

Laurel:

Not surprisingly, your paper was superbly-written and most thoughtful. I am aware of NVC and Marshall Rosenberg's work, and I believe there are several intersecting points between it and servant-leadership. Your interview-conversation with Ike was excellent, as was your own analysis. I think several of Ike's concerns about servant-leadership might be easily addressed by a little more grounding in the literature. Ken Wilber is also a favorite of mine, so I was glad to see your mention of him in your paper. One of the best papers of its kind, your score on this assignment is 15/15. Great work!

Larry

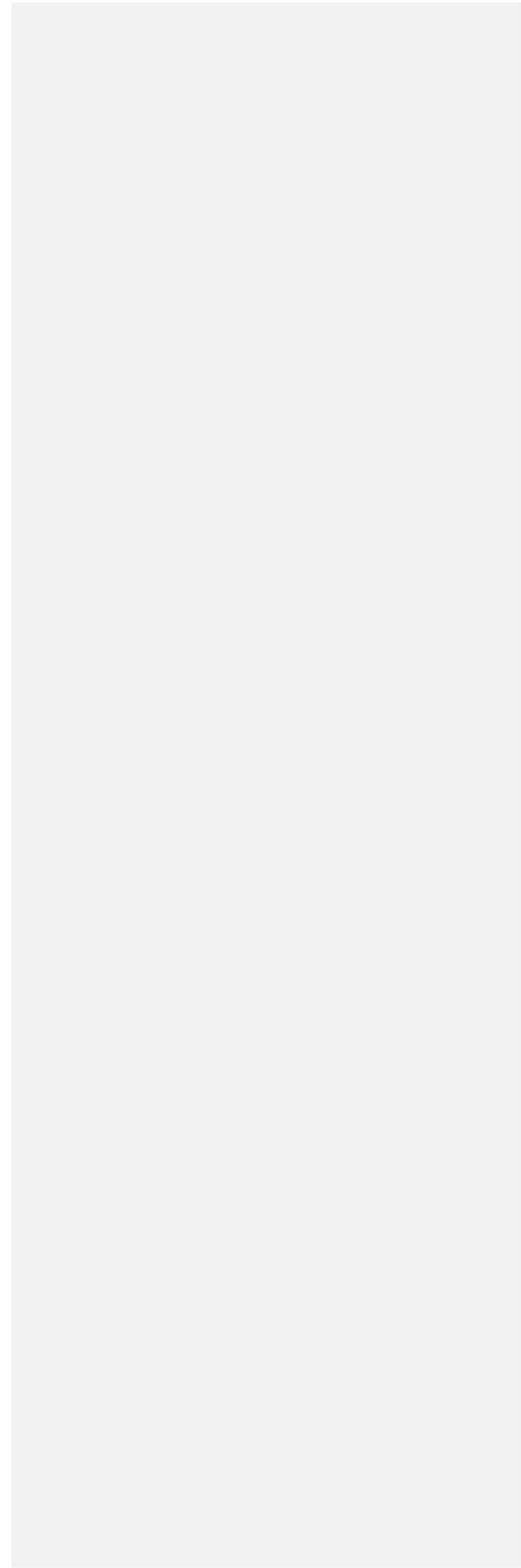
A Transformation of the Heart

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A Transformation of the Heart

“We need to think more about how well leaders handle relationships.” (DePree, 2002, p. 92). “You can’t reduce leadership to a formula. Leadership really is a quest, a search that never ends for most of us.” (p. 89) “It certainly never occurred to me that there could be any kind of healing resulting from mediation. . . . They walked out openhearted beings, trusting that they had been seen and valued and willing to see and value their antagonists in return. With time, I was ever more attracted to being in the presence of this kind of transformation. It has been incredibly satisfying and nurturing to me to contribute to these kinds of shifts.” (Lasater, 2010, “Choosing Life”, www.wordsthatwork.us, para. 3)

As inspired by participating in a five-day workshop with the leader I chose to interview followed by a lengthy conversation regarding this course and related topics on leadership development with its co-creator Ike Lasater, this paper discusses the commonalities and synergies between servant-leadership and nonviolent communication (NVC). NVC is a four-part process “founded on language and communication skills” which “guides us in reframing how we express ourselves and hear others” (Rosenberg, 2003, p. 3) with the intention of creating connection. While specifically the assignment was to discuss servant-leadership with a leader, find out what this person knew about servant-leadership, discuss their views compared to the readings and posts, after training with Ike and then talking with him for a couple of hours on this and other related topics as well as interacting with him related to the year-long immersion program I am participating with, I have found myself moved in a way I did not expect. As a result, following the outlined structure did not seem to fit the connection I am feeling to the values and aspirations of both servant-leadership and nonviolent communication. As such, I am adapting my paper concept to discuss servant-leadership through sharing my observations and experiences with Ike as representative of those who are actively integrating the philosophies of NVC into their lives.

A Leader Not Like You Might Expect

By Western standards, Ike fits what people stereotypically think of in physical terms as a leader; he is white, tall, good-looking, and has a strong presence. His biography would support this generalization. Based in San Francisco, Ike was a trial lawyer in State and Federal courts for twenty years, co-founded a law firm which handled complex commercial and environmental cases, and has created and/or served on many board of directors. He also co-founded The Yoga Journal and is a long-term practitioner of Aikido, Zen meditation, and yoga. For the last year and a half Ike has lived in Poland where he travels to the United States, Australia, and around Europe to offer trainings in NVC mediation, a program he co-created with John Kinyon. He also mediates disputes and offers conflict coaching to individuals and businesses. In the time since Ike decided to leave the practice of law in 1999, he served on the mediation panel for the United States District Court. Just a few months following the invasion of Afghanistan in 2002, Ike was in Pakistan where he first began to consider returning to the field of mediation utilizing NVC when he and John decided to collaborate. Their year-long immersion program that I am participating in on “Mediating Conflict for Yourself and Others” is in its third formal year.

Since his introduction to NVC in the late 90s, life has not been the same for Ike. As Senge references a story told by Greenleaf, “The real territory of change is always ‘in here’”. (2002, p. 348); and so it was for Ike who was searching for more and found it. Today, based on the below common description, with some clarification, I would describe Ike as a 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. That perhaps is sharply different from one who is leader first . . . The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s 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? (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 27)

In my experience of Ike, he is deeply motivated and inspired by wanting to make a difference on the planet and talks about the concept of “capacity” in doing so. In our discussion, he shared how he was depressed for the first two and a half days of our workshop in his desire to make this program scale-able to share it with more people. He talked about discussing with John how meaningful it would be to have 125 people in the program next year, with five or six simultaneous programs; driven by the need to contribute. Similar to NVC interests, Senge states about servant-leadership, “We wanted something new to be created in our organizations. We ask, what capacities do we need that we do not now have?” (2002, p. 348)

I have not discussed with Ike the shift in the focus of my paper as it was something which came alive in me as I struggled to follow the assignment in a way that not only demonstrated my understanding of the concepts of servant-leadership; but also contributed to my own learning and integration of connecting as well as my need to contribute. Hence, without discussing it with Ike, where I am imagining he might take exception or correct my classification with him as being a servant-leader starts with the identification. A periodic thread throughout our two hour discussion following the workshop was Ken Wilber’s work (which Ike independently brought up) of which I am somewhat familiar and Ike more extensively so. Specifically while discussing the concept of sacrifice, Ike was talking about how when we use an upper right quadrant perspective we tend to label things often that we see in others, such as “sacrifice”, “patience”, “servant-leader” when that may not be the experience for that individual. And in reality, the experience would more likely be what Ike refers to as “internal” and perhaps Wilber would refer to as upper left quadrant; and as such, language may not have the capacity to describe the individual experience. As sacrifice relates to being a servant-leader, Ike was clear with this statement, “I don’t sign up for that part of the checklist. It’s not accurate language for me. Who

gets to choose that word?" This was a thought I had brought up in the postings as it seems disempowering to define a choice as a sacrifice; and Ike felt similarly. We seem to share the thought that everything is a choice, albeit some choices may be more difficult than others. [\[To be clear, Robert Greenleaf didn't view servant-leadership as a sacrifice. To the contrary, he believed that servant-leadership was in the best interests of all, including the servant-leader.\]](#)

Ike may also disagree with being described as a servant-leader in context of the concept of putting others first. Ike talks about NVC as wanting to connect others to his needs; wanting both to get their needs met. But I tend to think that perhaps the difference in potential views may be about semantics as Ike writes the below on his website about his reaction to Fort Worth City Councilman Joel Burns sharing about his own experience in an attempt to inspire those who are considering suicide as a result of their sexual orientation. To me, what Ike says here sounds like someone who is not thinking about being a leader but is about others:

My hope for the work I am doing—training people in NVC mediation, mediating, coaching—is for people to be able to be heard across gulfs of discord and cultural training and bigotry about sexual orientation, religion, culture, class, and so on. I want hope, and I want others to have hope, including the kids that Mr. Burns was speaking to, that we can deal with these issues in a way that leaves everyone clued in to the fact that we are all humans, all share the same basic needs, and all deserve the compassion and love that each of us yearn for. (Lasater, 2010, "Choosing Life", www.wordsthatwork.us, para. 13)

Dictionary.com defines "serve" as: "to render assistance; be of use; help". And while perhaps Ike's actions of service are different than that of Leo in "The Journey to the East", in my experience and observation, he is always striving to be at service of connecting others. I find this quote particularly appropriate as I believe that anyone who has spent time with Ike values and appreciates Ike's contributions acknowledges that he is not offering someone the opportunity to

visit where he has not been as well, “I do not think I . . . could convey any real picture of the war to the most serious reader, if he had not himself experienced the war” (Hesse, 1956, p. 57).

The Characteristics of Servant-Leaders

As detailed in the Appendix, there are ten characteristics identified as representative of servant-leaders: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. (Spears, 2010, Retrieved from learn.gonzaga.edu) NVC shares similar values. This statement from Ike Lasater’s book summarizes many of these characteristics from a NVC perspective:

Since your need for empathy will have been met, you will be more likely to be able to listen to the other person before needing to be heard yourself. Marshall Rosenberg refers to this as “empathy before education.” Stephen Covey points to the same phenomenon in his book the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. His fifth habit is “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” We are more likely to get our needs met when we are sufficiently open to hearing and connecting with the needs of others, when we help them get their need for empathy met before we try to express ourselves. (2010, p. 72)

Following is a brief detail of how each characteristic relates to my experience with NVC in general, Ike, John, and other NVC practitioners:

Listening: Is a core concept of NVC utilizing the concepts of self and silent empathy;

Empathy: “A respectful understanding of what others are experiencing” (Rosenberg, 2003, p. 91);

Healing: As referenced in the Introduction, healing is possible through NVC;

Awareness: Involves recognizing and accepting what you are doing that blocks the connection you are hoping to create between yourself and others. (Lasater, 2010, p. 12)

Lasater says, “from the moment of awareness, we can choose to intervene, to create an alternative to the habitual” (p. 14);

Persuasion: Ike stated he felt this to be very much a part of his internalizing NVC and said, “I can read into it connotations that I don’t particularly like or ways to persuade that I don’t like. I want people to do what I want them to do. I want the world to be the way I want it to be. . . . I want to seduce them with my needs. I want to connect them to my needs. I want them to be doing it for their own reason to meet their own needs; but I want what I want.” (Lasater, personal interview);

Conceptualization: Ike has a very clear vision which is to “train trainers; to train people’s whose first language is some other language. But they are conversant in English so that they can get the training in-depth, in English but who want to be practitioners and trainers. They don’t have to be trainers but I want to get it across in other languages. The way I phrased it the first time but it was too limited a goal was trainers training NVC mediation in the five most spoken languages within five years. And I realized that would be Mandarin, English, Spanish, Hindi, and Arabic.” (Lasater, personal interview);

Foresight: I consider Ike’s recommended daily practice of “Mourning, Celebrating, and Learning” (MCL) as an element of foresight. While it may not specifically address the concept of projecting for the future, one might suggest that if you don’t change how you are approaching things, there is a strong likelihood you will not be experiencing different results or different levels of connection. MLC is taking a few minutes every day to review what you did and to mourn what did not meet your needs, celebrate what did, and learn from both. If I am meeting my needs and that of others, I can likely foresee that we will be connecting in a way which furthers our interactions and enhances our abilities to work together and work through conflict; [\[Good\]](#)

Stewardship: Lasater ends his book “Words that Work” with “I want to be part of creating a world that is characterized by the arising of compassion” (2010, p. 114). Through his commitment to the field in all that he lives and does, including when he has

choices of his to mourn and when he celebrates, he models for those around him how to connect and keep doing so;

Commitment to the growth of people: As is evidenced in the various quotations by Ike, the connection to and growth of people is fundamental to NVC;

Building community: “The underlying intention in using NVC is to connect – for each of us to connect with ourselves and with others. Out of this situation, we can create mutually satisfying outcomes.” (Lasater, 2010, p. 7). With this type of foundation, in my opinion, true community is likely to emerge naturally because we all are already connected.

One element that perhaps is implied as it relates to servant-leadership but is not identified as a key characteristic is the ability to be present which for NVC underlies offering empathy which “requires us to focus full attention on the other person’s message” rather than giving advice or reassurance or to explain our own position or feeling (Rosenberg, 2003, p 92).

Part of the discussion that Ike and I had about the characteristics that included other organizational theories and/or life philosophies and which was woven throughout our interview is that while many seem to have some number (often three, five, or seven) of characteristics, that while “that can be very helpful and useful, it doesn’t help you do it” (Lasater, personal interview). He gave an example of Buddhist literature which says to be compassionate and may even have a definition; but what is missing is how you do it. Using servant-leadership as an example, Ike says:

What you’re talking about, you’re pointing at something that really touches my heart.

How do I do it? Give me some help here. Having a five-point characteristic; maybe it helps me measure and make judgments about other people. That’s not very feeling and satisfying. How do I know in this next moment . . . what is my decision tree; what’s my choice. Give me a map. Help me decide in this next moment how I can act that can be in

alignment with these values I'm talking about when I say I want to be a servant-leader.

(Lasater, personal interview)

And I concur, a point I made early on in the posts. I am guessing that two factors are particularly relevant for me in this. First I recognize I have had access to studying conflict transformation which is based on NVC as it was taught at the University of North Florida; and not everyone has had this opportunity. But another equally relevant point which we will be studying in later modules, which Ike also talked about earlier in our conversation, is the concept of the stages of human development although that wasn't the language he used. In our very organic dynamic discussion, we were talking about the concept of choice in life and Ike brought up the physiological response we trigger in our body by our language. We had been talking about sociocracy which I brought up and Ike has experience with; and how this concept may or may not fit with servant-leadership and NVC as well as the practical issues of integration. And then Ike brought up how ultimately employment is a request and a choice; and went on to briefly talk about the power issues related to employment. And we were talking about food choices. At which point Ike made a point to reference the brain science reading he has been doing and he wanted to be very clear that he recognizes not everyone has access to the same choices.

This led to a brief conversation about Paulo Freire and "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" which is relevant when thinking about how a servant-leader can affect change. I have made the choice to include the whole comment (ignoring length considerations) as I enjoyed how it was expressed:

He said something like, "the oppressor can never liberate him or herself. It's only the oppressed who can liberate themselves and in so doing, offer liberation to the oppression." I struggled with that. I translated oppressor and oppressed. Oppressor is someone who is making choices about the health and well-being of others without the others being included. As soon as I translated it that way, I realized that at every

moment, I am simultaneously the oppressor and the oppressed. At every moment of my life I am making choices about the health and well-being of others, without including them. And I really get as the oppressor, it's often maybe not impossible, he says impossible; it's often that I can't be liberating because at the very least I just don't realize, I don't know. Or I have some kind of belief system that's operating without me really examining it, paying attention to it. So, if I'm going along like that, where am I going to get the information to wake up until someone brings it to my attention? Until the oppressed says, "you know, when you're doing that; that's really not meeting my needs. You're making choices about my health and well-being and I would like to be included, would you be willing to do this?" And that's the moment when I make choices that I liberate myself and I offer liberation to the other. [\[Agreed\]](#)

What I found most relevant to our studies of servant-leadership is the dual role we play, in the way Ike describes it, as oppressed and oppressor. I generally have avoided using those terms in my life as compared to the experiences Freire has had, I do not feel as if I have experienced oppression. However, the way that Ike says it, I can feel the freedom that awaits all of us, in liberating ourselves and others. And to me, that is the essence of what servant-leadership is about. The question for me about others studying and practicing servant-leadership is, how will they know what, who, and when liberation is needed starting with for themselves?

The Intersection and Moving Forward

And at this point of the writing, I take a pause for a deep breath and sigh as this is the last part I am writing (I do not write in a linear fashion) as this brings it all together for me and offers hope. I found it intriguing that Stephen Covey wrote the forward and has stories in two of our books so far, and that Ike also referenced Stephen in his book. And perhaps the intersection is already begun. Covey says, "The interplay between differing opinions can produce those third

alternatives that are better than what either had initially proposed. This is true synergy in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.” (2002, p. 10)

And I find myself wondering that perhaps a “third alternative” may be the integration or at least the introduction of NVC training into the Gonzaga Organizational Leadership program and/or into servant-leadership. What if this is the synergy that brings to fruition what Covey says just a few pages later:

What if we could get model communities in this country, and model institutions, schools, businesses and government units that would become islands of excellence in seas of mediocrity? What if they could become models and then transport what they learn and become mentors to others so that this whole spirit of stewardship, of servant leadership, at working at the empowerment process through structures and systems could take root and flourish? I honestly think we could heal our country. (2002, p. 12)

I know I have a plan to do further bringing NVC into my “cells” which takes practice. But I can feel how the integration of all of my studies and readings and philosophies will help me be as Gandhi says, “the change I seek”. And Ike stresses the importance of “taking the time you need” to practice (Lasater, 2010, p. 46); he says, “. . . it is unlikely that your intention to connect and communicate with others will ever be realized” (p. 46). My participation in the year-long immersion program which involves two more five-day workshops, monthly group calls, weekly empathy sessions, and weekly triad NVC mediation sessions will provide a solid opportunity for me personally to expand my ability to connect in a way that meets my needs, and will enhance my ability to contribute to myself and others. I will also be doing some presentations locally related to my Conflict Transformation program that has the primary objective of encouraging others to have a new relationship with conflict. My hope is that as a result some will pursue more knowledge and training and as others have, I have NVC to offer peace.

As Beazley and Beggs discuss, Robert Greenleaf's original vision included at least one writing, *Teacher as Servant*, on how "servant-leadership might be cultivated . . . and how it could be used to change society in dramatic and lasting ways" (2002, p. 55) . The authors reflect "Practice begins with serving, not because it is more important than leading (it can't be more important because it is part of leadership), but because it is more difficult" (p. 61). But as I have found through NVC, oh so rewarding. And maybe NVC is a piece of moving forward for others.

Conclusion

For me, working on this paper has been a "transformation of the heart"; hence, the title. And as these kind of evolutions or metamorphosis go, I have felt a bit like the character in "The Journey to the East" in which it is written:

Humbled, unspeakably foolish, unspeakably ridiculous, not understanding myself, feeling extremely small, I saw myself standing in the midst of this thing with which I had been allowed to play a little in order to make me realize what the League was and what I was myself. (Hesse, 1956, p. 96).

It is not that I have not read or studied much of what Ike and I discussed, or that I have not been on my own path of spiritual and intellectual learning for the past twenty or so years, and accelerated the past year, but sometimes when the pieces click together, they integrate into my soul, in a way that is profound.

That said, I am confident that the fact this course began at the same time I began a five day workshop as part of a year-long immersion program in "Mediating Conflict for Yourself and Others" was no accident. All of this in context of other work I am being led to and choosing to open my heart to that which God and the universe has to offer. Which led to me to another quote from the same book as above and I query for myself: "I have begun with the easiest tasks which require the smallest amount of faith. Each succeeding task will be increasingly difficult.

Answer me: are you prepared and willing . . . ?” (Hesse, 1956, pp. 108-109). And my response is “Yes”. [\[Great paper, Laurel\]](#)

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[\[Excellent References\]](#)

Appendix

Listening: Leaders have traditionally been valued for their communication and decision-making skills. Although 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 to clarify that will. He or she listens receptively to what is being said and unsaid. Listening also encompasses hearing one's own inner voice. Listening, coupled with periods of reflection, is essential to the growth and well-being 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 co-workers and colleagues and does not reject them as people, even when one may be forced to refuse to accept certain behaviors or performance. The most successful servant-leaders are those who have become skilled empathetic listeners.

Healing: The healing of relationships 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 one's relationship to 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 his essay, *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. Awareness helps one in understanding issues involving ethics, power 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 reliance on persuasion, rather than on 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 finds its roots in the beliefs of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) -- the denominational body to which Robert Greenleaf belonged.

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 leaders, this is a characteristic that requires discipline and practice. The traditional leader is consumed by the need to achieve short-term operational goals. The leader who wishes to also be a servant-leader must stretch his or her thinking to encompass broader-based conceptual thinking. Within organizations, conceptualization is, by its very nature, a key role of boards of trustees or directors. Unfortunately, boards can sometimes become involved in the day-to-day operations--something that should be discouraged--and, thus, 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 executive leaders probably need to develop both perspectives within themselves. Servant-leaders are called to seek a delicate balance between conceptual thinking and a day-to-day operational approach.

Foresight: Closely related to conceptualization, the ability to foresee the likely outcome of a situation is hard to define, but easier to identify. One knows foresight when one experiences 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. Foresight 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 CEO's, 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 and foremost 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 each and every individual within his or her organization. The servant-leader recognizes the tremendous responsibility to do everything in his or her power to nurture the personal and professional growth of employees and colleagues. In practice, this can include (but is not limited to) concrete actions such as making funds available 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 employees to find other positions.

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 or her unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group."

Note: As adapted from Spears, L. C. email/announcement sent October 26, 2010