

Servant leadership

Servant leadership is a leadership philosophy: Traditional leadership generally involves the exercise of power by one at the “top of the pyramid.” By comparison, the servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible. Servant leadership turns the power pyramid upside down; instead of the people working to serve the leader, the leader exists to serve the people. When leaders shift their mindset and serve first, they unlock purpose and ingenuity in those around them, resulting in higher performance and engaged, fulfilled employees.

The 10 most important characteristics of a servant leader:

1. Listening

You'll serve people better when you make a deep commitment to listening intently to them and understanding what they're saying. To improve your listening skills, give people your full attention, take notice of their body language, avoid interrupting them before they've finished speaking, and give feedback on what they say.

2. Empathy

Servant leaders strive to understand other people's intentions and perspectives. You can be more empathetic by putting aside your viewpoint temporarily, valuing others' perspectives, and approaching situations with an open mind.

3. Healing

This characteristic relates to the emotional health and "wholeness" of people, and involves supporting them both physically and mentally. First, make sure that your people have the knowledge, support and resources they need to do their jobs effectively, and that they have a healthy workplace. Then take steps to help them be happy and engaged in their roles.

4. Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the ability to look at yourself, think deeply about your emotions and behavior, and consider how they affect the people around you and align with your values.

You can become more self-aware by knowing your strengths and weaknesses, and asking for other people's feedback on them. Also, learn to manage your emotions, so that you consider how your actions and behavior might affect others.

5. Persuasion

Servant leaders use persuasion – rather than their authority – to encourage people to take action. They also aim to build consensus in groups, so that everyone supports decisions.

There are many tools and models that you can use to be more persuasive, without damaging relationships or taking advantage of others. You should also build your expert power – when people perceive you as an expert, they are more likely to listen to you when you want to persuade or inspire them.

6. Conceptualisation

This characteristic relates to your ability to "dream great dreams," so that you look beyond day-to-day realities to the bigger picture.

If you're a senior leader in your company, work through and develop a robust organisational strategy. Then, whatever level you're at, create mission and vision statements for your team, and make it clear how people's roles tie in with your team's and organisation's long-term objectives. Also, develop long-term focus so that you stay motivated to achieve your more distant goals, without getting distracted.

7. Foresight

Foresight is when you can predict what's likely to happen in the future by learning from past experiences, identifying what's happening now, and understanding the consequences of your decisions.

You can use tools such as [SWOT Analysis](#) to think about your current situation and environment, while [Scenario Analysis](#) helps you understand how the future could play out.

8. Stewardship

Stewardship is about taking responsibility for the actions and performance of your team, and being accountable for the role team members play in your organisation.

Whether you're a formal leader or not, you have a responsibility for the things that happen in your company. Take time to think about your own values, as well as those of your organisation, and where you sit with them. Also, lead by example by demonstrating the values and behaviours that you want to see in others, and have the confidence to stand up to people when they act in a way that isn't aligned with them.

9. Commitment to the Growth of People

Servant leaders are committed to the personal and professional development of everyone on their teams.

To develop your people make sure that you understand their developmental needs and give them the skills they need to do their jobs effectively. Also, find out what their personal goals are, and see if you can give them projects or additional responsibilities that will help them achieve these.

10. Building Community

The last characteristic is to do with building a sense of community within your organisation: You can do this by providing opportunities for people to interact with one another across the company.

Encourage people to take responsibility for their work, and remind them how what they do contributes to the success and overall objectives of the organisation.