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Developing Servant Leaders in Nonprofit Organizations

-By Seth Martinez, PhD

Overview: Servant leadership affords an organization many benefits. However, servant leaders are often not easy to find. This paper outlines several realistic, tactical practices a non-profit organization can deploy to develop servant leader attributes and behaviors within their ranks.

"Servant leadership affords an organization many benefits."

Developing Servant Leaders in Nonprofit Organizations

By Dr. Seth Martinez, Boise State University

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Countless headlines have been dedicated to the many fallouts of unethical leadership. The frequency of the occurrences and the numbers of headlines all beg the question, "What model of leadership embraces an ethical component while still being highly effective?" The answer is found in *servant leadership*.

What is a servant leader? A servant leader is an individual who wields influence by placing the interests and needs of his or her followers ahead of their own (Greenleaf, 2002). The intuition behind servant leadership (SL) is that organizational goals and objectives are achieved as leaders first serve the individuals under their stewardship (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004; Burton & Peachey, 2013). The key attributes and behaviors of a servant leader include: empathy, commitment to the growth of others, listening, awareness, persuasion, healing, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, and building community (Spears, 2010).

What are the Benefits of Servant Leadership? (Table 1)
Researchers have discovered positive outcomes associated with SL across three levels – individual, team, and the organization (see Table 1 below for a summary of SL benefits). At the individual level, researchers have found the SL leads to employee nurturance (i.e., help, service, and consideration of others), aspiration (i.e., pursuit of growth), and fostering a genuine customer-focus as well as extra-role behavior. Additionally, SL is positively related to organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and intrinsic work satisfaction (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). Jamarillo et al. (2009) concluded that SL positively affects employee turnover intention.

Table 1: *Benefits of Servant Leadership Summary*

Level	Positive Outcome Associated with SL
Individual	• Increased employee nurturance (i.e., help, service, and consideration of others) • Positive associations with a commitment to the organization, job satisfaction, intrinsic work satisfaction • Reduced employee turnover
Team	• Increased perceptions of fair treatment amongst a team • Increased levels of conscientiousness and helping behaviors • Antecedent to the team's shared belief in the collective team's ability • Enhanced team effectiveness • Culture of service for team (and organization)
Organization	• Increased perceptions of organizational care and appreciation • Increased trust in the organization • Increased views of the potential for organizational excellence

At the team level, Erhart (2004) found that in groups where servant leaders model service-oriented behavior for their followers, the unit experienced increases in perceptions of fair treatment. Second, the units that did experience collective fair treatment were themselves characterized as having increased levels of helping and conscientiousness behaviors. Hu and Liden (2011) discovered that SL is an antecedent to team members' shared belief about the general collective ability of the team. They also discovered that SL enhanced team effectiveness on tasks by elevating team potency. Liden, Wayne, Liao, and Meuser (2014) discovered that SL behaviors propagate a culture of service within a team and organization. This service culture then directly and positively influenced the performance of the organization as well as the behaviors and attitudes of the individuals.

Sendjaya et al. (2002) highlighted two illustrative examples of positive SL outcomes at the organizational level. First, revisiting Quick (1992), they attributed Southwest Airlines' established identity of caring and appreciative employees as the direct result of the organization's core value of SL. Next, they captured the observation of chairman of TD Industries, Jack Lowe (1998), in stating that the degree to which leaders of an organization behave in accordance with the principles of SL, trust increases and the basis for organizational excellence therefore exists.

Servant Leader Development in Your Nonprofit (Table 2)
Prior research (Martinez, 2016) established the presence of five dimensions that contribute directly to the development of servant leaders. Of relevance, four of the dimensions can be influenced by the organization, including: (1) exposure to a model of servant leadership; (2) intra-organizational leadership experience; (3) training; and (4) spiritual learning. Table 2 below highlights what an organization can do for each dimension to develop servant leaders within their ranks.

Table 2: *Developing Servant Leaders Within Your Nonprofit Organization*

Dimension	What Nonprofit Organizations Can Do
1. Exposure to a model of servant leadership	• Mentoring or shadowing program
2. Intra-organizational leadership experience	• Job rotation • 360^0 feedback
3. Training	• Internship/simulation • Group training • Programmed instruction
4. Spiritual learning	• SL expert lectures

Exposure to a Model of Servant Leadership
Mentoring. Consider designing an SL mentoring or shadowing program, where a novice observes authentic servant leader behavior real-time, in action, from a seasoned (or expert) servant leader. Research showed (Martinez, 2016) that the dimension with the greatest impact on SL development was having access and exposure to a person who modeled exemplar SL behavior.

Intra-organizational Leadership Experiences
Job Rotation. Consider the rotation of assignments which research showed serves two purposes: (1) to propagate servant leader practice; (2) increase individual-level *empathy*, which is a hallmark attribute of SL, within the organization.

360^0 Feedback. Provide a mechanism for multi-source feedback specifically about SL behaviors. 360^0 feedback activates self-awareness in a budding servant leader, and calls attention to behaviors that may be impeding the individual from reaching his or her servant leadership potential.

Training
Internship/Simulation. Consider providing proto-servant leadership experiences that allow learners to practice in low-cost, less-critical situations. For example, a "SL Orientation" can serve to indoctrinate learners to the organization's orientation toward SL and introduce them to the tenets of SL. Additionally, a "SL Bootcamp" (multiple days over one or multiple weeks) could also be effective, where individuals: (1) receive SL training; (2) are given practice tasks or assignments from which to practice executing as leaders of fictitious teams; (3) receive feedback from experts who observe what they are doing.

Group Discussions. Consider a group training program that (1) includes aspiring servant leaders across all levels, and (2) emphasizes interactivity. The goal is to encourage dialogue amongst the group around pre-selected discussion points. Therefore, small to medium group size is ideal. In this scenario, either the lead can begin with questions as prompts, or the more novice servant leaders can pose questions/scenarios to and hear responses from more expert servant leaders. The discussion will flow in directions that an organization cannot entirely predict, but research has shown this organic aspect of the group discussion to be of great value for servant leaders to learn from one another in such a format.

Programmed Instruction. Standardized documents and literature have shown to be highly effective tools in SL development because of their consistent and repeatable delivery. Therefore, consider creating and distributing an SL manual for the leaders (or anyone) in your organization. A single, concise SL manual which covers the basic principles of SL and outlines several recommendations for how to implement SL in certain roles, would be an effective “source of truth” resource for your organization.

Case studies. Develop case studies in both video and written format. The cases should include: (1) real examples of SL-in-action; (2) background of the context; (3) highlighted principles of SL that are especially present in the case.

Spiritual Learning

Lectures. Reflection is a key component in the development of SL attributes and behaviors, especially as it relates to the development of one’s view of self and one’s internal attitude toward leadership (*one’s internal view of self and one’s attitude toward the external world comprise spiritual learning, by definition). In this way, consider providing lectures or talks from expert servant leaders to encourage reflection and further establish the SL culture within the organization. In such lectures, reduce the number of declaratives used, and instead replace uses of “we must” or “you must” with *invitations* to “consider,” “ponder,” “think,” “reflect,” and “remember.” For consistency, these should take place at some regular cadence (e.g., 1x/quarter, or 2x/year).

Final Thoughts

SL embraces a unique, if not altogether uncommon, set of attributes and behaviors. Therefore, there is no magic bullet or one-size-fits-all for developing servant leaders in your organization. To develop a servant leader requires a uniquely fluid, dynamic, and highly personal and reflective process. Developing *into* and *as* a servant leader means developing a more altruistic stance (i.e., needs of others over self), greater autonomy (for others), increased trust (in leader-follower interactions), and constructive participation within the organization. And this precise approach to leadership means more favorable outcomes (including satisfaction) for the followers, the organization as a whole, and, therefore ultimately, the leader himself.

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5 Simple Ways to Be a Better Listener and Reader

By Jessica Johnson, Principal Consultant at the RBL Group

Before consulting, I was a television sports reporter. Very early on in my career I was sent to a conference to interview NCAA coaches and players before basketball season began. I spent a lot of time preparing for those on-camera interviews and came armed with pages and pages of notes and stats and questions.

Weeks after the interviews were conducted, I went back and watched them. I found that I was always ready with a question, but as I reviewed the tape, I realized how many follow-up opportunities I missed because I was so concerned with phrasing my next question perfectly or getting over my own nerves. I could have had a richer listening experience—and so could have my audience—but I was firmly in Level 1, inward listening.

In Level 1 we hear the words a person is saying, yet our focus is on what it means to us personally or to our team of volunteers, or the service we're trying to accomplish. We may find ourselves formulating a rebuttal, digging in our mind for a relatable experience, or crafting a clever question. While doing this we miss the meaning shared by the person we're listening to.

From time to time, we all get sucked into Level 1 listening. How can we catch ourselves and migrate to higher listening levels? Here are a few tips that might help you:

Develop your own 80/20 rule. The colleague you're trying to understand should be speaking 80% of the time and you only 20%. Try not to solve their problems with your own solutions, but rather ask them questions—especially questions you don't know the answer to.

Don't be afraid of silence. Maybe you don't have a question ready to ask because you've been so focused on what the people you are serving just said. Wonderful! Leave a little space while both parties think, and more information will flow.

Remove distractions. Turn off your screen, put away your phone, perhaps even close your eyes when speaking on the phone with someone (be cautious when sleepy) so you can focus entirely on them. Even an email alert flying into a corner of your screen can cause you to miss something critical in a conversation.

Ask questions. Even though my pre-prepared questions got me into trouble in those NCAA interviews because I focused too much on articulating the question, the ability to ask questions is a sign of a great leader. Just don't over-prepare and forget to listen for the answer and ask a follow-up question. Maybe you're working with a group of volunteers. The questions you ask them should help you understand how it feels to stand in their shoes. Be curious! Even if you think you know the answer, ask anyway—you will likely learn something new.

Stop talking. And that's the talking that happens inside your head as well as out of your mouth. If a question comes to mind while you're trying to listen, jot down a key word so you don't have to mentally hold onto that question and find the perfect way to phrase it. The note will be there to remind you when the time comes, or the question may have passed, and you'll have another to ask.

These are suggestions I've found helpful as I try to get out of Level 1 listening and focus on helping others feel understood. They may work for you, or you may have some of your own proven tactics.

About the Author: *Jessica Johnson is a Principal with The RBL Group. She has worked with organizations around the world as an executive coach, teacher, and facilitator and has published widely on the topics of leadership, HR, and talent management.*

Who exactly do Board Members Represent?

By Marianne Downing, Founder of Mission Aligned

In recent months, I have been in several conversations about the role of board members on nonprofit organizations. Often, when discussing roles, there is an emphasis on what board members do collectively: they strategically plan, drive policy decisions, have oversight of the finances and so on. There is much written about these roles, and they are often spelled out in these organizations' bylaws and/or job descriptions.

However, there is one discussion that I very rarely hear. Exactly who do board members represent?

As an organizer makes the journey towards formalizing a nonprofit organization, they begin by applying to both the state and federal authorities for approval to become tax exempt, usually known as a 501 (c) 3. One of the basic requirements for approval is that the organization must have a minimum of three board members among other requirements. A board is an integral part of a nonprofit organization.

From those days of start-up, it is the enthusiasm of those early founders that drives the organization goals forward. However, something happens the minute that they receive that all-important approval letter telling them they are now a legal nonprofit. In the excitement, it is sometimes difficult to understand the shift that occurs or should occur. This organization no longer belongs to these intrepid founders or any other leaders who follow. It now literally belongs to the public.

What does it mean to belong to the public? The word "public" is broad. How can we narrow this down? We begin with the documents that were submitted for approval that describe the mission or the purpose of the organization. This then begins to describe the "public" to which the board has now become accountable. It gives a kind of description of the target group or who in the "public" will benefit.

Every time a board member sits down to make a decision, every time they attend a board meeting, they are there to represent the wider public interests as described in that mission. Can this mission be adjusted or changed? Yes. But any adjustments need to be communicated publicly because the agreement to be a tax-exempt nonprofit organization is made with the public.

There is a paradox here that a nonprofit is expected to be open to anyone in the wider society who wants to access it at the same time as it is recognized that each nonprofit has specific targeted goals or aims which gives them permission to limit to whom they provide services.

What are some of the implications?

1. Any funding that comes into the organization effectively belongs to the public. It is why nonprofit organizations are asked by the IRS in their annual filings if their financial affairs are open for public scrutiny. This does not mean that someone from the public can come in and ask for their "fair share" of the funds. What it means is that the public can expect accountability that the funds will be spent on achieving the agreed mission.
2. Board members are required to declare any conflicts of interest they may have in making decisions because it must be clear that those decisions are made in the best interests of the organization and not in the interests of any individual or their close associations.

3. When "representatives" from other organizations are sent onto a particular board, the law is clear. The minute they sit down at the board table of any nonprofit then they immediately put on the "hat" of that organization and must make decisions that represent the public in the fulfilling of its mission. The needs of the referring organization must take a back seat while they are acting as board members. The viewpoint that they bring from their originating organization is no doubt valuable, but it can never

override the interests of the organization for whom they are now a board member.

Although there are many elements of founder's syndrome, this certainly begins to put some of it into perspective. What is founder's syndrome? Wikipedia describes founder's syndrome as: **"The difficulty faced by organizations where one or more founders maintain disproportionate power and influence following the effective establishment of the organization, leading to a wide range of problems."**

For me, it goes beyond someone exercising disproportionate power. It does not always lie with the actual "founder" of an organization either. We might add here that this syndrome can come about because a board member or board members do not understand the public nature of their role and they have developed a sense of personal ownership over the organization and its mission. The phrase, "my organization" is not infrequently heard.

What are some ways we can keep our perspective as a "public" organization at the forefront?

1. At every meeting, have a "mission moment" where the mission statement is read out or a story is told relating to the mission.

2. Include training for board members in communicating the mission to anyone outside of the organization.

3. Bylaws and job descriptions are written to contain reference to the responsibility of board members to represent public interests.

4. The board monitors the use of language by its members such as "our" or "my" organization and works to eliminate personal ownership terms.

5. The board constantly questions any new services or new directions, measuring them against the mission. When it is agreed to extend services, programs or offerings, meeting minutes should demonstrate how these services meet the needs of the agreed and publicly stated mission.

6. The mission should be regularly reviewed by the board to determine that it is still articulated well. It may need some adjustments and if yes, these need to be publicly communicated so that the changes are transparent and made available to the public. This includes notifying the IRS and the respective state authorities of any significant shifts in the mission and targeted population of the organization.

If we are conscious of our responsibilities as board members, we will be more likely to create and maintain a sustainable organization that outlives each of us as individuals, that is geared for success, and that is accountable in every way to the public it serves.

The 6 Graphs to Know Your Donors and Community Are Listening!

By David Higgins - Host of The Nonprofit Podcast, Author of *Demystifying Fundraising Funnels*

"The size of your audience doesn't matter. What's important is that your audience is listening."
-Randy Pausch

The Big Six Graphs

It's important to understand the grid you should use to identify who your audience is. Here are the six ways to graph your audience statistics.

1. Let's Talk Demographics
When we launch a new nonprofit, the first thing we do is create a demographic study. This is the study of populations' education, nationality, religion, and ethnicity, for example. You will find even greater detail as you dive into population studies that compare the relationships between economic, social, cultural, and biological processes influencing a population. When you start researching statistical study populations, you need to consider these factors:

- Accurately sampling large populations
- Population size
- Population dynamics
- Sampling bias
- Direct vs. indirect ways of gathering data

When you are using demographics to create a donor profile, it's also important to understand another caveat. The demographic profile you think will benefit most from your organization's activity isn't necessarily the same profile as the person who will donate to your nonprofit.

There's a definite difference between talking to a mature family with adults in their 40s and a single person in their 20s. One may be perfect for volunteering; another may be great as a potential donor. Which one would your service benefit, and which one will donate monthly because of the value you bring? Though this information is important, the difficulty is that it does not tell you how your audience feels. Sometimes we have too much information from the demographic research, and we drill down on the wrong group of statistics. What's crucial is that you don't stop at demographics. You need more information to create well-targeted marketing messages.

2. Understanding Online Analytics

Free platforms like Google Analytics have made it easy and accessible for you to generate statistics concerning interest in your website and funnels. This makes it easy to track the effectiveness of a digital approach for finding donors and creating revenue.

I love using Facebook PPC Ads (Pay Per Click) because the analytics are immediate, and I can quickly adjust the wording and focus of a nonprofit paid driver (ad) campaign. This allows me to easily see my ROI (Return on Investment) from using the platform.

This also allows me to send the message to the right people at the right time. When does my audience open their Facebook page? Or at what time of the day and day of the week are they most likely to pull out their wallet and use a credit card? Analytics will show me. As an example of the A/B or "split" testing, a nonprofit can send two different messages to solicit the same response to two different groups of 100 people and watch the analytics to see which one tracks better. Then, you take the most effective one and use it for the next week to drive viewers to your email-attraction or donation funnel. You can create competing funding events on your website and advertise them both over a seven-day period to see which ones cause specific visitors to act.

Taking the time to take the A/B test will allow you to retarget people who showed interest in your funnel or website but moved on. Now you can try a different approach to solicit their buy-in to your mission. By seeing where your visitors click next on your site, a nonprofit can strategize what will transition them from "looky-loos" into your next long-term donors.

3. Exploring Psychographics

Simply defined, psychographics is research into the psychology of an audience or donor group. Organizations enjoy a significant leap forward when they start using psychographics because it tells them what their donors genuinely care about. For example, when we gather John Smith's demographic information, we may discover these facts about him:

- He is in his mid-40s.
- His income is $85,000/yr.
- He manages a youth Little League.
- He oversees the marketing department at the local car dealership.

However, a psychographic study will point out even more:

- It's a battle to balance his job responsibilities and Little League.
- He wants to start vlogging on social media sites.
- He wants to move into a more lucrative career but doesn't know how to negotiate the transition.
- His hobby is kayaking, which takes up a lot of his extra time.

This cache of data will point you to the online networks that will attract John's attention to your nonprofit. The power of advertising directly on kayaking forums and job transition support groups would allow you to connect with many people like John.

This is your target donor group. Psychographic data also communicates how wide your reach can be. The *Activities, Interests, and Opinions (AIO) variables* used by this kind of research are especially valuable.

Using the right words so you engage your potential donor is a skill all in itself. One of America's most renowned copywriters, Gary Bencivenga, said this:

"The vast majority of products are sold because of the need for love, the fear of shame, the pride of achievement, the drive for recognition, the yearning to feel important, the urge to look attractive, the lust for power, the longing for romance, the need to feel secure, the terror of facing the unknown, the lifelong hunger for self-esteem, and so on.

"Emotions are the fire of human motivation, the combustible force that secretly drives most decisions to buy. When your marketing harnesses those forces correctly you will generate explosive increases in response." So, let's talk about how you can create messages that elicit strong emotions that drive people to action.

British advertising legend David Ogilvy insisted that the team around him communicate in the common exchange used every day. He said:

"Unless you have some reason to be solemn and pretentious, write your copy in the colloquial language which your customers use in everyday conversation." How do your donors talk? What slang do they use? At what level do they like to read? The best words you can use in your copy are found in the mouths of your donors. Are you listening to them when they are speaking to you? Are they even speaking to you at all? In the previous chapter, we looked at where you go to surround yourself with the target group that your statistics and psychographics point to as the best possible donor group.

Compelling messages use the exact words your audience uses to describe their own problems. That's why knowing your audience is so important. And all you need to do is get your audience to tell you about their problems in their own words. Following are three tactics you can use to get the exact words your audience uses.

4. Review Mining

"If you think you need rehab, you do!" Remember that headline? Joanna Wiebe is a great copywriter, but this headline was not written by her. She plucked it out of someone else's mouth. This is called review mining.

The original headline on this website was an overused and tired opening: "Your Addiction Ends Here." I have often seen headlines like that on marketing websites. But where do you think the new headline came from? Joanna was researching and came across an Amazon review of a book that focused on ending addiction.

Online reviews are a huge database of language used by your donors and your community. When people leave comments and reviews, they communicate both positive and negative language that is invaluable to you. You will learn the following:

- Their pain points
- What they love using their own vocabulary
- How an organization or product helped them
- What they wish could be done or how a group could have done better

This sounds like gold, doesn't it? It's something you can do right now.

5. Online Chats

Amazon reviews are not the only place your future donors are gathering and chatting. Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Quora, and chat forums are only a few of the many places where they are gathering. I would encourage you to take 15 minutes and write down all the online networking groups that may be housing your next monthly donor. If you are a music and dance nonprofit, you could go on Twitch for free and follow the amazing musicians there. Just listen to their great conversations. The big takeaway is that you get to see and understand how your potential donors are feeling and viewing life.

6. Interviews with Real People

Review mining and online conversations are an attractive place to start because they can be done literally right now. Open Google, type in "[your nonprofit category] reviews," and you'll get messaging ideas immediately.

But at the same time, you cannot deny the power and clarity you can receive from real, live interviews with real, live people. One of the biggest struggles with being limited to online conversations is having less availability for a follow-up question. One of my favorites is simply, "Tell me more." You will find yourself asking it over and over, and you will discover very compelling messages hiding in your future donor's head.

That's impossible on a Reddit thread that closed three years ago. Actual face-to-face (or phone-to-phone) conversations are hands-down the best way to know your audience, and as a result, you will be able to create better copy. A donor interview gives you the opportunity to ask questions like these:

- What's the hardest part about _____?
- How does ____ make you feel?
- When you connected with a _____ charity, what were you thinking about?
- Where do you go to find information about _____?
- How well does _____ solve your problem?

And then you say, "Tell me more." You get to hear real, personal stories, ones that lead to great communication and donor messages. *Now You Can Write In A Way That Your Audience Will Listen To*. Understanding your future donors is also understanding the need for your organization to grow and to make growth a priority. This is not something you can do in a conference room. You need to talk to real people. The wonderful thing about this process is that it allows you to uncover the deep, burning pain points of your donors and the language they use to describe those pain points. Then you can confidently script brilliant and accurate marketing messages.

The first three things we spoke about, demographics, psychographics, and analytics, convert the behavioral data so you can see how the people visiting your funnel page and website are acting. Review mining, online chat rooms, and interviews to discover how they are feeling. Your research will allow you to convert the right words into powerful copy and see the results of your messaging skills.

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