



## SERVANT-LEADERSHIP: REFLECTIONS ON A 30-YEAR PARTNERSHIP OF THE SPIRIT

—ANN MCGEE-COOPER,  
WITH DUANE TRAMMELL AND GARY LOOPER  
ANN MCGEE-COOPER & ASSOCIATES

This is a story about serendipity, synergy and synchronicity. Thirty years ago, three lives converged as a result of a chance meeting. Their collective calling gave birth to a vision that has transformed three generations of leaders.

Robert K. Greenleaf rose to a challenge from his economics professor to find ways to transform the dysfunction within large businesses and organizations by working from the inside. He captured the imagination of many with his seminal essay, *The Servant as Leader*. In it, he thoughtfully delineated a practical philosophy of leadership that was dramatically different from the traditional model of the “egocentric” or “boss” paradigm.

Jack Lowe, Sr., a natural servant-leader and founder of an air-conditioning equipment distributor, construction and services company in Dallas, had a vision that a company could be more than a job and a paycheck. He was committed to engaging his employees as partners, practicing servant-leadership to bring mutual trust and a servant’s heart into the act of leadership. He envisioned a leaderful organization in which every person awakened to his or her full potential and responsibilities, both as a leader and a servant of others.

My name is Anne McGee-Cooper and I was a very lucky young teacher with the belief that every life has a gift of unique genius and every person has the potential to learn and transform. When Jack Lowe, Sr. invited me to help create a servant-led company, a company of the sort envisioned by Robert Greenleaf, the result was a 30-year partnership of the



spirit. My life continues to be transformed by these two incredibly inspiring servant-leaders.

Joining me in this journey and writing are my business partners, Duane Trammell and Gary Looper. Duane helped establish Ann McGee-Cooper & Associates in the early '80s. Recognized with several top awards as a teacher, he has become my coach and partner. He has special gifts in curriculum design and bringing in the voice of those being served. Gary Looper joined our firm six years ago, bringing unique abilities in facilitation, research and writing. Together we share this story.

#### THE LEGACY OF A NATURAL SERVANT-LEADER

Jack Lowe, Sr., founder and president of Texas Distributors (now TDIndustries), earned a remarkable level of trust in his relationships that changed the face of Dallas. Because of his extraordinary servant-leadership, alliances formerly thought impossible were created, benefiting the entire city. An outstanding example of this was his capacity to bring racial groups filled with distrust into a shared plan to integrate the Dallas public schools. In his honor, one of the new public schools in Dallas has been named after this man who forged a lasting trust.

In 1970, Greenleaf wrote *The Servant as Leader*. Jack came across a copy of the essay not long afterwards and liked it so much that he began buying copies by the box and passing them out to Employees,<sup>1</sup> the Dallas school district board, the Dallas Chamber of Commerce, various business friends at his church, and most organizations of influence in Dallas at that time. Greenleaf became curious as to who might be buying his essay in bulk and why. A phone call began a long and deep friendship in which each man drew on his intuitive belief about more respectful and effective ways to grow leadership in all people.

For two years, Jack and Linda Wyatt Smithey (Jack's executive assistant) met with small groups of Employees in his home to discuss Greenleaf's essay and how they might apply it in their work together. In a memoir, Smithey wrote, "Harriet Lowe was a great contributor in those



meetings. Here we were in the home of the President, and his wife was making lunch for us. In a lot of ways, he was saying, ‘I really want you here. I want you to be a part of the family, not just the company.’”

Together, they created The People Objective from Linda’s notes collected from these dialogues with every Employee. They noted that their goal was for

each and every TD person to feel successful as a person—as a total person—with one’s co-workers, family, friends, community, God and self. Among other things, this means one must feel growth, must feel individually important. . . and it requires of oneself a high order of responsibility and self-discipline.

If through oversight or neglect or just not caring much, we fail to do what we can to help even one person in this objective, it’s really a bad failure. For this concept to be real, it must be total. There must be no one excluded.

After presenting this to the Employees, they also came up with some “Yardsticks.”

- Be honest.
- Think and act like a manager.
- Help create profits.
- Help create satisfied customers.
- Be understanding and helpful. Put yourself in the other person’s shoes.

Several years later, some of the Employees felt that the company was not following through on the “People Objective” and “Yardsticks.” That’s when Jack’s storied Breakfast Sessions began. Again, with small groups, he met to talk openly about the heart and soul of Texas Distributors. Out of these sessions came an organic list of characteristics that continue to guide the company.



## TD Leadership

In his book *The Servant as Leader*, Robert Greenleaf successfully expressed our views of how people can and should work together to grow our company. If our organization is to live up to its Basic Values and Mission, a key ingredient will be the Leadership provided by a very large number of us: simply and plainly defined:

- Leaders are people who have followers. They have earned recognition and respect.
- Leaders are first a servant of those they lead. They are a teacher, a source of information and knowledge, and a standard setter, more than a giver of directions and a disciplinarian.
- Leaders see things through the eyes of their followers. They put themselves in others' shoes and help them make their dreams come true.
- Leaders do not say, "Get going." Instead, they say, "Let's go!" and lead the way. They do not walk behind with a whip; they are out in front with a banner.
- Leaders assume that their followers are working with them. They consider others Partners in the work and see to it that they share in the rewards. They glorify the team spirit!
- Leaders are people builders. They help those around them to grow because the leader realizes that the more strong people an organization has, the stronger it will be.
- Leaders do not hold people down, they lift them up. They reach out their hand to help their followers scale the peaks.
- Leaders have faith in people. They believe in them. They have found that others rise to their expectations.
- Leaders use their heart as well as their head. After they have looked at the facts with their head, they let their heart take a look too.
- Leaders keep their eyes on high goals. They are self-starters. They create plans and set them in motion. They are persons of thought and action—both dreamers and doers.
- Leaders are faced with many hard decisions, including balancing fairness to an individual with fairness to the group. This sometimes requires a "weeding out" of those in the group who, over a period of time, do not measure up to the group needs of dependability, productivity, and safety.
- Leaders have a sense of humor. They are not stuffed shirts. They can laugh at themselves. They have a humble spirit.
- Leaders can be led. They are not interested in having their own way, but in finding the best way. They have an open mind.



Six months before he died, Jack suggested three other ideas that might be added to the company's list of purposes:

'To serve God. To serve our fellow man. To build a group of people who work together in friendship and love" (*A Partnership of the Spirit* by Ashley Cheshire, p. 133).

That encapsulates the spirit and conviction of an exemplary servant-leader who gave his life for the benefit of Partners at TD and the city of Dallas.

In 1976, I was invited to keynote a national conference for religious educators, chaired by Harriet Lowe, Jack's wife. Jack attended the conference and saw a connection that led him to invite me to talk with him about the dream he held for his company. He first asked me to read a copy of *The Servant as Leader*, by Robert K. Greenleaf, and to come back and share my thoughts. When I returned, fascinated and inspired by what I had read, I explained how the tenets of servant-leadership were parallel to what I believed about effective teaching: namely, that the most effective teachers lived what they taught, believed deeply in the unlimited capacity of every student, and used Experiential Learning to make learning fun and engaging. Making it safe to ask questions, explore differences of opinion, and engage in honest dialogue is key to evoking lasting changes in behavior. In addition, many interactive experiences were used as the basis for discovering more effective ways to team and lead.

As a professor at Southern Methodist University, I had founded and directed a research project which became a lab school pioneering highly innovative learning techniques. The Experimental Arts Program was also known for work with students of all ages using Accelerated Learning, highly validated techniques which brought learning to a deeper level, more quickly, with a higher level of retention. I had taught graduate students (all experienced teachers) to use these techniques successfully in situations in which students had experienced frequent failure and, as a result, low self-esteem. By making learning fun, bringing in all the senses, and creating a safe atmosphere in which success became the norm, teachers made it possi-



ble for abstract concepts to be understood and applied, with extraordinary results.

Jack knew that the concepts of servant-leadership were abstract and went against traditional management theory and beliefs. And he realized that craft workers didn't do well in traditional academic settings. But he thought my non-traditional teaching techniques and a strong belief that everyone could excel might be a great fit for his vision to bring servant-leadership into the lives, hearts, and daily work habits of every manager and Partner at TD.

In the beginning I collaborated with Steve Saunders, a bright young intern who was at that time Jack's executive assistant. Steve took me to several construction job sites for a first-hand look at the kinds of work environments challenging leaders at TD. Then, together, we began to integrate Steve's knowledge of the business, Greenleaf's concepts of servant-leadership, and my experience creating a learning environment in which every student could succeed.

*Robert K. Greenleaf: Mentor and Friend*

Not long after beginning this partnership, I was invited to Philadelphia to visit Bob and Esther Greenleaf at Crosslands, the Quaker Retirement Community they had moved into. I brought pages of questions that would become a basis for long conversations with Bob (many of which were taped). Over the next ten years, there were several visits, phone calls and letters. I was lucky enough to have Bob as a patient coach, mentor and friend guiding our efforts to more fully understand servant-leadership and ways to bring it into our work with Partners at TD.

Bob was an incredible listener who took my thinking to a deeper level. He built on what I knew and helped me discover the power of silence, reflection and not knowing. I only wish I could have a second go at being a student with Bob. He was so far out in front that only now, three decades later, am I catching up to what he was working to help me discover.



Bob had a keen sense of humor, an intense curiosity, and a gift for asking the kinds of questions that opened new doors of wondering. He frequently baffled and delighted me. Just when I thought I understood where he was leading me, he would surprise me with a totally different idea.

For example, one day we were talking about trust. I had learned from my father to prudently withhold trust until the other person had proven trustworthy. Greenleaf suggested that I might want to rethink this assumption. When a person you trust and admire has faith in you beyond where you are now, that person is giving you a new vision to live into and own. Acting on the capacity to create an expectation of excellence and then trust another to live into it was a new idea to me. And yet, as I reflected on my life, I realized that in more than one instance I had made a significant leap in performance because someone I admired believed in me and I didn't want to let that person down. Learning to trust first and open the possibility for enhanced performance breaks the negative chain of self-fulfilling prophecy.

On another visit I was talking non-stop, eager to learn as much as I possibly could in the short time we had together. Bob often found other, more creative ways to open new insights, as he did on this day. As I talked he quietly reached out, took my hand and led me outside to a wooden bench in the sunshine, where we sat in a long silence. It was clear that more talking wasn't appropriate. Then he began to explain that his Quaker background had given him two valuable gifts. The first was, "Don't speak unless you can improve upon the silence." I was stunned. What could this mean? For me, silence was an opportunity to fill something empty, or my time to talk. I had never considered that it might have value in and of itself. And just when I was grasping the idea that long periods of silence might open a deeper level of insight, Bob explained the second gift. "When Spirit moves within you, you must give it your voice. These two create a tension within which true dialogue emerges." We sat for a long while as these thoughts took root. Bob was a thoughtful person who had a gift for saying



a great deal with few words. While I will never fit this description, this conversation helped me begin to discover new options.

Bob was a practical businessman as well as a futurist. Consider his “15 Criteria for Running a Sound, Long-run Business.”

Fifteen Criteria of a Sound Long-Run Business

1. Make a satisfactory profit.
2. Protect our assets and use them efficiently—provide capital and access to capital for the future.
3. Maintain good stockholder relations.
4. Maintain and improve our position in the industry and the economy.
5. Develop new products, new fields, new techniques, new demands.
6. Conform fully with laws and ethical standards.
7. Satisfy our customers and keep them sound.
8. Maintain good relations with competitors to improve the industry.
9. Earn the respect of communities in which we operate.
10. Favorably influence the climate in which all business operates.
11. Effect growth of people in the business—in terms of morale, attitude, ability, initiative, self-reliance.
12. Effect welfare of people in the business—in terms of economic security, health, safety, family, stability, community responsibility.
13. Improve our knowledge of and control over our business.
14. Contribute something to the art of management.
15. Provide for future top management of the business.

\* From *On Becoming a Servant-leader* by Robert K. Greenleaf, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1996, p.188.

A COMPANY OF BOLD DREAMS

In 1982 Duane Trammell joined me to form a new company, Ann McGee-Cooper & Associates, Inc. Duane had been named Teacher of the Year in Dallas and had formerly been a graduate student studying with me. His creativity as a teacher and tremendous enthusiasm to grow and learn caused him to stand out in a class of highly gifted teachers. Together, we chose to found a new company based on the culture of servant-leadership we found so inspiring at TD. Our vision was to become servant-leaders





who inspired our clients to claim bold dreams through whole-brained balance. Learning to teach through the whole brain was the secret of Accelerated Learning and a process we integrated into everything we designed for TD.

AMCA, Inc. has been privileged over the years to work for a wide variety of clients from business and industry, education, healthcare, public utilities and government agencies. These include Southwest Airlines, the Fluor Corporation, Bechtel, Stone and Webster, Brown and Root, Halliburton, GE, Centex, TXU, the Federal Reserve Bank, Naval Weapons Center, NASA, and the CIA. We have coached national business leaders, government officials and college presidents on servant-leadership, growing learning communities, culture transformation, team-building, team time management and creative problem solving.

#### A UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP

Most consulting relationships don't last for thirty years, much less grow into a deeply committed partnership that goes beyond a formal contractual agreement. Over the years TD has found numerous ways to grow and strengthen the small consulting team of futurists that is Ann McGee-Cooper and Associates. And we are committed to go the second and third mile routinely to insure success for TD. Here are some of the unique dimensions that define this highly synergistic partnership:

1. From the very beginning, TD invested in growing AMCA as Partners. It is unusual for a company to reach beyond its Employees and provide training and development opportunities for vendors. Yet we have always been invited to attend all the leadership development and training being provided for TD Partners. This included opportunities to work directly with Stephen Covey, who was teaching from his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*, Dr. Bill Guillory, who taught classes on diversity, and Tom Peters, who gave a presentation on his innovative ideas about getting creativity into business strategy.



There were also classes on quality, continuous performance improvement, Spanish, and many other topics. By growing us, we could not only add more value, but also integrate the curriculums we were designing with all the other skills being taught and practiced.

2. TD's CEO (or another senior leader) has always personally come to kick off and close the day. We find it remarkable that a top company leader will consistently invest the time to welcome and challenge each class going through servant-leadership development. The shared goal is to make sure that Employees know the learning they are going to experience comes directly from the cultural aspirations of their leaders and Partners. It is not something from outside or "off the shelf." Toward the end of the day the senior leader would rejoin the class to listen in, provide a vision going forward, and challenge each Partner to live and act as a servant-leader. Only then could a culture of trust, respect, and creating a great place to work become a reality.

In 1980, when Jack Lowe, Jr. earned the CEO role at TD, he continued to espouse his father's philosophy of servant-leadership: "Bob Greenleaf, in *The Servant as Leader*, describes a new kind of leadership which puts serving others, including Partners, customers, and community, as the highest priority. This servant-leadership built the trusting relationship which got us through difficult times together and provided the foundation for using the tools of quality to aggressively improve the ways we serve our customers. Servant-leadership builds the trust which allows us to work together successfully as we face a continually changing future." Earning and maintaining the highest levels of trust are the foundation upon which both Jack and his father did business. One of Jack, Jr.'s special gifts was to build TD as a business. Yet he did so from a primary commitment to servant-leadership.



Even in financial downturns, Jack never wavered in his commitment to grow the people as well as the business.

In January 2005, after several years of careful succession planning, Harold MacDowell became the third CEO at TD. Promoted from within, Harold now opens every class on servant-leadership by sharing his stories of working over the past 20 years to grow his servant-leadership as the foundation for his new role. His message is compelling: “I’m convinced that our collective commitment to servant-leadership will enhance our shared trust that produces strong business results. It is my expectation that each of you will join me in this commitment.” Harold also tells funny, humbling stories of sobering mistakes that have helped him mature as a compassionate leader. Humor and humility are cornerstones of TD’s culture, and in his new role, Harold works hard to connect openly with everyone. Each leader is unique, yet what sets TD apart is their seamless commitment to making trust and trustworthiness the foundation upon which a great business and a great workplace are built.

3. AMCA, Inc. worked closely with top leaders from TD to recruit class sponsors for every class. And what we have learned with TD we have used to strengthen our work with all other clients. From the evaluations and feedback gathered after every class from every participant, we quickly learned that we needed help linking servant-leadership principles back to the workplace. We needed a TD leader in the class who would help reinforce the concepts. That person could also provide specific examples of how and why servant-leadership was a far better and more productive way to do business. Sometimes we had two class sponsors—one from the field and one from the office—to illustrate that there was no area of the company in which servant-leadership was not the preferred way of doing business. This proved to be very successful. Class sponsors not only reinforced all the



servant-leadership skills for managers, but also reminded participants that the company was only as strong as each of them in their maturity and daily performance as servant-leaders.

4. TD leaders are committed to responding to any concern about the behavior of leadership brought forward during the servant-leadership classes. Questions are followed up on by the senior sponsor and/or the People Department. Sometimes a participant asked, “Has my supervisor ever attended this class?” When class sponsors heard this, they knew we all had a lot of work to do getting every manager and supervisor to understand the importance of “walking the talk.” After every class we huddled with the senior sponsor, class sponsor and Jessie McCain, who led the People Department. Our focus was on ways to keep improving the learning and make sure that we were integrating theory with practice. As a direct result of these huddles, an advanced servant-leadership class was added so that all managers could return to renew and continue growing their skills.
5. TD participants proposed a “90-day review.” One of our class sponsors asked the class, “How can we make sure that we don’t let all these great new skills just get forgotten as we all rush back into our work?” One Partner suggested that they reconvene for 90 minutes in 90 days with a promise to be accountable for one new skill or improvement from their Personal Action Plan. The goal was 100% attendance and 100% reporting on at least one new area of improvement. This was so successful that it has become a norm for all the leadership classes at TD.
6. AMCA developed an advanced servant-leadership curriculum with TD. From the beginning the curriculum evolved from a thorough assessment of recommendations from all levels of leaders. Duane Trammell led this research effort. He met with a cross section of supervisors and superintendents from all areas of the business to learn what they thought was most important, as



well as the outcomes they wanted. From these meetings, he collected current success stories to illustrate the learning skills. He then added quotes from current leaders explaining how and why the transformation into servant-leadership was not only a far more successful way of doing business, but also the best path toward creating a great place to work.

We learned that although salaries and benefits are important, how people are treated and a high level of trust are the biggest factors determining loyalty and Employee retention. And turnovers are costly. Studies confirmed that when people leave a company, it is typically because they don't have a good relationship with their supervisors, they don't feel appreciated or included, or their work isn't valued. As a result of our research, we established four goals for a curriculum:

(1) Share Greenleaf's concepts about serving people; (2) Provide practical "how-to's" of good supervision; (3) Educate about TD's past and continuing investment in servant-leadership; and (4) Intersperse activities and conversations that would allow TDPartners time to dialogue and reflect on how they were doing on these key management/supervision activities.

To accomplish this, we divided the course into 8 skill areas:

1. Establishing an inspiring leadership philosophy;
2. Directing and coordinating work;
3. Leading a team;
4. Motivating people and improving relationships;
5. Dealing with difficult people;
6. Communicating, planning and organizing;
7. Using diversity as an advantage; and
8. Leading in tough situations; problem solving.

We designed 27 individual skills corresponding to the eight supervisory skill areas. These are not presented as a recipe, but rather as a beginning point from which each Partner can choose



to develop his or her own personal plan for growth. Each participant receives a Personal Action Plan to be filled in during the day. At the end of each of the eight sections, we stop to encourage participants to write down an application to their own work/home life.

Careful thought is given to the recognition of TD's legacy of servant-leadership practice. Each workbook is filled with pictures of TDPartners on jobsites doing their work. Section-openers contain not only quotes from Greenleaf, but also quotes from TD leaders sharing their philosophy of servant-leadership. To accomplish our last goal of allowing time for Partners to dialogue on how they are doing with servant-leadership as a company, we use short videos, table discussions, reflective imaging and team activities, role play, simulations, and customer problem-solving situations created by TDPartners. Rich dialogue and deep insights come from these interactive experiences.

Without question, the positive momentum of this process comes from the participants. Even though we are charged with designing and leading this process, we always come as students, create our own Personal Action Plan, and are accountable for our growth. The continuing transformation of all parties creates a synergy that grows stronger each year.

7. In 1998, based on the growing number of new Partners who spoke English as a second language, AMCA and TD together invested in getting the curriculum materials translated into Spanish. Now Partners have a choice: if they prefer, they can work from a Spanish rather than an English version of the learning materials. And we sometimes use a translator to make sure the oral parts of a class are understandable to all Partners.
8. We practice win/win/win teaming. When either party is in trouble, the other goes the extra mile. For example, Jack Lowe, Jr. has provided a number of business references and helped



AMCA find Dallas clients and build a strong, local presence. And when TD has been in tight financial situations, AMCA has found ways to keep the classes going on a very tight budget. We have worked hard to keep the class size small so that every Partner gets special attention and has time to have questions explored. TD has always made growing their people a top priority and doesn't drop their budget for these classes, even when times are tough.

9. As outside interest in servant-leadership grew, AMCA and TD made the classes a lab school for servant-leadership and allowed for a limited number of guests to observe and participate in the classes. These included not only subcontractors working closely with TD, but also school board members, principals, and top leaders of other community non-profit groups such as the YMCA and the Red Cross. Together we teamed with The Greenleaf Center to make our curriculum available world-wide to those interested in making the transformation into servant-leadership.
10. Based on our long-term partnership with TD, AMCA created 14 learning modules to teach servant-leadership so that anyone, anywhere, had access to high quality materials at a very reasonable price. We found creative ways to package the work we have developed together over the past 30 years into modules that could travel and be adapted to any age and any situation.
11. Early in the process, we worked to integrate what we were teaching in servant-leadership into all the other Employee tools such as performance reviews, quality workshops, diversity training, Seven Habits seminars, and so forth. AMCA Partners makes it our business to attend as many of the quarterly business reviews, Friday Forums (a monthly open forum to bring in outside speakers and broaden community and business awareness), celebrations, and other TD events. Our goal is to keep learning their business, to think and act like an owner, to keep searching for



even more effective ways to bring in current business opportunities, and to apply the skills of servant-leadership to all parts of the business.

12. TD leaders made servant-leadership and business results requirements for employment. In the mid '90s we had done an audit to make sure all business practices were rewarding a servant-leader's approach. We didn't want to inadvertently confuse Employees with classes teaching one set of values and practices while business processes rewarded different standards. Meanwhile, Jack Lowe, Jr. and his leadership team drew a "line in the sand." From that day forward, every leader within TD would be accountable for performance in both areas. In speech after speech, leaders admitted that previously abusive leadership had been overlooked by some who were good at making the numbers. But going forward, this would no longer be acceptable. If a particular leader was good at one standard, yet rejected, ignored or simply didn't perform well on the other, then that leader must either make prompt, significant improvement or find employment elsewhere. It took hard work to make this a reality, but it got the attention of everyone and significant changes were made where needed.
13. A partnership between AMCA and TD's Diversity Committee created four videotapes of skits, using company Partners, that highlighted servant-leadership and non-servant-leadership behaviors in the workplace. In 1999, a soul-searching session of the TD Diversity Committee led to an innovation in AMCA's servant-leadership classes. The committee found that servant-leadership was more "talk than walk" in critical areas of the business. Leaders on the committee openly shared some of the classic situations in which servant-leadership was still painfully absent. How could we further strengthen our resolve to put servant-lead-





ership into practice in each and every situation? How could we raise the bar?

In one of TD's regular Friday Forums, founders of The Container Store performed six entertaining skits illustrating their six core values. Even though the skits were "home made" and somewhat impromptu, the impact was terrific. They inspired us to identify nine typical scenarios showing the gap between our ideal and current practice. We recruited teams of Partners to create fun, quick skits to illustrate the differences. With little budget and home video equipment, we recruited top leaders to play the roles of leaders stuck in old, abusive styles, which added to the fun. Original music and even dance numbers were created. Don Frick, who had produced TD's 50th anniversary tape, produced these into nine short videos to be used at job sites as a starting point to stimulate healthy dialogue about what is and is not servant-leadership and why it is so important within the culture of TD. The impact of these homemade skits has been felt across TD and a number of other companies that have used them.

14. TD and AMCA created the Servant-leadership Learning Community (SLLC).

In January of 1998, when *Fortune* magazine came out with the first list of "100 Best Companies to Work For in America," TDIndustries and Southwest Airlines were honored as #5 and #1. Because of our work with both companies, we were inundated with calls from organizations large and small eager to learn more about servant-leadership. Parallel to this, we had also been actively learning and practicing the five disciplines of a learning organization as taught by Peter Senge and his colleagues at M.I.T. And, we had joined SOL (Society for Organizational Learning) to connect internationally with companies working to become learning organizations

With the encouragement of Jack Lowe, Jr., we formed the SLLC with seven organizations (including TD, Southwest Airlines, the Carrollton Police Department, the Bill Priest Institute for Economic Development,



TEMPO, and Celebration Restaurant) wanting to explore the practice of servant-leadership and the learning organization disciplines. TD generously opened servant-leadership classes as a lab school to the community and members of SLLC. Southwest Airlines served the SLLC as another mature, leaderful culture. Drawing from my 15 years as a member of SWA Culture Committee and joined by several top leaders, we drew from their 35 years of leading with a servant's heart.

Today, 11 member organizations meet once a quarter on a Friday morning and rotate sites among the members. Our vision is to aspire to practice and improve our collective skills as a learning community centered on servant-leadership. We desire to collectively increase our ability to co-create a future based on relationships of trust and respect as well as a triple bottom line that includes People, profit, and our stewardship of the planet.

Sometimes people make the mistake of thinking that servant-leadership is "soft stuff." Together we have learned that as hard as the technical business challenges are to "get right," they are far easier than the people side of the equation. To truly become an effective servant-leader requires courage, persistence, and commitment to the belief that together we can create something far more meaningful and successful than we can by working independently. We salute and thank all our Partners at TD for being our patient and inspiring teachers on this journey. We stand in awe of our good fortune at having been in the right place at the right moment. To have been given the opportunity to be impacted by the extraordinary lives of Bob Greenleaf and Jack Lowe, Sr. is a rare blessing. Equally, to live within the community of TD Partners over these thirty years has transformed everything about us, from our vision as a business to our personal commitment to keep growing our servant-leadership.

Jack Lowe, Jr. said recently, "We've been at this thirty years and we have yet to produce even one true servant-leader." As usual, Jack is disarming with his honesty, humor, and humility. The paradox is that he's right. We may never achieve the full measure of what it means to be true servant-leaders in every sense of Greenleaf's transcendent vision. Yet



Greenleaf challenges us to start within (not outside) on our mission to bring lasting change to the world:

“The servant views any problem in the world as *in here*, inside oneself, 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*.”

To quote another well-known servant-leader, Mahatma Gandhi:

“We must be the change we want to see in the world.”

---

Ann McGee-Cooper lives in Dallas, Texas, United States of America, and is a nationally recognized leadership consultant and author, a person of unique depth of heart and spirit, and a member of the advisory and contributing authors board for *The International Journal of Servant-leadership*. In her work she helps develop organizations that are servant-led and capable of influencing the crucial undercurrents of society. With Ann, Duane Trammell helped establish Ann McGee-Cooper & Associates in the early ‘80s. Recognized with several top awards as a teacher, he is Ann’s coach and business partner. Gifted in curriculum design, he emphasizes the voice of those being served. Gary Looper joined Ann McGee-Cooper & Associates six years ago, bringing unique abilities in facilitation, research and writing.

---

#### NOTE

1. We have adopted Southwest Airlines’ practice of capitalizing “Employee” and TDIndustries’ of capitalizing “Partner” to reflect their respectful terminology.



#### SOURCES TO CONSIDER

In addition to benefiting from Greenleaf's essay, we have learned from many books, tapes, videos and speakers. As difficult as it is to highlight just a few, here's an abbreviated list:

- Bohm, David. (1996). *On dialogue*. London: Routledge.
- The Business of Paradigms (video)*. Star Thrower.
- Cheshire, Ashley. (1987). *A partnership of the spirit*. Dallas: TDIndustries.
- Collins, Jim, & Porras, Jerry. (1994). *Built to last: Successful habits of visionary companies*. New York: Harper Business.
- Covey, Stephen. (1990). *The seven habits of highly successful people*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- De Geus, Arie. (1997). *The living company: Habits for survival in a turbulent business environment*. Boston: HBS Press.
- Ellinor, Linda, & Gerard, Glenna. (1998). *Dialogue: Rediscovering the transforming power of conversation*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Frick, Don M. (2004). *Robert K. Greenleaf: A life of servant-leadership*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Greenleaf, Robert K. (1977). *Servant-leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power & greatness*. New Jersey: Paulist Press.
- Greenleaf, Robert K. (2003). *The servant-leaders within: A transformative path*. New Jersey: Paulist Press.
- Hesse, Hermann. (1956). *The journey to the East*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Isaacs, William. (1999). *Dialogue*. New York: Currency.
- Jackson, Phil. (1995). *Sacred Hoops*. New York: Hyperion.
- McGee-Cooper, Ann, & Looper, Gary. (2001). *The essentials of servant-leadership: Principles in practice*. Boston: Pegasus Communications.
- Ostrander, Sheila, & Schroeder, Lynn. *Superlearning*. (2000). New York: Delta/The Confucian Press, 19.
- Patterson, Kerry, Grenny, Joseph, McMillan, Ron, Switzer, Al, & Covey, Stephen. (2002). *Crucial conversations: Tools for talking when stakes are high*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- The Pygmalion Effect (video)*. CRM Productions.
- Senge, Peter. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York: Currency Doubleday.



Wheatley, Margaret. (1999). *Leadership and the new science*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.