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Leadership Perspectives: Making a Difference with Servant Leadership

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Imagine the diorama shoe box your teacher had you make in fourth grade. Do you remember looking into the box through the holes on each end? What did you see? Did it look the same through both ends? What if you looked at it from a side hole? Each view gave you a new perspective on what was in the diorama shoe box.

Over time researchers have looked into the shoe box we refer to as leadership from different perspectives. Some look in the box at one end and see visionary leaders. They would describe this leader as someone who challenges the process, inspires a shared vision, enables others to act, models the way, and encourages the heart (Kouzes, 1987).

Visionary leaders make the success of the learner, service to others, and collaboration integral to their personal mission. They include these as undergirdings of the school's mission and vision. The vision provides the impetus and power to achieve success (Stueber, 2000).

In the first article of this trilogy on leadership

(see *Lutheran Education*, May/June, 2000), we examined the need for leadership in our ever-changing society. We introduced the first perspective on leadership—making a difference with 20/20 vision. It was one look inside the shoe box. In this article we take a peak at leadership through another side of the shoe box. As we do, we notice some things related to visionary leadership. We also see a new perspective on leadership—leaders make a difference as servants.

Characteristics of a Servant Leader

Time to take a peak inside our shoe box. Closely connected to visionary leadership is servant leadership. What we will see as we continue to look closely inside the leadership shoe box are ten characteristics of a servant leader (see Table 1) (Spears, 1994).

TABLE 1: Characteristics of a Servant Leader

• Foresight	• Empathy
• Commitment to the growth of people	• Awareness
• Conceptualization	• Building community
• Persuasion	• Stewardship
• Listening	• Healing

A servant leader displays *foresight*. Someone with foresight anticipates what is likely to happen and takes precautionary steps. A new student is coming to your classroom. The family has just moved here from England. The teacher with foresight will arrange that first day with care and concern to help the new student begin to develop friends and relationships. The teacher anticipates the child's needs and takes steps to accommodate the child. The servant leader teacher foresees and acts before it is too late. This teacher is highly intuitive and can pick up on other people's unspoken meanings and feelings.

A servant leader is *committed to the growth of people*. A principal who is committed to the growth of people demonstrates commitment to the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of each individual on the staff. This principal assures funding for personal and professional development of the staff. Her first order of business is to build a group of people who, under her influence, grow taller and become healthier, stronger, and more autonomous. The servant leader principal provides staff development activities that build trust and self-esteem.

A servant leader has an *ability to conceptualize* and to communicate concepts. This leader has identified his core values and concepts and communicates these to staff, parents, and congregation members. This leader considers the bigger picture as he looks at a problem by looking beyond the day-to-day realities. The classroom teacher can see beyond today's lesson to the teaching objectives for the unit or year. She communicates often and clearly with parents about school goals and values.

The servant leader has highly developed powers of *persuasion*. This leader can motivate others to implement change. This leader seeks to convince others, rather than coerce them into compliance. This leader has developed widespread agreement among the school's stakeholders on goals, roles, and the direction in which the school needs to move.

The servant leader *listens receptively* to what others have to say. When a problem arises, this leader responds by listening first. The servant leader employs active listening skills. She takes time to hear other points of view.

The servant leader demonstrates *acceptance* of others and has empathy for them. You recognize this characteristic in people who treat others with dignity and respect. This leader fosters care and concern for others so that everyone in the school experiences the love of others. This educator understands the point of view of others and the challenges they face. She identifies with St. Francis as he prayed, "Lord, grant that I may not seek so much to be understood as to understand."

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The servant leader shows *awareness* and perception. This principal has an accurate perception of the current strengths and weaknesses of his school. He is aware of and knowledgeable about the most effective educational practices. The servant leader sees obligations and responsibilities in a way that permits sorting out the urgent from the important in order to deal with the important.

The servant leader *builds community* in the schoolhouse. In the classroom, this teacher nurtures a spirit of cooperation and teamwork. Teachers, parents, students, and congregation leaders are actively involved in a school with this leader. A principal like this strives to build a strong positive community and identifies means

for building that community among those who work within the school.

The servant leader practices *stewardship*. This administrator manages the resources of the school to meet the needs of others before meeting his own needs. This leader holds the school in trust for the greater good of the constituency. He first and foremost commits his knowledge, insight, and leadership to serving the needs of others. The servant leader is willing to be accountable for the well-being of the school by operating in service, rather than in control, of those around them.

The servant leader has the ability to exert *healing* influence upon individuals and institutions. This is the person who can effectively calm people in stressful situations. It is the one who looks for ways to pick up the staff emotionally. This leader helps to make whole those who have a broken spirit and have suffered from emotional hurts.

Table 2: Mean Scores for Servant Leadership Characteristics

Characteristic	Self	Others
Foresight	8.50	8.15
Commitment to the growth of people	8.43	8.16
Conceptualization	8.42	8.41
Persuasion	8.39	8.29
Listening	8.53	8.17
Empathy	8.93	8.28
Awareness	8.43	8.27
Building	8.59	8.41
Stewardship	9.04	8.69
Healing	8.59	8.12

A group of effective Lutheran high school principals (N=19) participated in a research project using a servant leadership survey to determine to what degree they had these ten characteristics of a servant leader. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest rating, they had self-scores of at least 8.39 on every characteristic. Others who know them well also completed the survey. They rated these effective high school administrators at 8.12 or higher on these characteristics. These effective Lutheran high school administrators exhibit servant leadership characteristics

"usually" or "very frequently."

Using Servant Leadership

The servant leader understands and uses cultural linkages in her leadership activities. Bureaucratic linkages refer to occasions in which the leader is engaged in managerial tasks. Cultural linkages involve establishing behavioral norms, using symbols, instituting ceremonies and telling stories (Firestone, 1985).

Sashkin and Huddle (1988) described leadership activities which build cultural linkages including establishing an atmosphere conducive to learning, setting high expectations for teachers and students, setting school level goals, supervising curriculum and teaching, communicating effectively inside the school, and building parent and community support. Purkey and Smith (1983) identified the following cultural norms:

- collegiality;
- experimentation;
- high expectations;
- trust and confidence;
- tangible support;
- reaching out to the knowledge bases;
- appreciation and recognition;
- caring, collaboration, and humor;
- involvement in decision making;
- protection of what is important;
- traditions; and
- honest open communication. (p.438)

The role of the principal in this new understanding of leadership, then, is to empower teachers to lead. This is not easily done. It may be more difficult to build leadership capacity among colleagues than to tell them what to do. As difficult as it may be, it's imperative for principals to release authority and for teachers to learn how to enhance their leadership skills and informal authority. The release of authority on the part of the principal does not translate into less work for the principal. It will probably lead to more work. It involves creating collegial relationships instead of dependency relationships; it involves helping teachers realize that school leadership is a natural part of their role as educators; it involves sharing of information and vision; it involves listening; it involves helping the group produce results that are consistent with the school's mission; and it involves giving teachers a

chance to grow in confidence in leadership capacities (Kuck, 1999).

Conclusion

Go back in time with me to a dairy farm in southern Wisconsin. It's the summer of 1962. Early one evening as dad and I finished milking the cows we noticed the glow in the sky to the north and the sounds of sirens. Something had set off a fire at neighbor Cy Langer's barn. By morning all that remained of the barn was the charred rock walls and smoldering wood.

The next morning dad, my brother, and I walked over to join with about 20 neighbors to help Cy move his dairy cows to another barn a mile down the highway. The county police blocked the highway, and we began to herd the cows down the middle of the highway. Several people, including Cy, were taking the lead in organizing the neighbors. One of the farmers had anticipated the need to block the highway and called the county sheriff. Another had identified a nearby, unused barn and arranged with the owner for its use. The cows would not cooperate. We tried yelling. We made a line behind and to the side of them. We were not getting them to move down the highway.

The release of authority on the part of the principal involves creating collegial relationships instead of dependency relationships, helping teachers realize that school leadership is a natural part of their roles as educators, and giving teachers a chance to grow in confidence in leadership capacities.

Then Hilbert told Cy to get out in front and start walking down the middle of the highway. The cows recognized Cy and soon the lead cow started following. In only a little while the whole herd was quietly moving along. The rest of us were no longer needed. What a sight! One moment nothing would change the cow's behavior. The next they are following their leader.

Several characteristics of servant leadership were evident that morning. Hilbert had the foresight to tell Cy to get out in front and lead. Neighbors listened first and then acted. Everyone demonstrated empathy for Cy. There was a sense of some

healing that morning as the last of the cows moved into the new barn. Trust, confidence, and collegiality were everywhere. These farmers were extremely effective servant leaders. It was part of their culture.

We have peeked inside the shoe box of leadership. Each peek gives us another view of an effective leader. We looked in one side and saw the visionary leader (Stueber, 2000). In today's view we saw the servant leader. There are other perspectives on leadership. Next time we look through another side of the shoe box and see an effective leader as a spiritual leader.

Robert Greenleaf (1970) defined leadership as follows:

> 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?

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