



## POSITIVELY IMPACTING OUR WASTEFUL WAYS OF LIFE

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For years economists have argued that living conditions, as a whole, have improved in the United States because the country's gross domestic product (GDP) has risen. Others have argued, however, that rising GDP is a mere illusion of progressiveness in the United States and that the quality of life in America has been declining for many years. These skeptics insist that progressiveness and improvement must be measured by something other than a country's revenue (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins, 1999, p. 59).

The skeptics are making headway. Many scholars, economists, and authors today are singing a common tune. Some of them suggest that "uneconomic growth" more appropriately describes the U.S. economy. Economist Robert Repetto, as quoted in *Natural Capitalism*, asserts, "Under the current system of national accounting, a country could exhaust its mineral resources, cut down its forests, erode its soils, pollute its aquifers, and hunt its wildlife and fisheries to extinction, but measured income would not be affected as these assets disappeared. . . . The result can be illusionary gains in income and permanent losses in wealth" (Hawken et al., 1999, p. 61).

Despite the discernment presented by Hawken et al., given the recent economic downturn, many people have taken their eyes off of conservation issues. Consequently, problems such as waste accumulation continue to snowball. But as Americans struggle to maintain or regain the lifestyles they led before the downturn, it is as crucial now as ever before for them to understand the repercussions of how they are living. Simple daily decisions about whether to recycle soda cans and cell phones, what motivates us to go shopping, and the types of food we eat are severely crippling the world's ability to sustain us.



This essay examines the areas of people's everyday lives that are incredibly wasteful, using the United States as a case in point. Statistics are cited, trends are discussed, and questions are raised regarding how these situations developed and what effects they pose to today's world and the livelihood of future generations. The notion of servant-leadership is presented, and a practical framework is outlined illustrating how we can all lead through service and do our part to remedy major issues the world is currently facing. We all have choices to make each day. As Viktor Frankl (2000) so eloquently contended in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, "Everything can be taken from a [person] but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way" (p. 66).

The current American egocentrism and its seemingly blind attachment to unconscionable waste is not the first example of a society ravaging the environment to its own peril. Jared Diamond, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of the book *Collapse*, suggests that the environmentally triggered breakdown of Viking Greenland between approximately 1300 and 1450 as a result of deforestation parallels the environmentally-elicited collapses of Easter Island, the Ansazi, the Maya, and many other pre-industrial societies (Diamond, 2005, p. 179). A number of modern-day countries such as Rwanda and Haiti are currently in the same situation (pp. 7, 330). There is a profound and terrifying collective responsibility that rises out of forces as old as manifest destiny and colonialism, and as new as "globalization."

#### A MILLION POUNDS OF TRASH PER AMERICAN

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (2006, p. 1), the 2005 municipal solid waste in America totaled 245.7 million tons. Statistics show that individuals in the United States create an average of about four and a half pounds of trash per day (p. 1). Additionally, virtually all of the raw materials used to manufacture, package, transport, and market consumer goods also become refuse. When all materials are accounted for, the total average waste for every American soars to



approximately 1 million pounds per year (Hawken et al., 1999, p. 52). One simple example that illustrates how quickly garbage accumulates is discarded soda cans, which accrue in a mere three months to the amount of aluminum needed to replace the entire U.S. commercial aircraft fleet (p. 50). Other examples of waste include two million books, 350 million magazines, and 24 billion newspapers annually (Kostigen & Rogers, 2007, p. 14).

In the book *Natural Capitalism*, the authors note that the “total annual wastes in the United States alone, excluding wastewater, now exceed 50 trillion pounds per year” (Hawken et al., 1999, p. 52). So much waste has amassed in the United States that there have been enormous problems with its disposal. In fact, the highest point on the eastern seaboard visible from space is a landfill (Kostigen & Rogers, 2007, p. 65). As described in *The Green Book*, disposal is such a gargantuan issue that the United States often ships its waste to other countries. The authors report, “More than half of the electronics imported into the United States end up as exports to third world countries as waste” (p. 65)

Although recycling campaigns exist in many cities across the United States and progress continues to be made, the total amount of waste that gets recycled each day is still less than 2% (Hawken et al., 1999, pp. 52-53). Industries in the technology sector are huge contributors to the national waste stream. More specifically, electronic waste is the “fastest growing segment of municipal landfills around the world,” illustrated in part by the estimated 130 million cell phones that are thrown away every year (Kostigen & Rogers, 2007, p. 34). A few other common household items that are recyclable yet continue to be trashed at alarming rates are: 100,000 CDs (every month), 50 million pounds of toothbrushes (every year), and paper in the form of junk mail (one and a half trees’ worth per household per year) (p. 65).

Other countries are also guilty of wasteful practices. For example, 60% of recyclable domestic waste in the United Kingdom ends up in a landfill, and China is now home to six of the world’s top ten most polluted cities



(*Ecologist*, 2004, p. 1). Furthermore, many other nations are beginning to emerge as larger waste threats than the United States. Developing countries such as Korea, India, and China pose a particular threat due to the rates at which they are industrializing—which far surpass the rate at which the United States industrialized: it took the United States approximately fifty years to double its total income (Hawken et al., 1999, p. 53). Korea accomplished this feat in only twenty-five years, and it took China a mere nine (p. 53). As nations develop and their economies grow, production and manufacturing increase and exponential amounts of waste are created. To be sure, the United States is largely responsible for littering the world with garbage and continues to engage in unsustainable environmental practices. That said, the future waste from developing nations will far exceed anything ever before seen in the history of the world.

#### WATER

In addition to discarded products, an even more vital resource is being wasted every day: water. Earth's fresh water supply is diminishing more quickly with each passing day as both individual consumption rates and the world's population continue to rise. In 2000, the World Commission on Water noted that

the increase in water use in the future due to rising population will impose intolerable stresses on the environment, leading not only to a loss of biodiversity, but also to a vicious cycle in which the stresses on the ecosystem [will] no longer provide the services [necessary] for plants and people. (Robbins, 2001, p. 235)

The total fresh water available for human consumption on Earth is less than 3% of the total water on the planet (Hawken et al., 1999, p. 213). Furthermore, much of this 3% gets wasted each day before humans ever have a chance to use it. For example, Florida's swamps once held so much water that they posed an obstacle to urban development. Today, however, water shortages threaten the state in many areas because so much of the



landscape has been paved over for commercial development that fresh water can no longer penetrate the ground and replenish the aquifers. As a result, Florida has been forced to flush millions of gallons of excess water into the ocean to prevent flooding (Skoloff, 2007, p. A10).

Moreover, The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a network of United Nations scientists, as cited by Skoloff (2007), recently estimated that by 2050, up to 2 billion people worldwide will likely face major water shortages (p. A10). Meanwhile, individuals obviously use tremendous quantities of water for everyday activities such as watering lawns and landscapes, which consumes an estimated 7.9 billion gallons of water per day (p. 12). As well, commercial businesses contribute to water shortages through activities such as washing towels and linens in hotel rooms, which amounts to an average of 200 gallons of water each day per room in America (Kostigen & Rogers 2007, p. 24). Water consumption has reached unprecedented levels in the United States, totaling nearly 500,000 gallons of water per person annually (Skoloff, 2007, p. A10).

Other activities are also accelerating the depletion of Earth's fresh water supply. Author Marc Reisner, as quoted in *The Food Revolution*, explains, "The West's water crisis—and many of its environmental problems as well—can be summed up, implausible as this may seem, in a single word: livestock" (Robbins, 2001, p. 255). What we eat significantly affects the rate at which Earth's fresh water is consumed. Reisner goes on:

In California, the single biggest consumer of water is not Los Angeles. It's not the oil and chemicals or defense industries. Nor is it the fields of grapes and tomatoes. It is irrigated pasture: grass grown in a near-desert climate for cows. (p. 237)

To illustrate the point, let us examine the huge difference in water consumption between plants and animals by comparing the gallons of water required to grow vegetables, fruit, and wheat, all staples of plant-based diets, to the quantity needed to produce one pound of beef. To grow one pound of lettuce, 23 gallons of water are required. Similarly, one pound of



tomatoes requires 23 gallons, one pound of wheat needs 25 gallons, and one pound of apples can be grown with 49 gallons (Robbins, 2001, p. 236). In comparison, according to Dr. Georg Borgstrom, Chairman of the Food Science and Human Nutrition Department of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Michigan State University, the amount of water required to produce one pound of U.S. beef is 2,500 gallons (p. 236).

Granted, water chugged down by the thirsty cows of the world is not wasted per se. The situation, nevertheless, illustrates the astonishing amount of water being used to produce huge quantities of meat that feed the well-to-do people of the world—primarily U.S. citizens. In 2001, Americans spent \$110 billion on the fast-food segment of the food industry, which is dominated by restaurants that sell predominantly beef (Schlosser, 2002, p. 3). This comes as no surprise, however, as leadership in the food-industry has left people seemingly unaware of the effects their diets have on Earth's eco-system. This leadership, or lack thereof, coupled with the fact that fast-food giants spend millions of marketing dollars every year luring people into their establishments, creates a recipe for excessive quantities of meat, and therefore water, consumption. McDonald's, just one example, spends \$800 million annually to advertise its offerings, which are almost exclusively meat products (Robbins, 2001, p. 95).

Not only are vast amounts of fresh water being used to raise cattle, according to Ed Ayers, editor for *WorldWatch Magazine*, but also the average cow produces 130 times more waste than the average person (Robbins, 2001, p. 241). Now consider the fact that there are approximately 1.3 billion cattle on earth. The waste created by these animals equals the total amount of waste that would be created if the planet had an extra 169 billion people (Hawken et al., 1999, p. 206). Thus, it must be acknowledged that the livestock of the world are creating unfathomable amounts of waste and taking a toll on our world's fresh water supply. It is worth quoting the words of John Robbins, who writes,

If we are serious about wanting to leave our children, and their children, a habitable world, then we have to ask where our leverage lies, and where



we can be most effective. There is no other single action that is as effective at saving water as eating a plant-based diet. (Robbins, 2001, p. 240)

Other behaviors that consume massive quantities of water include small daily activities that most people seemingly take for granted. For example, people in the average American household waste around 8,000 gallons of water per year simply waiting for their showers to get hot (Kostigen & Rogers, 2007, p. 126). A simple remedy, which has yet to become widespread, is to install low-flow plumbing into homes. This small step would reduce the water consumption of the average three-person home in America by 54,000 gallons per year (p. 127).

Toilets also use huge quantities of water. Luckily, no altering of flushing practices is needed to alleviate this problem, but rather the simple installation of dual-flush toilets. Dual-flush toilets have two flush options, which use 0.8 gallons and 1.6 gallons of water per flush respectively. If properly employed, these toilets can reduce toilet water consumption by as much as 67% (Kostigen & Rogers, 2007, p. 130). Benjamin Grumbles, the assistant administrator for water at the Environmental Protection Agency, as quoted in the article “National Water Crisis Looms,” notes, “The need to reduce water waste and inefficiency is greater now than ever before” (Skoloff, 2007, p. A10). Interestingly, other countries, such as Ireland and even less-developed nations, restrict water usage and have had declarations on water conservation in place since the early 1990s (Beekman, 1998, pp. 354-355).

Sports activities such as golf also display fresh water irreverence. For example, the golf courses of the world consume 2.5 billion gallons of water each day to keep their grounds irrigated and green. This equals the amount of water required to support 4.7 billion people per day (Kostigen & Rogers, 2007, p. 108). While many people enjoy playing golf and it is a source of exercise, friendship, and competition, the fact is that golf courses consume colossal amounts of water each day. However, only a tiny fraction of the world’s people—generally those with high incomes—play golf.

It is not being suggested that Americans cease to participate in sports that have brought people together for decades and, in some cases, centuries.



Rather, the aim is to search for solutions that can lead us out of the literal mess we are in. One such principle is that of servant-leadership. Servant-leadership is centered on a model that “puts serving others as the number one priority” (Spears, 1998, p. 3). It espouses principles such as foresight, awareness, conceptualization, and stewardship, all of which point to the importance of waste prevention and natural capital preservation (Greenleaf, 2002, pp. 37-53). The fact of the matter is that if we do not become more conscious of our daily decisions and begin to actively value the earth’s resources, the quality of our lives and those of our children will quickly deteriorate.

In contrast, once people become conscious of their behavior, they can seek alternatives. For example, there are hundreds of golf courses throughout the world committed to reducing water consumption by such methods as improving irrigation. These improvements can reportedly reduce the annual water consumption of an average golf course by 1.9 million gallons (Kostigen & Rogers, 2007, pp. 114-115). Golfers have choices too. They can find out which golf courses proactively minimize their water usage and choose to support them.

#### WASTED MONEY

Another item that is constantly being wasted in the United States at stupefying rates is money. Currently, the United States is the top consumer nation in the world. Americans “spend about four times more per person than any other country,” which equates to increased merchandise production, shipping, packaging, and ultimately more waste (Kostigen & Rogers, 2007, p. 64). In fact, 9 trillion dollars is spent each year in the United States, but only 7 trillion shows any returned value (Hawken et al., 1999, p. 57). Where does this other 2 trillion dollars go? One major area is consumerism. Since 1990, the average income for an American household has increased by only 11%. The average spending, however, has jumped 30% (Bonner & Wiggan, 2006).

Americans today live in more expensive houses and buy fancier cars



than ever before. As well, we eat out more frequently, have wider TVs with clearer pictures, more clothes, more lines of credit, more toys, and ultimately more debt. In a mere 12-year period between 1992 and 2004, outstanding household debt in America doubled to more than \$10 trillion (pp. 292-293). In contrast, citizens in other countries seem more responsible with their money. German citizens, for example, have only begun using credit cards within the last ten years, and most still do not own one (Steinmetz, 1996, p. A14).

So, what do Americans get for all this debt? According to economists who have investigated the link between economics and happiness—not much. Studies have shown that if people lack life's basic necessities, extra income will indeed make them happier. However, at some point one cannot buy more happiness. In fact, people in Mexico report that they are, on average, happier than people in the United States, despite the fact that they are much poorer. Yet we Americans continue to try to make ourselves happier by buying more things and, in turn, wasting more money and resources (Graham, 2005, p. 201). Examples in addition to the consumer debt that contributes to \$2 trillion wasted annually in the United States include inefficient energy practices (\$200 billion), health-care for nonessential procedures such as elective caesareans (\$65 billion), lawsuits (many of which have trifling legal merit yet are conducted anyway) (\$300 billion), and unnecessary medical overhead created by the current insurance systems (\$250 billion) (Hawken et al., 1999, p. 58).

#### A NEW LENS: SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

After considering the grim facts that characterize our current wasteful nation (and much of the world), the question is, does hope exist? Is there hope for us when we continue to deplete our natural resources beyond repair to create products that quickly end up atop ever-increasing piles of garbage? Much of this paper suggests that our future appears grim. While bleak statistics paint a dark picture, there is hope. Tremendous hope lies in a leadership style and its principles that have the power to change human



behavior. Servant-leadership, formally introduced by Robert Greenleaf in the 1970s, is a sustainable approach that is centered on principles that can be employed by all people to promote positive change—daily. In Greenleaf's 2002 book titled *Servant Leadership*, when delving into the topic of change, Peter Senge notes, "In an era of massive institutional failure, the ideas in *Servant Leadership* point towards a possible path forward, and will continue to do so" (p. 345).

Servant-leadership principles provide a practical framework and a compelling inspiration to see the world through a new lens of hope. Stephen Covey, in his foreword to Spears' 1998 book, *Insights on Leadership*, writes, "The deepest part of human nature is that which urges people—each one of us—to rise above our present circumstances and to transcend our nature. . . . Perhaps this is why I have found Robert Greenleaf's teaching on servant-leadership to be so enormously inspiring, so uplifting, so ennobling" (p. xi). Servant-leadership provides the foundation for sustainable practices that can be utilized in offices, factories, classrooms, and homes. Moreover, servant-leadership inspires people to work for the greater good of humanity and its future. When theory and practical principles are put to work together, the synergies created contain the power to permanently transform our wasteful ways of life.

The power of servant-leadership is already becoming evident as its principles are employed across the globe. Every day, more people are becoming cognizant of the importance of living within the planet's limitations and conducting their daily lives accordingly. For example, statistics show that curbside recycling programs reached 8,550 by 2005 (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2006, p. 13). Additionally, Earth-friendly products are being sold in larger quantities than ever before, newspapers in many towns are being printed on recycled paper, and the nation's largest home improvement centers such as Home Depot and Lowe's are adopting servant-leadership principles by vowing to stop using materials from old-growth trees (Robbins, 2001, p. 233). Many firms are finding that even in today's tough economy, selling environmentally friendly solutions



is leading to higher rather than lower profits. Companies anchored by green products, such as Method, a California-based household cleaning solutions company, and Seventh Generation, a Vermont-based competitor, continue to see strong growth in the sales of their products despite the economic downturn (Birchall, 2009).

Servant-leadership is even being employed at the highest levels of corporate America by people such as Ray Anderson, the founder of Interface, Inc.—the world’s largest interior furnishings company (Achbor & Abbot, 2004). Anderson has shifted many of the operating procedures of his company to more environmentally friendly practices (Achbor & Abbot, 2004). Progressive ideas such as valuing natural resources as much as the consumer goods they are used to produce are beginning to forever change the way in which business is conducted. Moreover, the notion of placing nominal values on all of the earth’s natural resources is being seriously discussed and evaluated by major opinion leaders, including the CEOs of some of America’s worst-polluting companies.

Other powerful examples of servant-leadership principles being put into action are the advances being made in food production across the globe. A primary goal of new food technologies is to reduce waste and preserve water—an example of the servant-leadership principles of foresight, stewardship, and commitment to the growth of people. The use of better farming equipment and pesticide-free, organic farming are examples of improved practices. Organic farming, for instance, is providing people with healthier, more Earth-friendly food from smaller, sustainable inputs. Authors Catherine Greene and Carolyn Dimitri (2003) note,

Organic agriculture is expanding rapidly in the United States, as consumer interest continues to gather momentum and new organic production and marketing systems evolve. In the wake of USDA’s implementation of national organic standards in October 2002, continued growth in the industry is expected. (p. 1)

With regard to the preservation of water, the mindset of the U.S. public



is also shifting toward servant-leadership. “We’ve hit a remarkable moment,” reports Barry Nelson, a senior policy analyst with the Natural Resources Defense Council. “The last century was the century of water engineering. The next century is going to be the century of water efficiency” (as cited in Skoloff, 2007, p. A10). Leaders such as Nelson, while not promoting themselves as servant-leaders per se, are nonetheless employing servant-leadership principles, and the results are unanimously positive.

Entire communities are also subscribing to servant-leadership-based approaches. Stephen Covey notes, “There is growing awareness and consciousness around it [servant-leadership] in the world” (Spears, 1998, p. xi). Communities that once demanded fresh water for every task, including flushing toilets and washing driveways, are becoming environmentally conscious. A prime example is in the San Joaquin Valley of California. Broadview Water District, which supplies water to the valley, set a goal to use 10% less water annually. The district levied a surcharge on excess water use, which resulted in a 17% decrease in water use per acre and a 24% decrease in total drain water emitted (Hawken et al., 1999, p. 218).

#### SERVANT-LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK: KEY PRINCIPLES

All of us can incorporate the principles of servant-leadership into our lives—and in turn play an important role in providing future generations with the resources they need to be healthy and prosperous. The following is a brief introduction to ten key servant-leadership principles, emphasized by Larry Spears and illustrated by Robert Greenleaf’s (2002) work, that can be employed by all of us to create change through reducing waste, lessening resource consumption, saving money, and leading others to do the same.

1. Listening: The best test of whether we are communicating at a deep and significant level is to ask: Am I listening? We must reach a deep level of understanding and communication with others to gain trust, which begins with listening and manifests with positive change (p. 31).

2. Empathy: Servant-leaders strive to understand and empathize with



others. Individuals who fully accept others and empathize with them are more likely to be trusted and therefore able to effectively communicate and create change (p. 35).

3. Foresight: A necessary servant-leadership characteristic is to comprehend lessons from the past, realities of the present, and likely consequences of a future decision. The servant-leader sees a long sweep of history projected into the future that better enables the foreseeing of likely events (p. 40).

4. Awareness: Opening wide the doors of perception beyond the usual alertness of sight, sound, smell, and touch increases both general and self-awareness. “The cultivation of awareness gives one. . .the ability to stand aside and see oneself in perspective in the context of one’s own experience, amid the ever present dangers, threats, and alarms. Then one sees one’s own peculiar assortment of obligations and responsibilities in a way that permits one to sort out the urgent from the important and perhaps deal with the important” (p. 41).

5. Persuasion: Servant-leaders convince rather than coerce, through a gentle, non-judgmental argument that a wrong should be righted by individual voluntary action (p. 43). Persuasion often occurs one person at a time.

6. Conceptualization: Servant-leaders nurture the ability to believe in greatness by maintaining a perspective that thinks beyond day-to-day realities (p. 49). Given the grim facts that characterize our world today, conceptualization provides reason to believe in a hopeful future.

7. Healing: Servant-leaders learn to heal themselves and others through personal transformation. It is believed that one is never completely healed; thus servant-leaders constantly share in the search for wholeness with those whom they lead (p. 50). A bond of unity is formed among people as healing is sought and change is created.

8. Commitment to the Growth of People: Servant-leaders believe that people have intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions and commit to the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of all people within their scope of influence (p. 101).



9. Stewardship: Servant-leaders create trust within organizations and institutions and work for the greater good of society (p. 59). As servant-leaders work for the greater good of society, faith in humanity is enhanced, change is encouraged, and sustainable practices are put into action.

10. Community: Building community is necessary because “where community doesn’t exist, trust, respect, and ethical behavior are difficult for the young to learn and for the old to maintain. Living in community as one’s basic involvement will generate an exportable surplus of love that we may carry into our many involvements with institutions that are usually not communities: businesses, churches governments, and schools” (p. 52). Only through building community and generating a surplus of love will stewardship be practiced, healing be fostered, commitment to others be manifested, and sustainable changes occur.

#### FINAL THOUGHTS

Research blatantly illustrates that people all around the world have some bad habits, with America topping the list as the planet’s worst waste offender. Our grotesquely huge piles of garbage stink up the world, the planet’s fresh water supply can no longer quench our greedy thirsts, and every day we plummet further into the black hole of our national debt. Our lifestyles as they currently exist are simply unsustainable, and our ignorance is affecting the entire world.

Despite this reality, however, tremendous hope exists for the future. The fact that we (meaning all the people of the world) are not doing more to prevent waste accumulation and preserve the earth’s resources means that much can still be done. As well, a dynamic leadership application—servant-leadership—provides a sustainable framework and a stalwart foundation for creating tremendously powerful change. The effectiveness of servant-leadership has been shown through revolutionary leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., who famously stated, “Everybody can be great because everybody can serve” (King, 1998, p. 182). Indeed, this is where sustainable change begins—with each one of us. Every individual can be an advocate



of servant-leadership and provide promise to future generations of our globally connected world. John Robbins, in his 2001 book *The Food Revolution*, asks,

What keeps us from recognizing the power that we have to make choices that honor our spirits and enrich our lives? What keeps us passive and distant from our greatness? What keeps us closed down when we could be vibrant and creative? The same thing that keeps an animal in his cage, even when the door is opened and he has the chance to walk free. Habit.  
(p. 13)

All of us, Americans and non-Americans alike, are called to help reshape the wasteful ways in which most our industries operate and in which most individuals (nearly all of us) live. More specifically, let us take the first step in becoming servant-leaders by making time to evaluate the quality of our daily decisions and examining whether we are conducting our lives in accordance with the key servant-leadership principles. It is time to ask what we want our ecological footprints to look like to those who follow us. If today's trends continue, what will our children and grandchildren think about our lack of leadership, and consequently what we have done to the planet and each other? How do we want to be remembered? Surely not as hedonistic, ignorant, and uncaring people who failed to look beyond our own existence? Rather, perhaps, through the smiles of our grandchildren who remember us as servant-leaders who overcame tremendous challenges by framing our lives with powerful servant-leadership principles such as healing, increased awareness, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, and commitment to future generations.

It is time to decide whether we are willing to alter our deeply engrained habits and conduct ourselves in such a way that the purpose and meaning of our existence on earth exceeds the duration of our time here. It is time to decide whether we have the courage and commitment to be servant-leaders so that our children and grandchildren can experience many of the daily blessings we currently take for granted. Recently, at the conclusion of a United Nations conference on climate control, one delegate from



Papua New Guinea leaned into his microphone and boldly stated to the American delegates, “We seek your leadership. But if for some reason you are not willing to lead, leave it to the rest of us. Please get out of the way.” The entire conference erupted in applause (Hanley, 2007).

It is time to do more than just get out of the way. It is time for Americans to swallow our pride and become a nation characterized by servant-leaders—people who exemplify awareness, commitment, and stewardship. It *is* possible. Our nation is still considered one of the biggest powers in the world and as such, we can have a big—and positive—impact on the rest of the world. We can all partake in the journey by consciously valuing the world’s natural capital, becoming mindful of our waste, and looking at the world with hope through a new lens of servant-leadership.

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