

## *Me, me, me. I love myself. I have my picture on the shelf.*

When I was growing up, it was both demonstrated and expected of me on a daily basis that we are put here to serve others. And so, when I would get a bit too big for my britches, my mother would quietly look at me and recite the little ditty, “*Me, me, me. I love myself. I have my picture on the shelf.*” That’s all she needed to say to bring me back down to the reality that the world wasn’t about me and my selfish little ego.

Unfortunately, that lesson hasn’t been taught well of late, and the ‘me generation’ has proliferated—my needs...my wants...my rights...much to the consternation of business owners trying to build a cohesive, well-oiled team.

As a result, some companies are trying a different tack—servant leadership. This concept has become a trend in the business world, but the idea itself is a timeless one. The term was coined by Robert Greenleaf in an essay he wrote in 1970 and has been written about extensively since then. The thought behind it essentially flips the traditional mode of autocratic business practice upside down.

Our consulting firm has been focusing on mastering this concept, both internally and with our clients, but I’ve been pondering how well any of us grasp what it really means.

The best definition I found is this: “The focus of servant leadership is on the growth, success and welfare of the followers. The primary focus of a servant-leader is on his or her followers rather than on self. It is this singular characteristic which defines servant-leadership.” (Eric Swanson; Cru.org)

Just what does that definition look like in practice?

1. True leaders aren’t preoccupied with personal visibility and recognition. They don’t ask ‘How many people help *me*?’ but ‘How deep is my commitment to others?’
2. They recognize the contributions of those under them and willingly share the credit. They say ‘thanks’ often and mean it.
3. They don’t fake it. Servant leadership comes from a heart that is dedicated to helping others succeed. These leaders’ highest joy is seeing growth in those they serve.
4. It is important to be a good communicator, but more importantly, a servant leader is committed to being an intentional listener—actively hearing and assimilating what the others are saying.
5. These leaders are empathetic, seeking to understand others’ needs, motivations, and personalities.
6. Servant leaders don’t use their position of authority to force others to comply. Instead, they win others by persuading and convincing, which builds good teamwork and a great environment.
7. True servant leaders are dedicated to help others be their best selves. They bring patience, encouragement and gracious feedback, and if necessary, give reproof that is meant to teach, not demean.
8. By the way, if you are an employee, you aren’t off the hook—these same principles apply in how you relate to those both under and over you.

How are you measuring up? If I were to spend a few minutes with someone on your team, or your spouse or kids about your leadership, what would they say about you?

True leadership is found in serving others. It is the most powerful of all positions. It is the key to good relationships. It is a cure for all that ails you. Try it. You’ll feel better about yourself, and you will leave a legacy which will never be forgotten.

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