SERVANT LEADERSHIP| PERSONAL GROWTH | PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Journey From I to We

“We should be more selfish by serving others.”

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There I was, a 12-yr-old boy standing at the base of a mountain that in my mind might as well have been Mt. Everest.

I was surrounded by my prepubescent friends, these pimpled faces with small packs on our back about to take on a 10-mile hike to the top.

Yes, I know 10 miles isn’t much, but to 12-yr-old me, it was one of the scariest things I’d ever done. I had never hiked that far before. I was nervous. Our leader was a fit older gentleman. I took note of his rough hands - worn and calloused through hard work, the leathered lines around his eyes assuring me he had spent a fair amount of time in the outdoors. Although he mentioned this would be his first time on this mountain, he laid out his map in front of us. It was carefully researched, prepared and marked showing us where we were headed. I took comfort that this man was leading us.

As we began our hike there were several junctions in the trail, each time he brought out his map never telling us which way, but teaching us how to navigate the trail on our own, and together we knew which way to go. He wasn’t just leading us, he was one of us.

Yes, he taught us, but he also was taking each step we took - climbing over each obstacle we climbed, and when we reached the top, his celebration was as genuine and as fulfilling as each of ours. It was a powerful example to me of what I wanted to be as a leader.

Why don’t more leaders do as this man did?

How many times have we encountered leaders that rather than walk with us, prefer to stand at the bottom of the trail and tell us “OK, when you get a mile or so up, you’ll take a left, then after a big boulder, take a right, when you get to the river, cross it and then take a left… etc.”. They love to give direction but aren’t willing to walk the walk with us. Their direction may get us moving at first, it may even motivate us for a short time, but it is guaranteed to eventually become confusing, or be misunderstood, or even forgotten completely.

How can you move people unless you are moving yourself?

It literally goes against the laws of nature. Newton's first law says that in order to move an object, it has to be touched by something that is moving. So, you see, there is no such thing as an “unmoved mover” ~ *Especially not in our industry*.

Recently, I was with John Maxwell. He taught a similar principle by saying that “A leader has to be *in* the race”. He went further to say “Leaders never cross the finish line alone, they always cross with others. That’s why it may be a little slower because they are bringing others along.”

And that is where the key to true Servant Leadership lies: *The ability to develop other leaders.*

A servant leader has a commitment to the growth of others.

I always love seeing the way our products bless the life of a customer. But if I want to multiply that experience and bless more lives, I know that I must develop other distributors – other leaders. Customers add to a business, but distributors multiply. The role of a leader is to be the exponent, to help additional leaders assist others and raise to a power of themselves. They are thinking long term and what to do for others. And what to do for others is not always the short term. Too many leaders try to do things for others in the short term that they need to learn to do themselves. That's not leadership, that's co-dependency. And when everyone else is leaning on you, you end up with a broken back.

Be like the leader of those 12-yr-old boys. Walk with them, show them that you are on the same journey, but teach them how to do it themselves. You don't need to have all the answers, you just need to show them how they can find the answers for themselves. *This* is true service.

I can't stress enough how important it is for leaders to be walking the walk. Let others see that you are going through what they are, that you are practicing what you preach. And it will only make you a better leader. As John Maxwell says:

"Leaders must have current success; if they rely only on past success then they are simply history teachers".

Lastly, as a true servant leader, don't forget to serve your groups in ways that build their confidence. Successful people are grateful for others and show that gratitude through acts of service. As we set out to serve others, we inherently serve ourselves in the process. It's a two-fold return on investment. In a roundabout way, serving others is the selfish choice because you're getting more return on your investment than if you chose to only serve yourself. By affecting others you are personally changed in deeper and more fulfilling ways. We should be more selfish by serving others.

I want you to think about this past week. Count the number of times you did something for someone else because you knew they would appreciate it. Count the number of times you did something at work because you knew it would help out a coworker or resolve a problem others hadn't found the solution to. How many examples have you come up with? If you're struggling to think of things, it may be time to try a new approach.

The more we get out of our own way and serve others, the easier we find success with those same people.

The mentality of the most efficient leaders is to do the work *with* others, not *for* them. Be like that weatherworn leader. Callous your hands with hard work. Carefully research and prepare the map for where your group is going. Teach them how to navigate the map on their own. And most importantly – walk with them, climb the same obstacles, encourage them along the journey, and rejoice in reaching the top together.

Because you are… a Servant Leader.

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