



## THE HUMILITY TO SERVE: ACKNOWLEDGING A FALLIBLE SPIRIT AND NURTURING GROWTH —NICK HUGE

**S**ervant-leadership is a broad model that can be applied at many levels and in diverse seasons of one's life. It is not only limited to an occupation but is relevant to our daily, more personal, social and familial interactions. It often seems that nurturing the less personal relationships with subordinates and co-workers comes more readily than those that are more deeply intimate. There is generally greater vulnerability required to humble oneself and be at the mercy of those who can most deeply wound us. For most, there is at least somewhat of an emotional distance to maintain with employees and peers, and though these relationships may cause significant hurt and dissonance, it is not at the same level that a partner or child can. Being a spouse or parent may not be considered a formal leadership position, yet it is in just these roles that one may have the most substantial influence on society (Ferch, 2012). It is a unique aspect of servant-leadership as a whole that no official designation is required, whether personally or professionally, the ultimate desire is to serve others first, and the leader blossoms out of this service mindset into action (Ferch, 2012). Servant-leadership in an intimate setting may look different than in a professional arena, yet the symptoms are the same, to build up those around oneself and provide them opportunities for growth as individuals and as a community (Ferch,



2012). Two specific characteristics of servant-leadership that are essential to both the home and workplace are empathy and forgiveness. They are critical to human growth and security and build an environment that promotes community and stewardship (Ferch, 2012).

Whether in business or personally, the benefits of forgiveness are exponential within families and groups, leading to greater development, empathy, and grace (Vitz & Meade, 2011). Michael E. McCullough, a predominant forgiveness theorist, sees forgiveness as the means to regenerating amity and furthering group achievement and subsistence (Vitz & Meade, 2011). It is important to note that forgiveness and empathy are not only essential virtues to be offer others, but also crucial for oneself in order to combat feelings of shame and unworthiness (Vitz & Meade, 2011). Servant-leadership at its root induces “self-worth, responsibility, and liberty in others,” as well as be a healing (Ferch, 2012, p. xxiii). To be all of this for others, one must also be self-aware and have the self-respect to nurture and heal themselves. No one is immune from the trials and hardships of humanity, some are the consequences of poor choices while others fall upon us with no semblance of rhyme or reason. Admitting our faults and seeking justice and reconciliation are building blocks of being a servant and taking responsibility for the healing of those around us (Ferch, 2012). But not all wounds can be healed completely, and reconciliation and redemption may only come to those select few who are equally conflicted with their nemesis in a way that both recognize their individual responsibilities and seek authentic forgiveness. In *My Father’s House*, Sylvia Fraser (1988) chronicles her years of sexual abuse at the hands of her father and the many devastating effects that plagued her throughout her life. Though she was able to reach a place of forgiveness for her father, it



was after he passed, and neither she nor he experienced the sort of reconciliation and redemption that humans deeply yearn (Fraser, 1988). In his profoundly moving treatise *The Sunflower*, Simon Wiesenthal (1998) writes of a dying Nazi soldier who confesses his atrocities to Wiesenthal and seeks forgiveness. As with most victims of the holocaust, as well as the perpetrators and bystanders, forgiveness, reconciliation, and redemption did not come. As a servant-leader, it is essential to psychologically and emotionally prepare for this, and still maintain faith in the ability to affect change through love, empathy, and forgiveness. But it is equally vital how one responds when there is no expression of love, acknowledgement of wrongdoing, or forgiveness offered. The true measure of servitude and character becomes evident when reconciliation and redemption are only present in our hope and longing for something greater.

Dr. Shann Ferch (2012) writes that “Power then is not only the power to forgive, but the power to evoke in others the tenacity to respond to darkness with light, to respond to evil with good, and to respond to hatred with love” (p. 7). All of the elements of servant-leadership, especially forgiveness and empathy, can be found both organizationally and individually. Organizations have distinct cultures, and some of them can be profoundly destructive to the institution and the individuals that make it up. Yet, as previously mentioned, the intimacy of the family relationship often produces deeper wounds as well as a more deep-seated desire and need for forgiveness.

## PART I: FORGIVENESS IN FAMILY

The intimacy and vulnerability of family relationships make forgiveness and empathy incredibly fundamental for emotional health and growth. Both of these elements are imperative to human development and progress (Toussaint & Webb, 2005). Parenting and



partner conflict require ample doses of compassion and reconciliation to build successful relationships (Toussaint & Webb, 2005). As the closest relationships most will experience in their lifetime are within family, conflict is inevitable, unavoidable, and range from the mundane to the traumatic (Gordon, Hughes, Tomcik, Dixon, & Litzinger, 2009). It is essential to note that the effect of conflict in a spousal relationship will have profound and lasting impacts on how their children will relate to the parents as well as others (Gordon et al., 2009). Unforgiveness in the marital relationship leads to greater insecurity, instability, and negative function in familial relations as a whole (Gordon et al., 2009). Studies show that forgiveness is a reliable indicator of marital and familial satisfaction and that greater compassion directly leads to increased trust and security (Gordon et al., 2009). John Gottman, widely known for his work in relational health, cites four primary factors that destroy relationships: contempt, stonewalling, defensiveness, and criticism (Ferch, 2012). Servant-leadership, and empathy and forgiveness especially, are in direct conflict with each of these characteristics. Yet, without the injection of humility, remorse, and forgiveness, these four characteristics will feed off of one another and create a destructive cycle that builds on itself (Ferch, 2012). In the previously mentioned study by Gordon et al. (2009), forgiveness was essential to building trust in relationships, not only within the relationship but throughout the larger family as a whole. Failing to forgive is directly correlated to distrust and inevitably leads to Gottman's four factors of relational failure (Ferch, 2012). Due to the deeply personal nature of familial relationships, these conflicts may be intensely traumatizing and devastating, producing wounds that may last a lifetime. The severe trauma inflicted on Sylvia Fraser (1988) is an extreme example, but one that accurately



depicts the uniquely damaging pain of being victimized by someone so close. Her abuse led to a dissociative disorder, withdrawal, tremendous relational difficulty, and ultimately the destruction of her marriage all before she fully understood the debilitating effects of the trauma perpetrated upon her (Fraser, 1988). Though it took decades, it was through the belief of those closest to her, and the empathy and compassion they showed her that she was able understand the depth of her wounds, acknowledge her pain, and ultimately forgive her father (Fraser, 1988). As the violence transpired within the family, Fraser (1988) also overcame deep-seated anger at her mother and sister for not seeing the wounds and protecting her, thus creating further, deeper familial dysfunction. Dr. Shann Ray Ferch (2012) writes that “the servant leader transcends himself or herself to become the steward of others, capable of raising future generations, and confident in building community” (p. 155). This notion is nowhere more evident than in the most intimate and influential relationships of one’s life, that of the marriage and family.

### *Abuse and Consequences*

My experience with woundings and trauma within marriage and family is profoundly complex, deeply emotional, and impacts me daily. Though marital discord is often a two-way street, with both spouses contributing to the tension, there is often just one that bears greater responsibility as the perpetrator that initiates conflict and abuse. In my marriage, that person was me. Jennifer and I married young, not even out of college, and with no real-life experience to speak of. Our families were not perfect, but neither of us wanted for anything growing up. The tension and conflict began rather quickly, and as previously mentioned, was initiated by me. Ferch (2012) writes that “faith that denigrates others denigrates itself, just as the person who denigrates others, denigrates self,” and it was through



“faith” that my most intimate relationship became abusive (p. xxii). Jennifer and I grew up in the evangelical Christian church, and I fell prey to interpreting messages and scriptures in way that justified my selfish behavior and desires. When she would disagree with me or have a conflicting viewpoint I used false words and beliefs to manipulate her faith and thoughts, guilt and shaming her for not falling in line. The relationship only worsened when we sought counsel from our local pastor, who almost entirely sided with me and insisted that my wife “submit” to my leadership. I aspired to be a leader first, establishing my power and dominance rather than a servant. I sought first to meet selfish needs through manipulation and coercion, with little care for the abuse and trauma I inflicted along the way. Though in the throes of relational dissonance we somehow thought that having children would help us both relate better to one another. The effects of my manipulation and cruelty became evident as Jennifer withdrew further, protecting herself from the emotional abuse that had been effectively validated by a “trusted authority.” She felt broken, shamed, betrayed. As we brought our first daughter into our lives things continued to slide and worsen. The demands of caring for a baby added fuel to an already tense environment. Coupled with my enlistment in the Army after college, the dissonance mounted, as the level of abuse and trauma increased, and her defensive and hurtful reactions created deep-seated mistrust, resentment, defensiveness and fear. As we know from Gottman’s work these are all elements that lead to relational hostility (Ferch, 2012). Over the next ten years, and with the addition of two more children and several deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan at the height of those conflicts, the cycle of shame and abuse continued, and the wounds deepened.

We had a family, or at least the perception of one. Though



Jennifer and I had both grown in many ways, there was lingering friction, unresolved conflict and unacknowledged trauma. Though I came to see the harm in my thoughts and actions, and made feeble attempts at reconciling my mistreatment of Jennifer, I felt owed forgiveness, redemption, and complete trust. I also failed to acknowledge and take responsibility for the deep underlying trauma that Jennifer had suppressed to stay in the relationship and protect our children from the effects thereof. In spite of both of our efforts to guard the children against the scars of our marriage it spilled over. Shouting matches, anger, and my withdrawal, sometimes for hours, sometimes days, all deepened the fear and weariness. What neither of us knew was that I was battling posttraumatic stress as well as clinical depression, the symptoms of which my spouse recognized, and begged me to seek help. Working in a hyper-masculine environment where you kept your problems to yourself and handled your personal issues silently, I never spoke of my troubles, our troubles. I put everything on Jennifer—she was my best friend, spouse, therapist, caretaker, everything. It was unsustainable, and the family dynamic grew darker, further strained. The kids were older now, more aware of the struggles and dynamics, disenchanted by the example of marriage and romance that conflicted with what they inwardly knew it should look like. They loved and appreciated both of us, but they hated the tension and unpredictability of our familial environment. Our marriage was a runaway train that I was trying to keep on the tracks through the force of my strength and willpower, never seeking help or support from the many resources that were available to me. I was too proud, too successful and high performing to possibly need or ask for help. This attitude, the failure to recognize and acknowledge the destruction I wrought on our family, as well as my pain and depression, led to multiple severe depressive episodes. Finally, after a dark and terrifying attack, Jennifer broke. She could no longer sustain being my victim



and my savior. She both insisted that I get help and that we divorce, her spirit broken seemingly beyond repair.

This moment, now more than two years ago, has altered my life, and family relationships intensely. Through counseling, a non-deployable position, and the continued support of my now ex-wife, kids, and friends, I have grown to understand the healing power of forgiveness, both receiving it and giving it, as well as forgiving oneself. Even before our separation and eventual divorce, I had made efforts to educate myself further, to become a better husband and father. Though these offered glimpses into a healthy relationship, the dark always came back, the patterns of dissonance, the triggers, the unacknowledged and unforgiven. In the last few years these walls have begun to come down, both my wife and I have acknowledged the contributions we provided to our broken relational dynamic, and asked each other for forgiveness for specific moments and actions as well as general themes. The last few years have been immensely healing for both of us, and though still working through pain, we are both healthier than we have ever been. We have also both collectively and individually apologized and sought forgiveness from each of our children. My ex-wife and I's relationship is the best it has ever been in most ways and we communicate remarkably. Yet, there is no reconciliation—a divorce finalized and a family broken.

I had tremendous difficulty with this for some time—where was the reconciliation, the redemption that is supposed to come? In time, I came to see that it is all around me. It is in the way my kids run to hug me, call me and talk to me about everything going on in their lives. All three of them want to spend time with me and voice their appreciation and joy in our relationship in a way they never had amid the turmoil. It is in the way Jennifer and I co-parent, connect with one another, and love and appreciate each other in ways we never



did. I came to see that reconciliation and redemption do not mean we get back everything we once had or hope for. Sometimes it is getting the opportunity to love again, to atone for our humanity and worst nature. Jennifer and our children gave me an incredible opportunity, the gifts of grace and mercy, whereby they were no longer holding out judgment for the actions I had committed against them (Ferch, 2012). Instead, they had opened themselves up to healing, loving me again, and allowing me to love them in return. Learning to accept loss and hardship as well as the consequences of our actions, and using those painful moments to not only grow oneself but others as well is a critical element of servant-leadership (Ferch, 2012). I have learned many difficult and painful lessons from my personal experiences, and not to share these to help others navigate their own dark passages of life would minimize the value and wisdom of my own. And it is not only my personal life that has seen tragedy and trauma, but the trials of a highly competitive and driven work environment as well, and a culture that glorifies a destructive tradition.

## PART II: ORGANIZATIONAL CULPABILITY

Alcohol consumption is widespread and deeply established in military culture as a whole and is an ever-present source of conflict in my unit. Though the government made sizable endeavors to curtail excessive alcohol consumption in the military, they generally focus on an increased awareness of potential problems and treatment options for alcohol abuse. Military culture is so deeply ingrained with heavy drinking that these efforts produce negligible results at best, and are often only helpful once an incident takes place. Many within my organization argue that drinking heavily together builds camaraderie and esprit de corps yet ignore and overlook the many devastating effects it also has on relationships, families, and the



organization. While it is widely recognized by society at large that this type of culture is not conducive to a responsible and dignified organization, military and civilian leadership have had little impact on changing it. Years of conflicts, trauma, and time away from home lends itself towards destructive and unhealthy alcohol use, yet there is an unwillingness among leadership to address the issue in the same way a private organization would. To genuinely grasp how deeply entrenched heavy alcohol consumption is, and the effects it has both within my element, as well as throughout the military, it is imperative to look at the history and background that produced this environment as well as how the culture continues to promulgate it. Understanding how deeply established alcohol is within the organizational culture will necessarily lead to acknowledgment of the damage it causes, as well as the moral responsibility to respond to it in a dignified and gracious manner. Without admitting our collective guilt in this epidemic, forgiveness, from victims as well as for ourselves, and ultimately change will be incredibly challenging, if possible at all.

### *History*

It is a culture that goes back hundreds of years, spans across continents, and maintains both official and informal components (Wilson, 2008). Though it is widely known to anyone who works in the field, there is also ample reporting and hearsay that acknowledge the deeply ingrained culture of heavy alcohol use in the military. More than 40% of active duty service members are binge drinkers, and for those in their early 20s, that number jumps to more than half (Lerner, 2009). US military personnel average 130 days of drinking a year, putting them 18 days ahead of the next closest occupations—miners, and construction workers (Simkins, 2019). But the most disturbing element is that only five years ago the average number of



days of alcohol consumption was only 96 (Simkins, 2019). More than 30% of military males aged between 18 and 25 years admit to heavy drinking (5 or more drinks at one sitting), almost twice as much as their civilian counterparts (Ames & Cunradi, 2005; Schumm & Chard, 2012). It is widely known, and I can attest from my experience, that many military traditions involve mostly compulsory drinking (Hlad, 2019). Tributes to the fallen, promotion ceremonies, memorials, military balls, and, perhaps more than anything, merely bonding with other service members, or “building morale” and “esprit de corps” (Ames & Cunradi, 2005). As recently as 1982, military personnel were able to consume alcohol on base even if under the legal age limit in that state (Wallace & Weeks, 2008). Though now discontinued, in the Vietnam war, service members were given a daily ration of two beers (Krohn, 2009). Military posts still allow for class six establishments to provide alcoholic beverages at discounted prices and tax-free (Ames & Cunradi, 2005). Another element that drives the prevalence of heavy drinking in the military, which is far darker and too often ignored, is post-traumatic stress and mental health.

### *Alcohol and Mental Health*

Though ceremonies, customs, and peer pressure are undoubtedly causative elements, trauma and mental health are a substantial basis for the excessive drinking culture. Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS), depression, addiction, and other mental illnesses have a profound correlation with increased rates of substance abuse (Jacobson et al., 2008; Schumm & Chard, 2012; Simkins, 2019). Military personnel deployed to theatres of war demonstrate an increased propensity for mental health issues directly correlated to alcohol abuse, and the same correlation has been found in previous conflicts as well (Jacobson et al., 2008; Schumm & Chard, 2012). Military



populations, my organization included, have elevated occurrences of several mental health disorders, to include military sexual trauma (MST), traumatic brain injury (TBI), mortuary affairs experience, and the possibility of exposure to death and killing (Schumm & Chard, 2012). With these conditions comes a significantly increased risk of alcohol abuse (Schumm & Chard, 2012). Due to the years of conflict since September 11, 2001, and the many deployments to warzones after that, alcohol abuse became the most common coping mechanism for the traumatic experiences and long separations from friends, family, and society (Agius, 2018; Krohn, 2009). All of these elements are present within my unit, and the neglect and dismissal of the violence and hurt that alcohol abuse inflicts on the health of colleagues and the organization as a whole is a disgrace that does a disservice to those suffering from addiction and mental health disorders.

### *Consequences of Culture*

As previously noted, toasting, honoring, and remembering historical events or the memory of those lost are all instances where consuming alcohol is not only permitted but encouraged. It seems to be entirely reasonable—bringing service members together to honor their history and establish a connection through mutual and unique events (Ames & Cunradi, 2005). Many of my colleagues and leaders have argued that drinking alcohol helps ease the strains and worries of the military while also building relationships and camaraderie (Krohn, 2009). While this may be true, it discounts the unhealthy and destructive side effects that are unavoidable. The wounds and hurt that come from such a culture impact far more than just the service-person, but their friends, family, and the organization as well.

The financial loss ascribed to heavy drinking within the Department of Defense (DOD) is assessed to be more than a billion



dollars in excess expenditures, \$425 million alone in medical expenses (Schumm & Chard, 2012). Wasted productivity due to alcohol consumption is estimated to be over 320,000 days per year, with 10,400 service members unable to deploy and another 2,200 forced out of work entirely (Schumm & Chard, 2012). The effects continue to mount—34,000 service members arrested for alcohol-related incidents every year, half of those for driving under the influence (DUI) (Schumm & Chard, 2012). DOD has not published an internal study, but for the general population, alcohol abuse is known to be a primary factor in cases of sexual assault, with over half of reported incidents involving heavy alcohol consumption (Abbey, Zawacki, Buck, Clinton, & McAuslan, 2001). As alcohol consumption and sexual assault rates are higher in military populaces, it would be safe to conclude that heavy drinking perpetuates an epidemic of sexual assault within the DOD (Robbins, 2013). As previously noted, a substantial amount of soldiers, sailors, and marines wrestle with a variety of mental health disorders. Drinking intensifies depression, anxiety, insomnia, as well as other symptoms of PTSD (Alcoholism in the Military, 2019). Veterans and active service members who battle mental illness have a higher likelihood of self-harm, and alcohol use is directly correlated (Allen, Cross, & Swanner, 2005). The harmful effects are not only limited to the individual or their military unit but their families who shoulder the bulk of the consequences. The destructive impacts of alcoholism and binge drinking on the family structure and social relationships are many, throw mental health issues and combat trauma into the mix and they become staggering. The data is extensive, precise, and undebatable, and though not explicitly measured, I think the statistics within the small population of my unit may show an even deeper issue. Even with many deeply personal examples of the ill effects of alcohol, the majority of our community is staunchly against any



efforts to curtail the problem, citing individual freedom and responsibility and the availability of counselors and treatment. These platitudes not only do not address the underlying issue, culture, but often result in an individual not seeking help until they are facing the loss of their job, livelihood, and family.

### *Personal Responsibility*

The consequences of this culture have had a profound effect on me, my perception of leadership and responsibility, and how forgiveness, redemption, and restoration fits into it all. The loss due to alcohol abuse that is taking place throughout the military, and in my organization specifically, is entirely unethical and destructive, yet is often perceived as an individual issue that continues to go unaddressed. Several of my peers and subordinates struggle with alcoholism, yet they have managed it, tried to disguise it due to a culture around them that normalizes their behavior. The colleagues that have sought treatment only did so after a severe alcohol-related incident, a combination of several events, or because their family had given them an ultimatum. Admitting to a problem and seeking help is often akin to weakness, as alcohol consumption is so prevalent that many assume everyone frequently drinks considerable amounts and yet manages just fine. For many years, I was a part of this culture, unable to see the destructive nature of alcohol consumption being present at every work-related function. My perspective changed after having two direct subordinates, and friends become functioning alcoholics, frequently showing up to work smelling of alcohol, yet operating nearly normally. By trying to work with them while keeping them in their demanding jobs rather than forcing them to seek treatment, I only prolonged and potentially exacerbated their problem. If someone has a substance addiction, and that substance is ever-present, with no one even attempting to stop them from



indulging, but often encouraging them, how could they operate effectively in that environment? By the time both of these men were forced to seek treatment one of their families had left entirely and the other was still in denial that he had a problem. These two men took vastly divergent paths from here, one has been fortunate enough to recover, successfully maintained sobriety, and has taken the necessary space to escape the environment and strengthen his family. The other took a far more sinister path, completing three inpatient alcohol treatment programs successfully yet relapsing again and again. He was never able to stay sober, eventually being separated from the military, losing his family entirely, and taking his own life only a few months thereafter. These are only two situations in which I had personal involvement, yet there are many more like this throughout the military. I have come to the point where I can acknowledge the responsibility that our organization and I played in these two accounts. I am very much in the minority in my workplace, as most of my colleagues believe that it was all personal discipline and individual choices, even though many of them drank heavily with both men on many occasions, as I did myself.

#### *Responsibility, Acknowledgement, and Forgiveness*

I was fortunate enough to be able to apologize to the colleague who successfully completed treatment and has maintained sobriety. He was initially sheepish about my apology, believing as most do that it was his failure and flaws that led him there and not the responsibility of anyone around him. But through time he was able to see the profound and aggressive environment of ever-present alcohol consumption. I never got to make this apology and ask forgiveness of the other colleague, or his family for that matter. Though privately some will acknowledge the role our organizational culture plays in the high rate of alcohol abuse, and the destruction thereof, there is a



fear of instituting more significant restrictions or limits on the presence of alcohol. Forgiveness and redemption are complex elements in this conflict, as receiving both require some level of acceptance of responsibility (Wenzel, Woodyatt, & Hedrick, 2012). It seems to perpetuate the cycle of guilt and self-loathing, and alcohol hardens these feelings even further. There is no acknowledgment of responsibility, no apologies or requests for forgiveness from those hurt, and in the end no self-forgiveness either. Though there is a superficial self-forgiveness, whereby we move forward and make excuses and push the responsibility to the victims, the substance, the stresses of life, without ever honestly acknowledging our role in perpetuating an abusive culture (Wenzel et al., 2012). And I am not innocent in this façade. Though I recognize the issue, I have been unable to alter the culture in any measurable way. Though I and others are certainly trying to remedy the dissonance that we see, and feel in ourselves, we are unable to achieve self-forgiveness, and thus resort to justifying or excuse-making (Milam, 2017). Studies show that even if an offender receives forgiveness from a victim, if the perpetrator's actions, habits, or perspective remain unchanged there will continue to be dissonance within their conscience, and self-forgiveness will be fleeting (Milam, 2017; Wenzel et al., 2012).

Another issue with failed acknowledgment is that one will not seek forgiveness and reconciliation from those they have injured. Finding true self-forgiveness is especially tricky in this case, with no apology or confession offered, and therefore no forgiveness sought or given. Though self-forgiveness may be possible without receiving forgiveness from the injured party, it becomes almost impossible without confessing responsibility in some form (Dat & Okimoto, 2018). Acknowledgment is critical to forgiveness and self-



forgiveness, but all of them together are essential to redemption and reintegration (Dat & Okimoto, 2018). This forgiving and healing interaction may certainly benefit the organization or unit, as others will recognize that responsibility has been confessed, thus allowing for greater self-reflection and recognition (Dat & Okimoto, 2018). And this is where change may begin, with a discussion of both the individual responsibility of alcoholism, but also the immense contribution that military culture has on creating an environment that is enabling this abuse.

### *Collective Forgiveness*

Binge drinking and alcohol abuse are rampant in the military structure, and my organization is no exception. It is an element of military life that has been around since the earliest written accounts. In our modern age, all of the data is available that demonstrates the destructive nature this cultural element has on men and women who choose to enter an already stressful and at times traumatic profession. And it is not only harmful to service members but to their family, friends, and society as well. A big part of organizational legitimacy is having or maintaining social value, and all the more so the military as a service-oriented occupation (Seeger, 1997). The military proudly advertises that elements such as discipline, honor, integrity, duty, justice, and service are the foundation of their ethos. The destructive nature of excessive alcohol consumption is entirely at odds with these fundamentals. Though many see heavy drinking as inconsistent with the military's espoused values, they are hesitant to alter something that many consider personal freedom. Professionals believe that it is incredibly difficult to change one aspect of organizational culture, as many elements rely on each other to create the whole (Mike, 2014). It is imperative to acknowledge that the excessive availability and abuse of alcohol in the military is a



problem that is damaging to individuals, their families, and the organization as a whole. This culture injures many, and many require an acknowledgment of that, an apology, and the opportunity to offer and receive forgiveness. There are so many complex elements of injustice created by this culture of alcohol abuse and such a deep need for redemption and transformation. Though I may not be able to transform the greater culture, my experience, acknowledgment, and willingness to engage the issue within my unit can have an effect. Maintaining the courage to call out the destructive nature of this culture against those who defend it, and there are many, is essential to my self-forgiveness. Authentic redemption from the responsibility that I have in perpetuating this damaging culture and replacing it with an environment of servitude and healing requires a willingness to address it openly.

## CONCLUSION

The term *servant-leadership* is deceptive because it is not leadership in the traditional sense at all. It is the unique ability to put the needs of others, their wellbeing and nurturing, above our own. The irony is that in living this way one is often thrust into positions of leadership and power, as others gravitate to their selflessness and life-giving joy. But the real test of servitude, and being able to lead in a way that honors those around us, is how we face our failures, shortcomings, and woundings. In *American Masculine*, Shann Ray (2011) brings to life many tragic narratives of the human experience. These heartbreaking stories illuminate the deeply damaging cycle of abuse and pain that one generation often perpetuates for another (Ray 2011). Johan Galtung (1996), an expert on peace and conflict studies emphasizes “Violence of any kind breeds violence,” and those who hurt, abuse, and brutalize others are often victims of atrocities themselves (p. 32). Dr. Ferch (2003) writes that knowing our flaws



and shortcomings, being apologetic for them, and pursuing a better path is “One of the defining characteristics of human nature” (p. 1). And this is where servant-leaders can have such a profound and lasting impact, by acknowledging their humanity and faults, showing empathy, contrition, and the demonstrated yearning to break the cycle of abuse or hurt that is so prevalent in our world. When an individual can humble themselves and confess their faults and transgressions, showing authentic remorse, seeking forgiveness, and establishing genuine change, how many cycles of violence might they affect among their families, friends, coworkers, and beyond? Ferch (2012) writes that “With this knowledge we go to others, humble ourselves, ask forgiveness, and change—and it is precisely this lifestyle of modesty and real change that draws others near and evokes in them their own desire to be responsible” (p. 46). And this is where a true servant lifestyle shines through, by offering healing and hope for a better way of living, one that seeks rehabilitation rather than retribution, reconciliation and not isolation. A life of servitude creates ripples that extend beyond those closest to us but reaches those with whom we may never meet or interact. My privileged life offers me tremendous grace, mercy, and opportunity. And though bitterness, disengagement, and self-loathing are traps that lure me to focus inwardly on my shortcomings, I know to do so would be a disservice to my family, friends, and many more who may yet avoid pain and trauma by hearing of my own. This is the essence of my purpose. To humble myself, acknowledge my humanity, and thus empathize with and encourage anyone I interact with that they are not their brokenness. That though it may not look like a fairytale, reconciliation and gratitude for our transgressions can be a reality if we can alter the lens through which we see it to one of love and compassion.



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