

Leadership Series: Take the Lead

The Servant Leader

What is a servant leader?

A servant leader is one whose management style that prioritizes the team's growth and well-being over the organization' of the leader's own ambitions. The servant leader focuses on coaching and developing others, not just on the goals and ambitions of the organization.

Servant leaders exhibit characteristics that are expressed as leadership skills and practices. These include the following:

- Listening – Using active listening skills, not interrupting, maintaining appropriate eye contact in a way that make people feel that they are both heard and valued.
- Empathy – The ability to not only “walk in another’s shoes,” but to see their world and experience from their own perspective, identifying and resonating their emotions back to them in conversation.
- Healing – A critically important skill right now, this is helping a person feel validated and worthwhile by means of empathy, listening, and caring appropriately for their needs.
- Self-awareness – The ability to look honestly and objectively at one’s own strengths and weaknesses, perpetuating one’s own personal and professional development, and modeling this for the team.
- Persuasion – Persuasion – This is a critical pathway into collaboration, for it allows the servant leader to lead through influence and by empowering others as opposed to leading by power.
- Commitment to growth – This includes investing in the people around you in terms of time, energy, and resources, while also improving one’s skills as well.
- Conceptualization – Knowing where you are going day-by-day as a leader, a team, and an organization, and to see various parts and steps that make up the whole.
- Foresight – Taking one’s knowledge of the past and applying it to the future of the team and the enterprise, and including the lessons learned from previous efforts.
- Stewardship – The stewardship of one’s leadership includes leading by example, not by instruction, and by not asking people to do what you are not willing to do yourself.
- Building community – Building trust in one’s relationships with and between colleagues, including using smaller tasks to build trust and deepen relationships.

Tips for strengthening servant leadership today:

- Start your day with a short meditation time focused on your leadership skills and on one or more of the skills above.
- Be present – in your leadership and your relationships within the enterprise; pay attention to others, to non-verbals, mood, and tone in interactions with the team.
- Make it safe to give honest feedback to you on your goals as well as your leadership.
- Make it universal – apply servant leadership skills in your family, as a volunteer, even in friendships.