



Ten Tips for Cultivating a Servant Leadership Culture

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Servant leadership turns the traditional leadership pyramid upside down, placing leaders at the bottom to serve the employees above them. It is putting the success of those you lead above your personal interests, serving not self-serving.

The concept of servant leadership is easy to understand. What some find difficult is translating the idea of servant leadership into behaviors. Here are ten tips that can help you become a better servant leader and cultivate a servant leadership culture.

Check your Motive Ensure every decision is serving not self-serving. If you implement servant leadership because you want better results for your benefit, you will not get the results you want. Those you lead will see through your façade. You may say the right things, but eventually your actions will betray you. If you implement servant leadership because you truly care about those you lead and you want better results for them, you will get exponentially better results. “Servant leaders do many of the same things other leaders do...the big difference is their orientation and their motivation...They possess an others-first mindset” (Mark Miller, *The Heart of Leadership*).

Truly Care John Harbaugh, head coach for the Baltimore Ravens said, “If you really want people to feel that you care about them, the best way to do that is to actually care about them.” Learn about them. Know the names of their spouses/significant others and children. Be interested in what is happening in their lives outside of work. Ask about those things. Be more than their supervisor; be their friend.

Ditch the Open Door Policy Do you have an open door policy? Then walk out that door and have a conversation! Servant leaders do not wait for people to come to them. Every day they go to those they serve and ask three questions: 1) How are you? 2) What are the most important things you need to accomplish today? 3) How can I help you?

Remember, It's "Both/And" Servant leaders do not sacrifice results for relationships or relationships for results. Ken Blanchard is fond of saying, "Servant leadership is both/and—both results *and* relationships." Servant leaders get results *for* the people, not *from* them. "Ironically, when your focus is on what you want *for* people, the result will be what you want *from* people" (The Ken Blanchard Companies).

Create Decisive Organization Values The organizations' values should be decisive, not just desired. Decisive values are used as the decision tree for every decision by every employee. They empower employees to make independent decisions and help them feel confident they are making the right decisions for the right reasons.

Decisive values also determine who is hired and fired. Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos, said, "We believe that it's really important to come up with core values that you can commit to. And by commit, we mean that you're willing to hire and fire based on them. If you're willing to do that, then you're well on your way to building a company culture that is in line with the brand you want to build."

Hire for Culture When filling open positions, consider the candidates' character before considering their competencies. Evaluate their alignment with your values and servant leadership culture before considering their skills and experience. Ron Mittelstaedt, CEO of Waste Connections, said, "You can train skills; you can't train character."

Consistent, Persistent Messaging You will need more than a few servant leadership classes and some pretty posters for servant leadership to permeate your organization's culture. Those you serve should hear you talk about people and servant leadership more than you talk about productivity, profitability, and processes. Mittelstaedt has frequently said, "We talk about people 80% of the time and the business 20% of the time."

Pull the Weeds If the most productive manager in your organization is a self-serving leader, help her become a servant leader. If she cannot or will not, let her go. Keeping her will send the message that servant leadership is secondary to productivity and profitability and it will choke your culture.

Provide Servant Leadership Training Every leader should be trained and re-trained on servant leadership. It is a learned skill that is developed over a lifetime. Continuous training, coaching, and mentoring are necessary for one to become a servant leader.

Your example will be the best training you can provide. People will look to you to understand what servant leadership is. What you do and say will teach them more about servant leadership than any book or class.

Provide a Servant Leadership "Game Plan" Give your leaders a list of tasks they can do each day that will help them become better servant leaders. Waste Connections' Servant Leader Game Plan (below) is one example.

Here are some “plays” you can run each day to be a better servant leader.	SERVANT LEADER “GAME PLAN”				
	Daily Play	Daily Play	Daily Play	Daily Play	Daily Play
Manage by walking around (MBWA) two times each day. Your objective is to have meaningful conversations.	Provide feedback: I liked how you _____. Next time you might try _____.		Discuss the values and their relevance to what’s happening in the moment.	Get to know them and their family by asking questions and listening. Share a little about yourself so they get to know you.	Catch ‘em doing something nearly right and provide praise or a coaching tip to make them even better.
Post the company’s vision, purpose, and values statement at your site.	Post on the office wall.	Post in the truck.	Post in the break room.	Post in the bathroom.	Hand out a copy with paychecks.
Hold employee meetings to explain accountability to the company’s vision, purpose and values statement.	Discuss the values at EVERY meeting.	Post the manager “To Do” list. Ask employees add to the list. Report back what you did. “You said it. We did it.”	Share examples of what it would look like to demonstrate the values.	Share why each value is important to the business, our customers, our employees, and the company.	Recognize employees demonstrating the values.
Get to know your people and what matters to them.	Have a “Take-10 Check In” coffee talk with each direct report once a month. Ask: “What’s the most important thing we can chat about?”	Ask: “What can I do for you?” Ask: “What are you working on and how can I help?”	Ask: “What’d you do for fun this weekend?” Listen and let it be their moment...	Ask: “Tell me a little about what else you’d like to be doing around here and how I can help.”	Ask: “How is your family doing?” Put spouse and kids name, birthdates, in your calendar.
Catch your people doing something right!	Say, “I like it when you _____.”	Have on hand and distribute \$5 gift cards when you see them doing it right.	Write a personal note explaining why you appreciate what they did.	Don’t assume that “they should know what is right.” Tell ‘em! Show ‘em! Watch ‘em!	Catch ‘em catching others doing something right! Now, that’s team work!
Hold employee meetings – explaining accountability to District Vision, Purpose and Values Statement	Share examples of how following the VPV helps the business results.	Share example s of how NOT following the VPV hurts the business.	Ask; “If you were king for a day, what would you change around here to better connect with our VPV and why?”	Set standards/vision around the values. i.e. Service = “This is the year of no zeros on Tooty service calls.”	Establish and follow-up with accountability systems – complaint log, district scorecards, checklists, etc.
Read <i>Your Leadership Legacy</i> by Martha Brooks and share what you learned.	Dare to Drive the Dream Commit to your vision! Keep talking about it.	Dare to be a Person, not a Position. Demonstrate respect for everyone around you.	Dare to Connect with People Ask questions to explore what others are thinking.	Read <i>The Secret</i> by Ken Blanchard and Mark Miller S.E.R.V.E	Read <i>Leading at a Higher Level</i> by Ken Blanchard. Be flexible in your management style.
Leave time in every meeting to give employees a chance to give you their “to do” list.	Ask, “What can we do to make it better?” Ask, “What can I do to help you accomplish your goals?”	Report back. Here’s what we were able to do after your suggestion to _____ last week.	Report back. Here’s why we were NOT able to do that was suggested last week.	Ask, “What are you working on this week that will make you and our District better?”	Ask, “What did you accomplish last week?” and “What do you need my help with this week?”
Incorporate S.A.F.E. 3-Minute coaching as part of your everyday leadership style. Remember to say Thank You!	After observing say: I just saw you _____. That was great because _____. I appreciate knowing that I can count on you to keep it up.	After observing, Ask then Tell. I just saw you _____. Why did you do it that way? (listen) Here’s what I’d like to see from you next time...	Ask; What ideas do you have to possibly solve this problem? or What else can we try? or Who should we run this by for feedback?	Say, “Here’s a tip to make it easier next time. You might try_____.”	Say, “You might what to check in with Chris on that. I’ve seen excellent results in how he approaches the situation.”