

Preface

# The Road from Darkness to Light

SHANN RAY FERCH

In a world often brimming with disdain, what is hope? And where does hope reside? I grew up in Montana, a state that boasts miles of open land split by the rugged and sometimes brutal heights of one hundred mountain ranges. For me, hope is found in nature, in wilderness, and in the wilderness that exists inside people. Servant-leadership, a way of being that is characterized by wisdom, freedom, health, and autonomy; it is a source of hope in all the complexity and chaos of the present day. Contrary to the hyperspeed of the contemporary age, I've found there are those who walk toward the dawn, and having traversed the night's darkness they emerge unafraid. When we return from walking such roads we are never the same again.

The elegant and powerful collection of interviews you now hold delves deep into the heart of leadership, both the shadow side and the transcendent side, and emerges with profound answers to some of life's most perplexing and ultimate questions.

Who are those who enter the dark and come forth with light in their hands?

Where are these people?

Can I know them?

Will they welcome me?

From global servant-leader and former president of the Philippines Corazon Aquino to agents of exquisite social change Frances Hesselbein, Parker Palmer, and Meg Wheatley to profound leadership personas Ken Blanchard, John Carver, Larry Spears, and George Zimmer, *Conversations on Servant-Leadership* provides uncommon insight and a clear sense of the humility and courage needed to engage the human community in the work of individual and collective responsibility.

In contemporary life, irony is the breeding ground where we first begin to feel comfortable placing others, and the world we inhabit, under the cold eye of our contempt. We might say irony is the more raucous and less easily controlled brother of healthy skepticism, but without health we collude in our own collective inertia and inch forward until we fall like detritus over the lip of a great abyss and finally reach what Wallace Stegner famously referred to as our angle of repose. With the current rate of physical, emotional, and familial deficit, and with a deficit-economy equaled only by our immense spiritual poverty, where do we look to find a sense of hope? When speaking of America, Mother Teresa gave an indictment more barbed than we might imagine: she said America is the poorest country in the world because America's poverty is a spiritual poverty. The same criticism might also be leveled at the Western postcolonial world as a whole, a world where debt, rampant abuse of capitalism, and the degradation of the least privileged of society often goes unchecked. Into this void of consumerism, lack of integrity, and lack of intimacy, a voice of hope is needed.

*Hope.*

We find it in the least likely places. At dusk when the sky's burden moves from blue to black. At dawn when as if from far below, the vault is filled with light. Or sometimes we find hope down one of those high country roads we knew we needed to walk but were afraid to for fear of what we might find.

I am reminded of the kind of humanity that is the result of such hope, and so I want to close this introduction with a brief description of the servant-leadership that rises in the midst of despair. The healing work of the Nez Perce gives a bright echo to the narratives of hope found in the interviews in this book.

Ten miles west of Wisdom, Montana, there are miracles of topography dazzling to the eye. The Canadian border is not far away. The Rocky Mountain front runs north to south and in late autumn, if we have the will, we might walk together into the night. The night is long and the path uneven and often precarious. In the predawn blackness the grand fortresses of rock are ominous, and forests shroud the land around us. When at last the sun begins to light the world, the mountains look strange and otherworldly, black against a sky filled with open air and refracted light. Soon the towering sculptures of stone come clear, carved as if from an extraordinary excess of materials. Above and to the east a red swath burns on the jagged edge of the earth, and when the sun finally breaks the horizon our bodies tilt and our faces turn gold.

And ten miles west of Wisdom, Montana, there are miracles of friendship and grace to marvel the miracles of the sky. Robbie Paul, a modern-day Nez Perce, Nimi'ipuu, woman who knew the depths of atrocity her people

experienced leads us. Consider her story, a woman whose family suffered nearly insurmountable loss, and who discovered the only road out was to pass through a heart-wrenching encounter with the history of genocide endured by her people.

Intuitively, she knew she needed to walk that road hand in hand with her father.

In this, a time fraught with violent upheavals in America and across the globe, if we listen to Robbie's story, we are led to a place of right feeling again. In a world harried by human atrocity, waste, and war, there are those who speak a reverberating truth. Robbie Paul is a descendent of Chief Joseph, the man who spoke his words of grief and resignation on the trail of tears: "I will fight no more forever." The Nez Perce are a people of uncommon tenacity in the unfolding of United States history. The Nez Perce are also a sovereign nation who now hold reconciliation ceremonies at the site of the Big Hole Massacre, ten miles west of Wisdom, Montana, where little more than a century ago, Nez Perce women and children were cut down and destroyed by U.S. Cavalry.

Unimaginable if it weren't for the fact that it's true, today the descendants of those who were massacred meet with the descendants of the Cavalry who committed the massacre. A ceremony of peace is performed. The Nez Perce invite reconciliation. Despite every right to be hateful or violent, the Nez Perce forgive and lead the human race into a necessary engagement with our own darkness. They take the veil from our eyes and let us see.

Robbie Paul, a scholar with a doctorate in leadership studies, traced five generations of Nez Perce servant-leaders in her own family, from the advent of first white contact to today. In her research, she recorded the resilience of her people. She also found in her people the road to healing in the face of genocide, and she found that this road requires our most essential will. At the end of this road she took her father's hand and walked with him into the heart of the mountains, where she sat down together with the descendants of those who had massacred her people and her father's people.

There she offered not cynicism, or contempt, or ruin.

She and her father offered peace.

In the symphony of voices in *Conversations on Servant-Leadership*, leaders honestly consider the darkness of the age and help us emerge with light, hope, and courage in our hands. From this example, we can walk forth and seek to fulfill the beautiful call of Robert K. Greenleaf, envisioning and embodying a leadership that serves others in a way that together we become more wise, more free, more healthy, and more autonomous, and the least privileged among us are benefited, or at least not further deprived.



# Introduction to Servant-Leadership

LARRY C. SPEARS

The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?

—Robert K. Greenleaf

## Glancing Backward

It has been forty-five years since Robert K. Greenleaf coined the term *servant-leader*, and first wrote about it in his classic essay, “The Servant as Leader.” And, it has been twenty-five years since I began my own journey in helping to carry the message of servant-leadership, first as CEO of the Greenleaf Center (1990–2007), then as both CEO of the Spears Center for Servant-Leadership (2008–present) and as Servant-Leadership Scholar with Gonzaga University’s School for Professional Studies (2010–present). This book, and those milestones, prompts me to begin by sharing some insights regarding servant-leadership literature, followed by a look at the understanding and practices of contemporary servant-leadership.

Starting in 1970, Robert Greenleaf began to pen what became a dozen essays and two books published during his lifetime. The 1970 publication of “The Servant as Leader” essay was followed in 1972 by “The Institution as Servant,” and the 1974 publication, “Trustees as Servants.” In 1977, Paulist Press published those first three essays, plus other writings by Greenleaf, in

the book, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*. Then, in 1979, Paulist Press published a second book by Greenleaf titled, *Teacher as Servant*. Greenleaf continued to write essays on servant-leadership into the mid-1980s, when a series of strokes made it increasingly difficult for him to write. Bob Greenleaf died in 1990 at the age of eighty-six.

I first encountered the term *servant-leader* in the early 1980s, while working on the staff of *Friends Journal*, a Quaker magazine, published in Philadelphia. More than thirty years later, I still recall having one of those “aha” moments—the realization that the term *servant-leader* had named something to which I aspired, but for which I had not had a name until reading it in the manuscript that had arrived in the *Friends Journal* office. The author who had sent us his article was Robert K. Greenleaf.

In December 1989, I was living in the Philadelphia area and working at Bryn Mawr College when my wife and I learned that we were expecting a second child. This got us thinking and talking about several things related to our parents living in Indiana, and we and our children living relatively far away in Philadelphia. A series of conversations that my wife and I had led us to decide within the space of a week or two that if I could find a position in Indianapolis that seemed like a good fit, we would make the move back to Indiana after living in the Philadelphia area for thirteen years.

I ordered a subscription to Sunday edition of the *Indianapolis Star* to be sent to me at our home in Ardmore, Pennsylvania. When the first issue arrived, I opened the paper and began to read the Help Wanted ads. One of the very first listings that I read was for the position of executive director of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership. As it turned out, this was also the final placement in a series of three notices that had been run in the Sunday editions of the *Indianapolis Star*. I was excited to read the description, and even more excited by the feeling that what was being described was something that I had to offer. I wrote a long letter, sent it along with my résumé, and was invited to come to Indianapolis for an interview.

At the interview, I learned that a decision had been made to move the Greenleaf Center from Newton Centre, Massachusetts to Indianapolis. What was initially described as a one-hour meeting soon stretched into a much longer meeting, after which I was offered the position as executive director by the Greenleaf Center’s hiring committee, which included Jim Tatum (Tatum Motors, Neosho, Missouri), Sister Joel Read (Alverno College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin), and Jack Lowe Jr. (TDIndustries, Dallas, Texas). We shook hands, and eight weeks later, I moved back to Indianapolis with my family. Several days after that, a moving truck showed up with the contents of the Greenleaf Center’s office that had been loaded up in Massachusetts and brought

to Indianapolis. In 1990, we began the Greenleaf Center's operations with a two-room office, a staff consisting of myself and a part-time bookkeeper, and an operational budget of ninety thousand dollars—most of which was in the form of a final operational grant that had been given to the Greenleaf Center by Lilly Endowment (located in Indianapolis). The small tree that was the Greenleaf Center at that time had been transplanted in Indianapolis, where it would soon take root and begin to grow in many remarkable ways.

Robert Greenleaf died shortly after I was hired to lead the Greenleaf Center, and we spent just one morning together. I am eternally grateful to have had the few hours that we spent together at Crosslands, the Quaker retirement center located in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. Elsewhere, I have written of my one visit with Bob Greenleaf. I recall how he chuckled when I told him that our second son had been born on Greenleaf's own birthday: July 14 (Bastille Day)!

In my early months at the Greenleaf Center, I spoke with the board members and others and eventually developed a plan aimed at stabilizing and then growing the center into a stronger entity. The combination of collaboration, hard work, and good fortune quickly began to pay off, and over time, the Greenleaf Center thrived as an organization. This, in turn, helped us in our primary goal of encouraging a better world through the understanding and practice of servant-leadership.

From the age of ten on, I have felt a calling as a writer and editor, and I have consistently focused a good portion of my energies toward using those gifts and skills on behalf of those causes I believe in, and to which I have devoted my own life's work. Starting in 1990, I worked to further our mission through writing and editing in many different ways, including the creation of newsletters, correspondence, grant proposals, articles, membership letters, display advertisements, essays, and much more. Nearly everything that I did in this vein was done with the goal of furthering our message and mission.

Several months after Bob Greenleaf's death, his family sent me a number of boxes containing a vast array of papers that they had found in his home files. The day the boxes arrived, I pulled up a chair next to the boxes and began to go through the contents. By that time, I had read all of Robert Greenleaf's published work and was familiar with it. However, as I began to go through the boxes, from time-to-time I would come across a file folder that contained a piece of writing by Bob Greenleaf. Most of these folders had a title written across the top in Bob's handwriting. These appeared to be things that Bob Greenleaf had written, though in most instances I did not recognize them as anything that was found in his published work. At first,

there were five folders, then a dozen, then fifty. At the end of that day, I had made a cursory pass through all of the boxes that I had received, set aside the file folders that contained writings by Bob that I did not recognize as being among his published work, and I began to count the number of folders, which totaled about ninety. Some of these folders held pieces of writing as short as a single page. One folder held about one hundred pages of what appeared to have been an uncompleted book project. Most of the folders held articles and reflections that varied in length from two to twenty pages. The hair on the back of my neck was standing up as I came to the realization that Robert Greenleaf had privately written dozens and dozens of articles and essays, stretching over a fifty-year period. It seemed clear that he had done this mostly as an aid to his own developmental thinking on various topics. It also appeared that he had done so without any expectation of publishing what he had written.

I had uncovered a treasure trove of largely unknown writings by Bob Greenleaf. This, in turn, would shape my own work in a profound way for years to come. With support from the Lilly Endowment, and together with Don Frick and Anne Fraker, we published many of the works in two new books.

Starting in 1990, and almost every day since then, I have made it a point to write or edit something in furtherance of encouraging a more servant-led world. On days when my spirit and energies have been high, I have sometimes written or edited a broad range of things in a single day (articles, correspondence, grant proposals, newsletters, books, etc.). On days when my spirit or energies have been low, I have made a point of at least responding to my e-mail, or reaching out to someone who I have wanted to encourage in their own work as a servant-leader. Whether it was ten minutes one day, or ten hours another day, my personal sense of calling to this kind of work, plus a deep feeling of persistence, has led me to write and edit others writings on servant leadership on a daily basis. Each passing week, month, year, and decade has created a longer paper trail of published work. Here at the twenty-five-year mark, this has resulted in more than a dozen books that I have created with the help of others, plus another dozen books to which I have contributed chapters. Since 2005, I have had the great joy of working with Shann Ferch on the annual *International Journal of Servant-Leadership*. Shann serves as editor and I serve as senior advisory editor. I have also written over 300 articles on servant-leadership.

From 1996 to 2003, I cocreated a series of five books of writings by Robert Greenleaf. They are: *On Becoming a Servant-Leader* (1996), *Seeker and Servant* (1996), *The Power of Servant-Leadership* (1998), *Servant Leadership*:



25th Anniversary Edition (2002), and, *The Servant-Leader Within* (2003). *On Becoming a Servant-Leader* and *Seeker and Servant* are collections of Bob's writings that I found among the boxes in 1990. *Servant Leadership* and *The Power of Servant-Leadership* are collections made up mostly of the series of a dozen articles that Bob had published through the Center for Applied Ethics (the name was changed to the Greenleaf Center in 1985). In addition, *The Servant-Leader Within* contains his 1979 book, *Teacher as Servant*, plus some other content. As I have said on more than one occasion to aspiring writers: Even one's own death need not be an impediment to becoming a published author. You just need someone who has an interest in your writings and a commitment to seeing that they are published.

As both an editor and as a writer, I have maintained a dual commitment that I have tried to serve in equal measure. One commitment has been to ensure that Robert Greenleaf's own ideas and writings were made available and continue to be made available. I view his thinking on servant-leadership as being of critical importance to our understanding of the servant-as-leader idea. As such, about half of the books that I have cocreated, and about half of the articles that I have written have focused on Robert Greenleaf's writings or ideas.

The second commitment that I have had is to encourage the development of many other voices in the servant-leadership choir, and help writers to share their ideas with others. This has led me to cocreate a series of Servant-Leadership Anthologies, which include: *Reflections on Leadership* (1995), *Insights on Leadership* (1998), *Focus on Leadership* (2002), *Practicing Servant-Leadership* (2004), and *The Spirit of Servant-Leadership* (2011). In some ways, the book that you are now holding is the latest servant-leadership anthology—though this one is in the form of interviews with thought-leaders on servant-leadership. Roughly half of the articles that I have written have focused on trying to expand the edges of our understanding about servant-leadership and covered a lot of ground as I have examined servant-leadership in relation to people, organizations, places, and ideas. In recent years I have written or cowritten articles on servant-leadership in conjunction with service-learning, Myers-Briggs, aging, meditation, the Council of Equals, Bruce Springsteen, spirituality, King Arthur and the Knights of the Roundtable, organizational practices, personal development, philanthropy, and other topics. The single thread running throughout all of this has been a belief that servant-leadership has something to offer in these and many other areas.

These two strands of my work—helping to ensure that Robert Greenleaf's ideas and writings are encouraged and understood, and simultaneously helping to ensure that servant-leadership continues to grow in new and

unexpected directions through the varied writings of others, and myself, have served as a consistent two-pronged approach for me for the past twenty-five years. While I leave it to history to determine how effective this strategy has been, from my own perspective it has offered the best of both worlds of maintaining the solid core of Greenleaf's ideas while expanding outward the scope of servant-leadership in how it is understood and practiced.

### The Johnny Appleseed Approach to Servant-Leadership

Since 1970, roughly one million people have read either an essay or book on servant-leadership growing out of the work that Bob Greenleaf and/or I have done in collaboration with others. Articles and television appearances have been read or viewed by another fifteen million people. As I look back, I begin to see each article, essay, book, and television appearance as seeds that have been planted. Some have fallen on hard soil, been left unwatered, and blown away in the wind. Others have been dropped in good soil, been cared for, and have bloomed into a beautiful array of people and organizations currently practicing servant-leadership. Many other seeds have been planted and are simply waiting for the right set of conditions to come together and to trigger still more growth.

It is in that way that I have come to see the writings of Robert Greenleaf, the authors interviewed in this book, the hundreds of contributing authors to the various servant-leadership anthologies and to the International Journal of Servant-Leadership, untold numbers of others, and my own work, as representing a kind of Johnny Appleseed approach to servant-leadership.

When taking the long view of things, a servant's heart and a pocketful of seeds may help in the creation of a better, more caring world. I hope so. No, I believe it is so.

### Understanding Servant-Leadership and the Ten Characteristics of Servant-Leadership

The servant-leader concept continues to grow in its influence and impact. In fact, we have witnessed an unparalleled explosion of interest and practice of servant-leadership in the past fifteen years. In many ways, it can truly be said that the times are only now beginning to catch up with Robert Greenleaf's visionary call to servant-leadership.

The idea of servant-leadership, now in its fifth decade as a concept bearing that name, continues to create a quiet revolution in workplaces around the world. This Introduction is intended to provide a broad overview of the growing influence this inspiring idea is having on people and their workplaces.

In countless for-profit and not-for-profit organizations today we are seeing traditional, autocratic, and hierarchical modes of leadership yielding to a different way of working—one based on teamwork and community, one that seeks to involve others in decision making, one strongly based in ethical and caring behavior, and one that is attempting to enhance the personal growth of workers while improving the caring and quality of our many institutions. This emerging approach to leadership and service is called *servant-leadership*.

The words *servant* and *leader* are usually thought of as being opposites. When two opposites are brought together in a creative and meaningful way, a paradox emerges. And so the words *servant* and *leader* have been brought together to create the paradoxical idea of servant-leadership. The basic idea of servant-leadership is both logical and intuitive. Since the time of the industrial revolution, managers have tended to view people as objects; institutions have considered workers as cogs within a machine. In the past few decades, we have witnessed a shift in that long-held view. Standard practices are rapidly shifting toward the ideas put forward by Robert Greenleaf, Peter Block, Stephen Covey, Peter Senge, Max DePree, Margaret Wheatley, Ken Blanchard, Richard Leider, Shann Ray Ferch, James Autry, and many, many others who suggest that there is a better way to lead and manage our organizations. Robert Greenleaf's writings on the subject of servant-leadership helped to get this movement started, and his views have had a profound and growing effect on many.

### Robert K. Greenleaf

Despite all the buzz about modern leadership techniques, no one knows better than Greenleaf what really matters.

—*Working Woman* magazine

The term *servant-leadership* was first coined in a 1970 essay by Robert K. Greenleaf (1904–1990), titled “The Servant as Leader.” Greenleaf, born in Terre Haute, Indiana, spent most of his organizational life in the field of management research, development, and education at AT&T. Following a forty-year career at AT&T, Greenleaf enjoyed a second career that lasted twenty-five

years, during which time he served as an influential consultant to a number of major institutions, including Ohio University, MIT, Ford Foundation, R. K. Mellon Foundation, the Mead Corporation, the American Foundation for Management Research, and Lilly Endowment. In 1964 Greenleaf also founded the Center for Applied Ethics, which was renamed the Robert K. Greenleaf Center in 1985, and is now headquartered in Westfield, Indiana.

I was blessed to have met Bob Greenleaf, and to have served as president and CEO of the Greenleaf Center from 1990 to 2007. In 2008, I launched the Spears Center, where I continue to carry forward the idea of servant-leadership as first described by Greenleaf.

As a lifelong student of how things get done in organizations, Greenleaf distilled his observations in a series of essays and books on the theme of the servant as leader—the objective of which was to stimulate thought and action for building a better, more caring society.

### The Servant as Leader Idea

The idea of the servant as leader came partly out of Greenleaf's half century of experience in working to shape large institutions. However, the event that crystallized Greenleaf's thinking came in the 1960s, when he read Hermann Hesse's short novel *Journey to the East*—an account of a mythical journey by a group of people on a spiritual quest.

After reading this story, Greenleaf concluded that the central meaning of it was that the great leader is first experienced as a servant to others, and that this simple fact is central to his or her greatness. True leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a deep desire to help others.

In 1970, at the age of sixty-six, Greenleaf published "The Servant as Leader," the first of a dozen essays and books on servant-leadership. Since that time, more than a half-million copies of his books and essays have been sold worldwide. Slowly but surely, Greenleaf's servant-leadership writings have made a deep, lasting impression on leaders, educators, and many others who are concerned with issues of leadership, management, service, and personal growth.

### What Is Servant-Leadership?

In his works, Greenleaf discusses the need for a better approach to leadership, one that puts serving others—including employees, customers, and community—as the number one priority. 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.

Who *is* a servant-leader? Greenleaf said that the servant-leader is one who is a servant first. In “The Servant as Leader” he wrote, “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 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?”

It is important to stress that servant-leadership is *not* a “quick-fix” approach. Nor is it something that can be quickly instilled within an institution. At its core, servant-leadership is a long-term, transformational approach to life and work—in essence, a way of being—that has the potential for creating positive change throughout our society.

## Characteristics of the Servant-Leader

Servant leadership deals with the 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.

—*New York Times*

I have spent many years carefully considering Greenleaf’s original writings, and from them I have extracted a set of ten characteristics of the servant-leader that I view as being of critical importance. The following characteristics are central to the development of servant-leaders:

**Listening:** Leaders have traditionally been valued for their communication and decision-making skills. While these are also important skills for the servant-leader, they need to be reinforced by a deep commitment to listening intently to others. The servant-leader seeks to identify the will of a group and helps clarify that will. He or she seeks to listen receptively to what is being said (and not said!). Listening also encompasses getting in touch with one’s own inner voice and seeking to understand what one’s body, spirit, and mind are communicating. Listening, coupled with regular periods of reflection, is essential to the growth of the servant-leader.

**Empathy:** The servant-leader strives to understand and empathize with others. People need to be accepted and recognized for their special and unique spirits. One assumes the good intentions of coworkers and does not reject them as people, even while refusing to accept their behavior or performance. The most successful servant-leaders are those who have become skilled empathetic listeners.

**Healing:** Learning to heal is a powerful force for transformation and integration. One of the great strengths of servant-leadership is the potential for healing one's self and others. Many people have broken spirits and have suffered from a variety of emotional hurts. Although this is a part of being human, servant-leaders recognize that they have an opportunity to "help make whole" those with whom they come in contact. In "The Servant as Leader" Greenleaf writes: "There is something subtle communicated to one who is being served and led if, implicit in the compact between servant-leader and led, is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something they share."

**Awareness:** General awareness, and especially self-awareness, strengthens the servant-leader. Making a commitment to foster awareness can be scary—you never know what you may discover. Awareness also aids one in understanding issues involving ethics and values. It lends itself to being able to view most situations from a more integrated, holistic position. As Greenleaf observed: "Awareness is not a giver of solace—it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed. They are not seekers after solace. They have their own inner serenity."

**Persuasion:** Another characteristic of servant-leaders is a primary reliance on persuasion, rather than using one's positional authority, in making decisions within an organization. The servant-leader seeks to convince others, rather than coerce compliance. This particular element offers one of the clearest distinctions between the traditional authoritarian model and that of servant-leadership. The servant-leader is effective at building consensus within groups. This emphasis on persuasion over coercion probably has its roots within the beliefs of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), the denomination with which Robert Greenleaf himself was most closely allied.

**Conceptualization:** Servant-leaders seek to nurture their abilities to "dream great dreams." The ability to look at a problem (or an organization) from a conceptualizing perspective means that one must think beyond day-to-day

realities. For many managers this is a characteristic that requires discipline and practice. The traditional manager is focused on the need to achieve short-term operational goals. The manager who wishes also to be a servant-leader must stretch his or her thinking to encompass broader-based conceptual thinking. Within organizations, conceptualization is also the proper role of boards of trustees or directors. Unfortunately, boards can sometimes become involved in the day-to-day operations and fail to provide the visionary concept for an institution. Trustees need to be mostly conceptual in their orientation, staffs need to be mostly operational in their perspective, and the most effective CEOs and leaders probably need to develop both perspectives. Servant-leaders are called to seek a delicate balance between conceptual thinking and a day-to-day focused approach.

**Foresight:** Closely related to conceptualization, the ability to foresee the likely outcome of a situation is hard to define, but easy to identify. One knows it when one sees it. Foresight is a characteristic that enables the servant-leader to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future. It is also deeply rooted within the intuitive mind. As such, one can conjecture that foresight is the one servant-leader characteristic with which one may be born. All other characteristics can be consciously developed. There has not been a great deal written on foresight. It remains a largely unexplored area in leadership studies, but one most deserving of careful attention.

**Stewardship:** Peter Block (author of *Stewardship* and *The Empowered Manager*) has defined stewardship as “holding something in trust for another.” Robert Greenleaf’s view of all institutions was one in which CEOs, staffs, and trustees all played significant roles in holding their institutions in trust for the greater good of society. Servant-leadership, like stewardship, assumes first a commitment to serving the needs of others. It also emphasizes the use of openness and persuasion rather than control.

**Commitment to the growth of people:** Servant-leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As such, the servant-leader is deeply committed to the growth of every individual within his or her institution. The servant-leader recognizes the tremendous responsibility to do everything within his or her power to nurture the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of employees. In practice, this can include (but is not limited to) concrete actions such as making available

funds for personal and professional development, taking a personal interest in the ideas and suggestions from everyone, encouraging worker involvement in decision making, and actively assisting laid-off workers to find other employment.

**Building community:** The servant-leader senses that much has been lost in recent human history as a result of the shift from local communities to large institutions as the primary shaper of human lives. This awareness causes the servant-leader to seek to identify some means for building community among those who work within a given institution. Servant-leadership suggests that true community can be created among those who work in businesses and other institutions. Greenleaf said, “All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant-leaders to show the way, not by mass movements, but by each servant-leader demonstrating his own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group.”

These ten characteristics of servant-leadership are by no means exhaustive. However, I believe that the ones listed serve to communicate the power and promise that this concept offers to those who are open to its invitation and challenge.

## Servant-Leadership in Practice

Servant-leadership has emerged as one of the dominant philosophies being discussed in the world today.

—*Indianapolis Business Journal*

The domains and applications for the purposeful presence of servant-leadership today are many. Servant-leadership principles are being applied in significant ways in many different areas. The first area has to do with servant-leadership as an institutional philosophy and model.

### *1. Servant-Leadership as an Institutional Model*

Servant-leadership crosses all boundaries and is being applied by a wide variety of people working with for-profit businesses; not-for-profit corporations; and churches, universities, health care, and foundations.



Servant-leadership advocates a group-oriented approach to analysis and decision making as a means of strengthening institutions and improving society. It also emphasizes the power of persuasion and seeking consensus, over the old top-down form of leadership. Some people have likened this to turning the hierarchical pyramid upside down. Servant-leadership holds that the primary purpose of a business should be to create a positive impact on its employees and community, rather than using profit as the sole motive.

Many individuals within institutions have adopted servant-leadership as a guiding philosophy. An increasing number of companies have adopted servant-leadership as part of their corporate philosophy or as a foundation for their mission statement. Among these are Synovus Financial Corporation (Columbus, Georgia), ServiceMaster Company (Downers Grove, Illinois), the Men's Wearhouse (Fremont, California), Southwest Airlines (Dallas, Texas), Starbucks (Seattle, Washington), and TDIndustries (Dallas, Texas).

TDIndustries (TD), one of the earliest practitioners of servant-leadership in the corporate setting, is a Dallas-based heating and plumbing contracting firm that has consistently ranked in the top ten of *Fortune* magazine's *100 Best Companies to Work for in America*. TD's founder, Jack Lowe Sr., came upon "The Servant as Leader" essay in the early 1970s, and began to distribute copies of it to his employees. They were invited to read the essay and then to gather in small groups to discuss its meaning. The belief that managers should serve their employees became an important value for TDIndustries.

Forty years later, TDIndustries continues to use servant-leadership as the guiding philosophy. Even today, any TDPartner who supervises at least one person must go through training in servant-leadership. In addition, all new employees continue to receive a copy of "The Servant as Leader" essay, and TD has developed elaborate training modules designed to encourage the understanding and practice of servant-leadership.

Some businesses have begun to view servant-leadership as an important framework that is helpful (and necessary) for ensuring the long-term effects of related management and leadership approaches, such as continuous quality improvement and systems thinking. It is suggested that institutions that want to create meaningful change may be best served in starting with servant-leadership as the foundational understanding and then building on it through any number of related approaches.

Servant-leadership has influenced many noted writers, thinkers, and leaders. Max DePree, former chair of the Herman Miller Company and author of *Leadership Is an Art* and *Leadership Jazz* has said, "The servanthood of leadership needs to be felt, understood, believed, and practiced." In addition, Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline*, has said that he tells people "not

to bother reading any other book about leadership until you first read Robert Greenleaf's book, *Servant-Leadership*. I believe it is the most singular and useful statement on leadership I've come across." In recent years, a growing number of leaders and readers have "rediscovered" Robert Greenleaf's own writings through books by DePree, Senge, Covey, Wheatley, Autry, and many other popular writers.

## 2. *Education and Training of Not-for-Profit Trustees*

A second major application of servant-leadership is its pivotal role as the theoretical and ethical basis for "trustee education." Greenleaf wrote extensively on servant-leadership as it applies to the roles of boards of directors and trustees within institutions. His essays on these applications are widely distributed among directors of for-profit and nonprofit organizations. In his essay, "Trustees as Servants," Greenleaf urged trustees to ask themselves two central questions: "Whom do you serve?" and "For what purpose?"

Servant-leadership suggests that boards of trustees need to undergo a radical shift in how they approach their roles. Trustees who seek to act as servant-leaders can help to create institutions of great depth and quality. Historically, two of America's largest grant-making foundations (Lilly Endowment and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation) have sought to encourage the development of programs designed to educate and train not-for-profit boards of trustees to function as servant-leaders. John Carver, the noted author on board governance, has also done much to raise awareness of servant-leadership in relation to trustee boards.

## 3. *Community Leadership Programs*

A third application of servant-leadership concerns its deepening role in community leadership organizations across the country. A growing number of community leadership groups are using Greenleaf Center resources as part of their own education and training efforts. Some have been doing so for more than thirty years.

M. Scott Peck, who wrote about the importance of building true community, said the following in *A World Waiting to Be Born*: "In his work on servant-leadership, Greenleaf posited that the world will be saved if it can develop just three truly well-managed, large institutions—one in the private sector, one in the public sector, and one in the nonprofit sector. He believed—and I know—that such excellence in management will be achieved through an organizational culture of civility routinely utilizing the model of community."

#### 4. *Service-Learning Programs*

A fourth application involves servant-leadership and experiential education. During the past thirty years experiential education programs of all sorts have sprung up in virtually every college and university—and, increasingly, in secondary schools, too. Experiential education, or “learning by doing,” is now a part of most students’ educational experience.

Around 1980, a number of educators began to write about the linkage between the servant-leader concept and experiential learning under a new term called *service-learning*. It is service-learning that has become a major focus for some experiential education programs in the past two decades.

The National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) has service-learning as one of its major program areas. In 1990, NSEE published a massive three-volume work called *Combining Service and Learning*, which brought together many articles and papers about service-learning—several dozen of which discuss servant-leadership as the philosophical basis for experiential learning programs.

#### 5. *Leadership Education*

A fifth application of servant-leadership concerns its use in both formal and informal education and training programs. This is taking place through leadership and management courses in colleges and universities, as well as through corporate training programs. A number of undergraduate and graduate courses on management and leadership incorporate servant-leadership within their course curricula. Several colleges and universities now offer specific courses on servant-leadership. Since 2005, I have personally collaborated with Gonzaga University around the creation and teaching of graduate courses in servant-leadership, and in the creation of the annual *International Journal of Servant-Leadership*. From my collaboration with Gonzaga University, this book emerged, and it is my great honor to present interviews of several of my Gonzaga colleagues here alongside more well-known thought leaders. My experience of my Gonzaga colleagues has been profound, and the text of their interviews here confirms exceptional servant-leaders exist be they more or less famous, more or less published, or more or less positioned to influence a national or international audience.

In addition to educational institutions promoting servant-leadership, a number of noted leadership authors, including Peter Block, Ken Blanchard, Max DePree, and Peter Senge, have all acclaimed the servant-leader concept as an overarching framework that is compatible with, and enhancing of, other

leadership and management models such as total quality management, systems thinking, and community-building.

In the area of corporate education and training programs, dozens of management and leadership consultants now utilize servant-leadership materials as part of their ongoing work with corporations. Among these companies are U.S. Cellular, Synovus Financial, and Southwest Airlines. A number of consultants and educators are now touting the benefits to be gained in building a total quality management approach on a servant-leadership foundation. Through internal training and education, institutions are discovering that servant-leadership can truly improve how business is developed and conducted, while still successfully turning a profit.

## 6. *Personal Transformation*

A sixth application of servant-leadership involves its use in programs relating to personal growth and transformation. Servant-leadership operates at both the institutional and personal levels. For individuals it offers a means to personal growth—spiritually, professionally, emotionally, and intellectually. It has ties to the ideas of M. Scott Peck (*The Road Less Traveled*), Parker Palmer (*The Active Life*), and others who have written on expanding human potential. A particular strength of servant-leadership is that it encourages everyone to seek opportunities to both serve and lead others, thereby setting up the potential for raising the quality of life throughout society. In recent years, there has been growing attention paid to the ways in which servant-leadership and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator are mutually strengthening of each other.

## 7. *Servant-Leadership and Diversity*

For some people, the word *servant* may prompt an initial negative connotation due to the oppression that many people—especially women and people of color—have historically endured. However, on closer analysis many come to appreciate the inherent spiritual nature of what Greenleaf intended by the pairing of *servant* and *leader*. The startling paradox of the term *servant-leadership* serves to prompt new insights.

In an article titled, “Pluralistic Reflections on Servant-Leadership,” Juana Bordas has written, “Many women, minorities, and people of color have long traditions of servant-leadership in their cultures. Servant-leadership has very old roots in many of the indigenous cultures. Cultures that were holistic, cooperative, communal, intuitive, and spiritual. These cultures cen-