

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP: WHEREFORE ART THOU LAUREL?

Laurel:

What a wonderful paper you have written here. It is marked by unusual depth of thought, and a powerful sense of self-understanding. Your commentary throughout (and your questions) are profound. I also like the way you write. Your score is 15/15. Thanks for sharing this.

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“Something new is needed here, and I have to provide it. . . . a feeling of inner necessity. . . . ‘This *has* to exist. This *has* to happen. I *have* to do it.’ . . . If I want the world to change, I have to change it.” (Zohar, 2002, pp. 113-114) This feeling has been burning inside of me for a number of years with one expansion; it is not about me changing the world. It is about “we” changing the world in concert with God and in collaboration and community with others. In this paper, I provide a snapshot of myself as a servant-leader in training in context of a being-in-training; or what feels more accurate for me is in context of a being-in-evolution. For me, the focus of being a servant-leader is on developing my inner landscape so that I can better connect with others in a meaningful way. Ruschmann talks about basic values but if I have not integrated them myself, can I truly connect with others at these levels: “building trusting relationships, having concern and belief in each other, fairness, honesty, responsible behavior, and a high standard of business ethics . . . “ (2002, p. 130)

I have made a conscious choice to write in first person as I am comfortable in my ability and willingness to be objective about myself. What I broadly plan to follow is what Horsman discusses in the opening to Module 3, in “embracing the choice to become a servant-leader in training . . . this transition arises from reflection, learning, healing, and affirming ones’ motive to serve and then to lead. . . . what servant attitudes, values, skills and characteristics must I work on to be able to better form my servant approach”. I qualify that I plan to do this as so much in my life is a paradox and is often created as it is created, beyond the vision. So we will explore together. [\[Lovely\]](#)

The From and The Now

As I have read the course materials, I realize that my entire life I have likely been a seeker similar to how Greenleaf defines it, “they were listening for prophetic vision” (1998, p.

36). While I may differ in my exact definition, I recall as a child searching and looking and listening for something that was not “here”. As such, my questions were not welcome at the Catholic grammar school I attended in the 1960s and 1970s. Of late, I have begun to realize that I have always known there was more to just about everything and that included about me. Only recently have the pieces begun to fit together and I understand things at a depth I knew existed, hungered for, but felt was just out of my reach. When I read this line by Greenleaf, it felt right for me, "If you can't find yourself, you're not lost enough" (2002, p. 334). I have begun to enjoy the process of finding not only myself but also finding the joy in life. That said, while I have been enjoying the readings in the course and find I could write a short book of the most provocative and compelling quotations I resonate with, the course has turned me upside down in terms of challenging my commitment to my own spiritual, emotional, and developmental growth. I have experienced an uncharacteristic resistance to posting and writing as I can feel the more I verbalize and articulate my inner shifts, the more I transform and transcend; and that edge of the precipice can feel inviting yet quite scary at times. I have just started reading Parker Palmer’s “The Promise of Paradox” and I suspect what is going on for me is well described by, “. . . running away from a true calling may be the surest way to run toward it, even though you may arrive soaked and smelly” (2008, p. xxxiv). Later what Parker says resonates more and perhaps touches the core of my fear even more:

Social action requires power, but whenever we humans come close to power, trouble follows. We think we want power as a means to other ends, but holding power tends to become an end in itself. We think we want power to work for the common good but are tempted to use it for purposes of self-promotion and self-enhancement (p. 21).

There is also the fear of achieving what we desire or need. And thus, the tears start, yet again, if I allow them. Are they tears of fear, tears of fulfillment, or perhaps both and more.

Right around September 11, 2001, I had begun to awaken from what I now identify as a time of compliance in my life. Showkeir's discussion on compliance is compelling to me as I have been known most of my life as someone who does not comply but I had done so, internally: "Meaning, purpose, and freedom ensue from struggle, risk, and engagement; compliance cuts us away from these. . . . Servant-leadership is much more than putting a compassionate face on compliance" (2002, p. 158). However, rebellion to compliance often does not involve life-affirming or connected conversations and I felt empty of any skills to connect. I needed a wake-up call. The more active part of my path started in 2003, the year my father died, and a series of intuitions that I heard, listened to, and acted on led me to be at my parent's home when my dad fell, and died ten days later. And thus started the time of what Thompson refers to as "following the string" in your life (2000, p. xiv). A couple of years later, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit and I became very active with Louisiana for a year and a half and overall in the animal welfare field which led to my co-developing a disaster response program and training and managing a team of volunteers, many professionals in their own fields. I had not been so directly involved with a corporation since I left the advertising agency in 1990 after becoming ill, and found the experience of interacting with the politics and personalities exhausting after a while especially in dealing with the unwarranted personal character attacks in spring 2009. While it may have been easy to point the finger at many things outside of myself, through spiritual work I was engaged with, it became obvious that the change needed to begin with me. It was then that I began to acknowledge my innate leadership role on the planet. Even up until the time I started this program in March of this year, I was more of a reluctant leader. And then the pieces started to come together and as I began to actively choose to lead, I realized I had work to pursue. When I read this quote on a friend's website, I realized that I wanted to become a conscious creator:

At each moment you choose the intentions that will shape your experiences and those things upon which you will focus your attention. If you choose unconsciously, you evolve unconsciously. If you choose consciously, you evolve consciously.

Where your attention goes, you go. Every action, thought and feeling is motivated by an intention, and that intention is a cause that exists as one with effect. (Thoughts from “Seat of the Soul” by Gary Zukav) [\[Superb\]](#)

Greenleaf says, "I do not believe that there has ever been in this world, certainly there is not now, a promise of outward peace. . . . the only true inward serenity is inward. Serenity is the window through which one looks out on the world of affairs. It is how one feels inside as he engages, with spirit, in the turmoil and strife of the world of affairs. . . . I prefer to view the inward world as real, and the external world as contrived and transient". (1998, p. 107). As I have commented in posts, I believe that what we can do is change how we feel inside which will impact others and Ruschmann concurs: “. . . though we can’t change everyone around us, we can change ourselves, and make a difference” (Blanchard as quoted by Ruschmann, 2002, p. 133). And I appreciate the guiding vision Greenleaf offers, "Become the full stature of the caring, serving person you have the potential to become and all will come clear to you on such matters" (1998, p. 157) as this is where I am now. It feels like a good compass to me.

The Ten Characteristics as a Guideline

I realize that the ten characteristics of servant-leadership (see Appendix) are not definitive but I am finding them useful as a guideline as they provide a benchmark for a quasi-evaluative assessment of ones’ evolution. Provided herein is a brief overview of my thoughts on each and/or a summary self-assessment:

Listening: From my perspective, this is foundational to all other characteristics; and has been one of my most challenging skills to learn as in my family-of-origin, silence in the

household could mean emotional turmoil. Hence, I learned at a young age to just keep talking, keep filling the silence. My Nonviolent Communication (NVC) training and practice is helping me learn active learning skills and this is consistent with what I am learning:

An even grander sense of listening, suggested by Basil Pennington, is that we listen with our total being. . . . our inner faculties listen for feelings, emotions, memories, insights, ideas and concepts. Our whole being can be focused on perceptive listening. . . . when each of us becomes aware of and accepts that we are a certain listening; that is a starting point for becoming aware of greater and perhaps truer perceptions. (Horsman, "Listening", 2010, p. 3)

I was also intrigued by Horsman's recounting of Zweifel's discussion on the eight types of listening and to see listening delineated into distinct levels has broadened my understanding even further. I now have a focus to move beyond the four lower levels and to work on developing my ability to empathize and what Zweifel refers to as "listening to listening" (Horsman, "Listening", 2010, pp. 5-6); [\[Wonderful insights here\]](#)

Empathy: Until I began to study NVC, like many others, I equated empathy with sympathy, fixing, diversion, etc. I have begun to learn and am practicing skills to learn empathy. Typing this, I feel sad that I have not had access to this skill including for my own benefit;

Healing: Through learning to listen to myself and my inner guidance as well as listening to others combined with having empathy for myself and others as well as actively working on forgiveness for myself, I am learning to have joy and lightness in my life; surely a sign of spiritual healing;

Awareness: Being aware has always been one of my fortes; what has been more challenging is not feeling overwhelmed by the level of awareness I have and not always sharing what I hear or see. What is intriguing as I am typing this is that I think part of what has been going on with me the past couple of weeks is that my level of awareness is expanding even further, and it was already quite developed;

Persuasion: As may be evident from my posts and previous writings, I am fascinated by this characteristic and am beginning to reframe it for myself as I have had such negative connotations related to the word. As defined for servant-leadership, it seems to me that part of persuasion includes allowing others to take responsibility for their own decisions as this will facilitate consensus. I like how Showkeir describes this: "Inviting others to join and engaging conversations about their choice explicitly honors that with which only they can deal -- their choice and their free will" (2002, p. 164). Separately, I am intrigued by what Greenleaf says, "Persuasion, when exercised by a leader, is not passive. It is dynamic sustained, and challenging and it may repel some who might be followers of a less insistent leader" (1998, p. 160). I have wondered if this might be because persuasive leaders evoke others to higher levels of responsibility and development, and that can make people uncomfortable; [I think so. And, while I think that I understand the roots of your concern about the word, "persuasion," I think you also understand both the Quaker context from which this word was chosen; and also, that Greenleaf was contrasting persuasion to coercion and manipulation (in SERVANT LEADERSHIP). For Greenleaf, true persuasion is a choice that is ours to make freely. Persuasion does not really exist unless you have genuinely been persuaded of something. Without the freedom of choice, it isn't persuasion, but something else (manipulation or coercion). Also, persuasion is grounded in the possibility of either party being persuaded].

Conceptualization: This is one of my passions in life and I literally cannot turn off the visions I feel, see, and hear. My challenge has been expressing the vision in a fashion which inspires people and they feel that the vision is reachable;

Foresight: I think it would be easy to confuse trouble-shooting with foresight; and I am a trouble-shooter by trade so I am learning the differences. That said, the more I begin to understand the level of my inner guidance, I believe that perhaps my trouble-shooting reputation is facilitated by my previously undefined skill in foresight. Regardless, this is an area I need further extensive development;

Stewardship: My entire life I have been overly responsible, inappropriately taking responsibility for others and their actions. I am only now identifying how stewardship feels to me, different from enabling. I am envisioning that stewardship will look like what some refer to as “holding the space” or “holding the vision”;

Commitment to the growth of people: I believe my entire life I have been committed to the growth of people but did not have the skills to connect in ways which supported them. Then, I found when I began and as I continue to not enable people and allowed them to take responsibility for their own choices, problems often escalated in our relationship due to the changing dynamics. From other spiritual work I have been engaging as well as directly from the reading in this course, I feel that I have understanding, a growing awareness, and specific skills to authentically achieve this. I really enjoyed this quote which I feel is relevant to helping others grow, "Servant-leadership is transformative because it reorders the manner in which people view themselves in relation to the world." (Horsman, “Journey”, 2010, p. 6). I equate this characteristic to not only doing what I can to help people but also as the parable suggest, “teaching people to fish”; [\[Yes\]](#)

Building community: What has fascinated me is that in spite of my obvious emotional limitations, based on long-standing issues or traits I never learned, I appear to have an innate ability to build communities. I have been told this for years but especially in the animal welfare field as I have been committed and inspired in bringing together various organizations to a common goal. And I really appreciated what McGee-Cooper and Trammell [have](#) to say as it embodies what building community feels like:

Servant-leaders find fulfillment in the deeper joy of lifting others to new levels of possibility, an outcome that goes far beyond what one person could accomplish alone. The magical synergy that results when egos are put aside, vision is shared, and a true learning organization takes root is something that brings incredible joy, satisfaction, and results to the participants and their organizations. (2002, p. 150)

From my perspective and as referenced earlier, a foundational quality is the willingness and separately, the ability, to take responsibility for ones' choices. I enjoy how Horsman quotes Greenleaf's explanation of this, "Everything we do follows the law of cause and effect. When we cause something to happen, there is an effect, usually more than one effect. Some of the consequences of our actions are planned, other consequences come as a surprise." ("Servant-leadership", 2010, p. 13) As part of this, I believe in order to create the ability to choice to accept responsibility for our choices; we must nurture our ability to forgive, starting with ourselves. I think this concept evokes a range of emotions in many but when I read Horsman's description, it seems do-able and inviting, "it involves nurturing self healing and self love that comes with lightening the burden of guilt and shame" (Horsman, "Servant-leadership", 2010, p. 14). For me, another core characteristic is gratitude which is addressed in "Focus on Leadership": "More people than might be imagined have to learn how to be served with gratitude and joy rather than with embarrassment or resentment. Those who cannot accept

cannot truly give; those who cannot be served by others cannot truly serve others" (Beazley and Beggs, 2002, p. 58). Feeling gratitude in my body and in my soul makes everything seem worthwhile and soothes any angst I may feel.

Integrating Level of Development

However immodest this may sound, I live most of my life at the Strategist stage of development as Torbert and Fisher (as quoted by Thompson, 2000, pp. 129-132) references it, or as a stage 5 as Kohlberg references it (as quoted by Thompson, 2000, p. 121), and I am in the early stages of Phase IV as Hall defines it (as quoted by Horsman, "Human Development", 2010, p. 6-8). I think in some ways, this is why I connected to "The Journey to the East" so much as it seems that this line defines a higher stage of development, "It seemed that, in time, all the substance from one image would flow into the other and only one would remain: Leo. He must grow, I must disappear." (Hesse, 1956, p. 118) What is so intriguing about this line is that it is filled with subtleties, which will only be heard by those at various levels of development. [\[What a powerful insight, Laurel\]](#)

I am newer in my awareness of the evolution of my developmental progress; and, akin to Wilber, words just do not do this topic justice. As it relates to each theory, the sections I relate to the most are as follows. As it relates to Kohlberg's theory: "Inherent in this stage is the possibility of going beyond a duty-oriented mentality . . . the commitment to generate a meaningful life for oneself through self-determination, self-actualization, and self-definition" (Thompson, 2000, p. 121). As it relates to Torbert & Fisher's theory, I resonate with all of it but particularly enjoy these elements, "It is the Strategist who has far greater capacity for ambiguity and stress, a greater desire for collaborative action and empowerment, and a greater facility for seeing multiple perspectives and applying multiple logics. . . . the Strategist's center is located in something far more immutable than our human groups or our own egos . . ."

(Thompson, 2000, p. 132). And this description of Phase IV from Hall is exactly how I have felt for some time, “the world gets bigger both within and without. Without it becomes global and galactic and within it becomes infinite. The interdependent ‘we’ responds to the common call to work for global harmony, to build and renew the face of the earth” (Horsman, “Human Development”, 2010, p. 6).

I have consciously mostly avoided discussing personal stages of development as most people will not relate at the same level, and I wanted to keep the lines of communication open as much as possible. I am so new at this stage, or perhaps new to my awareness of being at this stage, that I am easily bouncing between various stages depending on factors such as triggers, health, etc. The challenge I am encountering in most of my classes is that I want to further my own education and learning as well as participate in facilitating others; and as such, part of my training related to my evolving level of development is finding that balance of speaking in the language which comes most comfortably to me while also being able to connect with others. I appreciate the safe environment you have provided that I feel comfortable sharing this openly.

[\[Thank you for sharing that.\]](#)

The Where-Now or Rather Where-Next: Connection

I want to make a difference in the world, and it is difficult at times to not want to do it all, now especially when you believe it is possible to make a substantial change. I concur wholeheartedly and have found myself as Zohar describes, “She had . . . a passion to celebrate the unity of existence and the true reality that lies behind the human form.” (2002, p. 115) My heart just sings at the possibilities of this viewpoint. Separately, I find myself wondering “how”. As I continued through our readings, I became disillusioned and sad at times wondering what it is going to take for people to open up enough to help facilitate a much-needed change. I read what Greenleaf hoped and envisioned for the future and predicted if changes weren’t made. And it

seems like while progress has clearly been made, I am guessing it has not been to the level he might have hoped for. And then I wonder what I, a sole being, can achieve.

This leads to an expanded view I have of something Bennis says, “Leaders ask the *what* and *why* questions, not the *how* questions”. (2002, p.104) It seems this statement leaves much room for misinterpretation as Greenleaf also talks about the “how” and says, “he proceeds to offer a few thoughts about how what he is talking about can happen” (Vaill, 1998, p. xii).

Because I develop programs as a profession, my fascination and frustration is where and how to start. Since I first started studying Conflict Transformation, I have had the same thought Thompson does, “Our work and the institutions in which it is performed are simply too central to our lives and values for deep-seated cultural change to evolve without them” (2000, p. 109).

Factor in that much of what is suggested is that as servant-leaders, we are creating the vision that is being called for. Who is doing the calling in today’s day and age? Perhaps that is why it is so important to hone hearing our own intuition, so we can follow the inner guidance and hear the souls of other individuals calling for a community of change. I question where is Gonzaga in this development process? Yes, they have a Servant-Leadership program; but which of the leaders there have been trained in it. Or are they too entrenched in the politics of lower development? Where does NVC fit in; or rather, how can we integrate NVC training into existing programs as I believe it offers a tangible “how” in a constructive, big picture sense.

For me, it starts with connecting in an interdependent way. Influential to much of my thinking and feeling on the topic of connectedness comes from The Dalai Lama who talks about how we are all connected, and what we do to one is done to all. He says, “The world will change when each individual makes the attempt to counter their negative thoughts and emotions and when we practice compassion for its inhabitants irrespective of whether or not we have direct relationships with them” (1999, p. 180).

Horsman talks about one major key to connection:

In terms of quantum thinking, you and I exist only in relation to each other. If relationship is the source of our existence, and if relationships are sustained and deepened through communication, the communication is the medium for our existence. It is through communication between you and your colleagues that they cease to be objects and that you influence, shape and mold each other. (2010, p.5)

And Zohar helps me see that the possibility does exist, “. . . servant-leadership involves practicing the essence of quantum thinking. Servant-leaders . . . change the system, invent the new paradigm, clear a space where something new can be. They accomplish this not just from ‘doing’, but, more fundamentally, from ‘being’.” (2002, p. 112) [\[Good thoughts here.\]](#)

Conclusion

What gives me hope is this classic saying by Margaret Mead, “Never doubt the power of a small group of committed individuals to change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has” (as quoted by McGee-Cooper & Trammell, 2002, p. 150). More often than not, I believe that anything is possible. Occasionally I despair that change is really possible but I see it around me all the time, in small and large ways.

For me, the goal is to keep following my inner guidance, which has included in addition to my personal spiritual expansion pursuing studies in Conflict Transformation, Nonviolent Communication, the Master of Art in Organizational Leadership at Gonzaga, and the Servant Leadership program. In terms of this program, I like this short simple summary as it provides a goal which seems achievable but which also leaves room for exponential expansion, “The focus of servant-leadership is on sharing information, building a common vision, self-management, high levels of interdependence, learning from mistakes, encouraging creative input from every

team member, and questioning present assumptions and mental models.” (McGee-Cooper and Trammel, 2002, p. 141)

What I would like to live for and embody as a living being, as an active participant in society and life is this, “The servant-leader serves from a base of love”. (Zohar, 2002, p. 120)
Only time will tell if I can continue to open my heart and let it stay open in order to truly connect.

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[\[Wonderful Reference list\]](#)

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