



THE THREE C'S OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

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Recently, my contemplation has resulted in only one phrase:
Choose yourself correctly.

Leadership is sometimes viewed as an endless journey, a state of mind, or a method. Servant-leadership is about mission, practice and persuasion. To me, it is all these frameworks and more. The “more” is that it is a journey of endless choices – not merely of decisions, but of choices about who you want to become. The meantime between deciding who you choose to be is between every breath taken in some ways. Because only between breaths do we actually think and feel our choices.

You see, the past has been written and can be interpreted; the future is completely unpredictable. The present is either positive or negative choice. The future is the equation of your past plus a positive or negative present choice. What is your choice today? Under what frame do you “choose yourself correctly”?

I remember the day I stepped into this country—all my frameworks crumbled from living my first twenty years in Singapore. I really could not rely on the lenses I carried with me over the oceans. I learned again and again while doing the daily things needed. In a way, I was building the plane while I was flying a plane. Now, after thirty years, six companies, three startups, and two books, I have finally discovered my framework, which I call the 3 C's of servant-leadership: they are *cause*, *community*, and *craft*. These are the lenses of my present, not the future or the past. So be aware, it could change if the equation of my life in the present changes.

For years I found my capabilities driven for self-driven reasons. It was



natural to come here to this country and to strive for material wants. However, I always battled within to search for meaning. I am now finding value only in goals bigger than myself. More and more, leaders are finding true expression in their core philosophy or ideology at work. Many are fueled by a cause. Causes are different than mission statements. Causes are taken, while missions are given. Missions are personal, while causes expand the world. Causes are built around a greater good.

Throughout the '90s, I focused on building a business around causes; my cause as a consultant was to help organizations find their cause. I am still focused on this. As a healthcare executive, my cause is to assist in the transformation of our broken healthcare system. The system is built to serve itself, perpetuating, opaque, and institutionally-centered, breeding a closed entitlement-based paternalism that is driving healthcare costs to 16% of the GDP. I have found my cause, or should I say the cause found me, in removing the tyranny of the healthcare system. Care beyond yourself is what I wish for you in your quest. I wish for you the selfless discovery of something beyond yourself. *Entheos*, meaning a kind of depth of enthusiasm, takes a different form with Robert Greenleaf. He says, "Entheos is now defined as the power actuating one who is inspired, while enthusiasm is seen as its less profound, more surface aspect."¹ He adds that entheos does not come in response to external incentives and that all that can be willed is the search. As all of us know, Gandhi's famous phrase driving this insight teaches us that to make true change, we must start within, for that is where causes are born.

The second C is community—our sense of connectedness. Servant-leadership is about the connected among us. Some who have lost their sense of and belief in connectedness believe that life is a series of transactions to be won, while others lose. Servant-leaders behave from a foundation of opportunity, not the fear of loss. They work in a world of abundance where there is time for all to have, and not in a world built for a few in which we fight for scarce resources to fulfill our desires. Mahatma Gandhi once said that "personal service when it merges into universal service is the only service



worth doing.” In a sense, servant-leaders feel within, and serve out. Servant-leaders realize there is no “me” without “we”; that we define family generally too narrowly. Family is not with the ones with whom we are connected by blood and/or marriage; family is as broad as you allow it to be. One cannot be lonely—only alone.

So if community is what and whom we make it, what of others who want to fight and destroy that notion and who challenge our way of life with coercive uses of power? How do we work with these groups? Well, we must not forgo the identity of the servant-leader in the process of dealing with the coercive forces of the world. I believe we can stand where we stand and not back down. We must have the “toughness of mind with which one looks out upon a seething, troubled world with a quiet-eye and asks the meaning of it all—not so much to judge it as to enlarge the perception from which to build even more solid ground for one’s own two feet to stand on.”²

Beyond the ingredients of cause and community, I believe it is crucial for us to find our voice to lead and follow. First of all, we have all received the gift of life, whether it seems good, bad, or ugly. What you do with it is important, but what you become is just as important. Your skills get you work, but your craft reframes the world for others. We focus on skill development, and that is very useful; but consider your skills to be ingredients and combine them into a recipe of your craft. In my first book, I declared that the world we live in is “data-obese and information starved.” A craftsperson transcends the obvious brute force skills to find the right combination of skills to serve.

It is not enough to read where the “puck is going”; you must be able to build a new arena for a new game. Robert Greenleaf once said that he cannot conceive of a duller, less creative world than one in which everything can be fully and rationally explained. Servant-leaders must deal with ambiguity as they not only deal within markets, but also create markets. So think of your skills and talents as components in designing the voice of your capabilities. Then you have the opportunity to create phenomena, not activities with little outcomes. We can manipulate you with ideas concern-



ing all the great skills to be acquired, but it would have no use to you if you did not understand the framework that skills live within. That framework is a core belief that to change the world, you must first change your self. Robert Greenleaf puts it simply: “If a flow of the world is to be remedied, to the servant the process of change starts in here, in the servant, not out there.”³ So spend the time to configure your skills into a unique recipe that not only defines you, but also defines what you stand for. Then practice this craft till time ends. Because with that, it may actually seem that time will stop for you, and your need to serve will be timeless.

So I urge us all to choose yourself correctly, using a cause, your community, and the power of your craft. There are times in life when your name will be called. This is the same sound you heard when you were born—your name in one way is the most beautiful sound in the world. Hearing your name means something to you, but please make your name mean something to others. May your name represent worth to your community and to yourself.

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NOTES

1. Robert K. Greenleaf. *The Power of Servant-leadership*, Barrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 1998, p. 72.
 2. Robert K. Greenleaf. *The Power of Servant-leadership*, Barrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 1998, pp. 100-101.
 3. Robert K. Greenleaf. *The Servant-leader Within – A Transformative Path*, Paulist Press NY/Mahwah, NJ, 2003, p. 68.
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