SERVANT LEADERSHIP | PERSONAL GROWTH | PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

SERVANT LEADERSHIP: WHAT DOES IT MEAN, WHAT DOES IT TAKE, WHERE DOES IT LEAD?

"…our default thinking is so real to us we believe whatever the things we made up about ourselves as children to be the truth about who we are now."

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"Servant Leadership," is a term bandied about extensively. Is it simply rhetoric? Is it a concept born out of cultural or religious heritage? Or is it perhaps a precept that contains practical applications? I am of a mind that servant leadership has substance and can be viewed as a platform from which one chooses to design their life. A state of mind achievable by anyone who wishes to make a positive difference.

In the words of Robert Greenleaf, ***"{Servant Leadership} begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve... The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant - to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served."*** Here's the challenge, service to others is not hardwired as our first response. Human beings are inherently driven by the *amygdala*, that emotion-driven part of our brains where fear is shown to be our default reaction. Interestingly, we do not question the emotional riptides witnessed in children, it is to be expected, however, as we mature it becomes blatantly apparent which of us takes on the mantle of personal development versus those who remain slaves to their emotional life.

What then does it take to become a leader committed to service?

As Max DuPree puts it, ***"The first responsibility of a leader is to define {their} reality."*** Few people voluntarily take on this task. Being creatures of comfort, we tend to avoid honest assessments of ourselves, as the process is not comfortable, and for some even a bit scary. Generally, "defining our reality" occurs uninvited, particularly when faced with personal hardship or tragedy.

My brother David shared a concept in relation to the care and feeding of my computer recently that makes for an apt analogy in this conversation, "Unless you have a solid-state computer, you must defrag on a regular basis." To intentionally mince words, most of us are not likely operating from a 'solid state' nor 'defragging' our minds on a regular basis.

Therefore, unless we are willing to wait on fates' hand to determine our rate of growth and capacity for contribution, we must intentionally take on assessing ourselves. This process cannot be avoided. Genuine servant leadership can only occur when fear has been eradicated for where there is fear there is no love… We must actively choose to disregard our amygdala's fear-based reactions and commit to operating from a platform of love, where we can aspire to manifest the attributes inherent to servant leadership.

One access point to effectively accomplishing the goal of servant leadership is quite simply curiosity. We can begin by asking the questions that make us most uncomfortable. Facing the hidden aspects of ourselves that are not a match for how we wish to operate in the world. "Defragging," as it were, provides us with the freedom and clarity needed to become genuinely present and available to others.

Where can this lead us?

Servant leadership, as Larry C. Spears puts it, ***"…truly offers hope and guidance for a new era in human development."*** Looked upon as an investment, the ROI on servant leadership far outweighs any other form of relationship and defies all forms of measurement, monetary or otherwise. What price can one assign the deepest and most gratifying moments life offers… the experience of making a difference?

"Successful and caring leadership". As Shar McBee shares in her book, TO LEAD IS TO SERVE, her success as a leader blossomed when she learned to

“… serve without expectation,”

ascribing that the qualities of service and leadership are most effective when intertwined. Consider what it would be like to live in a society where the most valuable aspects of leadership included kindness and generosity; where the greatest accolades were bestowed upon those who prioritized the needs of others. Consider the impact on society if numbers of people committed themselves to servant leadership.

Picture a day when those ruled by their desire for personal attainment suddenly find themselves at the back of the line. Can you picture the cacophony that would ensue? What would happen if the “haves” could no longer buy or bully their way in to the front of the line, as they are accustomed? VIP’s would be reeling, not only from a loss of identity - as so many perceive themselves to *be* what they do - but also by the challenge of navigating the personal development they skipped over in the pursuit of power. There would be no way around it, becoming kind would be the standard.

In my estimation, servant leadership is the natural course. Humanity is designed to evolve and I believe that includes our collective spiritual evolution. We have been free from many of the concerns that spawned our emotionally driven thinking. The amygdala does serve an important purpose. However, it is time now to ascend the ladder of human development, address what is needed and become truly engaged, curious and concerned for the well being of all.

Imagine if you will, “No need for greed or hunger, a brotherhood of man…”

John Lennon.

Amy McKenzie~
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