

# The Servant as Leader

By Robert K. Greenleaf

THE SERVANT AS LEADER  
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## Preface

*The Servant as Leader* is the first of four essays on the role of servant. The second is *The Institution as Servant*, followed by *Trustees as Servants*, and *Teacher as Servant* (Paulist Press 1979).

This revision of the 1970 edition of *The Servant as Leader* is the fruit of much helpful criticism, and more is welcomed. It is offered again not as a final or complete statement, but as a record of thinking in transition that is drawn more from experience and searching than from scholarship.

Behind what is said here is a twofold concern: first for the individual in society and his bent to deal with the massive problems of our times wholly in terms of systems, ideologies, and movements. These have their place, but they are not basic because they do not make themselves. What is basic is the incremental thrust of an individual who has the ability to serve and lead.

My second concern is for the individual as a serving person and his tendency to deny wholeness and creative fulfillment for himself by failing to lead when he could lead.

Overarching these is a concern for the total process of education and its seeming indifference to the individual as servant and leader, as a person and in society, on the assumption that intellectual preparation favors his optimal growth in these ways when, in fact, quite the reverse may be true.

Part of the problem is that *serve* and *lead* are overused words with negative connotations. But they are also good words and I can find no others that carry as well the meaning I would like to convey. Not everything that is old and worn, or even corrupt, can be thrown away.

Some of it has to be rebuilt and used again. So it is, it seems to me,  
with the words *serve* and *lead*.

*Robert K. Greenleaf*

SERVANT AND LEADER. Can these two roles be fused in one real person, in all levels of status or calling? If so, can that person live and be productive in the real world of the present? My sense of the present leads me to say yes to both questions. This paper is an attempt to explain why and to suggest how.

The idea of *The Servant as Leader* came out of reading Herman Hesse's *Journey to the East*. In this story we see a band of men on a mythical journey, probably also Hesse's own journey. The central figure of the story is Leo who accompanies the party as the *servant* who does their menial chores, but who also sustains them with his spirit and his song. He is a person of extraordinary presence. All goes well until Leo disappears. Then the group falls into disarray and the journey is abandoned. They cannot make it without the servant Leo. The narrator, one of the party, after some years of wandering finds Leo and is taken into the Order that had sponsored the journey. There he discovers that Leo, whom he had known first as *servant*, was in fact the titular head of the Order, its guiding spirit, a great and noble *leader*.

One can muse on what Hesse was trying to say when he wrote this story. We know that most of his fiction was autobiographical, that he led a tortured life, and that *Journey to the East* suggests a turn toward the serenity he achieved in his old age. There has been much speculation by critics on Hesse's life and work, some of its centering on this story which they find the most puzzling. But to me, this story clearly says—*the great leader is seen as servant first*, and that simple fact is the key to his greatness. Leo was actually the leader all of the time, but he was servant first because that was what he was, *deep down inside*. Leadership was bestowed upon a man who was by nature a servant. It was something given, or assumed, that could be taken away. His servant nature was the real man, not bestowed, not assumed, and not to be taken away. He was servant first.

I mention Hesse and *Journey to the East* for two reasons: first to acknowledge the source of the idea of *The Servant as Leader*. Then I



want to use this reference as an introduction to a brief discussion of prophecy.

Fifteen years ago when I first read about Leo, if I had been listening to contemporary prophecy as intently as I do now, the first draft of this piece might have been written then. As it was, the idea lay dormant for eleven years until, four years ago, I concluded that we in this country were in a leadership crisis and that I should do what I could about it. I became painfully aware of how dull my sense of contemporary prophecy had been. And I have reflected much on why we do not hear and heed the prophetic voices in our midst (not a new question in our times, nor more critical than heretofore).

I now embrace the theory of prophecy which holds that prophetic voices of great clarity, and with a quality of insight equal to that of any age, are speaking cogently all of the time. Men and women of a stature equal to the greatest of the past are with us now addressing the problems of the day and pointing to a better way and to a personage better able to live fully and serenely in these times.

The variable that marks some periods as barren and some as rich in prophetic vision is in the interest, the level of seeking, the responsiveness of the hearers. The variable is not in the presence or absence or the relative quality and force of the prophetic voices. The prophet grows in stature as people respond to his message. If his early attempts are ignored or spurned, his talent may wither away.

It is *seekers*, then, who make the prophet; and the initiative of any one of us in searching for and responding to the voice of a contemporary prophet may mark the turning point in his growth and service. But since we are the product of our own history, we see current prophecy within the context of past wisdom. We listen to as wide a range of contemporary thought as we can attend to. Then we *choose* those we elect to heed as prophets—*both old and new*—and meld their advice with our own leadings. This we test in real-life experiences to establish our own position.

Some who have difficulty with this theory assert that their faith rests on one or more of the prophets of old having given the “word” for all time and that the contemporary ones do not speak to their condition as the older ones do. But if one really believes that the “word” has been given for all time, how can one be a seeker? How can one hear the contemporary voice when one has decided not to live in the present and has turned him off?

Neither this hypothesis nor its opposite can be proved. But I submit that the one given here is the more hopeful choice, one that offers a significant role in prophecy to every individual. One cannot interact with and build strength in a dead prophet, but he can do it with a living one. “Faith,” Dean Inge has said, “is the choice of the nobler hypothesis.”

One does not, of course, ignore the great voices of the past. One does not awake each morning with the compulsion to reinvent the wheel. But if one is *servant*, either leader or follower, one is always searching, listening, expecting that a better wheel for these times is in the making. It may emerge any day. Any one of us may find it out of his own experience. I am hopeful.

I am hopeful for these times, despite the tension and conflict, because more natural servants are trying to see clearly the world as it is and are listening carefully to prophetic voices that are speaking *now*. They are challenging the pervasive injustice with greater force and they are taking sharper issue with the wide disparity between the quality of society they know is reasonable and possible with available resources, and, on the other hand, the actual performance of the whole range of institutions that exist to serve society.

A fresh critical look is being taken at the issues of power and authority, and people are beginning to learn, however haltingly, to relate to one another in less coercive and more creatively supporting ways. A new moral principle is emerging which holds that the only authority deserving one’s allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader. Those

who choose to follow this principle will not casually accept the authority of existing institutions. *Rather, they will freely respond only to individuals who are chosen as leaders because they are proven and trusted as servants.* To the extent that this principle prevails in the future, the only truly viable institutions will be those that are predominantly servant-led.

I am mindful of the long road ahead before these trends, which I see so clearly, become a major society-shaping force. We are not there yet. But I see encouraging movement on the horizon.

What direction will the movement take? Much depends on whether those who stir the ferment will come to grips with the age-old problem of how to live in a human society. I say this because so many, having made their awesome decision for autonomy and independence from tradition, and having taken their firm stand against injustice and hypocrisy, find it hard to convert themselves into *affirmative builders* of a better society. How many of them will seek their personal fulfillment by making the hard choices, and by undertaking the rigorous preparation that building a better society requires? It all depends on what kind of leaders emerge and how they—we—respond to them.

My thesis, that more servants should emerge as leaders, or should follow only servant-leaders, is not a popular one. It is much more comfortable to go with a less demanding point of view about what is expected of one now. There are several undemanding, plausibly-argued alternatives to choose. One, since society seems corrupt, is to seek to avoid the center of it by retreating to an idyllic existence that minimizes involvement with the “system” (with the “system” that makes such withdrawal possible). Then there is the assumption that since the effort to reform existing institutions has not brought instant perfection, the remedy is to destroy them completely so that fresh new perfect ones can grow. Not much thought seems to be given to the problem of where the new seed will come from or who the gardener to tend them will be. The concept of the servant-leader stands in sharp contrast to this kind of thinking.

Yet it is understandable that the easier alternatives would be chosen, especially by young people. By extending education for so many so far into the adult years, the normal participation in society is effectively denied when young people are ready for it. With education that is preponderantly abstract and analytical it is no wonder that there is a preoccupation with criticism and that not much thought is given to “what can I do about it?”

Criticism has its place; but as a total preoccupation it is sterile. In a time of crisis, like the leadership crisis we are now in, if too many potential builders are taken in by a complete absorption with dissecting the wrong and by a zeal for instant perfection, then the movement so many of us want to see will be set back. The danger, perhaps, is to hear the analyst too much and the artist too little.

Albert Camus stands apart from other great artists of his time, in my view, and deserves the title of *prophet*, because of his unrelenting demand that each of us confront the exacting terms of his own existence, and, like Sisyphus, *accept his rock and find his happiness in dealing with it*. Camus sums up the relevance of his position to our concern for the servant as leader in the last paragraph of his last published lecture, entitled *Create Dangerously*.

One may long, as I do, for a gentler flame, a respite, a pause for musing. But perhaps there is no other peace for the artist than what he finds in the heat of combat. “Every wall is a door,” Emerson correctly said. Let us not look for the door, and the way out, anywhere but in the wall against which we are living. Instead, let us seek the respite where it is – in the very thick of battle. For in my opinion, and this is where I shall close, it *is* there. Great ideas, it has been said, come into the world as gently as doves. Perhaps, then, if we listen attentively, we shall hear, amid the uproar of empires and nations, a faint flutter of wings, the gently stirring of life and hope. Some will say that this hope lies in a nation, others, in a man. I believe rather that it is awakened, revived, nourished by millions of solitary individuals whose deeds and works every day negate frontiers and the crudest implications of history. As a result,

there shines forth fleetingly the ever-threatened truth that each and every man, on the foundations of his own sufferings and joys, builds for them all.

One is asked, then, to accept the human condition, its sufferings and its joys, and to work with its imperfections as the foundation upon which the individual will build his wholeness through adventurous creative achievement. For the person with creative potential there is no wholeness except in using it. And, as Camus explained, the going is rough and the respite is brief. It is significant that he would title his last university lecture *Create Dangerously*. And as I ponder the fusing of servant and leader it seems a dangerous creation: dangerous for the natural servant to become a leader, dangerous for the leader to be servant first, and dangerous for a follower to insist that he be led by a servant. There are safer and easier alternatives available to all three. But why take them?

As I respond to the challenge of dealing with this question in the ensuing discourse I am faced with two problems:

First: I did not get the notion of the servant as leader from conscious logic. Rather it came to me as an intuitive insight as I contemplated Leo. And I do not see what is relevant from my own searching and experience in terms of a logical progression from premise to conclusion. Rather I see it as fragments of data to be fed into my internal computer from which intuitive insights come. Serving and leading are still mostly intuition-based concepts in my thinking.

The second problem, and related to the first, is that, just as there may be a real contradiction in the servant as leader, so my perceptual world is full of contradictions. Some examples: I believe in order, and I want creation out of chaos. My good society will have strong individualism amidst community. It will have elitism along with populism. I listen to the old and to the young and find myself baffled and heartened by both. Reason and intuition, each in its own way, both comfort and dismay me. And many more. Yet, with all of this, I believe that I live with as much serenity as do my contemporaries who venture into controversy as freely as I do but whose natural bent

is to tie up the essentials of life in neat bundles of logic and consistency. But I am deeply grateful to the people who are logical and consistent because some of them, out of their natures, render invaluable services for which I am not capable.

My resolution of these two problems is to offer the relevant gleanings of my experience in the form of a series of unconnected little essays, some developed more fully than others, with the suggestion that they be read and pondered on separately within the context of this opening section.

## Who is the Servant-Leader?

The servant-leader *is* servant first—as Leo was portrayed. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. He is sharply different from the person who is *leader* first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. For such it will be a later choice to serve—after leadership is established. The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, will they not be further deprived?

As one sets out to serve, how can one know that this will be the result? This is part of the human dilemma; one cannot know for sure. One must, after some study and experience, hypothesize—but leave the hypothesis under a shadow of doubt. Then one acts on the hypothesis and examines the result. One continues to study and learn and periodically one re-examines the hypothesis itself.

Finally, one chooses again. Perhaps one chooses the same hypothesis again and again. But it is always a fresh open choice. And it is always an hypothesis under a shadow of doubt. “Faith is the choice of the nobler hypothesis.” Not the *noblest*, one never knows what that is. But the *nobler*, the best one can see when the choice is made. Since the test of results of one's actions is usually long delayed, the faith that sustains the choice of the nobler hypothesis is psychological self-insight. This is the most dependable part of the true servant.

The natural servant, the person who is *servant first*, is more likely to persevere and refine his hypothesis on what serves another's highest priority needs than is the person who is *leader first* and who later serves out of promptings of conscience or in conformity with normative expectations.

My hope for the future rests in part on my belief that among the legions of deprived and unsophisticated people are many true servants who will lead, and that most of them can learn to discriminate among those who presume to serve them and identify the true servants.



## Everything Begins with the Initiative of an Individual

The forces for good and evil in the world are propelled by the thoughts, attitudes, and actions of individual beings. What happens to our values, and therefore to the quality of our civilization in the future, will be shaped by the conceptions of individuals that are born of inspiration. Perhaps only a few will receive this inspiration (insight) and the rest will learn from them. The very essence of leadership, going out ahead to show the way, derives from more than usual openness to inspiration. Why would anybody accept the leadership of another except that the other sees more clearly where it is best to go? Perhaps this is the current problem: too many who presume to lead do not see more clearly and, in defense of their inadequacy, they all the more strongly argue that the “system” must be preserved—a fatal error in this day of candor.

But the leader needs more than inspiration. He ventures to say, “I will go; come with me!” He initiates, provides the ideas and the structure, and takes the risk of failure along with the chance of success. He says, “I will go, follow me!” when he knows that the path is uncertain, even dangerous. And he trusts those who go with him.

Paul Goodman, speaking through a character in *Making Do* has said, “If there is no community for you, young man, young man, make it yourself.”

## What Are You Trying To Do?

What are you trying to do?—one of the easiest to ask and most difficult to answer of questions.

A mark of a leader, an attribute that puts him in a position to show the way for others, is that he is better than most at pointing the direction. As long as he is leading, he always has a goal. It may be a goal arrived at by group consensus; or the leader, acting on inspiration, may simply have said, “Let’s go this way.” But the leader always knows what it is and can articulate it for any who are unsure. By clearly stating and restating the goal the leader gives certainty and purpose to others who may have difficulty in achieving it for themselves.

The word *goal* is used here in the special sense of the overarching purpose, the big dream, the visionary concept, the ultimate consummation which one approaches but never really achieves. It is something presently out of reach; it is something to strive for, to move toward, or become. It is so stated that it excites the imagination and challenges people to work for something they do not yet know how to do, something they can be proud of as they move toward it.

Every achievement starts with a goal. But not just any goal and not just anybody stating it. The one who states the goal must elicit trust, especially if it is a high risk or visionary goal, because those who follow are asked to accept the risk along with the leader. A leader does not elicit trust unless one has confidence in his values and his competence (including judgment) and unless he has a sustaining spirit (entheos) that will support the tenacious pursuit of a goal.

Not much happens without a dream. And for something great to happen, there must be a great dream. Behind every great achievement is a dreamer of great dreams. Much more than a dreamer is required to bring it to reality; but the dream must be there first.

## Listening and Understanding

One of our very able leaders recently was made the head of a large, important, and difficult-to-administer public institution. After a short time he realized that he was not happy with the way things were going. His approach to the problem was a bit unusual. For three months he stopped reading newspapers and listening to news broadcasts; and for this period he relied wholly upon those he met in the course of his work to tell him what was going on. In three months his administrative problems were resolved. No miracles were wrought; but out of a sustained intentness of listening that was produced by this unusual decision, this able man learned and received the insights needed to set the right course. And he strengthened his team by so doing.

Why is there so little listening? What makes this example so exceptional? Part of it, I believe, with those who lead, is that the usual leader in the face of a difficulty tends to react by trying to find someone else on whom to pin the problem, rather than his automatic response being, "I have a problem. What is it? What can *I* do about *my* problem?" The sensible man who takes the latter course will probably react by listening, and somebody in the situation is likely to tell him what his problem is and what he should do about it. Or, he will hear enough that he will get an intuitive insight that resolves it.

I have a bias about this which suggests that only a true natural servant automatically responds to any problem by listening *first*. When he is a leader, this disposition causes him to be *seen* as servant first. This suggests that a non-servant who wants to be a servant might become a *natural* servant through a long arduous discipline of learning to listen, a discipline sufficiently sustained that the automatic response to any problem is to listen first. I have seen enough remarkable transformations in people who have been trained to listen to have some confidence in this approach. It is because true listening builds strength in other people.

Most of us at one time or another, some of us a good deal of the time, would really like to communicate, really get through to a significant level of meaning in the hearer's experience. It can be terribly important. The best test of whether we are communicating at this depth is to ask ourselves, first, are we really listening? Are we listening to the one we want to communicate to? Is our basic attitude, as we approach the confrontation, one of wanting to understand? Remember that great line from the prayer of St. Francis, "Lord, grant that I may not seek so much to be understood as to understand."

One must not be afraid of a little silence. Some find silence awkward or oppressive. But a relaxed approach to dialogue will include the welcoming of some silence. It is often a devastating question to ask oneself, but it is sometimes important to ask it—"In saying what I have in mind will I really improve on the silence?"

## Language and Imagination

Alfred North Whitehead once said, “No language can be anything but elliptical, requiring a leap of imagination to understand its meaning in its relevance to immediate experience.” Nothing is meaningful until it is related to the hearer’s own experience. One may hear the words, one may even remember them and repeat them, as a computer does in the retrieval process. But *meaning*, a growth in experience as a result of receiving the communication, requires that the hearer supply the imaginative link from the listener’s fund of experience to the abstract language symbols the speaker has used. As a leader (including teacher, coach, administrator) one must have facility in tempting the hearer into that leap of imagination that connects the verbal concept to the hearer’s own experience. The limitation on language, to the communicator, is that the *hearer* must make that leap of imagination. One of the arts of communicating is to say just enough to facilitate that leap. Many attempts to communicate are nullified by saying too much.

The physicist and philosopher Percy Bridgman takes another view of it when he says, “No linguistic structure is capable of reproducing the full complexity of experience.... The only feasible way of dealing with this is to push a particular verbal line of attack as far as it can go, and then switch to another verbal level which we might abandon when we have to... Many people...insist on a single self-consistent verbal scheme into which they try to force all experience. In doing this they create a purely verbal world in which they can live a pretty autonomous existence, fortified by the ability of many of their fellows to live in the same verbal world.” This, of course, is what makes a cult—a group of people who thus isolate themselves from the evolving mainstream. By staying within their own closed verbal world they forfeit the opportunity to lead others. One of the great tragedies is when a proven able leader becomes trapped in one of these closed verbal worlds and loses his ability to lead.

## Withdrawal — Finding One's Optimum

People who go for leadership (whether they are servants or non-servants) may be viewed as one of two extreme types. There are those who are so constituted physically and emotionally that they like pressure—seek it out—and they perform best when they are totally intense. And there are those who do not like pressure, do not thrive under it, but who want to lead and are willing to endure the pressure in order to have the opportunity. The former welcome a happy exhaustion and the latter are constantly in defense against that state. For both the art of withdrawal is useful. To the former it is a change of pace; to the latter it is a defense against an unpleasant state. The former may be more the natural leader; the latter needs a tactic to survive. The art of withdrawal serves them both.

The ability to withdraw and reorient oneself, if only for a moment, presumes that one has learned the art of systematic neglect, to sort out the more important from the less important—and the important from the urgent—and attend to the more important, even though there may be penalties and censure for the neglect of something else. One may govern one's life by the law of the optimum (optimum being that pace and set of choices that give one the best performance over a lifespan)—bearing in mind that there are always emergencies and the optimum includes carrying an unused reserve of energy in all periods of normal demand so that one has the resilience to cope with the emergency.

Pacing oneself by appropriate withdrawal is one of the best approaches to making optimal use of one's resources. The servantas-leader must constantly ask himself, how can I use myself to serve best?

## Acceptance and Empathy

These are two interesting words, acceptance and empathy. If we can take one dictionary's definition: *acceptance* is receiving what is offered, with approbation, satisfaction, or acquiescence; and *empathy* is the imaginative projection of one's own consciousness into another being. The opposite of both, the word *reject*, is to refuse to hear or receive—to throw out.

The servant always accepts and empathizes, never rejects. The servant as leader always empathizes, always accepts the person but sometimes refuses to accept some of the person's effort or performance as good enough.

A college president once said, "An educator may be rejected by his students and he must not object to this. But he may never, under any circumstances, regardless of what they do, reject a single student."

We have known this a long time in the family. For a family to be a family, no one can ever be rejected. Robert Frost in his poem "The Death of the Hired Man" states the problem in a conversation on the farmhouse porch between the farmer and his wife about the shiftless hired man, Silas, who has come back to their place to die. The farmer is irritated about this because Silas was lured away from his farm in the middle of the last haying season. The wife says this is the only home he has. They are drawn into a discussion of what a home is. The husband gives his view:

Home is the place where when you have  
to go there they have to take you in!

The wife sees it differently. What is a home? She says,

I should have called it something you  
somehow haven't to deserve.

Because of the vagaries of human nature, the halt, the lame, half-made creatures that we all are, the great leader (whether it is the mother in her home or the head of a vast organization) would say

what the wife said about home in Robert Frost's poem. The interest in and affection for his followers which a leader has, and it is a mark of true greatness when it is genuine, is clearly something the followers "haven't to deserve." Great leaders, including "little" people, may have gruff, demanding, uncompromising exteriors. But deep down inside the great ones have empathy and an unqualified acceptance of the persons of those who go with their leadership.

Acceptance of the person, though, requires a tolerance of imperfection. Anybody could lead perfect people—if there were any. But there aren't any perfect people. And the parents who try to raise perfect children are certain to raise neurotics.

It is part of the enigma of human nature that the "typical" person—immature, stumbling, inept, lazy—is capable of great dedication and heroism *if* he is wisely led. Many otherwise able people are disqualified to lead because they cannot work with and through the half-people who are all there are. The secret of institution building is to be able to weld a team of such people by lifting them up to grow taller than they would otherwise be.

Men grow taller when those who lead them empathize and when they are accepted for what they are, even though their performance may be judged critically in terms of what they are capable of doing. Leaders who empathize and who fully accept those who go with them on this basis are more likely to be trusted.



## Know the Unknowable – Beyond Conscious Rationality

The requirements of leadership impose some intellectual demands that are not measured by academic intelligence ratings. They are not mutually exclusive but they are different things. The leader needs two intellectual abilities that are usually not formally assessed in an academic way: he needs to have *a sense for the unknowable* and be able to *foresee the unforeseeable*. The leader knows some things and foresees some things which those he is presuming to lead do not know or foresee as clearly. This is partly what gives the leader his “lead,” what puts him out ahead and qualifies him to show the way.

Until quite recently many would attribute these qualities of knowing the unknowable and foreseeing the unforeseeable to mystical or supernatural gifts. And some still do. Now it is possible at least to speculate about them within a framework of natural law. The electrical body-field theory suggests the possibility of an interconnection between fields and could explain telepathy. Some are willing to explore the possibility of memory traces being physical entities, thus providing a basis for explaining clairvoyance. In far-out theorizing, every mind, at the unconscious level, has access to every “bit” of information that is or ever was. Those among us who seem to have unusual access to these “data banks” are called “sensitives.” What we now call intuitive insight may be the survivor of an earlier and greater sensitivity. Much of this is highly speculative but it is inside the bounds of what some scientific minds are willing to ponder within the framework of what is known about natural phenomena. Information recall under hypnosis is suggestive of what is potentially available from the unconscious.

What is the relevance of this somewhat fanciful theory to the issue at hand, the thought processes of a leader? One contemporary student of decision making put it this way: “If, on a practical decision in the world of affairs, you are waiting for *all* of the information for a good decision, it never comes.” There always is more information, sometimes a great deal more, that one might have if one waited

longer or worked harder to get it—but the delay and the cost are not warranted. On an important decision one rarely has 100% of the information needed for a good decision no matter how much one spends or how long one waits. And, if one waits too long, he has a different problem and has to start all over. This is the terrible dilemma of the hesitant decision maker.

As a practical matter, on most important decisions there is an information gap. There usually is an information gap between the solid information in hand and what is needed. The art of leadership rests, in part, on the ability to bridge that gap by intuition, that is, a judgment from the unconscious process. The person who is better at this than most is likely to emerge the leader because he contributes something of great value. Others will depend on him to go out ahead and show the way because his judgment will be better than most. Leaders, therefore, must be more creative than most; and creativity is largely discovery, a push into the uncharted and the unknown. Every once in a while a leader finds himself needing to think like a scientist, an artist, or a poet. And his thought processes may be just as fanciful as theirs—and as fallible.

Intuition is a *feel* for patterns, the ability to generalize based on what has happened previously. The wise leader knows when to bet on these intuitive leads, but he always knows that he is betting on percentages—his hunches are not seen as eternal truths.

Two separate “anxiety” processes may be involved in a leader’s intuitive decision, an important aspect of which is timing, the decision to decide. One is the anxiety of holding the decision until as much information as possible is in. The other is the anxiety of making the decision when there really isn’t enough information—which, on critical decisions, is usually the case. All of this is complicated by pressures building up from those who “want an answer.” Again, trust is at the root of it. Has the leader a really good information base (both hard data and sensitivity to feelings and needs of people) and a reputation for consistently good decisions that people respect? Can

he de-fuse the anxiety of other people who want more certainty than exists in the situation?

Intuition in a leader is more valued, and therefore more trusted, at the conceptual level. An intuitive answer to an immediate situation can be a gimmick and conceptually defective. Overarching conceptual insight that gives a sounder framework for decisions (so important, for instance, in foreign policy) is the greater gift.

## Foresight – The Central Ethic of Leadership

The common assumption about the word “now” is that it is this instant moment of clock time—*now*. In usage, we qualify this a little by saying *right now*, meaning this instant, or *about now*, allowing a little leeway. Sometimes we say, “I’m going to do it now,” meaning “I’m going to start soon and do it in the near future,” or “I have just now done it,” meaning that I did it in the recent past. The dictionary admits all of these variations of usage.

Let us liken “now” to the spread of light from a narrowly focused beam. There is a bright intense center, this moment of clock time, and a diminishing intensity, theoretically out to infinity on either side. As viewed here, *now* includes *all* of this—all of history and all of the future. As one approaches the central focus, the light intensifies as this moment of clock time is approached. All of it is *now* but some parts are more *now* than others, and the central focus which marks this instant of clock time moves along as the clock ticks. *This is not the way it is!* It is simply an analogy to suggest a way of looking at *now* for those who wish better to see the unforeseeable—a mark of a leader.

Prescience, or foresight, is a better than average guess about *what* is going to happen *when* in the future. It begins with a state of mind about *now*, something like that suggested by the light analogy. What we note in the present moment of clock time is merely the intense focus that is connected with what has gone on in the past and what will happen in the future. The prescient man has a sort of “moving average” mentality (to borrow a statistician’s term) in which past, present, and future are one, bracketed together and moving along as the clock ticks. The process is continuous.

Machiavelli, writing 300 years ago about how to be a prince, put it this way. “Thus it happens in matters of state; for knowing afar off (which it is only given a prudent man to do) the evils that are brewing, they are easily cured. But when, for want of such knowledge, they are

allowed to grow so that everyone can recognize them, there is no longer any remedy to be found.”

The shape of some future events can be calculated from trend data. But, as with a practical decision mentioned earlier, there is usually an information gap that has to be bridged, and one must cultivate the conditions that favor intuition. This is what Machiavelli meant when he said that “knowing afar off”—which is only given a prudent man to do. The prudent man is he who constantly thinks of “now” as the moving concept in which past, present moment, and future are one organic unity. And this requires living by a sort of rhythm that encourages a high level of intuitive insight about the whole gamut of events from the indefinite past, through the present moment, to the indefinite future. One is as once, in every moment of time, historian, contemporary analyst, and prophet—not three separate roles. This is what the practicing leader is, every day of his life.

Living this way is partly a matter of *faith*. Stress is a condition of most of modern life, and if one is a servant-leader and carrying the burdens of other people—going out ahead to show the way, one takes the rough and tumble (and it really is rough and tumble in some leader roles), one takes this in the belief that, if one enters a situation prepared with the necessary experience and knowledge at the conscious level, *in the situation* the intuitive insight necessary for one’s optimal performance will be forthcoming. Is there any other way, in the turbulent world of affairs (including the typical home), for one to maintain serenity in the face of uncertainty? One follows the steps of the creative process which require that one stay with conscious analysis as far as it will carry him, and then withdraw, release the analytical pressure, if only for a moment, in full confidence that a resolving insight will come. The concern with the past and future is gradually attenuated as this span of concern goes forward or backward from the instant moment. The ability to do this is the essential structural dynamic of leadership.

Foresight is seen as a wholly rational process, the product of a constantly running internal computer that deals with intersecting series and random inputs and is vastly more complicated than anything technology has yet produced. Foresight means regarding the events of the instant moment and constantly comparing them with a series of projections made in the past and at the same time projecting future events—with diminishing certainty as projected time runs out into the indefinite future.

The failure (or refusal) of a leader to foresee may be viewed as an *ethical* failure; because a serious ethical compromise today (when the usual judgment on ethical inadequacy is made) is sometimes the result of a failure to make the effort at an earlier date to foresee today's events and take the right actions when there was freedom for initiative to act. The action which society labels "unethical" in the present moment is often really one of no choice. By this standard a lot of guilty people are walking around with an air of innocence that they would not have if society were able always to pin the label "unethical" on the failure to foresee and the consequent failure to act constructively when there was freedom to act.

Foresight is the "lead" that the leader has. Once he loses this lead and events start to force his hand, he is leader in name only. He is not leading; he is reacting to immediate events and he probably will not long be a leader. There are abundant current examples of loss of leadership which stems from a failure to foresee what reasonably could have been foreseen, and from failure to act on that knowledge while the leader had freedom to act.

There is a wealth of experience available on how to achieve this perspective of foresight, but only one aspect is mentioned here. Required is that one live a sort of schizoid life. One is always at two levels of consciousness: one is in the real world—concerned, responsible, effective, value oriented. One is also detached, riding above it, seeing today's events and seeing oneself deeply involved in today's events, in the perspective of a long sweep of history and projected into the indefinite future. Such a split enables one better to

foresee the unforeseeable. Also, from one level of consciousness, each of us acts resolutely from moment to moment on a set of assumptions that then govern his life. Simultaneously, from another level, the adequacy of these assumptions is examined, in action, with the aim of future revision and improvement. Such a view gives one the perspective that makes it possible for him to live and act in the real world with a clearer conscience.

## Awareness and Perception

Framing all of this is awareness, opening wide the doors of perception so as to enable one to get more of what is available of sensory experience and other signals from the environment than people usually take in. Awareness has its risks, but it makes life more interesting; certainly it strengthens one's effectiveness as a leader. When one is aware, there is more than the usual alertness, more intense contact with the immediate situation, and more is stored away in the unconscious computer to produce intuitive insights in the future when needed.

William Blake has said, "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything will appear to man as it is, infinite." Those who have gotten their doors of perception open wide enough often enough know that this statement of Blake's is not mere poetic exaggeration. Most of us move about with very narrow perception—sight, sound, smell, tactile—and we miss most of the grandeur that is in the minutest thing, the smallest experience. We also miss leadership opportunities. There is danger, however. Some people cannot take what they see when the doors of perception are open too wide, and they had better test their tolerance for awareness gradually. A qualification for leadership is that one can tolerate a sustained wide span of awareness so that he better "sees it as it is."

The opening of awareness stocks both the conscious and unconscious minds with a richness of resources for future need. But it does more than that: it is value building and value clarifying and it armors one to meet the stress of life by helping build serenity in the face of stress and uncertainty. The cultivation of awareness gives one the basis for detachment, the ability to stand aside and see oneself in perspective in the context of one's own experience, amidst the ever present dangers, threats, and alarms. Then one sees one's own peculiar assortment of obligations and responsibilities in a way that permits one to sort out the urgent from the important and perhaps deal with the important. Awareness is *not* a giver of solace—



it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed. They are not seekers after solace. They have their own inner serenity.

A leader must have more of an armor of confidence in facing the unknown—more than those who accept his leadership. This is partly anticipation and preparation, but it is also a very firm belief that in the stress of real life situations one can compose oneself in a way that permits the creative process to operate.

This is told dramatically in one of the great stories of the human spirit—the story of Jesus when confronted with the woman taken in adultery. In this story Jesus is seen as a man, like all of us, with extraordinary prophetic insight of the kind we all have some of. He is a leader; he has a goal—to bring more compassion into the lives of people.

In this scene the woman is cast down before him by the mob that is challenging Jesus's leadership. They cry, "The *law* says she shall be stoned, what do *you* say?" Jesus must make a decision, he must give the *right* answer, *right* in the situation, and one that sustains his leadership toward his goal. The situation is deliberately stressed by his challengers. What does he do?

He sits there writing in the sand—a withdrawal device. In the pressure of the moment, having assessed the situation rationally, he assumes the attitude of withdrawal that will allow creative insight to function.

He could have taken another course; he could have regaled the mob with rational arguments about the superiority of compassion over torture. A good logical argument can be made for it. What would the result have been had he taken that course?

He did not choose to do that. He chose instead to withdraw and cut the stress—right in the event itself—in order to open his *awareness* to creative insight. And a great one came, one that has kept the story of the incident alive for 2,000 years—"Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone."

## Persuasion – Sometimes One Man at a Time

Leaders work in wondrous ways. Some assume great institutional burdens, others quietly deal with one man at a time. Such a man was John Woolman, an American Quaker, who lived through the middle years of the eighteenth century. He is known to the world of scholarship for his journal, a literary classic. But in the area of our interest, leadership, he is the man who almost singlehandedly rid the Society of Friends (Quakers) of slaves.

It is difficult now to imagine the Quakers as slaveholders, as indeed it is difficult now to imagine anyone being a slaveholder. One wonders how the society of 200 years hence will view “what man has made of man” in our generation. It is a disturbing thought.

But many of the eighteenth century American Quakers were affluent, conservative slaveholders and John Woolman, as a young man, set his goal to rid his beloved Society of this terrible practice. Thirty of his adult years (he lived to age 52) were largely devoted to this. By 1770, nearly 100 years before the Civil War, no Quakers held slaves.

His method was unique. He didn’t raise a big storm about it or start a protest movement. His method was one of gentle but clear and persistent persuasion.

Although John Woolman was not a strong man physically, he accomplished his mission by journeys up and down the East Coast by foot or horseback visiting slaveholders—over a period of many years. The approach was not to censure the slaveholders in a way that drew their animosity. Rather the burden of his approach was to raise questions: What does the owning of slaves do to you as a moral person? What kind of a institution are you binding over to your children? Man by man, inch by inch, by persistently returning and revisiting and pressing his gentle argument over a period of thirty years, the scourge of slavery was eliminated from this Society, the first religious group in America formally to denounce and forbid

slavery among its members. One wonders what would have been the result if there had been fifty John Woolmans, or even five, traveling the length and breadth of the Colonies in the eighteenth century *persuading* people one by one with gentle non-judgmental argument that a wrong should be righted by individual voluntary action. Perhaps we would not have had the war with its 600,000 casualties and the impoverishment of the South, and with the resultant vexing social problem that is at fever heat 100 years later with no end in sight. We know now, in the perspective of history, that just a slight alleviation of the tension in the 1850's might have avoided the war. A few John Woolmans, just a *few*, might have made the difference. Leadership by persuasion has the virtue of change by convincement rather than coercion. Its advantages are obvious.

John Woolman exerted his leadership in an age that must have looked as dark to him as ours does to us today. We may easily write off his effort as a suggestion for today on the assumption that the Quakers were ethically conditioned for his approach. All men are so conditioned, to some extent—enough to gamble on.

## One Action at a Time—The Way Some Great Things Get Done

Two things about Thomas Jefferson are of special interest here. First as a young man he had the good fortune to find a mentor, George Wythe, a Williamsburg lawyer whose original house still stands in the restored village. George Wythe was a substantial man of his times, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a member of the Constitutional Convention. But his chief claim to fame is as Thomas Jefferson's mentor. It was probably the influence of mentor on understudy, as Jefferson studied law in Wythe's office, that moved Jefferson toward his place in history and somewhat away from his natural disposition to settle down at Monticello as an eccentric Virginia scholar (which he remained, partly, despite Wythe's influence). The point of mentioning George Wythe is that old people may have a part to play in helping the potential servantas-leader to emerge at his optimal best.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Jefferson, more important in history than the Declaration of Independence or his later term as President, was what he did during the war. With the publication of the Declaration the war was on and Jefferson was famous. He was importuned on all sides to take important roles in the war. But he turned them all down. *He knew who he was* and he was resolved to be his own man. He chose his own role. He went back to Virginia and didn't leave the state for the duration of the war.

Jefferson believed the war would be won by the Colonies, that there would be a new nation, and that that nation would need a new system of law to set it on the course that he had dreamed for it in the Declaration of Independence. So he went back to Monticello, got himself elected to the Virginia legislature, and proceeded to write new statutes embodying the new principles of law for the new nation. He set out, against the determined opposition of his conservative colleagues, to get these enacted into Virginia law. It was an uphill fight. He would go to Williamsburg and wrestle with his colleagues

until he was slowed to a halt. Then he would get on his horse and ride back to Monticello to rekindle his spirit and write some more statutes. Armed with these he would return to Williamsburg and take another run at it. He wrote 150 statutes in that period and got 50 of them enacted into law, the most notable being separation of church and state. For many years Virginia legislators were digging into the remaining 100 as new urgent problems made their consideration advisable.

When the Constitution was drafted some years later Jefferson wasn't even around; he was in France as our Ambassador. He didn't have to be around. He had done his work and made his contribution in the statutes already operating in Virginia. Such are the wondrous ways in which leaders do their work—when they know who they are and resolve to be their own men and will accept making their way to their goal by one action at a time, with a lot of frustration along the way.

## Conceptualizing – The Prime Leadership Talent

Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig, whose adult life was the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century, is known as the Father of the Danish Folk High Schools. To understand the significance of the Folk High School one needs to know a little of the unique history of Denmark. Since it is a tiny country, not many outside it know this history and consequently Grundtvig and his seminal contribution are little known. A great church dedicated to his memory in Copenhagen attests the Danish awareness of what he did for them.

At the beginning of the 19th century Denmark was a feudal and absolute monarchy. It was predominantly agricultural, with a large peasant population of serfs who were attached to manors. Early in the century reforms began which gave the land to the peasants as individual holdings. Later the first steps toward representative government were taken.

A chronicler of those times reports, “The Danish peasantry at the beginning of the nineteenth century was an underclass. In sullen resignation it spent its life in dependence on estate owners and government officials. It was without culture and technical skill, and it was seldom able to rise above the level of bare existence. The agricultural reforms of that time were carried through without the support of the peasants, who did not even understand the meaning of them....All the reforms were made *for the sake of the peasant*, but not *by* him. In the course of the century this underclass has been changed into a well-to-do middle class which, politically and socially, now takes the lead among the Danish people.”

Freedom—to own land and to vote—was not enough to bring about these changes. A new form of education was designated by Grundtvig explicitly to achieve this transformation. Grundtvig was a theologian, poet, and student of history. Although he himself was a scholar, he believed in the active practical life and he conceptualized a school, the Folk High School, as a short intensive residence course for young adults dealing with the history, mythology, and poetry of the

Danish people. He addressed himself to the masses rather than to the cultured. The “cultured” at the time thought him to be a confused visionary and contemptuously turned their backs on him. But the peasants heard him, and their natural leaders responded to his call to start the Folk High Schools—with their own resources.

“The spirit (not knowledge) is power.” “The living word in the mother tongue.” “Real life is the final test,” as contrasted with the German and Danish tendency to theorize. These were some of the maxims that guided the new schools of the people. For fifty years of his long life Grundtvig vigorously and passionately advocated these new schools as the means whereby the peasants could raise themselves into *the* Danish national culture. And, stimulated by the Folk High School experience, the peasant youth began to attend agricultural schools and to build cooperatives on the model borrowed from England.

Two events provided the challenge that matured the new peasant movement and brought it into political and social dominance by the end of the century. There was a disastrous war with Prussia in 1864, which resulted in a substantial loss of territory and a crushing blow to national aspiration. And then, a little later, there was the loss of world markets for corn, their major exportable crop, as a result of the agricultural abundance of the New World.

Peasant initiative, growing out of the spiritual dynamic generated by the Folk High Schools, recovered the nation from both of these shocks by transforming their exportable surplus from corn to “butter and bacon,” by rebuilding the national spirit, and by nourishing the Danish tradition in the territory lost to Germany during the long years until it was returned after World War I.

All of this, a truly remarkable social, political, and economic transformation, stemmed from one man’s conceptual leadership. Grundtvig himself did not found or operate a Folk High School, although he lectured widely in them. What he gave was his love for the peasants, his clear vision of what they must do for themselves, his long articulate dedication—some of it through very barren years,

and his passionately communicated faith in the worth of these people and their strength to raise themselves—*if only their spirit could be aroused*. It is a great story of the supremacy of the spirit.



## And Now!

These three examples from previous centuries illustrate very different types of leadership for the common good. They are not suggested as general models for today, although some useful hints may be found in them. What these examples tell us is that the leadership of trail blazers like Woolman, Jefferson, and Grundtvig is so “situational” that it rarely draws on known models. Rather it seems to be a fresh creative response to here-and-now opportunities. Too much concern with how others did it may be inhibitive. One wonders, in these kaleidoscopic times, what kind of contemporary leadership effort will be seen as seminal one hundred years from now, as we can now see the three I have described. Let me speculate.

The signs of the times suggest that, to future historians, the next thirty years will be marked as the period when the dark skinned and the deprived and the alienated of the world effectively asserted their claims to stature. And that they were not led by a privileged elite (like Woolman, Jefferson, and Grundtvig) but by exceptional people from their own kind.

It may be that the best that some of today’s privileged can do is to stand aside and serve by helping when asked *and* as instructed. Even the conceptualizing may be done better, not by an elite as Grundtvig did it in his times, but by leaders from among the dark skinned, the alienated, and the deprived of the world. A possible role for those who are now favored by the old rules may be, as Miguel Serrano has said, that of diving under this big wave and taking with them the accumulated wisdom as they see it, in the hope of coming up on the other side prepared to make it available when the turbulence of these times has passed and the dark skinned and the deprived and the alienated have found their way and can freely choose that which they find useful from what the now-privileged have stored away. Not many of today’s privileged may elect this course. But those among them who see themselves as *servants first* may want to consider it as a possible best course for them.

I do not have the prescience to know what will come of all this. And I am not predicting a golden age, not soon. But I do believe that *some* of those of today's privileged who will live into the twenty-first century will find it interesting *if* they can abandon their present notions of how they can best serve their less favored neighbor and wait and listen until the less favored find their own enlightenment, then define their needs in their own way and, finally, state clearly how they want to be served. The now-privileged who are natural servants may in this process get a fresh perspective on the priority of other's needs and thus they may again be able to serve by leading. In the meantime, Paulo-Freire has offered the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to ponder while they heed John Milton's advice, "They also serve who only stand and wait."

For those of today's privileged who feel more like joining the fray and serving and leading actively as best they can during what promises to be a long period of unusual turbulence, Woolman, Jefferson, and Grundtvig are suggested as models to be studied closely. Study them not to copy the details of their methods but as examples of highly creative men, each of whom invented a role that was uniquely appropriate for himself as an individual, that drew heavily on his strengths and demanded little that was unnatural for him, and that was very right for the time and place he happened to be.

## Healing and Serving

Twelve ministers and theologians of all faiths and twelve psychiatrists of all faiths had convened for a two-day off-the-record seminar on the one-word theme of *healing*. The Chairman, a psychiatrist, opened the seminar with this question, “We are all healers, whether we are ministers or doctors. Why are we in this business? What is our motivation?” There followed only ten minutes of intense discussion and they were all agreed, doctors and ministers, Catholics, Jews, and Protestants. “For our own healing,” they said.

This is an interesting word, healing, with its meaning, “to make whole.” The example above suggests that one really never makes it. It is always something sought. Perhaps, as with the minister and the doctor, the servant-leader might also acknowledge that his own healing is his motivation. There is something subtle communicated to one who is being served and led if, implicit in the compact between servant-leader and led, is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something they share.

Alcoholics Anonymous is regarded by some who know as recovering more alcoholics from this dreadful illness than all other approaches combined. Legend has it that the founding meeting to incorporate the organization was held in the office of a noted philanthropist, a very wealthy man. In the course of the discussion of the principles that would guide the new organization, the philanthropist made a statement something like this: “From my experience I think I know about the things that can be done with money and the things that cannot be done with money. What you in AA want to do cannot be done with money. You must be poor. You must not use money to do your work.”

There was more conversation but this advice profoundly influenced the course of AA. The principles that have guided the work of AA over the years were born at that meeting: they will be poor; no one but an alcoholic can contribute money to AA’s modest budget; AA will own no real property; the essential work of AA, one recovered (or partly

recovered) alcoholic helping another toward recovery, will not be done for money.

Here are two quite different perspectives on healing and serving. Whether professional or amateur the motive for the healing is the same, for his own healing.

## Community—The Lost Knowledge of These Times

Men once lived in communities and, in the developing world, many still do. Human society can be much better than it is (or was) in primitive communities. But if community itself is lost in the process of development, will what is put in its place survive? At the moment there seems to be some question. What is our experience?

Within my memory, we once cared for orphaned children in institutions. We have largely abandoned these institutions as not good for children. Children need the love of a real home—in a family, a community.

Now we realize that penal institutions, other than focusing the retributive vengeance of society and restraining anti-social actions for a period, do very little to rehabilitate. In fact they *debilitate* and return more difficult offenders to society. What to do with these people? It is now suggested that most of them should be kept in homes, in community.

There is now the beginning of questioning of the extensive building of hospitals. We need some hospitals for extreme cases. But much of the recent expansion has been done for the convenience of doctors and families, not for the good of patients—or even for the good of families. Only community can give the healing love that is essential for health. Besides, the skyrocketing cost of such extensive hospital care is putting an intolerable burden on health-care systems.

The *school*, on which we pinned so much of our hopes for a better society, has become too much a social-upgrading mechanism that destroys community. Now we have the beginnings of questioning of the school as we know it, as a specialized, separate-from-community institution. And much of the alienation and purposelessness of our times is laid at the door, *not of education*, but of the *school*.

We are in the process of moving away from institutional care for the mentally retarded and toward small community-like homes. Recent experience suggests that, whereas the former provide mostly

custodial care, the small community can actually lift them up, help them grow.

Now the care of old people is a special concern, because there are so many more of them and they live so much longer. But the current trend is to put them in retirement homes that segregate the old from normal community. Already there is the suggestion that these are not the happy places that were hoped for. Will retirement homes shortly be abandoned as orphan homes were?

As a generalization, I suggest that human service that requires love cannot be satisfactorily dispensed by specialized institutions that exist apart from community, that take the problem out of sight of the community. Both those being cared for and the community suffer.

*Love* is an undefinable term, and its manifestations are both subtle and infinite. But it begins, I believe, with one absolute condition: unlimited liability! As soon as one's liability for another is qualified *to any degree*, love is diminished by that much.

Institutions, as we know them, are designed to limit liability for those who serve through them. In the British tradition, corporations are not "INC" as we know them, but "LTD"—Limited. Most of the goods and services we now depend on will probably continue to be furnished by such limited liability institutions. But any human service where he who is served should be loved in the process, requires community, a face-to-face group in which the liability of each for the other and all for one is unlimited, or as close to it as it is possible to get. Trust and respect are highest in this circumstance and an accepted ethic that gives strength to all is reinforced. Where there is not community, trust, respect, ethical behavior are difficult for the young to learn and for the old to maintain. Living in community as one's basic involvement will generate an exportable surplus of love which the individual may carry into his many involvements with institutions which are usually not communities: businesses, churches, governments, schools.

Out of the distress of our seeming community-less society, hopeful new forms of community are emerging: young people's communes, Israeli kibbutzes, and therapeutic communities like Synanon. Seen through the bias of conventional morality, the communes are sometimes disturbing to the older generation. But among them is a genuine striving for community, and they represent a significant new social movement which may foretell the future.

The opportunities are tremendous for rediscovering vital lost knowledge about how to live in community while retaining as much as we can of the value in our present urban, institution-bound society.

All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant-leaders to show the way, not by mass movements, but by each servant-leader demonstrating his own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group.

## Institutions

We differ from the primitives in that it is our task to rediscover the elementary knowledge of community while we refine and radically improve much of the vast non-community institutional structure on which we depend and without which we could not survive. A hopeful sign of the times, in the sector of society where it seems least expected—highly competitive business, people-building institutions are holding their own while they struggle successfully in the market place. It is not a great revolutionary movement but it is there as a solid fact of these times. And it is a very simple approach. The first order of business is to build a group of people who, under the influence of the institution, grow taller and become healthier, stronger, more autonomous.

Some institutions achieve distinction for a short time by the intelligent *use* of people; but it is not a happy achievement, and eminence, so derived, does not last long. Others aspire to distinction (or the reduction of problems) by embracing “gimmicks”: profit sharing, work enlargement, information, participation, suggestion plans, paternalism, motivational management. Nothing wrong with these in a people-building institution. But in a people-using institution they are like aspirin—sometimes stimulating and pain relieving, and they may produce an immediate measurable improvement of sorts. But these are not the means whereby an institution moves from people-using to people-building. In fact, an overdose of these nostrums may seal an institution’s fate as a people-user for a very long time.

An institution starts on a course toward people-building with leadership that has a firmly established context of *people first*. With that, the right actions fall naturally into place. And none of the conventional gimmicks may ever be used. (For fuller discussion of institutions see a companion essay *The Institution as Servant*.)



## Trustees

Institutions need two kinds of leaders: those who are inside and carry the active day-to-day roles; and those who stand outside but are intimately concerned and who, with the benefit of some detachment, oversee the active leaders. These are the *trustees*.

The trustee is what his title implies, a person in whom ultimate trust is placed. Because institutions inevitably harbor conflict, the trustee is the court of last resort if an issue arises that cannot be resolved by the active parties. If tangible assets are involved, he legally holds them and is responsible to all interested parties for their good use. He has a prime concern for goals and for progress toward goals. He makes his influence felt more by knowing and asking questions than by authority, although he usually has authority and can use it if need be. If, as is usual, there are several trustees, their chairman has a special obligation to see that the trustees as a group sustain a common purpose and are influential in helping the institution maintain consistent high-level performance toward its goals. The chairman is not simply the presider over meetings, he must serve and lead the trustees as a group and act as their major contact with the active inside leadership. Although trustees usually leave the “making of news” to active persons in the enterprise, theirs is an important leadership opportunity.

So conceived, the role of trustees provides an unequaled fulfillment opportunity for those who would serve and lead. And no one step will more quickly raise the quality of the total society than a radical reconstruction of trustee bodies so that they are predominantly manned by able dedicated servant-leaders. Two disturbing questions: Is there now enough discerning toughness strategically placed to see that this change takes place, in the event that able, dedicated servant-leaders become available in sufficient numbers to do it? And are enough able people now preparing themselves for these roles so that this change *can* be made in the event that it is possible to make

it? (For a fuller discussion of the trustee role see companion essays *The Institution as Servant*, and *Trustees and Their Servants*.)

## Power and Authority—The Strength and the Weakness

In a complex institution-centered society, which ours is likely to be into the indefinite future, there will be large and small concentrations of power. Sometimes it will be a servant's power of persuasion and example. Sometimes it will be coercive power used to dominate and manipulate people. The difference is that, in the former, power is used to create opportunity and alternatives so that the individual may choose and build autonomy. In the latter the individual is coerced into a predetermined path. Even if it is "good" for him, if he experiences nothing else, ultimately his autonomy will be diminished.

Some coercive power is overt and brutal. Some is covert and subtly manipulative. The former is open and acknowledged, the latter is insidious and hard to detect. Most of us are more coerced than we know. We need to be more alert in order to know, and we also need to acknowledge that, in an imperfect world, authority backed up by power is still necessary because we just don't know a better way. We may one day find one. It is worth searching for.

The trouble with coercive power is that it only strengthens resistance. And, if successful, its controlling effect lasts only as long as the force is strong. It is not organic. Only persuasion and the consequent voluntary acceptance are organic.

Since both kinds of power have been around for a long time, an individual will be better off if at some point he is close enough to raw coercion to know what it is. One must be close to both the bitterness and goodness of life to be fully human.

The servant, by definition, is fully human. The servant-leader is functionally superior because he is closer to the ground—he hears things, sees things, knows things, and his intuitive insight is exceptional. Because of this he is dependable and trusted. And he knows the meaning of that line from Shakespeare's sonnet: "They that have power to hurt and will do none...."

## How Does One Know the Servant?

For those who follow, and this is every man—including those who lead, the really critical question is who is this moral man we would see as leader? Who is the servant? How does one tell a truly giving, enriching servant from the neutral person or the one whose net influence is to take away from or diminish other people?

A distinguished Rabbi and scholar had just concluded a lecture on the Old Testament prophets in which he had spoken of true prophets and false prophets. A questioner asked him how one tells the difference between the true and the false prophets. The Rabbi's answer was succinct and to the point, "There is no *way*!" he said. Then he elaborated, "If there were a *way*, if one had a gauge to slip over the head of the prophet and establish without question that he is or he isn't a true prophet, there would be no human dilemma and life would have no meaning."

So it is with the servant issue. If there were a dependable *way* that would tell us, "This man enriches by his presence, he is neutral, or he takes away," life would be without challenge. Yet it is terribly important that one *know*, both about himself and about others, whether the net effect of one's influence on others enriches, is neutral, or diminishes and depletes.

Since there is no certain way to know this, one must turn to the artists for illumination. Such an illumination is in Herman Hesse's idealized portrayal of the servant Leo whose servanthood comes through in his leadership. In stark modern terms it can also be found in the brutal reality of the mental hospital where Ken Kesey (in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*) gives us Big Nurse—strong, able, dedicated, dominating, authority-ridden, manipulative, exploitative—the net effect of whose influence diminished other people, literally destroyed them. In the story she is pitted in a contest with tough, gutter-bred MacMurphy, a patient, the net effect of whose influence is to build up people and make both patients and the doctor in charge of the ward grow larger as persons, stronger, healthier—an effort that

ultimately costs MacMurphy his life. If one will study the two characters, Leo and MacMurphy, one will get a measure of the range of possibilities in the role of servant as leader.

## In Here, Not Out There

A king once asked Confucius' advice on what to do about the large number of thieves. Confucius answered, "If you, sir, were not covetous, although you should reward them to do it, they would not steal." This advice places an enormous burden on those who are favored by the rules, and it establishes how old is the notion that the servant views any problem in the world as *in here*, inside himself, not *out there*. And if a flaw in the world is to be remedied, to the servant the process of change starts *in here*, in the servant, not *out there*. This is a difficult concept for that busybody, modern man.

So it is with joy. Joy is inward, it is generated inside. It is not found outside and brought in. It is for those who accept the world as it is, part good, part bad, and who identify with the good by adding a little island of serenity to it.

Herman Hesse dramatized it in the powerful leadership exerted by Leo who ostensibly only served in menial ways but who, by the quality of his inner life that was manifest in his presence, lifted men up and made the journey possible. Camus, in his final testament quoted earlier, leaves us with, "each and every man, on the foundations of his own sufferings and joys, builds for them all."

## Who is the Enemy?

Who is the enemy? Who is holding back more rapid movement to the better society that is reasonable and possible with available resources? Who is responsible for the mediocre performance of so many of our institutions? Who is standing in the way of a larger consensus on the definition of the better society and paths to reaching it?

Not evil people. Not stupid people. Not apathetic people. Not the “system.” Not the protesters, the disrupters, the revolutionaries, the reactionaries.

Granting that fewer evil, stupid, or apathetic people or a better “system” might make the job easier, their removal would not change matters, not for long. The better society will come, if it comes, with plenty of evil, stupid, apathetic people around and with an imperfect, ponderous, inertia-charged “system” as the vehicle for change. Liquidate the offending people, radically alter or destroy the system, and in less than a generation they will all be back. It is not in the nature of things that a society can be cleaned up once and for all according to an ideal plan. And even if it were possible, who would want to live in an aseptic world? Evil, stupidity, apathy, the “system” are not the enemy even though society building forces will be contending with them all the time. The healthy society, like the healthy body, is not the one that has taken the most medicine. It is the one in which the internal health building forces are in the best shape.

The real enemy is fuzzy thinking on the part of good, intelligent, vital people, and their failure to lead, and to follow servants as leaders. Too many settle for being critics and experts. There is too much intellectual wheel spinning, too much retreating into “research,” too little preparation for and willingness to undertake the hard and high risk tasks of building better institutions in an imperfect world, too little disposition to see “the problem” as residing *in here* and not *out there*.

*In short, the enemy is strong natural servants who have the potential to lead but do not lead, or who choose to follow a non-servant. They suffer. Society suffers. And so it may be in the future.*



## Implications

The future society may be just as mediocre as this one. It may be worse. And no amount of restructuring or changing the system or tearing it down in the hope that something better will grow will change this. There may be a better system than the one we now know. It is hard to know. But, whatever it is, if the people to lead it well are not there, a better system will not produce a better society.

Many people finding their wholeness through many and varied contributions make a good society. Here we are concerned with but one facet: *able servants with potential to lead must lead and, where appropriate, they must follow only servant-leaders*. Not much else counts if this does not happen.

This brings us to that critical aspect of realism that confronts the servant-leader, that of *order*. There must be some order because we know for certain that the great majority of people will choose some kind of order over chaos even if it is delivered by a brutal non-servant and even if, in the process, they lose much of their freedom. Therefore the servant-leader will beware of pursuing an idealistic path regardless of its impact on order. The big question is, what kind of order? This is the great challenge to the emerging generation of leaders: can they build better order?

An older person who grew up in a period when values were more settled and the future seemed more secure will be disturbed by much he finds today. But one firm note of hope comes through—loud and clear; we are at a turn of history in which people are growing up faster and some extraordinarily able, mature, servant-disposed men and women are emerging in their early and middle twenties. The percentage may be small, and, again, it may be larger than we think. And it is not an elite; it is all sorts of exceptional people. Most of them could be ready for some large society-shaping responsibility by the time they are thirty *if* they are encouraged to prepare for leadership as soon as their potential as builders is identified, which is possible for many of them by age eighteen or twenty. Preparation to lead need

not be at the complete expense of vocational or scholarly preparation, but it must be the *first priority*. And it may take some difficult bending of resources and some unusual initiative on the part of these people to accomplish all that should be accomplished in these critical years *and* give leadership preparation first priority. But whatever it takes, it must be done. For a while at least, until a better led society is assured, some other important goals should take a subordinate place.

All of this rests on the assumption that the only way to change a society (or just make it go) is to produce people, enough people, who will change it (or make it go). The urgent problems of our day, an immoral and senseless war, destruction of the environment, poverty, alienation, discrimination, overpopulation, are here because of human failures; individual failures; one man at a time, one action at a time failures.

If we make it out of all of this (and this is written in the belief that we will make it), the “system” will be whatever works best. The builders will find the useful pieces wherever they are, invent new ones when needed, all without reference to ideological coloration. “How do we get the right things done?” will be the watchword of the day, every day. And the context of those who bring it off will be: men (all men and women who are touched by the effort) grow taller, and become healthier, stronger, more autonomous, *and* more disposed to serve.

Leo the *servant*, and the exemplar of the *servant-leader*, has one further portent for us. If we may assume that Herman Hesse is the narrator in *Journey to the East* (not a difficult assumption to make), at the end of the story he establishes his identity. His final confrontation at the close of his initiation into the Order is with a small transparent sculpture, two figures joined together. One is Leo, the other is the narrator. The narrator notes that a movement of substance is taking place within the transparent sculpture.

.... I perceived that my image was in the process of adding to and flowing into Leo's, nourishing and strengthening it. It seemed

that, in time. . . only one would remain: Leo. He must grow, I must disappear.

As I stood there and looked and tried to understand what I saw, I recalled a short conversation that I had once had with Leo during the festive days at Bremgarten. We had talked about the creations of poetry being more vivid and real than the poets themselves.

What Hesse may be telling us here is that Leo is the symbolic personification of Hesse's aspiration to serve through his literary creations, creations that are greater than Hesse himself; and that his work, for which he was but the channel, will carry on and serve and lead in a way that he, a twisted and tormented man, could not—except as he created.

Does not Hesse dramatize, in extreme form, the dilemma of us all? Except as we venture to create, we cannot project ourselves beyond ourselves to serve and lead.

To which Camus would add, *create dangerously!*

## What Experts Say about Greenleaf and “The Servant as Leader”

The writings of Robert Greenleaf have been read by hundreds of thousands of individuals, and are highly respected by noted experts on leadership and management. Here are some of their comments on servant leadership.

“I have found Greenleaf and his writings among the most original, useful, accessible and moral on the topic of leadership.”

Dr. Warren Bennis, professor of management, author of *On Becoming a Leader*

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I truly believe that servant-leadership has never been more applicable to the world of leadership than it is today. Not only are people looking for a deeper purpose and meaning when they must meet the challenges of today’s changing world; they are also looking for principles and philosophies that actually work. Servant-leadership works. Servant-leadership is about getting people to a higher level by leading people at a higher level.

Dr. Ken Blanchard, author of *Leading at a Higher Level*

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“The deepest part of human nature is that which urges people—each one of us—to rise above our present circumstances and to transcend our nature. If you can appeal to it, you tap into a whole new source of human motivation. Perhaps that is why I have found Robert Greenleaf’s teaching on servant-leadership to be so enormously inspiring, so uplifting, so ennobling.

“A great movement is taking place throughout the world today. Its roots, I believe, are to be found in two powerful forces. One is the dramatic globalization of markets and technology. And in a very pragmatic way, this tidal wave of change is fueling the impact of the second force: timeless, universal principles that have governed, and always will govern, all enduring success, especially those principles that give ‘air’ and ‘life’ and creative power to the human spirit that produces value in markets, organizations, families, and, most significantly, individual’s lives.

“One of these fundamental, timeless principles is the idea of servant-leadership, and I am convinced that it will continue to dramatically increase in its relevance....You’ve got to produce more for less, and with greater speed than you’ve ever done before. The only way you can do that in a sustained way is through the empowerment of people. And the only way you get empowerment is through high-trust cultures and through the empowerment philosophy that turns bosses into servants and coaches...

“Leaders are learning that this kind of empowerment, which is what servant-leadership represents, is one of the key principles that, based on practice, not talk, will be the deciding point between an organization’s enduring success or its eventual extinction.”

Dr. Stephen Covey, author of *Principle Centered Leadership*

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Servant-leadership is not about a personal quest for power, prestige, or material rewards. Instead, from this perspective, leadership begins with a true motivation to serve others. Rather than controlling or wielding power, the servant-leader works to build a solid foundation of shared goals by (1) listening deeply to understand the needs and concerns of others; (2) working thoughtfully to help build a creative consensus; and (3) honoring the paradox of polarized parties and working to create ‘third right answers’ that rise above the compromise of ‘we/they’ negotiations. The focus of servant-leadership is on sharing information, building a common vision, self-

management, high levels of interdependence, learning from mistakes, encouraging creative input from every team member, and questioning present assumptions and mental models.

Dr. Ann McGee-Cooper and Duane Trammell, authors of *Being the Change: Profiles from Our Servant Leadership Learning Community*

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“Robert Greenleaf takes us beyond cynicism and cheap tricks and simplified techniques into the heart of the matter, into the spiritual lives of those who lead.”

Parker Palmer, author of *The Active Life*

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I believe that the book *Servant Leadership*, and in particular the essay, “The Servant as Leader,” which starts the book off, is the most singular and useful statement on leadership that I have read in the last 20 years. Despite the virtual tidal wave of books on leadership during the last few years, there is something different about Bob Greenleaf’s essay, something both simpler and more profound. This one essay penetrates to such a depth that it resonates in us, like the aftertones of a Buddhist meditation gong, calling us to quiet. Rereading the essay, I found myself stopped, repeatedly, by a single sentence or phrase. For many years, I simply told people not to waste their time reading all the other managerial leadership books. ‘If you are really serious about the deeper territory of true leadership,’ I would say, ‘read Greenleaf.’

Peter M. Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline*

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“I believe that Greenleaf knew so much when he said the criterion of successful servant-leadership is that those we serve are healthier and wiser and freer and more autonomous, and perhaps they even loved our leadership so much that they also want to serve others.”

Margaret Wheatley, author, *Leadership and the New Science*

# Questions for Reflection and Discussion

## **Servant and Leader**

1. Greenleaf asked at the beginning of his essay, can the roles of servant and leader be fused into one real person? If so, can that person live and be productive in the real world of the present? Greenleaf answers yes to both questions. What do you think?
2. Greenleaf said that “The great leader is seen as servant first.” What does that mean to you? Can you cite any contemporary examples?
3. How can you tell when someone is servant first?
4. Do you agree with Greenleaf that prophetic voices are speaking cogently all the time? If so, who do you think are some of the prophetic voices speaking today?
5. Greenleaf said: “A new moral principle is emerging which holds that the only authority deserving one’s allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader.” Do you agree or disagree?
6. Greenleaf said that servant leadership stands in sharp contrast to the idea of “retreating to an idyllic existence” or the idea of destroying existing institutions completely so that “new perfect ones can grow.” In what ways does servant leadership differ from these alternatives?
7. Greenleaf said that “The danger, perhaps, is to hear the analyst too much and the artist too little.” What does that mean to you?



Do you agree that this is a danger? If so, why?

8. Why did Greenleaf think that the fusing of servant and leader seems a dangerous creation?

### **Who is the Servant-Leader?**

9. How does Greenleaf define a servant-leader? What are the key elements in Greenleaf's definition?
10. Greenleaf wrote about the best test of a servant leader. What do you think about the test?

### **Everything Begins with the Initiative of an Individual**

11. Do you agree with Greenleaf that the very essence of leadership, going out ahead to show the way, derives from more than usual openness to inspiration?
12. What else does a leader need in addition to inspiration?

### **What Are You Trying to Do?**

13. Do you agree that "Every achievement starts with a goal?"
14. Comment on Greenleaf's discussion of eliciting trust.
15. Greenleaf says that "Not much happens without a dream." Have you seen either contemporary or historical figures live out their dreams?

### **Listening and Understanding**

16. According to Greenleaf, how does a true natural servant automatically respond to a problem?
17. What are the benefits of really listening?
18. Do you find silence awkward or oppressive?

### **Language and Imagination**

19. Do you agree that "Nothing is meaningful until it is related to the hearer's own experience?"

## **Withdrawal—Finding One's Optimum**

20. Do you use contemplation/reflection/withdrawal? If so, why and how? If not, how could these be beneficial to you?

## **Acceptance and Empathy**

21. Greenleaf said that “The servant always accepts and empathizes, never rejects.” Is that setting an unrealistically high standard for servant-leaders?
22. Greenleaf said that “Men grow taller when those who lead them empathize and when they are accepted for what they are, even though their performance may be judged critically in terms of what they are capable of doing.” Do you agree?

## **Know the Unknowable—Beyond Conscious Rationality**

23. What two intellectual abilities did Greenleaf say that a leader needs?
24. What happens if you wait for all the information you need to make a good decision?
25. According to Greenleaf, how do leaders bridge the information gap?

## **Foresight—The Central Ethic of Leadership**

26. How did Greenleaf define “foresight?”
27. Greenleaf said that “Foresight is the lead the leader has.” He also says, “Living this way is a matter of faith.” How are foresight and faith linked together?
28. What happens when leaders fail to exercise foresight?

## **Awareness and Perception**

29. What are the characteristics and capabilities of a leader who is “aware” as Greenleaf defined awareness?

30. Greenleaf said that awareness is not a giver of solace. Do you agree or disagree?

### **Persuasion—Sometimes One Man at a Time**

31. What was John Woolman's approach to bringing about change?

### **One Action at a Time—The Way Some Great Things Get Done**

32. Greenleaf said that Jefferson knew who he was and chose his own role. What role did he choose?

### **Conceptualizing—The Prime Leadership Talent**

33. Describe Grundtvig's conceptual leadership.

### **And Now!**

34. Who did Greenleaf suggest will assert their claims to stature in the future?
35. What role did Greenleaf see for "today's privileged"?

### **Healing and Serving**

36. What did Greenleaf say is the motive for healing?

### **Community—The Lost Knowledge of These Times**

37. Do you agree that community is the lost knowledge of our times? If so, how is the "community-less society" affecting you?
38. Greenleaf said that love begins with unlimited liability. What does that mean to you?

### **Institutions**

39. What is the difference between a people-using institution and a people-building institution?

### **Trustees**

40. How did Greenleaf describe the role of the trustee?

41. Greenleaf said that “no one step will more quickly raise the quality of the total society than a radical reconstruction of trustee bodies so that they are predominantly manned by able dedicated servant-leaders.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?

### **Power and Authority—The Strength and the Weakness**

42. What is the difference between coercive power and the power of persuasion?
43. What is the problem with coercive power?
44. Why did Greenleaf say that the servant-leader is functionally superior to other kinds of leaders?
45. How would you use power and authority as a servant-leader?

### **How Does One Know the Servant?**

46. According to Greenleaf, is there a dependable way to know who is a servant?

### **In Here, Not Out There**

47. How does the servant view any problem?

### **Who Is the Enemy?**

48. Who did Greenleaf say is the enemy when it comes to creating a better society? Do you agree or disagree?
49. How does society suffer when natural servants choose not to lead, or people choose to follow non-servants?

### **Implications**

50. Greenleaf said: “There must be some order because we know for certain that the great majority of people will choose some kind of order over chaos even if it is delivered by a brutal non-servant and even if, in the process, they lose much of their freedom.” What do you think?

51. What is Greenleaf's assumption regarding "the only way to change a society"?
52. What dilemma does Hesse dramatize?

## **REVIEW QUESTIONS**

53. Did Greenleaf's essay change your ideas about leadership? If so, in what ways?
54. Which characteristics of servant leadership make the most sense to you? The least sense?
55. Name some servant-leaders that you know in your own life, or from history, novels, or movies. Why do you see them as servant-leaders?
56. How different would the world be, if most leaders were servant-leaders?

## **PERSONAL QUESTIONS**

57. Are you willing to follow a servant-leader? If so, who are you willing to follow, and how?
58. Are you willing to become a servant-leader? If so, when will you start, and what will you do?

## About the Author

### Robert K. Greenleaf (1904-1990)

Robert K. Greenleaf was born and raised in Terre Haute, Indiana. He joined AT&T in 1926 and worked there until his retirement in 1964. Toward the end of his career, he served as AT&T's Director of Management Research. He also held a joint appointment as visiting lecturer at M.I.T.'s Sloan School of Management and at the Harvard Business School, and taught at Dartmouth College and the University of Virginia. After retiring from AT&T in 1964, he served as a consultant for Ohio University, M.I.T., Ford Foundation, R.K. Mellon Foundation, Lilly Endowment and the American Foundation for Management Research.

In 1970, Greenleaf published the first edition of his essay, "The Servant as Leader," which coined the phrase "servant-leader" and launched the modern servant leadership movement. This was followed by a series of essays and reflections, including "The Institution as Servant," "Trustees as Servants," "Servant Leadership in Business," "Servant Leadership in Education," "Servant Leadership in Foundations," and "Servant Leadership in Churches." He continued to write and speak until his death in 1990.

## About the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership

The Greenleaf Center was founded by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1964 as the Center for Applied Ethics, Inc. The Center was renamed the Robert K. Greenleaf Center in 1985, and does business today as the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership. The Center's mission is to promote the awareness and practice of servant leadership throughout the world. The Center hosts an annual international conference, sponsors a speakers bureau, holds workshops, distributes a newsletter, and publishes and sells books and essays on servant leadership. For more information, please contact:

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