



Ignite! Newsletter –May 2007

## Great Leadership Begins with a Serving Heart

At The Ken Blanchard Companies® much of our work has focused on leadership behavior and how to improve leadership style and methods. In recent years we have added to this model by looking at leadership character and intention. Why are you leading--is it to serve or to be served? Answering this question in a truthful way is very important. We believe that if leaders don't have the heart right, they simply won't ever get leadership right.

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### The Two Parts of Leadership

Robert Greenleaf first coined the term "servant leadership" in 1970 and published widely on the concept for the next 20 years. Yet when people hear the phrase "servant leadership," they are often confused. They immediately conjure up thoughts of the inmates running the prison, or trying to please everyone. Others think servant leadership is only for church leaders.

The problem is these people don't understand that leadership has two parts: vision and implementation. Because of this, they think you can't lead and serve at the same time. Nothing could be further from the truth.



## Setting the Vision versus Implementing the Plan

The first part of leadership--setting the vision--is where a leader defines the direction and communicates what the organization stands for and wants to accomplish.

Once people are clear on where they are going, the leader's role shifts to a service mindset for the task of implementation--the second aspect of leadership. How do you make the dream happen? This is where the servant aspect of servant leadership comes into play.

In his book Good to Great, Jim Collins contends that true leadership--the essence of what people long for and want desperately to follow--implies a certain humility that is appropriate and elicits the best response from people. He found two characteristics that describe great leaders: will and humility. Will is the determination to follow through on a vision/mission/goal. Humility is the capacity to realize that leadership is not about the leader; it's about the people and what they need.

According to Collins, when things are going well for typical self-serving leaders, they look in the mirror, beat their chests, and tell themselves how good they are. When things go wrong, they look out the window and blame everyone else. On the other hand, when things go well for great leaders, they look out the window and give everybody else the credit. When things go wrong, these servant leaders look in the mirror and ask questions such as "What could I have done differently that would have allowed these people to be as great as they could be?"

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### Serving or Self-Serving?

When we talk about servant leadership and ask people whether they are a servant leader or a self-serving leader, no one will admit they're a self-serving leader. Yet we observe self-serving leadership all the time. What is the difference?

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Too many people think that who they are is their position and the power it gives them. Yet that's not true. Where does your power come from? It's not from your position; it's from the people whose lives you touch. You finally become a true leader when you realize that life is about what you give rather than what you get. The shift from self-serving leadership to leadership that serves others is motivated by a change in heart.

Servant leaders realize that leadership is not about them. It's about what and who they are serving. Effective servant leaders recognize that their jobs are to create and maintain cultures that turn on employees so they can turn on customers.

Today's leaders need to be highly skilled in both setting overall corporate vision and serving in the role of coach and supporter for their people in helping them to get their jobs done. These leaders do that by looking down the traditional hierarchy and saying, "What can I do for you?" rather than having their people looking up the hierarchy and saying, "What can we do for you?" They constantly try to find out what their people need to be successful. Rather than wanting people to please their bosses, servant leaders want to make a difference in the lives of their people and, in the process, impact the organization.