

10TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION, REVISED AND UPDATED

THE SERVING LEADER

Five Powerful Actions
to Transform Your Team,
Business, and Community

KENNETH R. JENNINGS

JOHN STAHL-WERT

Foreword by KEN BLANCHARD
Servant Leadership Online Training Summit March 24 - April 2, 2020

More Praise for *The Serving Leader*

“Our organization’s mission centers on serving patients and partners. The lessons shared in *The Serving Leader* showed our executive team the importance of leading by serving our employees. This was a new orientation for many of us, and it has transformed both how we work together as a leadership team and how we lead our individual teams. This approach has made us better leaders and I believe better people.”

—**Bill Valle, President, Fresenius Medical Services**

“*The Serving Leader* is a great book. I encourage you to not only read and pay attention to this book but also embrace it, as it will change the way you think about business. The principles outlined in this book will make you succeed as a leader. Through upending the corporate pyramid, true leaders become servants who are willing to serve employees. Serving Leaders get obstacles out of the way, help employees do their jobs, help meet employees’ needs, and hold people accountable.”

—**Billy Ainsworth, President and CEO, Progress Rail Services Corporation, a Caterpillar Company**

“We recognize a tradition of leadership at Johns Hopkins from great physicians like Sir William Osler, who said, ‘We are here to add what we can to life, not to get what we can from it.’ The principles of Serving Leadership are strong reflections of the link between our tradition and future vision. The core tenets of shared leadership, asset-based thinking, and leveraging of strengths are integral to the success of departmental strategic planning.”

—**Colleen Koch, MD, MS, MBA, Clinical Director, Anesthesiology and Critical Care Medicine, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine**

“My leadership practice was greatly strengthened by the teaching I found in *The Serving Leader*. I have applied its lessons at the bank as well as in the other areas of my life. I highly recommend this book!”

—**David S. H. Wong, Chairman, Halftime Institute, Hong Kong, and former Deputy Group CEO, Bank of China**

“*The Serving Leader* provides a new road map for leaders looking to achieve outstanding results. The principles are applicable to any organization and can transform the way people relate to one another in service to the greater goal.”

—**Richard Lovering, Vice President of Human Resources and Organizational Development, AtlantiCare**

"The Serving Leader has become must reading for leaders across our region. Many business leaders, as well as nonprofit and elected leaders, are using this book to give us a common language and discipline across Greater Rochester as we work together to strengthen the culture and economy of our region."

—Mark Peterson, President and CEO, Greater Rochester Enterprise

"The principles of The Serving Leader will resonate with everyone who desires a better outcome: a stronger and more engaged team, a sense of direction and purpose, and the ability to leverage strengths to achieve a greater goal. This book will challenge you to rethink how you serve your family, your team, and your community."

—Roseann Kobialka, RN, MBA, Corporate Director of Organizational Development, AtlantiCare

"Having engaged personally and deeply in a study cohort of The Serving Leader, the experience was nothing short of transformational for my life and leadership. I recommend this book and the opportunity to thoughtfully participate in a cohort to all the great leaders in my circle."

—Chris Lowery, Chancellor, Columbus/Southeast Region, Ivy Tech Community College

"The powerful yet simple concepts of The Serving Leader create not only a common language but also impactful team and productivity results. I have been delighted to share the power of *The Serving Leader's* principles with my teams and executive partners."

—Craig Stambaugh, Vice President, Human Resources, Health Services Division and Talent Acquisition, UPMC

"In an ever-changing world, the need for great leadership is consistent. Great leadership is the difference between success and failure in all business endeavors including significant changes. The Serving Leader is a foundational text to help leaders who want to be great leaders and create a workplace and a community where people flourish. It provides clear guidance on the steps to be a Serving Leader and make a difference. This is all about leadership that matters."

—Donna Brighton, CEO, Brighton Leadership Group, and President of the Board, Association of Change Management Professionals

“The leadership development course ‘The Serving Leader’ led to fundamental changes in how our executive team showed up and engaged with one another. It also had a profound effect on our entire corporate management team.”

—**Thomas J. Weider, Senior Vice President, Sales and Account Management, Fresenius Medical Care**

“In our company, we have taken *The Serving Leader* in as our central text. It impacts our culture, values, and spirit, for sure. But equally, it impacts our results, growth, reputation, and profitability. We have never found a more powerful leadership model than what has been given to us in this book.”

—**Rick Newton, President and founder, Newton Consulting**

“*The Serving Leader* provides a framework for leading and developing other leaders that works in both the nonprofit and for-profit arenas. From healthcare to financial services to the local church, I have seen *The Serving Leader* uniquely equip leaders to serve their people and their great purpose.”

—**Mike McCormick, Lead Pastor, Calvary Christian Church, Lexington, Kentucky**

“The teaching and the story I encountered in *The Serving Leader* both underscored and strengthened the core commitments I hold as a leader. This book is a blessing to me at work, in the community, at church, and at home!”

—**Kristy Williams Fercho, Senior Vice President, Head of Customer Management (West Region), Fannie Mae**

“This developmental model works. Jennings and Stahl-Wert nail the fundamental necessity that leaders embrace service to others, especially their staff, to achieve their mission and vision. We have seen the Serving Leader approach pay dividends in the development of our staff members. The narrative of *The Serving Leader* beckons the reader with the question, ‘How can I find the same significance in my work that Mike finds through these practices?’ This is a must for HR professionals who want to change the game in their organizations.”

—**Rev. Lee R. Scott, Director of Staff Services, Coalition for Christian Outreach**

"The Serving Leader makes practical and simple the foundational principles of great leadership. At World LEADERS, we are great fans of what Stahl-Wert and Jennings have given the world through this book."

—James Davis, President, World LEADERS Group

"In our work in strategy, we use *The Serving Leader* as a powerful tool to establish the essential leadership foundations required for real progress. Whether leading strategy, execution, or change, Serving Leadership sets the culture that makes enduring progress possible."

—Chris Hafner, Board Chairman, Strategic Planning Society, and member, Diploma and Accredited Programmes Committee, Saïd Business School, University of Oxford

"Both as a great business book and as a very moving human story, *The Serving Leader* captures the heart of what I have given my lifetime in service to at Kodak, at Hillside, and in my daily life with family and friends. This is a powerful book that every leader should read!"

—Augustin (Augie) Melendez, President, Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection, Hillside Family of Agencies

"The ThirdRiver Partners team is grateful to be among those whose lives have been changed on the journey to Serving Leadership. We look forward to this new edition of *The Serving Leader* and to the collaboration this work will inspire."

—Heather Hyde Jennings, cofounder of ThirdRiver Partners, LLC, and coauthor of *The Greater Goal*

THE
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KENNETH R. JENNINGS
JOHN STAHL-WERT



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*This book is dedicated to the colleagues
and clients around the world who
practice the Five Powerful Actions—
the practical, measurable, masterable
behaviors of Serving Leadership—
revealed within this brief story.*

Contents

Foreword by Ken Blanchard ix

Introduction 1

Mike Wilson's Journal

The Fast Track Diverted 7

A New Assignment 17

Action: Upend the Pyramid 27

Action: Raise the Bar 43

Action: Blaze the Trail 59

Mending a Broken Track 77

Action: Build on Strength 89

Action: Run to Great Purpose 103

The Serving Leader 119

Mike Wilson's Updates 127

Resources for Further Reading 155

Acknowledgments 161

About the Authors 163

Foreword

In the foreword I wrote for *The Serving Leader* when the book was first published in 2003, I called it “the most practical guide available to implementing servant leadership in your life and work.” My passion for the book came from the deeply moving story and rock-solid action steps the authors laid out for men and women who wanted to uplift people with their leadership.

So I'm delighted to write the foreword to the second edition of *The Serving Leader*, which has become an international bestseller and changed countless lives around the world. When they wrote this book, Ken Jennings and John Stahl-Wert not only captured the essential leadership practices that are foundational to all extraordinary leaders but also provided a practical pathway for learning and growth that we can follow to improve our day-to-day leadership.

The years that separate the first and second editions of this book have been marked by the burgeoning field of servant leadership. Thankfully, the world is coming to recognize the need for Serving Leaders.

Foreword

What I love about this updated second edition is the way it shows how the authors have continued to learn and grow over these past twelve years. They've travelled the globe in their service to owners, executives, senior leaders, and aspiring up-and-comers. They've crawled down into the organizations of some of the world's greatest companies and have validated their findings many times over. By spending thousands of hours in the presence of exceptional business and organizational leaders, they've enriched their understanding of how great leadership works.

Those who have already read *The Serving Leader* will find in these pages the story they loved so well, along with the bonus of a completely new chapter that brings the story right up to the present.

Those picking up this book for the very first time can look forward to the joy of encountering a touching story filled with rich teaching about the kind of leadership that leaves a lasting impact.

Today's marketplace is hungry for books and guides that can support leaders with practical advice on how to grow their influence, engage their people, drive superior results, and add greater value. What sets John Stahl-Wert and Ken Jennings's book apart is that it shows how to achieve all the above—and at the same time serve the highest good.

KEN BLANCHARD
January 2016



Mike Wilson's Updates

I can't believe how the years have flown by since putting my pen to this journal for the very first time, sitting on that interminable train ride from Boston to Philadelphia, now over a decade back. Over these years, I've seen Serving Leaders put the "Five Powerful Actions" to work around the world. I've learned from so many extraordinary leaders and from the work they do in organizations and communities everywhere. And I've learned that it's not a journey to be taken alone. There's a shared learning experience that is critical to the Serving Leader's journey.

While the data continues to accumulate in support of Serving Leadership, and practitioners of these disciplines are reporting extraordinary results for their enterprises (and people), a general view still prevails in many places that a hard-nosed preoccupation with the numbers is all that's needed. This is why I say that Serving Leadership isn't a journey to be taken alone. The more the practitioners get to connect with each other, compare notes, share learnings,

The Serving Leader

and sharpen practice, the greater their boldness to pour themselves wholeheartedly into this powerful practice of leadership.

And this is, in part, why I've decided to again put pen to paper and add to this journal. I've learned a great deal from the work that was set in motion by this journal. I want to capture that here. But beyond that, Will Turner and Martin Goldschmidt, who both are still deeply involved in my life and in this work, precipitated this little venture back into journaling by asking me for an update. They are, as much as I am, devoted to teaching the principles of Serving Leadership. To my great joy, they lean heavily upon the model that I fleshed out in this journal, and they recently challenged me to draw from the span of this decade to sharpen the lessons that we are devoted to learn and to practice.

As I've taken up this task, interviewing clients from the work we've done and organizing the insights that I've accumulated, it has become clear to me that the lessons from these years fall into two buckets:

- Lessons for personal growth
- Lessons for organizational performance

The lion's share of my notes below focus on the lessons that address organizational performance. I will lay out these lessons by utilizing the framework of the Five Powerful Actions of the Serving Leader, putting each lesson into one or another of the actions. But first, I want to lay out the more personal reflections.

Lessons for Personal Growth

The personal growth lessons that I've learned over these past ten years have, frankly, been the hardest part. That said, I've come to realize that growing up is what all of us struggle to do and that this work is deeply important. I've also come to realize that there is an adult kind of growing up that extends beyond what we usually think of as the "growing-up years" and that this kind of growth never really ends.

We can become super competent at the technical skills required by our professions. But that maturity doesn't translate into an ability to powerfully lead others by influencing, collaborating, and building trust. Practicing the skills that are required for influential leadership is just what the Serving Leader journey is all about.

The amazing leaders I've met have all done their growing up work, and I understand today just how important this is to our leadership. And we need help with this part. In the same way that *The Serving Leader* provides a framework for the leadership growth we must do on the outside, we need a framework that helps us with the inside work that we must do, the growing-up work.

My greatest leadership challenge since finishing *The Serving Leader* was precisely this—how to be as grown up on the inside as I was skilled as a leader on the outside. There was, in short, a very large gap between the inside me and the outside me! What is evident from working with many great leaders is that my own experience in this regard is not unusual. We leaders all struggle to grow up,

The Serving Leader

and the great ones become very intentional about this part of their work.

Repeatedly, I have been called to serve organizational leaders who, like me, mastered the outside behaviors of Serving Leadership but who needed immense help on the inside issues of heart and ego and character and maturity. And so, since I was going through all the pain of growing up myself, I've been making notes about it so I could share what I'm learning with you.

Following are three high-level reflections on the challenges we leaders must face in our growing up work:

- Change always starts with the heart.
- Our response to failure is key.
- Work and life must integrate.

Change Always Starts with the Heart

In teams, organizations, and communities, not much meaningful change really happens unless the hearts of leaders are aimed at serving others. Some leaders arrive at the commitment to be a Serving Leader more easily than others do. Some develop a heart for this work through the great examples in their lives. Others must endure painful experiences before they choose to cultivate a heart of service. That's me, honestly. My personal story of change includes some very tough lessons learned.

In my enthusiasm to start Serving Leader experiments around the country, I rushed past the “heart change”—for

myself and for the leaders around me—and focused just on programs and outcomes and metrics. This was to my regret. Programs unwound and results were ultimately lacking when a heart-based core belief in serving others to make a difference was missing.

To put this differently, tacking on the behaviors of Serving Leadership without growing into greater maturity as an actual, flesh-and-blood Serving Leader is like going to battle in a suit of armor that does not fit. The suit of armor is powerful, but we must learn to fit it, to fill it, and to wear it well.

In every great organization that Will, Martin, and I have served over these years, a grown-up leader was at the helm. And this only makes sense. How is a leader going to give people a great sense of purpose if selfish drive is what lies at the heart of that leader? How does a leader convey strong respect for people if that leader is insecure and preoccupied with getting accolades and affirmation for himself or herself? How does a leader guide workers to make values-based decisions if the leader's own character is up for grabs, moment by moment? We can guide a team or company into deeply purposeful work, guard and protect people as they do challenging tasks, and hold the line on excellence, on quality, on integrity, on safety, and on the promises we make only if we have the courage, patience, and equanimity that is born from true maturity.

Easier said than done, of course. But it must be said. Change always starts with the heart. Our leadership must include a focus on growing our capacity of heart, looking after our own intentions and motivations.

Our Response to Failure Is Key

As my father showed me and I captured in previous journal entries, great leadership is chock-full of paradoxical truths. The greatest Serving Leaders I have seen around the world over these years are living paradoxes. For instance, these leaders focus on hard results but are comfortable exercising the soft power of influence, setting examples, and giving second chances. Another example, which I've come to see as especially important, is that leaders' response to failure is highly predictive of their ultimate success—even more predictive of their success than how they behaved when all seemed well. I've watched again and again as good Serving Leaders respond to failure by digging for greater maturity, by reaffirming their values, by engaging their teams in the challenge of plotting better approaches, and by always keeping the greater goal in view.

The paradox, in brief, is this: failure can lead to break-away success when the leader is grown up enough to tell the truth and to ask for help.

Failure, I've come to realize, recurs again and again in our life. In many ways, our journey is just one trip-up after another. But we can make progress continually, so long as we're quick to name the trip-up and quick to ask for help. It doesn't feel comfortable to lean into our failures this way, but it was the same when we learned to walk or when we learned practically anything else important in life. Every first step we took as an aspiring toddler was a lean into imbalance. Toddle, we did. But no big deal. If we kept

making adjustments, kept getting back up, we could really make some progress.

I have also observed several reverse corollaries to this truth. I'll name just two. Some promising leaders take themselves out of the game at their first face-plant. Either because they are embarrassed by a failure or because they don't realize that even good leaders fail, they bow out. This is a loss! Other up-and-comers just tell lies. It wasn't their fault. They didn't do it. Everything's great. This kind of denial is too common, and these denizens of denial begin a journey of very destructive leadership.

Failure is in the soup. It happens. Failure can be an incredible gift if we name it, learn from it, pull others around us, and embrace the journey we're on. I've never seen a fantastic leader, as a matter of fact, who didn't ever fail fantastically.

Work and Life Must Integrate

Something wonderful happens along the way when leaders commit to serving their teams at work. I heard again and again statements like this: "Serving leadership has been one of the best things ever to happen to my family." Spouses and children have become some of the greatest fans of the work that I've done with leaders. Growth in Serving Leadership strengthens organizational performance *and* strengthens (and also heals) family relationships.

Those who are Serving Leaders at work use the very same practices in their relationships at home. Sometimes with

great emotion, leaders have confided in me that learning to repair broken team relationships at work affected the way they approach broken relationships at home. Serving leaders learn that family relationships can also be transformed. A new favorite saying is “If you can do this at home, you can do it anywhere!”

This is one of the gifts I’ve discovered—that better business performance can be gained right alongside better life performance. We can become better friends, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers—and bosses—simultaneously.

I will return a final time to this subject of personal growth—including my relationship with Anna and with my colleagues Will Turner, Martin Goldschmidt, and the whole rest of the team. But I want to turn my attention first to the lessons for organizational performance.

Lessons for Organizational Performance

Great business leaders understand that it is impossible to compete on the world stage in any sector unless the people who work for you bring the full capacity of their brains, imagination, heart, devotion, honor, integrity, and initiative to the job. What the greatest Serving Leaders have taught me over these years is that the lion’s share of great acts committed inside great businesses day by day are done by ordinary workers who *choose* to give their full best.

What I’m talking about here is generally referred to as “an engaged worker.” In the course of doing their job, engaged workers see something that the boss is not aware of, or they think something that the supervisor never taught them, or

they have a breakthrough in their imagination that is not listed anywhere in their job description—and that thing that they see or think or imagine can become a game changer for the company.

This story is repeated, sector by sector and industry by industry, around the world. I have walked through toy manufacturing plants in China, through manufacturing facilities in Germany, through healthcare software companies in the United States, through large and complex medical systems, through universities and high schools, through fast-food and fast-casual restaurant franchises, and through retirement homes, cleaning companies, manufacturers of rail systems, financial service companies, snack food empires, and award-winning airlines—and I have seen exactly this same phenomenon again and again. What makes a great company great is people who decide by their own free will and without the use of carrots and sticks to give themselves fully to the job.

By way of contrast, many workers do just what they must to get by. They don't show up late, don't leave early, and complete the checklist they've been given. While this is the critical baseline for all work, only companies with workers who exceed these basic requirements win in the marketplace. And what many leaders fail to grasp is that they—the leaders—are responsible for creating the culture and the conditions that cause people to want to offer more. Often, leaders create conditions that teach people that it's not wise to do their best.

I interviewed a night supervisor in a great Serving Leader manufacturing plant who explained this issue to me

The Serving Leader

perfectly. “In my old job,” Brian said, “if I went out of my way to point out a problem or to volunteer to do something that wasn’t in my job description, I always regretted it. I’d get blamed if anything went wrong, or my boss would take the credit if my idea worked out. But here,” he continued, his face enthusiastic, “the CEO and all the managers are focused on doing a great job and on supporting us. They back me up when I express a concern, they show me in all kinds of ways that I’m valued, and they keep all of us focused on what really matters—doing good work and serving our customers.”

Watching great Serving Leader companies has taught me that fully alive human beings are what we need to win. We need workers who have their brains turned on and who have a live, beating heart. Great companies are great because the people who show up at work every day bring their humanity with them and take up their posts thinking and acting as though they themselves are the owners of the company. A manager can’t incentivize that kind of behavior, can’t detail it in job descriptions, can’t buy it, and can’t threaten people into giving it.

Simply, workers who give their full humanity to a job *choose* to do so. They choose to, or they choose not to. The deepest discovery I have made teaching Serving Leadership over these years is that organizational greatness lies in the hands, hearts, and minds of the dozens or hundreds or thousands or tens of thousands of workers who call that company home. We leaders can’t demand that our workers make the choice to bring themselves fully to the job. All we can do—are you sitting down?—is work to deserve them.

We must earn them. Serving leaders win precisely because they do what is required, day after day, to unlock the vast treasury that is the fully engaged and aligned force that our people can be.

Here's how Serving Leaders do it.

Lessons from the Five Powerful Actions

Dad originally charged me with organizing what I observed about Serving Leadership into a framework, a framework that became the Five Powerful Actions. I want to use that framework here to dive deeper into how Serving Leadership unlocks extraordinary organizational performance in businesses and communities around the world.

Run to Great Purpose Since *The Serving Leader* was written, an entire movement has grown up around “finding purpose” and “answering the *why* question,” illustrated in books such as *The Purpose-Driven Life* and *The Greater Goal*. This movement exists for good reason. Human beings are wired for purposefulness. Failing to provide workers with a link between their daily tasks and a great and compelling purpose is tantamount to managerial malpractice.

Part of what I learned is that it is possible for individuals to run to a greater purpose. I've also learned that it is possible for groups, teams, organizations, and even whole communities to run to a greater purpose.

In fact, running to a greater purpose becomes a unifying and aligning mechanism to bring many people together, working together for a greater goal. Nothing matches the

The Serving Leader

power of aligned teammates running as a group, encouraging each other along the way, toward a shared common greater purpose. I've seen it in places from prominent companies to programs helping prisoners.

I've discovered some important additional points about this, however, points that are sometimes missed by the purpose movement:

- A Great Purpose Statement (a company's compelling why, or vision) must tap into the deep requirement human beings have to contribute their lives to the service of others. We were born to make a difference, but a “Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal” (to quote from Jim Collins and Jerry Porras) doesn't automatically tap into the need to serve others. As we rethink our organization's why, it is imperative that we test it, not only in terms of its audaciousness (which I'm in favor of) but in terms of its usefulness to others, to the world, to the care and service of people. Then when we ask our workers to do their very best, the request is compelling because the purpose of their work—serving people—deserves nothing less.
- If we have a Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal that doesn't speak to serving, we must connect it to our shared story of how we will achieve our great purpose. For example, a company may want to double revenue in the next three years in service to its vision of growth. What a fantastic goal that could be! However, on its own it fails the

“compelling purpose” test. Workers won’t jump out of bed each morning with passion and drive unless they are going to a job that is making a difference in the world.

- When a company becomes clear about its Great Purpose Statement, that vision must be translated into every daily work assignment. Stories must be spread of people doing the everyday jobs asked of them and how those tasks brought true good to the world. Leaders need to help workers see the outcome of their work through stories and continuous encouragement. No job is menial to a worker who understands why that job matters!

Leaders who are committed to cultivate an exciting and fully engaged workforce will take the time to effectively answer the purpose question. Our workers look to us to help them understand the great difference they are making in the world.

Upend the Pyramid Human beings carry the knowledge, or in some cases, only the suspicion, that their lives have irreducible value. What I mean by “irreducible” is that their value can’t be explained by just the work they do, the things they make, or the service they offer. Human beings are not valuable because of their doings; they are valuable simply because they are. This is why we are called “human beings” and not “human doings.”

Great leaders understand this, and they devote themselves to valuing their people as people. They also exercise

The Serving Leader

great patience in this work because the workers who come to them have not all had the same experiences of being valued in their past.

Human beings who were treated reasonably well in their childhood carry the knowledge that this concept is true. They know that they are a treasure. They know that the love they were shown as children wasn't earned by them. They are loved just because they are.

Human beings who were *not* treated well in childhood nevertheless still carry the suspicion that they are worthwhile. Even the child who has heard only "You're worthless" can't make peace with that message. This child spends years, if not a lifetime, waging a fierce war against this unacceptable idea. Human beings can no more be taught to placidly accept the idea that they are worthless than a dog can be taught to happily not wag its tail. "Human" and "worthy" coexist as serenely as romance and flowers. "Human" and "worthless" will battle each other to the death.

There's no question that my long battle for a sense of self-worth came right out of my childhood experiences of not knowing if I mattered to my dad as much as his work mattered. Not being sure, I made a mess of many things. Dad figured this out at the end—not just that I mattered but that he needed to show me that I mattered. This is the tricky part for us. I have met leaders who deeply love their workers, but the workers don't know it. And that is just not good enough!

The great Serving Leaders I've worked with over the years are always working on three areas in Upend the Pyramid.

- They take a true interest in their people. Authenticity is hard to fake, so it's necessary for leaders to get real about their care for others. All leaders have a certain number of direct subordinates, and that is the right place to start. Great leaders take active steps to really learn who those people are, who they are as people. They ask them about their lives, their aspirations, their struggles and needs—and then they make sure to really listen! They make room for a true human connection and build on it over time.
- They give their people increasing responsibility and authority (and teach/coach/challenge them to succeed). They grow their people. The way growth ordinarily progresses on the job is through delegation. Great leaders learn to delegate effectively by being thorough, detailed, supportive, and transparent. Yes, they could often do a job faster themselves, compared to the time it takes to show someone else how to do it, but they know that there's not enough of themselves to go around. And besides, they know that the treasure is their people, and they invest time in them!
- They allow (and forgive) mistakes and errors. The great leaders I've served all build careful review processes that reward candor and admission. They make telling the truth the attractive and celebrated option. And they use regular team

The Serving Leader

meetings to talk through mistakes, collaborate on solutions, and affirm those who work for them. By doing this—allowing for mistakes—they make it clear that they are invested in their people's growth; nobody grows when there isn't grace for error.

All the engagement literature says the same thing. Highly engaged workers report being loved and feeling loved at work! But peeling this report back one layer, I've found that engaged workers are those who have leaders who take time to express true interest in them, who take time to effectively delegate new tasks and responsibilities to them, and who take time to help them learn from their mistakes (rather than punishing them and driving them into hiding).

Your people are a treasure. The only appropriate treatment of a treasure is to safeguard it, showcase it, and prize it for its great worth.

One of the women I worked with in a German manufacturing company described the authentic and intentional efforts made by her immediate supervisor as well as the general manager of her division. "At my old company," Shari said, "the managers used programs they had acquired to try to make it feel more human at work. There would be special events, themes of the month, and prizes. But it was all a paint-by-number, 'show your people you care' program that we knew they were getting out of an instruction manual. I think they cared about us enough to care if we were being productive," she continued. "But it was just a gimmick.

"Here," Shari continued, "we know it's real. Yes, they use programs, too, but they do that because they care, not because they want us to think they care. So, it's all great.

"When work cares about you," she added, "you care about work."

Above, I wrote about the personal growth side of leadership. This is just one example of how the personal growth of Serving Leaders is completely intertwined with the organizational performance side of leadership. Leaders must truly care. And the caring must come from the heart.

Raise the Bar Raise the Bar reinforces the structure of servant leadership with steel. I've learned that Serving Leadership is compassionate but not soft. Great Serving Leaders are unrelenting in building a culture of highly aligned values, driving performance and accountability from that culture, and insisting on building excellence by embedding the values of the organization all the way out to the fingertips of the organization.

A few years ago, I addressed a group of high-potential young leaders who were assigned to a fast-track program. They asked me to talk about Serving Leadership, and during the program I led them through a values exercise, which I titled "Do and Be What You Say!" I made the very same point I emphasized above: "The reason that the greatest businesses and organizations on earth are so great is precisely because they are filled with great people intent upon doing great work that day on the job!"

"If you want to shine in your sector," I said, "then pack your team with people who think like owners, serve like

The Serving Leader

soldiers, do what's right at any price, and never whine that something's not in their job description. Great organizations are filled with people who do great things without being told."

A key element in creating such an organization is found in *Raise the Bar*, which is focused on the discipline of leading by values and incorporates three disciplines:

- Identify and define your core values, including the kinds of behaviors that illustrate your values.
- Hire in alignment with the values that you identified and defined.
- Manage and reward your people based on your values.

A great example of a company that has embedded its values all the way out to the fingertips of the organization is a European manufacturer that used *The Serving Leader* to redesign its hiring, management, performance review, and reward processes. I stopped a line worker on the assembly floor during one of my visits and asked him what the company's secret was. "In this company," he told me, "everyone is authorized to do the right thing without needing to check with a manager first." He said it, and I know he believed it. The thing I loved about this was that the CEO had said the exact same thing to me at dinner the night before. Everyone was on the same page!

As I talked about this example with the young leaders in the fast-track program, I said, "Once you declare

your values, you must live them, stand by them, die for them.” And then I asked a question. “When you face a clash between your principles and your profits, why must you, as a leader, stick with your principles?” One of the young women in the group raised her hand. “People won’t do their best for leaders who violate their own principles,” she said.

How can I improve on that answer? Great organizations are great because they’re filled with people who freely choose to do their very best. It’s a maddeningly simple concept yet stunningly hard to execute. We leaders can’t *make* our people do their very best. We don’t have the muscle to pull this off, and we aren’t mind readers. We don’t know what someone’s best is; we only know what we want people to do. Someone’s best is far, far more than what we have the ability to tell her to do. Someone’s best is what he, freely, by his own private choice, decides to do, whether it is asked for, paid for, or even conceived of by the boss.

Do and be what you say! This is the heart of Raise the Bar. If you demonstrate that you don’t mean what you say, you’ll probably still get to keep your employees. They’ll “quit and stay,” swapping out the notion of making an actual difference with the notion of protecting their paycheck. After all, human beings are rational and self-interested; however much you disappoint them, they’ve still got bills to pay.

But on the other hand, show them that you *do* mean what you say and some incredible human beings will start showing up. They will because people want more than a paycheck; they want a calling, a worthwhile day, a story to tell at night about how they work for a company—for a

The Serving Leader

leader—who puts her money where her mouth is! Do and be what you say, and awaken greatness all around you!

Raise the Bar has one additional and vital element. Beyond the high bar of character and integrity standards, you raise a performance standard. The character standard wins your workers' trust, without which no one strives for excellence. And the performance standard wins your workers' commitment to do their utmost.

I often say to the leaders I serve that I've got some strong medicine they need to take, and it is this: "If you want your workers to go above and beyond, to dig deep to do their utmost, then you must go above and beyond. Raise the Bar starts with the leader who raises the bar for his own attitudes, intentions, behavior, and results. Leading involves going first, and that is never truer than with the leader's own commitment to being fully engaged."

Blaze the Trail Along the way these last years, I have interviewed hundreds of employees in Serving Leader-led organizations. Something I almost always hear from employees who have transferred from elsewhere into the Serving Leader-led organization is this: "I'm not sure why it is yet, but it just seems easier to get my work done here."

What they're putting their finger on is the Serving Leader action of Blaze the Trail. Serving leaders relentlessly seek out systemic barriers to performance in the organization and radically and permanently eliminate those barriers. They tackle all barriers, whether they are inadequate training, counterproductive company practices and policies, physical obstacles, isolation, poor communication, or

the many dozens of other barriers that stand in the way of performance in modern organizations. And sometimes—maybe even oftentimes—it's we, the leaders, who put up barriers to performance.

On the subject of busting barriers, I give credit to Anna. She despises barriers that stand between those motivated to do good and the achievement of that good. I will give you her list of best practices that excellent Serving Leaders use to unleash the energy of those who work with and for them.

- Distribute organization-wide surveys that ask, “What stands in the way of or prevents you and your team from performing with excellence? Name the obstacles for us, please.” Anna adds that it's important to make certain that a systematic and action-oriented implementation process is in place to actually *use* the feedback!
- Perform after-action reviews during and after projects. Celebrate successes and also analyze the barriers that stand in the way of success. Learn to identify underlying assumptions, to test them, to improve them, and to let go of them when they fail us.
- Replace limiting assumptions with new possibilities. Charge teams with designing and leading corporate-wide actions to permanently disable barriers in the service of other teams that will follow them.

The Serving Leader

- Reward the elimination of barriers.
- Learn the disciplines of continuous improvement, closed-loop corrective action, Six Sigma and Lean Six Sigma, and other tools to identify and eliminate upstream barriers to success. An order-of-magnitude improvement in the impact of these kinds of programs seems to occur when the programs are deliberately coupled with Serving Leader tools and actions.
- Physically colocate teams that will benefit from working closely together, or find innovative ways to effectively collaborate virtually.
- Use barrier-busting ability as a criterion for selecting leaders for advancement.

I experienced a very personal learning related to breaking through barriers that I have come to refer to as “The Letter.” It’s now a well-worn sheaf of papers, as I’ve carried it everywhere for over a decade. Mom handed me an envelope right after Dad’s funeral in Philly, a letter from Dad, written in the shaky handwriting of his last few weeks of life.

As I’ve already detailed in these writings, Dad hoped I would commit myself to continue his work to help develop Serving Leaders around the country. He also anticipated I would need some help. Hence, “The Letter.”

It was a very personal letter, but the last three pages were a list of names and phone numbers, organized by cities around the country. Dad’s advice was simply “Call them, Mike. Each

is ready to help build Serving Leaders.” This letter from Dad broke a huge barrier before I knew that I had it. Each person on that list has helped me, has helped all of us, with the advancement of my learning and of the work of Serving Leadership. The barrier he was busting was the barrier of not having the connections and the colleagues I needed. All leaders have this barrier in their own lives, and all the people the leaders connect with have this barrier, too.

One of the most profound and powerful barrier busters a leader can wield in *Blaze the Trail* is to offer encouragement to others and to help them succeed by writing references, giving them connections, and offering to stand in the gap as a networker. Our circles and connections are a great privilege. We must open up these relationship circles and share our connections with those who are coming behind us!

Build on Strength Effective Serving Leaders build teams composed of interlocking strengths, and they challenge teammates to play to their strengths. Effective leaders also do strength building, developing the talents and strengths of everyone around them.

But like much of Serving Leadership, there is a paradox in building strengths. Hemingway wrote, in *A Farewell to Arms*, “The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places.” These words are true in the development of Serving Leaders.

Paradoxically, I’ve learned something about how setbacks, failure, and brokenness can build stronger leaders.

The Serving Leader

I've learned not just by observing good Serving Leaders but also from personal experience.

The year after Dad died was a rocky one. I wanted to get a Serving Leader development practice going quickly, and I was having success visiting old friends in the corporate world who were glad to give me a chance. But when it came to going beyond my circle of friends to introduce Serving Leadership into organizations, I stumbled. For the first time in my career I was stuck, and I didn't know how to correct the difficulties I was experiencing.

The harder I tried, the worse my results were. And being on the road selling, growing in frustration with my results, and increasingly turning inward and becoming irritable caused my relationship with Anna to disintegrate. So I shot up a distress flare and called Dad's old friend and counselor, Will Turner. Will saw me the very next day.

I described my months of setbacks and "nonsuccess." I felt like a failure, especially sharing with a man who had known so much lifelong success. So, it took me completely off guard when a broad grin spread across Dr. Turner's face. "That's marvelous, Mike," he said, "the best thing possible, depending, of course, on what you do with this gift."

"Gift?" I stammered, nearly incredulous.

"Yes, a gift," Will insisted. "Failure, Mike, brings with it one of the best chances to grow and develop real strength. How you're approaching your sales challenges and your business growth—and frankly, how you're managing your most important relationships, especially with Anna—clearly isn't working. You now have the precious chance to step back and examine the limiting assumptions that are

the roots of your setbacks. This is breakthrough material, Mike!”

The heart of what I've learned about this action over these years is that we are always growing. And this Build on Strength process happens in a number of ways.

- We Build on Strength when we invest ourselves in learning what our strengths are. Taking assessments, talking to our colleagues, and seeking feedback and evaluation are concrete ways we can learn more about where our shoulders are the broadest.
- We Build on Strength when we bring others around us who can be strong where we're weak so that our team can be strong together. After all, the strengths we need don't have to come from us. This is why we work with others, and getting clear on the places where we aren't strong equips us to seek teammates who are excellent in those areas.
- We Build on Strength when we stretch ourselves, take risks, and put ourselves into new and challenging assignments. After all the assessments and evaluations have been done, the job still isn't over because we're not done growing yet. The point isn't to assess ourselves and then lock ourselves into what we've learned. All of us have strengths that we haven't yet discovered, and only life and testing will bring these things into the light.

The Serving Leader

- We Build on Strength every time we fail and when we gain the lessons that we need to learn from our failure.

It's all growth, and we never, ever stop growing. We mustn't. To be alive is to learn and to grow.

Summary Words (for Now)

Over these years, I have had some very dark nights of the soul. There were times when I flat-out regretted leaving my firm in Boston, regretted launching out on a venture that I felt unequipped to handle. When Dad died, I felt so passionate about helping others become Serving Leaders—I still feel that way—but the road was tough, especially at first.

But here's another paradox. This hard road, which I wanted to abandon on a number of occasions, has been the most rewarding road I've ever travelled. The greatest organizations I've encountered have Serving Leaders at the helm. Serving leadership is world changing, and Serving Leaders are the people who get me out of bed in the morning. Helping others become Serving Leaders has become my great purpose.

I reported above that Serving Leader actions work equally well at home as on the job. I know this because it is working for me, for Anna, and for our young family. The actions have rescued us, enabled our growth, held us together, and given us the tools and language we need to thrive. All of this is its own story—the “how I've grown up” story—and Anna recently suggested I try my hand at getting this part

of the story down, too. How Serving Leaders lead is just part of it; how Serving Leaders grow is equally important. I promised Anna, just as I promised my father over a decade ago, that I'd work on this. And so, while the memory is still fresh, I'll put the "How the Serving Leader Grows" story into a future journal to share with you soon.

As I bring this update for Will and Martin to a close, I find myself drawn back to where it all started, back to my father and to my relationship with him. At the beginning of my journey as an aspiring Serving Leader, I often asked myself, "Is my father pleased with what I'm doing?" My insecurity in those early days after Dad died was massive. I was constantly asking the question, "Would Dad approve?"

I don't ask myself those questions so much anymore. It's not that I'm disinterested in whether he's pleased; I'm absolutely committed to living in a way that he would approve of. But I've done a lot of growing up over these years, and I know some things that I didn't know then. The short of it is that my dad was never *displeased*. Not with me, that is. He was often displeased with himself back in those years, but my dad graduated from being displeased with himself to the discovery, later in his life, that it's all a gift.

Dad came to know, and I am learning, that all the struggles we go through are just a part of life. When I face a really hard challenge, it's not a test. Even though I've often felt like a failure, I won't get a failing grade because I'm not being tested. I'm not being judged. And I won't be condemned for the fact that life can be hard.

Rather, when I face a really hard challenge, it's an exercise. Dad came to know that the challenges we go through

The Serving Leader

in life (and in leadership) contribute to our growth. We can get better and we can get stronger because of what we go through. And I'm completely with my dad, now, on this point. Hard as some days can be, it's all a gift and it's all a blessing.

I wish just this kind of blessing on all aspiring Serving Leaders, the blessing of growth, strength, and true contribution.

MIKE WILSON
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