenge is anything but soft and easy, for it places accountability where it belongs — with the internal, and not with the external in our lives. We offer these workshops during the year in a variety of settings. Sometimes we work with intact groups, sometimes we are hosted by several people or groups who want to provide the experience for a variety of people, and sometimes we host regional workshops ourselves. We not only provide the “Introduction to Servant-Leadership” workshop—which is focused on the individual and his/her journey, and “The Emerging Model” workshop—which focuses first on the individual and then on organizational change—we also customize these, as well as develop workshops for groups with focused issues. For example, we have developed workshops for those interested in Team Building and Servant-Leadership; for those interested in Continuous Quality Improvement and Servant-Leadership; for families who are involved in family-owned businesses; for organizations that are moving toward developing “true” self-directed teams; for those interested in learning the art and skills of dialogue; for organizations interested in board and/or staff development, and for those interested in Reading and Dialogue groups.

During the past two years, I have had the privilege of working with a number of organizations focusing on a variety of issues. For example, there are many colleges and universities that are developing leadership institutes; and, there are also a number of states that are developing leadership institutes for state employees and elected officials. The Greenleaf Center has worked directly with participants in these institutes, and with the faculty for these institutes. I have also had the opportunity to help develop institute programs and, in one case, have assisted a graduate program in rewriting its course of studies using servant-leadership as the foundation for their degree program.

We have also been involved with a number of boards of trustees as they’ve continued their own development. Sometimes boards invite us to help them with an organizational challenge; for example, we helped one college board develop a unique evaluation for the college president. This triggered a number of opportunities for the board and the college community. Another board was going through a healing-and-restructuring process and wanted to experience how the concepts contained within servant-leadership would help them during this dual focus time. Still other boards have requested help in developing operational and developmental plans, while two “new” boards requested that we help them with their own development.

The Greenleaf Center has also provided help to healthcare systems, organizations involved with manufacturing, state government agencies and school systems. Our latest invitation has taken us into the emerging area of managed care. We were invited to participate in a new venture between a hospital and a healthcare delivery system. We have been involved at the Management/Director level of this new venture for the past three months, and we are looking forward to working within this system over an extended period.

The breadth of our involvement, I believe, is directly related to the hunger for connection that exists, and to the power of the seekers. Our pledge is to keep serving and responding to those who continue to search, and to those who wish to find ways of breaking down barriers. If we can be of service to you and your organization as you continue your journey please know that we are no more than a phone call away.
Brazil
(Continued from page 1)

decisions. These groups developed a plan, but the results were disastrous because the top managers and Directors never bought into it, just as employees don’t really buy into a plan they don’t devise. Our “empowerment” backfired and we lost about two years with that.

“Several years later, we had a real financial crisis and had to make some very quick decisions. One Monday, the Directors met and came up with a plan. On Tuesday and Wednesday, we shared the crisis and the plan with employees—in essence, we converted our decisions into proposals—and asked employees to share their own ideas, alternative suggestions, even their fears. One of our proposals was to take away fringe benefits. The suggestion from employees was that if things were that bad, the Directors should also have their cars taken away. A few of the Directors didn’t like it, but we did it. By Friday, we had assimilated all the suggestions and revised our plan, which was presented again the following Monday and accepted.

“Actually, it wasn’t accepted everywhere. For years, I had been visiting our plant in Sao Paulo and instigating revolution by saying, ‘Hey, if something needs to be done and they won’t let you do it, just do it anyway!’ When the employees there heard about our final plan, they decided not to obey the manager on it. She called and said, ‘This thing is out of hand.’ So I went to Sao Paulo and said, ‘Let’s not confuse two things. One is participation, the other is decision-making and responsibility. You have a right to express all your views, but your manager doesn’t lose the right to make decisions. That was very useful. It brought back a balance of participation and responsibility mean. Participation doesn’t mean doing away with managers.

“Later, our entertainment division was losing money, so a new manager went in and changed things radically. He did away with narrow job descriptions, moved everyone to smaller offices, and put together teams to get jobs done. One team might have had an architect and a draftsman, another a secretary and an engineer. He said, ‘OK. As long as you spend within the budget, you need to get authorization from nobody. Just do it.’ That made a huge difference.

“One person who had been very negative became a pillar of the community. A telephone operator who everyone thought was limited in abilities became an efficient scheduler and troubleshooter. This was a survival situation, but you know, when people have a clear perception that what they do is vital to the company, and are trusted, they will add value and be successful. That entertainment division went from 180 people losing money to about 70 people making money.

“I find that servant-leadership, participatory management, strengthening the internal structure of leaders and management, is necessary for other programs to happen, including quality programs. Servant-leadership helps people understand what’s going on inside them. They need the ideas of servant-leadership so there can be an inner resonance.

“For transformation to occur, a leader must believe in these ideas, be able to resist the attacks, the criticism, the pressure. His internal structure must be sound. He or she has to be able to take these leaps of faith, stand in the void, and face the unknown. Without servant-leadership, you would be shaken before you could make the transformations.”

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 priorities 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 caring and 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.

Spring Workshops in Servant-Leadership

The Greenleaf Center will be conducting two different one-day workshops, in Indianapolis, in April.

“Servant-Leadership: The Foundation for Effective Change” will be held on Friday, April 7, in Indianapolis, Indiana.

“Personal Journey Through Servant-Leadership” will be held on Friday, April 21, in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Registration is open to all. The cost is $150 for the day. Group and student rates are available. Contact Michele Lawrence at the Greenleaf Center (317-259-1241) for more information.
Servant Leader Books in Review

The Democratic Corporation: A Radical Prescription for Recreating Corporate America and Rediscovering Success

by Russell L. Ackoff. Oxford University Press. 229 pages. $23.00

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. Jeff is Director of Organization Development for Warner-Wellcome, a consumer health products manufacturer.)

Although there is nothing in The Democratic Corporation to connect it directly with Robert Greenleaf or the concept of servant-leadership, Ackoff’s ideas — particularly his persistent emphasis on developing members of an organization to operate autonomously in service to the organization’s purpose — resonate strongly with Greenleaf’s. He offers an insightful examination into the state of contemporary organizations, provocative thoughts about the kind of leadership required for those organizations to restore their vitality and contribute positively to American society, and approaches to restructuring organizations to build in more democracy.

Crucial to Ackoff’s argument is his belief that the function of the corporation in modern society is to produce and distribute wealth. When enterprises do this, they contribute to the development of society and their members. According to Ackoff, “Development is an ability and desire to satisfy one’s own needs and legitimate desires and those of others. A legitimate desire is one which does not inhibit the development of someone else.” Development thus recognizes our interdependence and our independence.

Given this definition, Ackoff postulates, a “developmental ideal” which he calls “omnicompetence” and by which he means that organizational members learn to develop themselves and empower others to develop themselves along the dimensions of ethics, morality and aesthetics. In his 1966 commencement address at Redlands University, Robert Greenleaf discussed beauty, momentaneity, openness, humor, and tolerance as elements of a life style which “build the will and the strength to deal creatively with bureaucracy.” Greenleaf’s context was coping with the prevalent organization mode of his times. Ackoff’s view is transformational. Thinking of organizations as social systems and not as machines eradicates bureaucracy.

In a comment which evokes Greenleaf’s “test” of a leader (e.g., “... do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?”), Ackoff observes, “Behavior that encourages and facilitates the development of others can be taken to be ethically good.” Aesthetics represents that property of nature “which we call beauty and inspires us and arouses the courage required to make further progressive efforts”. Unfortunately our enterprises lack any concept of corporate aesthetics which, like servant-leadership, some experience as an oxymoron.

The focus of the corporation on development emerges from a shifting “world view” of our enterprises. Greenleaf talked about a “theology” of institutions. Ackoff talks about an evolution in our thinking about our enterprises. First enterprises were conceived of as machines. They were “attributed with no purpose of their own, but were believed to have the function of serving their owner’s purpose.” This view dominated America’s early industrial experience and led to the fortunes of the Mellons, Rockefellers, Carnegies, Goulds and the other scions of their age.

As the 19th century drew to a close, ownership became more broadly-based. This led to the creation of a management class created on the model of the church. “When enterprises went public,” Ackoff writes, their gods (the individual owners like Carnegie) disappeared, ... ownership became an abstraction.” Management (the church) and managers (the clergy) were created to control enterprises in the alleged interests of their owners (gods) and to discern and communicate their will to the employees. Profit maximization was cited as the purpose of those enterprises. Ackoff describes a case where a senior executive, convinced that profit maximization was not the goal against which decisions had been made, asked Ackoff to research what objective could be inferred from their decisions. “One objective was found that made almost all executive decisions rational,” he notes, “maximization of the standard of living of those executives who made the decision.” Self interest had triumphed over service to the organization’s goals.

The social systems view of enterprises is now emerging. “Social systems,” Ackoff writes, “are systems that have purposes of their own, are made up of parts that have purposes of their own, and are parts of larger systems that also have purposes of their own.” Recognizing that the elements of the system as well as the context in which the system operates are, in and of themselves, purposeful, is the source of service to others’ development. The social systems view of organizations is an incubator for the concept of servant-leadership and creates room for the servant-leader.

Participation and consensus, ideas championed by Greenleaf, are essential when organizations are viewed as social systems. The quality of work life of the members of an organization depends on the extent to which members can be self-controlling and participate in decisions which affect them. Quality of work life is not synonymous with standard of living. A high standard of living sometimes erodes the quality of life — a claim borne out by the increase of societal problems with which we contend daily.

Greenleaf commented on the difference between coercion and persuasion. Ackoff talks about the difference between power over and power to. Power to facilitates action and personal responsibility at all levels of an organization. Action and responsibility facilitate the individual’s development. The individual’s purpose, the organization’s purpose and society’s purpose all stand a greater chance of being fulfilled. “The higher the quality of work life the producers of products or services enjoy,” Ackoff concludes, “the higher the quality of products or services they produce.”

A Message from the Membership Director

by Marcia Newman

The other day I had a warm and lovely conversation with a member about the need to simplify our lives. We shared how much effort it takes to remove ourselves from the noise of today’s living amidst so much technology, in order to find a quiet space for reflection. He had been raised on a farm and I had lived several years as a young girl in a farm guesthouse surrounded by cornfields. We revisited memories of summer evenings listening to the sounds of nature, silver skies, harvest moons and winter snows.

Perhaps it is because the earth seems so still at this time of year that the need for quiet becomes so strong. Bare trees and snow-covered meadows mirror our own vulnerability and nakedness. The earth, in its own resting cycle, calls us back and asks us to re-tune ourselves to its rhythm, that we might once again, find our own.

Robert Greenleaf felt strongly about the need for personal solitude and reflection. In fact, he considered them to be essential ingredients for living out servant-leadership. He writes, “The ability to withdraw and regroup oneself, if only for a moment, preserves that one has learned the art of systematic neglect, to sort out the more important from the less important — and the important from the urgent — and to attend to the more important, even though there may be penalties and censure for the neglect of something else. . . . Pacing oneself by appropriate withdrawal is one of the best approaches to making optimal use of one’s resources.”

I find it interesting that he was writing years ago when technology had not begun yet to take over so many aspects of our lives. If Greenleaf foresaw the necessity for reflection then, when life may have seemed degrees simpler, how much more do we need to pull away from the sirens of business which beg for our attention today?

Wherever this letter finds you in the new year, I hope that you will make time for uncluttered, quiet moments—a drive in the country, a morning walk to enjoy the frost warming to dew from the kiss of the sun, an evening of candlelight glow with family or friends, or a moment alone, to be still. To be thankful. To be. This small investment will prove richly rewarding in your ability to truly care and respond to others; you will also be silently renewing the rhythm of your own life.

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The Robert K. Greenleaf Center invites you to join 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.

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This Conference is a Must!

Twenty-five years ago, Robert Greenleaf published his seminal essay, The Servant As Leader. In celebration of this anniversary year, some of today’s most insightful thinkers and writers will share their latest thinking at the 1995 Conference. This is the first time all of these keynote speakers have appeared together in the same program!

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