

Servant Leadership

A model for the planned giving development professional

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There's a tiny book written in the 70s that forever changed how I view my role as a leader. And I wasn't the only one! This book sent ripples throughout academia and corporate America that are still being felt. Now it's time for the nonprofit sector to heed the lessons.

Servants take the lead!

The Servant as Leader, by Robert K. Greenleaf, the twentieth century visionary thinker and long-time AT&T executive, was the result of Greenleaf's three decades of experiments and studies on organizational leadership. Countless contemporary leadership authors such as Stephen Covey, Ken Blanchard and Margaret Wheatley have explored servant-leadership and continue to apply its simple yet rich approach. In recent years, "servant-led" corporations have outpaced the success of some of the top Fortune 500 corporations. Southwest Airlines, Starbucks and The Container Store, are a few examples.

Servant sounds like pushover...

This use of the term "servant" was problematic at first even for Greenleaf. It has historical and social connotations that run counter to the concept of leadership. But the servant-leader is no doormat. He or she has vision and the ability create a plan and execute it. A key difference, according to Greenleaf, is that "a true natural servant automatically responds to any problem by listening first." So the leader who wants to develop his or her servant-leader qualities should take on the "arduous discipline of learning to listen."

Planned giving officers have a tall order to fulfill.

It falls to us to unify top leadership, the benefactors who support us, and constituents who benefit. I suggest the best type of person to accomplish this task is the servant-leader.

Another book that has helped me immensely is *Seven Pillars of Servant Leadership*, by James W. Sipe and Don M. Frick. Among these seven pillars, the first

Called to serve.

As planned giving development professionals, we're all called to serve. We serve the mission and values of our organization. We serve the people and causes our organization helps. We serve the interests and needs of the benefactors we're charged to assist in the process of planning their best and most meaningful gift. Embracing servant-leadership as a model for our practice points us in the right direction for those we serve and for ourselves. ●

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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 one who is leader first.

— Robert K. Greenleaf

What is servant-leadership?

In his book, Greenleaf describes two kinds of leaders.

The "leader first" person is driven to promote her/his own vision and needs first by influencing others to conform.

The "servant first" person shares power, puts others' needs first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible. How do you know if a company is servant-led?

Greenleaf suggests a test: "Do those served grow as persons; do they *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?"

three—"Person of Character," "Puts People First" and "Skilled Communicator"—hold the key for the gift planning development professional. Sipe and Frick describe persons of character as those who maintain integrity, demonstrate humility and serve a higher purpose.

Recently I took a planned giving course produced by Lilly School of Philanthropy. The course distilled one key component that perfectly reflects the servant-leader attitude:

"As gift planners, we must address the donor's philanthropic and financial objectives. Never lose sight of the significance of your organization's mission to the donor."

Slip this handy booklet into your pocket before your next round of prospect calls. It's not another ways-of-giving brochure — it's a "why's of giving" that helps you better understand the upside and downside of different giving options for both you and your prospects.

**Not just simplified.
Over-simplified.**

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