# Leadership Crossroads: The Values of Servant-Leaders
*By Dr. Sandra R. Bryant*

What is it that Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, Toro Company, Synovus Financial Corporation, ServiceMaster Companies, The Men's Warehouse, and TD Industries know that we don't? They are servant-led companies and have servant leadership as part of their corporate philosophy or as a foundation to their mission statement. But what does servant leadership mean. and how does it impact the service we receive from these companies?

Servant leadership puts emphasis on serving others, whether customers, employees, or community, as the number one priority in the business. Servant leadership emphasizes increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of community, and the sharing of power in decision making. At its core, servant leadership is not a quick fix or magic bullet to organizational leadership. It is, however, a transformational approach to life and work and has the potential to create positive change throughout society.

The New York Times stated, *"servant leadership deals with a reality of power in everyday life, its legitimacy, the ethical restraints upon it and the beneficial results that can be attained through the appropriate use of power."* But, it's not just power; it is a combination of ten characteristics proposed by Greenleaf. They are: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment, and building community. These ten characteristics have been studied, reviewed and researched, and have evolved into the following: integrity, humility, service, (love) caring for others, empowerment, and visioning-- among others.

Servant leaders are those who serve with a focus on the followers, whereby the followers are the primary concern and the organizational concerns are peripheral. The servant leader leads and serves with an altruistic approach. This leader also empowers followers, acts with humility, exhibits love, leads with service, is trusting, and is a visionary for the followers.

The literature regarding servant leadership reveals many distinguishable attributes of such leaders. Patterson's (2002) definition of servant leadership identified the following constructs: (a) altruism, (b) empowerment, (c) humility, (d) love, (e) service, and (f) trust. Now, we can discuss these individually.

*Altruism*: Leaders help followers selflessly just for the sake of helping, which involves personal sacrifice, even though there is no personal gain (Kaplan, 2000). DeYoung (2000) stated the traditional view of altruism as an unselfish concern for others often involving personal sacrifice; however the idea of personal pleasure in helping others is also included in the understanding of altruism.

*Empowerment*: Empowerment is a central element in excellent leadership (Russell & Stone, 2002). It is especially important in servant leadership (Fairholm, 1998).

Empowerment involves entrusting workers with authority and responsibility (Costingan, et al., 1998). Servant leaders multiply their leadership by empowering others to lead (Wilkes, 1996).  It is the opposite of historic management, which emphasizes manipulation and coercion in daily operations.

*Humility*: Emmons (2000) explained, "to be humble is not to have a low opinion of oneself; it is to have an opinion of oneself that is no better or worse than the opinion one holds of others. It is the ability to keep one's talents and accomplishments in perspective ... to have a sense of self-acceptance, an understanding of one's imperfections, and to be free from arrogance and low self esteem" (p.164-165). The most effective leaders use their positions to learn and never lose their sense of humility. Servant leadership does not have any room for arrogance (Bower, 1997), and that humility involves seeing things from another's perspective producing both appreciation and respect in the organization (Crom, 1998). The servant leader is not interested in exaltation; rather, the leader is interested in being accountable and serves from an authentic desire to help.

*Love*: Servant leaders visibly appreciate, value, encourage, and care for their constituents (Winston, 1999). They inspire hope and courage in others by living out their convictions, facilitating positive images, and by giving love and encouragement (Kouzes & Posner, 1993). Such actions reflect unconditional love in the workplace and they build relationships (Covey, 1990). Nix (1997) argued that love could transform the workplace into something that is better for everyone. "Work is love made visible" (Batten, 1997, p.50).

*Service*: Greenleaf's (1997) perspective is that being a leader, particularly a servant leader, begins with the desire to "serve first" (p. 13). Service is one of the highest motivations to leadership by helping others develop their talents and abilities to the fullest potential (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Other writers advocate that we need a new sense of society, of serving one another in the context of community (Senge, 1995). From these views, one can conclude that service is a critical element of leadership, particularly servant leadership. Leaders must understand that one of their primary functions as leaders is to serve the needs of others.

*Trust*: Greenleaf (1997) stated trust is at the root of servant leadership. He further explained that leaders do not elicit trust unless followers have the "confidence in leaders' values and competence, which includes judgment, and unless the leaders posses a sustaining ethos that will support the pursuit of the goal" (p. 16). Servant leadership, therefore, is based on trust (Fletcher, 1999).  According to Kezar (2002), a servant leadership philosophy includes helping people feel comfortable and creating an open environment where everyone has a voice, works collaboratively and collectively, and uses truth-telling skills. Creating an environment of trust is a goal of servant leaders (Bennett, 2001). Trust is a belief in the unseen potential of followers, believing they can accomplish goals, and requires consistency and reliability on the part of the leader for direction, prophecy, and prosperity (Patterson, 2002).

*Vision*: Greenleaf (1997) proffered that leaders have a "sense for the unknowable and are able to foresee the unforeseeable" (p. 22). From this perspective, communication of the leaders' vision to the followers influences the followers into working toward making the vision a reality. Vision for the servant leader, therefore, refers to the idea that the leader can see a person as a viable and worthy person; believe in his or her future state; and seek to serve him or her as such. This looking ahead, according to Melrose (1995), requires the servant leader to have faith and vision of not what is, but what can be, which fosters a great capacity for growth. This vision builds the belief that one can improve, step forward, and reach goals. Servant leaders enrich lives, build better human beings, and encourage people to become more than they ever believed, and that this is more than a job; this deep-rooted leadership is about mission and the mission to serve (Melrose, 1995).

Now, you should have a better understanding of the ways in which the leaders of those servant-led companies view their roles. Not, convinced yet? In the next issue of Succeed to Lead, we will look at the approaches taken by these servant-led companies and how you, too, can implement servant leadership into your organization.