

## **SERVANT LEADERS : THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Gone are the days when leadership and data were preserved for a few elites. Organization worldwide are now directing their focus towards helping employees grow and prosper through the support of servant leaders not just to lead but to serve. Rather than hiding behind ranks and accolades, these leaders work with a serve first attitude and lead teams following the principle of 'acting first'. The servant leader empowers every member of the team for the holistic well being and growth of the organization enabling employees to show altruism and go beyond their call of duty.

**Keywords-** Prosper, Serve, Acting First, Holistic Well Being, Altruism.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The term "Servant Leadership" was firstly used by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970 who is also the "Founder of the modern servant leadership movement". It begins with the natural feeling to serve first and then consciously choose to become the one who aspires to lead. Servant leaders differ from individuals who are leaders first, perhaps because of an unusual drive to acquire material possession by individuals in such an approach. The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types with combination of shades and blends of human nature between them.

The servant leadership style has been developed to create a class of sympathetic and highly motivated leaders practicing a humble leadership style in just one word, "encouragement". As one cannot be encouraged without motivation, and cannot gain any motivation without a purpose, servant leaders are passionate and motivated individuals who respond to every task at workplace positively by saying 'we can do it'. One of the best examples of servant leadership is the one who says, "Do as I do, not as I say."

### **TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP Vs SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

Ninety six percent of HR professionals agree that employee experience at workplace is becoming more important and leaders have a crucial role to play in ensuring that it's a positive one. With this realization, the concept of servant leadership is growing in importance and popularity.

But what differentiates a servant leader from a traditional leader? The answer is their priorities. In traditional leadership model, the priority is to create a good result for the shareholders. The theory goes that if the shareholders are happy with the company's performance, they will invest more money in the company resulting in increased sales. And when sales increase, the extra revenue can be invested in employee wellbeing. The leadership model takes the shape of a pyramidal hierarchical structure in which shareholders are at the top and employees are at the bottom.

In contrast to this, a servant leader's number one priority is the employees. They understand that looking after employee well-being will increase their engagement, innovation, and productivity. It will result in happy and satisfied customers who can lead to increased revenue

and ensure high shareholder satisfaction. Under servant leadership style the pyramid is inverted, where employees are at the top and shareholders at the bottom.

### **SERVANT LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS**

Servant leaders should possess the following characteristics--

1. Awareness--To give them a holistic perspective on any situation, servant leaders should be aware of those around them.
2. Listening—Effective decision-making abilities and good communication were once considered the hallmark of a good leader. These skills remain relevant even today, but the servant leader also understands the importance of practicing listening skills. Active listening and reflecting back can help in better understanding of the employees needs.
3. Empathy—Being empathic is one of the core traits of servant leaders that makes employees feel heard and understood.
4. Foresight--Foresight is the ability to anticipate the possible outcomes of a decision on a situation. It's a skill that grows with experience and is connected with their intuitive abilities.
5. Conceptualization--The ability to conceptualize a problem or decision means looking beyond day-to-day interaction and envisioning a hypothetical future. A servant leader knows how to convey this vision to the team in a way that makes them feel involved and increases employee engagement, commitment and motivation.
6. Persuasion--A servant leader should rely on his power of persuasion rather than ordering subordinates. This is one of the biggest difference between servant leader and a traditional leader.
7. Community building--A team is a community, and the servant leader is the one who is responsible for making each team member feel that they are a part of the community.
8. Stewardship—Stewardship is when the servant leader behaves like a shepherd who steers the flock away from danger and guides them to green pastures that gives them space to grow healthy and strong in order to reap the rewards from their milk and wool coats. Similarly servant leaders use the available resources to ensure the well-being of their team to result in greater productivity.
9. Healing-- Talking about personal problems at work is not encouraged but if the suffering affects the performance level of employees, it needs to be discussed and eliminated. Servant leadership is transformational leadership, and it can help the employees overcome these issues in order to reduce the absenteeism and employee turnover problem at workplace.
10. Commitment to the growth of people--A servant leader should be committed to ensuring both the personal and professional growth of each member of his team putting forth every possible effort to support them.

### **KEY PRINCIPLES OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

1. Honour others –A servant leader should give priority to the honour of all individuals of the team.

2. Inspire vision—A well defined vision needs to be set before hand by the servant leader for accomplishing a particular goal.
3. Choose ethics —An efficient servant leader should focus on individual and group ethics before setting the profit targets.
4. Empower others--Before considering personal gains a servant leader needs to focus on individual empowerment.
5. Balance focus with flexibility –The decision making process should have the element of flexibility while remaining focussed on the objectives to be achieved.
6. Serve with humility— Leaders should always serve the team and the organization with humbleness.

### **WHOM DO SERVANT LEADERS SERVE**

When talking about servant leadership, the most important question that comes in the mind is “Who do servant leaders serve?” as servant leaders have priorities for

Putting others first—To begin with, one should first serve the immediate team and then branch out to determine which other groups must be served as well.

Finding strengths and weaknesses-- One important characteristic of servant leaders is their ability to work closely with colleagues to find out their strengths and weaknesses. The focus is to emphasize areas of strengths for greater employee retention, productivity, and a more positive work experience from the environment while trying to minimize the areas of weakness.

Practice humility-- Humility is concerned with neither overestimating one’s merits nor overvaluing oneself. It’s a sign of healthy ego and is not a sign of weakness. One need to remain modest, calm and focused on giving credit to others.

### **HOW TO DEVELOP THE SKILLS OF A SERVANT LEADER**

1. Lead by example-- A servant leader should always lead their team by setting his example before them.
2. Show people why their job is important—To keep the team focused, an intelligent servant leader can easily make his team understand the reasons why their job is important.
3. Encourage collaboration and employee engagement—A servant leader should be capable in motivating employees to collaborate and work together.
4. Help the teams grow and develop—Besides being the leader of the group, a servant leader is a facilitator who enhances the performance level of his team contributing to its growth and development.
5. Care for the team members personally—The servant leader understands the impact of the individual wellbeing on the goals of the organization. So they personally take care of the well being of the members of their team.
6. Ask for feedback— For collective efforts to become successful, feedback is essential as it points out the areas of strengths and weaknesses.

## **HOW SERVANT LEADERS MOTIVATE EMPLOYEES TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE**

Servant leaders can be a source of inspiration for the team members by-

1. Paying attention to the members individually--That's the key to inspire the employees.
2. Bring socialization at workplace by interacting with each other.
3. Communicate expectations of the company to the employees and clarify what is being expected from them. Giving them the authority to work, and making them accountable for the work done.
4. Be open and available for discussion all the time trying to strengthen the feedback loop.

## **HOW SERVANT LEADERS CONTRIBUTE TO ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

Servant leadership is revolutionary leadership which believes in turning traditional leadership model upside down. It involves placing the needs of employees before the leader's need; hence it is quite different from the traditional authoritarian leadership style. They believe in serving instead of commanding, showing humility instead of practicing authority, looking to enhance the development of their team by unlocking their potential, creativity and sense of purpose. The end result is "magic happens and performance goes through the roof."

Majority of traditional business leaders function for maintaining the desired level of performance, in exchange for salary and benefits which they receive. Such leaders are simply the boss for their employees. But the servant leader moves beyond the concept of the boss and actively seeks to develop and align an employee's sense of purpose with the company's mission. These empowered employees are trusted, purpose driven, well trained and innovative possessing the capacity to give high performance level with the potential to become future leaders, ensuring long-term viability of the organization. But to reap these fruits, servant leader's needs to ultimately start with an unselfish mindset with less focus on oneself, providing a healthy workplace culture and practicing good behaviour with others.

## **BEST PRACTICES**

For top executives who aspire to become successful servant leader's one bedrock principle needs to be practiced--a serve first mindset, since successful servant leadership starts with a leader's desire to serve his or her staff, which in turn serves and benefits the organization at large. This serve-first mindset can be put into practice from the very beginning, during an employee's on boarding phase.

Once the on boarding process of employees is over, the induction program helps servant leaders in getting acquainted with employees, by involving in meaningful conversation about how operations are carried out in the organization. The servant leader tries to solicit the new hire's observation, impression and opinion about the ongoing projects to convey a positive message from the very onset, that the employee's thoughts are valued. Servant leaders keep a continuous focus on talent development with the objective to leverage the employees' strengths since they realize that business objectives will not be served without granting authority and creating responsibility in the team members to complete the projects on time.

## **QUESTION CLOSER, LISTEN CLOSER**

Two core practices are essential towards achieving organizational goals -- asking questions and attentive listening. Asking the right question to the employees is very crucial for servant leaders. These questions vary from discussion related to employee's background, to factors impeding the progress of the employees, to detailed understanding of their assessment of the firm's business environment. Every question whether big or small, about different aspects helps in relationship building. It sends a positive message among the individuals in the group that their opinion matters, and the leader is interested in getting their feedback. These questions should be asked both ways. Employees should also feel comfortable clarifying their doubts without worrying how their leader would feel.

Besides asking questions the servant leaders should also practice the art of listening to understand. This means the servant leaders should listen to the employee silently and patiently making an active effort to understand their view point. Even if the leader feels annoyed or disagrees with the other persons view point he needs to wait until the other person has finished speaking. If needed, the leader may also clarify what the other person has just expressed, in a way to communicate understanding. While this may be only a common courtesy gesture for some, but listening to understand is a tedious task compared to asking questions.

### **ENCOURAGEMENT, HUMILITY, TRUST**

The hallmark expression of an effective servant leader is listening attentively to an employee, which motivates them positively. During this interaction the servant leaders should practice humility and be encouraging to employees. This means that when employees make mistakes, the leader should not scold them but engage in meaningful conversation demonstrating trust in them, to make the necessary changes to eliminate errors, keeping in mind that they are both servants and leaders. Trust is a prerequisite for servant leaders, because the leaders must trust that the employees are worth serving and that the organization will benefit from their services and employees must trust their leader is competent enough, to guide them in the right direction while integrating individual goals with that of the organization for future success.

### **WHY SERVANT LEADERSHIP IS BECOMING THE STYLE OF FUTURE**

Servant Leadership is an authentic example of transformational leadership approach to address the needs of the followers genuinely. It believes in fulfilling people's needs and empowering them by bringing positive changes. So the competitive future belongs to those organization and its leaders, who have empowered everyone on board to resolve professional issues. In this era of globalised 21<sup>st</sup> century, the whole world is viewed as a single village where high performance can only be expected with a united and empowered team of workers with a work environment that focuses on the member's holistic welfare. Only those institutions are likely to survive who have servant leadership at the core of their organizational structure and are willing to embrace change in the long run.

### **CONCLUSION**

Following servant leadership practices in the organization keeps the team engaged empathetically making members more comfortable in expressing and discussing their issues with their leaders. As a result, they feel empowered, trusted, motivated while remaining loyal to the organization. Servant leadership demonstrates leadership without requiring the spotlight, giving leaders an opportunity to lead and let others take the credit making it a way of life. Such leaders are people who may not have a classic leadership personality but have the courage to step forward and say, "I would like to help here" where everyone will listen and listened to, leading to few misunderstandings. This will help in building a united,

cohesive committed society, which will be more empathetic, contributing to the growth of every member facing common challenges in unison.

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