



## A JOURNEY IN SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

—LARRY C. SPEARS

I would like to start by commending all of our contributing authors in this journal. The articles contained within this issue are truly remarkable and offer a compelling vision of servant-leadership. These articles represent the diverse thinking of people from around the world, and a powerful landscape of human insight that deeply inspires me.

### ON SERVANT-LEADERS AND SERVANT-FOLLOWERS

I am convinced that if we take seriously Greenleaf's definition and best test of servant-leaders, and if we look with fresh eyes, we will see that we are surrounded by authentic and previously invisible servant-leaders—many of whom have never even heard the term *servant-leadership*. We ought to encourage self-awareness of the fact that many people act as servant-leaders—usually without being conscious of it. Much of our philanthropic, community, and mentoring impulses are, I would argue, examples of servant-leadership in action. Many servant-leadership publications tend to focus only on designated organizational leaders, which ultimately runs counter to this broader understanding of servant-leadership.

Continuing with the thought that anyone can be a servant-leader, and that many often are without recognizing it: the corollary of the servant-leader is the servant-follower. I believe that we can improve both ourselves and the world by becoming more conscious of our call to act as servant-leaders and servant-followers as we deem most helpful in any given moment. If we seek to serve first, then we choose at times either to lead or to follow as a servant. Servant-leadership isn't tied to positional leadership, and so servant-leaders are called to assess in any given moment whether it is best to lead or to follow. Learning to ask the question with consciousness and frequency is helpful to the ongoing development of the effective



servant-leader/servant-follower. What I mean to suggest here is that most of us who embrace servant-leadership will find ourselves at times in the role of servant-leader and at other times in the role of servant-follower, at work, at home, in our communities, and elsewhere. Choosing when to lead and when to follow as a servant seems to me to be an important act of discernment.

#### SERVANT-LEADERSHIP PUBLISHING

Since our last journal, I have continued to publish in a range of servant-leadership writings. For those who may be interested, here is an abbreviated listing of the servant-leadership publications work that I have published since our last journal:

- “Top Lessons Learned” (Greenleaf Center Blog, 2013).
- *Fortuitous Encounters: Wisdom Stories for Learning and Growth*, Paul Davis and Larry Spears (Paulist Press, 2013). Co-editor and contributing author.
- “What Can Hunter-Gatherers Teach Us About Servant-Leadership,” Richard Leider and Larry Spears (The Spears Center, 2013).
- *Servant Leadership: Leaving a Legacy*, Rocky Wallace (Rowman and Littlefield, 2012). Book jacket endorsement.
- “The Promised Land: Robert Greenleaf, Bruce Springsteen, and Servant-Leadership,” Joe Albert and Larry C. Spears (2012).
- *Repacking Your Bags: Lighten Your Load for the Good Life*, Richard Leider and David Shapiro (Berrett-Koehler, 2012). Book jacket endorsement.
- “The Heart of Giving: Servant-Leadership and Purposeful Philanthropy,” Richard Leider and Larry Spears (The Spears Center, 2012).
- *Forgiveness and Power in the Age of Atrocity: Servant Leadership as a Way of Life*, Shann Ray Ferch (Rowman and Littlefield, 2011). Foreword by Larry.
- *Leading Wisely in Difficult Time: Three Cases of Faith and Business*, Michael Naughton and David Specht (Paulist Press, 2011). Foreword by Larry Spears.
- *The Spirit of Servant-Leadership*, Shann Ray Ferch and Larry C. Spears (Paulist Press, 2011). Foreword by co-editor and contributing author Larry Spears.



- *Setting the Agenda: Meditations for the Organization's Soul*, Edgar Stoesz and Rick M. Stiffney (Herald Press, 2011). Chapter: "The Board's Two-fold Challenge."
- *Teachers as Servant Leaders*, Joe D. Nichols (Rowman and Littlefield, 2011). Book jacket endorsement.

#### SERVANT-LEADERSHIP TRAVELS

I am most grateful for the kind invitations to speak on servant-leadership that I have received since our last *Journal*, and for the opportunity to travel and meet with servant-leaders around the world. I wish to recognize and to thank folks at the following institutions for their warm and caring welcoming of me, and for their commitment to servant-leadership:

Catholic Business Education Conference, University of Dayton,  
Dayton, OH

East Carolina University, Greenville, NC

Earlham School of Religion, Richmond, IN

George Fox University, Newburg, OR

Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA

Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA

The Greenleaf Center, Westfield, IN

The Greenleaf Centre-United Kingdom, London, England

Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, MN

LifeSp\*rk, Minneapolis, MN

Portland Center, Portland, OR

Presbyterian Church Pension Board, Philadelphia, PA

Project Management Institute-MN, Minneapolis, MN

Rasmussen College, Blaine, MN



Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA

Servant-Leadership Learning Community, Indianapolis, IN

Servant-Leadership Winter Conference, San Diego, CA

Trinity Western University, Langley, B.C., Canada

University of Madison-Wisconsin, Madison, WI

I enjoy and appreciate opportunities to speak and I invite you to be in touch with me ([lspears@spearscenter.org](mailto:lspears@spearscenter.org)) if you are interested in exploring possibilities.

#### SERVANT-LEADERSHIP TEACHING

Since our last issue, I have had the great gift of teaching a dozen courses of more than two hundred students—mostly online graduate courses in Gonzaga University’s Masters Program in Organizational Leadership, plus one course in the Doctoral Program in Leadership Studies. The quality of students in all of these courses is uniformly high. I know that I learn as much or more through my own interactions with Gonzaga students, and through our shared search for wholeness.

#### BE PREPARED

(From *Fortuitous Encounters*, by Larry C. Spears and Paul Davis [Paulist Press, 2013])

Storyteller: Larry C. Spears ([www.spearscenter.org](http://www.spearscenter.org))

Prepare now for your old age.

—Elmer Davis

I have spent most of my adult life raising awareness of Robert K. Greenleaf and his writings on servant-leadership. Following his death, I gathered his scattered writings and produced and edited the five books for which he is known today.

In *Servant Leadership* (Paulist Press, 1977/2002), Greenleaf wrote, “The servant-leader is servant first.” And he offered this as his best test of servant-leadership: “Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely



themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?"

While one of my personal fortuitous encounters was in meeting Robert Greenleaf, one of Greenleaf's fortuitous encounters came when, at the age of forty, he heard radio commentator Elmer Davis say, "prepare now for your old age." Greenleaf says that he judged Davis to be a true servant and heeded his advice.

Over the course of the next twenty years, from the age of forty to sixty, Robert Greenleaf made several decisions based upon that fortuitous encounter that helped to set up the course of his life from the age of sixty to eighty, the years during which he experienced his greatest productivity and most lasting influence. Chief among them were these:

- Greenleaf resolved to stop his frequent business flying and, instead, he began to take trains when travel was required. This afforded him the time for reflection, which he felt he needed. It also afforded him greater opportunities for conversation with people.
- He began to make his way to people from whom he thought that he might learn something, and who he thought might "make him stretch."
- He spent two years with Jungian analysts (Martha Jaeger and Ira Progoff), focused on the analysis of his dreams. Greenleaf said that these sessions helped to raise his self awareness and creativity.
- He developed close relationships with several very different institutions: The Menninger (psychiatric) Foundation, The U.S. Air Force, and the National Council of Churches.
- He developed several close friendships with ethics professors, most notably, Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel.
- He also engaged in an extensive study of the history of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), which he said was an important part of his years of preparation, as well as being an enjoyable activity.

In all of this, Greenleaf sought to prepare himself for a future that was not yet clear to him, but that somehow seemed right. Many years later, Greenleaf wrote this: "In giving some details of my own preparation I am not suggesting that what I did would be appropriate or possible for anyone else. But of this I am quite sure: anyone who thinks of his or her old age as an event to be prepared for is more likely to have a more fruitful old age than one who has not thought that way, regardless of what his or her preparation



consists of. Whether one's gifts and opportunities are great or small, my advice would be, prepare!"

Greenleaf said that serenity may not be what one achieves in old age; it may be one of the fruits of what one has learned by preparing while one is young.

At the age of eighty-two, Robert Greenleaf wrote his last essay, titled "Old Age: The Ultimate Test of Spirit." In it, he said that he was grateful to many people, including Elmer Davis for his radio advice some forty-two years earlier.

"Old age is the ultimate test of spirit," wrote Greenleaf. "Surviving from my Boy Scout experience seventy years ago is the motto, BE PREPARED. I am eternally grateful for it."

#### FOR REFLECTION

Like Greenleaf, what might you do to prepare for your old age? How might this lead to your own fortuitous encounters?

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Larry C. Spears is president and CEO of The Spears Center for Servant-Leadership ([www.spearscenter.org](http://www.spearscenter.org)), a not-for-profit charitable organization based in Indianapolis. From 1990 to 2007, he served as president and CEO of The Robert K. Greenleaf Center. A noted thought-leader and speaker on servant-leadership, he is an editor and contributing author to two dozen books, including *The Spirit of Servant-Leadership* (2011, Shann Ray Ferch and Larry C. Spears), and *Insights on Leadership* (1998). Larry also serves as the Gonzaga University Servant-Leadership Scholar, and as senior advisory editor of *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership*—a joint publication of Gonzaga University and The Spears Center, published by SUNY Press. He is also editor of *The Undergraduate Journal of Servant-Leadership*—a joint electronic publication of Gustavus Adolphus College and The Spears Center.