



## SERVANT-LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY

—STEPHEN R. COVEY

*In this essay, drawn from his keynote speech at the Greenleaf Center's 1999 conference, Dr. Covey describes what he calls the four roles of leadership—modeling, pathfinding, alignment, and empowerment—using examples and a nautical metaphor. Covey says the true test of leadership is the one that Robert K. Greenleaf described, and that true servant-leadership produces servant-leadership in others. Stephen Covey was a keynote speaker at the Greenleaf Center's 1996 and 1999 annual international conferences.*

I want to say a word about this conference: it's a beautiful illustration of win-win situations, because servant-leadership is the enabling art to accomplishing any worthy objective. It's glorious to see these two organizations—The Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership and the National Association for Community Leadership—come together and to see others join together and to let go of the ego investment in words, semantics and agendas, to realize the transcendent agenda that unifies us and the transcendent values of respect and service, servant-leadership, and the enabling values.

My purpose now is to describe what I call “the four roles of leadership.” The first role is simply to be an example, a model: one whose life has credibility with others, has integrity, diligence, humility, the spirit of servant-leadership, of contribution. This is the most fundamental of our roles. Someone asked Albert Schweitzer how kids learn. He said, “Three ways. First, example. Second, example. Third, example.” Nothing is as powerful as example. I don't care how much or how little you know. When you teach what you yourself are still learning, you also enroll people as a support for



you to help you live it. You give your knowledge to others by trying to live it; yes, it's hard. You show humility: this modeling is the foundation of true leadership. People who genuinely care and who have this personal integrity merit the confidence of others.

The second role of leadership is pathfinding. That's the vision role. That's the role of deciding what your mission is and what your values are, what you're trying to accomplish. The big mistake most organizations tend to fall into—and in many firms leaders tend to fall into—is to announce to other people what their mission is. Because if there's no involvement of the people in forming the mission, there's no commitment from the people. The mission won't be the operative, powerful, empowering focus it's intended to be. For true pathfinding, you must always study what the needs of people are. You must try to discern what the value systems are and how you can come up with a strategic plan within those values to meet those needs. That's essentially what pathfinding involves.

The third role of leadership is alignment. Once you have chosen the words that define what your vision, your mission, your values are, then you have to make sure that all of the structures and systems inside the organization reflect that. This is the toughest part of the pathfinding role. Because once you realize you have to align structures and systems, once you realize you're not just in some kind of vision workshop for the mental exercise, but that your organizational structures and systems will be governed by your visions and values—I'm telling you, you will start to take seriously the concept of coming up with a proper goal or vision or mission. Unless you institutionalize your values, they won't happen. All you'll do is talk about them, about the value of servant-leadership, about the value of community leadership, about cooperation, innovation, diversity—but unless they're institutionalized, built into the very criteria of structures and systems to support the strategy, the vision, the mission that you're after, they will not happen. That's why that alignment role is so vital. You can't come up with competitive compensation systems and still say you value cooperation. You can't say you value the long term when you're totally governed by short



term data. You can't say you value creativity when march-step conformity is the thing that's continually enforced. You can't say you value diversity when really deep in the bowels of recognition systems are prejudices about different kinds of groups or people. But you can get commitment and involvement by many people if your value system is truly exemplified by your organization's structure and policies. And if your values are based on natural laws or principles that are universal and self-evident, then you institutionalize that moral authority. You're no longer dependent on the moral authority of a particular individual.

The fourth role of leadership is empowerment, empowering people. The fourth role is essentially the fruit of the first three. When you have a common vision and value system, and you have put into place structures and systems reinforcing that vision, when you have institutionalized that kind of moral authority—it is like lifeblood feeding the culture, the feelings of people, the norms, the mores—feeding it constantly. Now you're really out of people's way. You don't have to be focused on morals. You don't have to be focused on procedures; you have a few, but relatively few. You can focus instead upon vision and values and release the enormous human creativity, the human ingenuity, the resourcefulness, the intelligence of people to the accomplishment of those purposes. Everything connects together: the quality of the relationships, the common purpose and values. You find that people will organize themselves. They'll manage themselves. People are drawn to doing their own best thing and accomplishing that worthy purpose, that vision. That's empowerment!

Let me give you a visual image for each of those roles from a nautical source. The first role, *modeling*, is an anchor. That means you personally are anchored to the principles of integrity, of service, of contribution, of kindness, of respect, all these most basic principles and values. The second image is the image of a map with the ship going towards its destination. *Pathfinding* means that ship knows where it's going. It has a destination. The third image, for *alignment*, is the steering wheel. When the steering wheel of this big ship is turned, all of the structures and systems, the huge



rudder, the trimtab of the rudder, everything else is geared to responding to the direction that has been given from this wheel. All the parts of the ship are coordinated, everything is focused, aligned. The fourth image, the one of *empowerment*, is the fully-masted sailing ship. With the sails set up fully, responding to the wind, you have the release of that human potential: everyone cooperates together to take that ship to its destination.

Now I want to introduce one other image: the image of a trimtab. The trimtab is the small rudder on the big rudder of a ship, a small surface, that when you turn it, it turns the larger surface. Sometimes the resistance of the ocean is so strong that you can't turn the rudder directly. So you turn a small trimtab, which is easier to turn, that gets leverage against the water, and that can enable the rudder to turn, and when the rudder turns you can direct the ship to its destination. I love this image of a trimtab, because every one of us can become a trimtab figure—inside our families, inside our communities, inside our organizations. It doesn't make any difference what your position is: any person can become a trimtab figure.

People often ask if modeling always comes first. My experience is that there is an element of modeling which comes first; otherwise there's no credibility. But the highest form of modeling is when you're carrying out the other three roles. You model when you help people get involved in the process of deciding the destination, the pathfinding role. You are modeling tremendous respect for others when you are willing to align structures and systems that affect you as well as everyone else, and you make yourself accountable. You have essentially modeled integrity. The greatest gift you can give to another person is themselves. You do this when you affirm in people their basic gifts and talents and capacities, their ability to become trimtabs themselves, to become change catalysts. When you do that, you show tremendous reverence for people, you show humility, you show respect, you show caring—that's modeling.

The true test of leadership is the one that Bob Greenleaf described: you model these four roles of leadership so that others around you are empowered to find their own paths, and they in turn are inspired to help even more



people find their paths. Greenleaf said your servant-leadership produces servant-leadership in others. You don't just serve, you do it in a way that makes them independent of you and capable and desirous of serving other people. Anyone can be a servant-leader. Any one of us can take initiative ourself; it doesn't require that we be appointed a leader, but it does require that we operate from moral authority. That's the great need. The spirit of servant-leadership is the spirit of moral authority. It says, "I'm not into me. I'm into serving you and other people. And I know for me to be a servant, I have to be a model or I'll lose the spirit of servant. I'll just want to have 'the appearance' of serving so that people will think more of me." Then they lose the kind of humility Robert Greenleaf spoke about.

You can release tremendous synergy when you empower people, and you can do it most effectively when you come to any situation not with a competitive, win-lose attitude, but with a win-win attitude. It only takes one person to think win-win. Not two. So when you join together with other groups, you have different vocabularies, different kinds of agendas, a different focus and so forth. The natural thing with people is to want to be understood. No: instead seek to understand the other first. That's the spirit of the servant-leader. I want to understand you. What are your concerns? What are your interests? Why don't we both win? Now *that* empowers us *both*; it releases our potential. The key to empowerment is to listen to other people and to value their differences.

Let me tell you about a colleague I sometimes team-teach with when I'm in South Africa. He's well known in that country for his successes, and his businesses are prospering. And with the new South African economic reality—with the global economy, the releasing of the sanctions, the dismantling of apartheid—a lot of businesses are really languishing. And businessmen press him. They say, "How did you do this? What are you doing?" He basically starts with a story of playing Monopoly with his son, beating his son in a very competitive game, and then really emotionally piling on, kind of gloating. And his son says to him, "Father, does it matter that much to you? It's only a game." And the father at the time was going through



Seven Habits training, writing his personal mission statement, and he said, “What has happened to me? What has my life been based upon?” It was based upon technique, power, training, education, but not principles. So he went deep inside all the rationalizations in his mind and his heart, including apartheid. And he really let it out. He tells businessmen this story. That’s not the story they want to hear. They want to hear techniques. They want to know what program he recommends. He says, “It starts with oneself.” And it does. Starting with himself was the key. He went from power leadership to servant-leadership. He became interested in others, empowering others.

There’s one last point I’d like to make. There are four needs in all people. We must survive in our body: we must live. We must relate to others: we must love. We must grow and develop, use our talents: we must learn. And we must also have value, make a difference: we must leave a legacy. To live, to love, to learn, to leave a legacy. Where these needs overlap, you find that internal motivation, the fire within. If you do not have an outward focus to leave a legacy, the fire will go out in other areas. Did you know that? People will be wanting more for themselves. The culture will divide and people will learn toward their own ends. But when you are making a living, building a family, having good relationships, constantly growing and learning, all with intent to contribute, to serve, the fire goes on. It ignites. If a lit match gets close to another match, it will ignite the other match. It’s the warmth of caring that does it. Then the fire goes on. If I were to take that match and put it to a candle, it would burn for a long period of time. What if I were to translate that candle into an electrical system or something even bigger?

Starting with your own fire, you can create something that will burn bright for many people and last a lifetime—through alignment of structures and systems, through the institutionalization of the principles we have talked about—you can empower others to live, to love, to learn, to leave a legacy. You can be a servant-leader.



Stephen R. Covey is vice-chairman of FranklinCovey Company, the largest management and leadership development organization in the world. He is perhaps best known as the author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, a book with a compelling message that has sold over 15 million copies in 38 languages. His most recent book, *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness*, has also become an international bestseller. Dr. Covey was recognized as one of Time magazine's 25 most influential Americans.