



THE PROMISED LAND

Robert Greenleaf, Bruce Springsteen, and Servant-Leadership

—JOE ALBERT AND LARRY C. SPEARS

Bruce Springsteen and Robert K. Greenleaf. Two very different men, born into different ages, different environments, different careers. Yet, despite all of their differences, these two men share much in common. Beyond certain superficial similarities—during the 1950s and '60s they lived a short distance from one another in New Jersey—we contend that Springsteen and Greenleaf share a commitment to what has come to be called “servant-leadership,” and to a set of characteristics that exemplify servant-leaders.

We live in an age of deepening cynicism—a time where a lack of integrity and mistrust abound. Yet, we see in the writings of Robert Greenleaf, and in the music and lyrics of Bruce Springsteen, a powerful antidote to cynicism and despair. While much has been written about Springsteen as a musical artist, and as a pop icon, we believe that this is the first look at Bruce Springsteen as a contemporary servant-leader.

Through an examination of the lyrics and life of Bruce Springsteen in relation to key elements of servant-leadership, and especially ten characteristics associated with servant-leaders, it is our belief that Springsteen is an essential contemporary servant-leader and prophet.

DEEP STRUCTURES OF PERSONALITY

Our fundamental understanding of character has much to do with the essential traits exhibited by a person. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the nature of character and character education, based upon a belief that positive character traits can be both taught and learned. Many people today are familiar with the *Character Counts!*^(sm) program of the Josephson Institute of Ethics. That program has been adopted by a number



of schools and communities nationwide and teaches core values, which they call “Six Pillars of Character.” Those six particular character values are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

The nature of character and its relationship to leaders has also taken on increased significance in recent years. A number of noted leadership authors have looked at issues of a leader’s character. James Hillman, in *The Soul’s Code: In Search of Character and Calling*, describes the “invisible source of personal consistency, for which I am using the word ‘habit,’ psychology today calls character. Character refers to deep structures of personality that are particularly resistant to change” (Hillman 1996, 260).

The literature on leadership includes a number of different listings of character traits as practiced by leaders. We particularly like Warren Bennis’s short list as contained in his book, *On Becoming a Leader*, in which he identifies “vision, inspiration, empathy and trustworthiness” as key characteristics of effective leaders” (Bennis 1989, 140). Much of the leadership literature includes as an implicit assumption the belief that positive characteristics can and should be encouraged and practiced by leaders. Robert K. Greenleaf, the originator of the term *servant-leadership*, is someone who thought and wrote a great deal about the nature of servant-leadership and character.

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP AND CHARACTER

The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: 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?

—Robert K. Greenleaf, *The Servant as Leader*

With that definition in 1970, retired AT&T executive Robert K. Greenleaf (1904–1990) coined the term *servant-leadership* and launched a quiet revolution in the way in which we view and practice leadership. Four decades later, the concept of servant-leadership is increasingly viewed as an ideal leadership form to which untold numbers of people and organizations aspire. In fact, we see today an unparalleled explosion of interest in, and practice of, servant-leadership.



We are experiencing a rapid shift in many businesses and not-for-profit organizations—away from the more traditional autocratic and hierarchical models of leadership and toward servant-leadership as a way of being in relationship with others. Servant-leadership seeks to involve others in decision making, strongly based in ethical and caring behavior, and enhancing the growth of workers while improving the caring and quality of organizational life.

The words *servant* and *leader* are usually thought to be opposites. In deliberately bringing those words together in a meaningful way, Robert Greenleaf gave birth to the paradoxical term *servant-leadership*. In the years since then, many of today's most creative thinkers are writing and speaking about servant-leadership as an emerging leadership paradigm for the twenty-first century. The list is long and includes: James Autry, Warren Bennis, Peter Block, John Carver, Stephen Covey, Max DePree, Joseph Jaworski, James Kouzes, Larraine Matusak, Parker Palmer, M. Scott Peck, Peter Senge, Peter Vaill, Margaret Wheatley, and Danah Zohar, to name but a few of today's cutting-edge leadership authors and advocates of servant-leadership. In her groundbreaking book on quantum sciences and leadership, *Rewiring the Corporate Brain*, Zohar goes so far as to state that “[s]ervant-leadership is the essence of quantum thinking and quantum leadership” (Zohar 1997, 146).

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

As longtime fans of Bruce Springsteen's music, we have found much in his lyrics, and in his life of service and leadership, to support our contention that Springsteen is an outstanding modern-day example of a servant-leader. One interesting way of examining this may be found in an analysis of his songs through the lens of these ten servant-leader characteristics. Just as Robert Greenleaf was originally inspired to coin the term *servant-leader* through his understanding of Hermann Hesse's fictional character of Leo in *Journey to the East*, we have gained insight and inspiration on servant-leadership from many sources, including the rich music and lyrics from Bruce Springsteen's prodigious work and life.

In his forty-year recording and performing career, Bruce Springsteen has written and performed literally hundreds of songs. We have chosen to focus primarily—though not exclusively—on a single work by Mr. Springsteen that has a contemporary presence and is rich with servant-leadership themes.



In 1978, after three successful albums, Bruce released *Darkness on the Edge of Town*. This album has significance for a number of reasons. After *Born to Run* was released in 1975, Bruce appeared on the cover of both *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines where he was described as the future of rock and roll. His first two albums captured his experiences of life and the many rich characters he introduced to us who are seeking redemption, a dream, or love. In *Born to Run*, we meet those pursuing the “runaway American dream.” The romantic bravado that threads throughout each story involves risk, excitement, and the possibility of a “walk in the sun.” However, soon after the glow of *Born to Run*, Bruce made a decision to part ways with his manager, Mike Appel. This decision led to a lawsuit that prevented Springsteen from entering into a recording studio for nearly two years.

DARKNESS ON THE EDGE OF TOWN

Darkness on the Edge of Town is a meditation on where are you going to stand? With whom are you going to stand?

—Bruce, *The Promise*

In 1977, Bruce began work on an album that revealed a very different set of characters than he had sung about before. Where earlier albums—*Greetings from Asbury Park*, *The Wild, the Innocent, and the E-Street Shuffle*, and *Born to Run*—contained narratives about characters that were hopeful, seeking the American Dream, finding redemption and filled with youthful zeal, the characters in *Darkness on the Edge of Town* were in a very different place.

In his introduction to the *Darkness on the Edge of Town* album in his *Book of Songs*, he states, “along with my own experience—the stress and tension of my father’s and mother’s life that came with the difficulties of trying to make ends meet—influenced my writings. I asked myself new questions. I felt a sense of accountability to the people I’d grown up alongside of. I began to wonder how to address that feeling” (Springsteen 1998, 65). The characters in this chapter of his career experience daily struggles in the pursuit of personal redemption. In *Born to Run*, the protagonists seek to escape out onto the highways and turnpikes of their lives. In *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, the characters come to grips with the daily grind of working in the factory, struggling with their own mortality, and “living lives of quiet heroism” (Sanford 1999, 147). This shift in characters in his music reflected an internal change in the author: “[M]y characters stand unsure of their fate, but dug in and committed. By the end of *Darkness* I’d found my adult voice” (Springsteen 1998, 69).



THE SERVANT-LEADER JOURNEY OF BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

Another significant aspect of *Darkness on the Edge of Town* is that in 2010 a set of previously unreleased recordings that were not used on that album were finally released as part of a two-CD set called *The Promise*. Release of *The Promise* stirred renewed interest in the original *Darkness on the Edge of Town* record and more clearly illustrates the shift in Springsteen's writing and thinking that occurred during the creation of the 1978 release.

As the span of his remarkably dynamic career is viewed, from the 1973 release of *Greetings from Asbury Park* through the 2009 release of *Working on a Dream*, what is evident is the growth in consciousness and context of his life and art. Of particular note is the shift that occurs with the release of *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, concerning his sensitivity and understanding of those around him. This is especially true for those who struggle with the everyday sorts of things common to most people. This is the essential starting point for servant-leadership as uniquely given voice by Bruce Springsteen.

From this album on, there is a consistent thread of themes of redemption, meaning, and struggle. There are frequent references in every album to those who are on the margins of society, those who are easily demonized and forgotten—the “less privileged” in society whom Robert K. Greenleaf mentions in his Best Test of servant-leadership. Springsteen began, through the form of parables placed within his music, to tell the stories of those whose personal stories are not part of the commonly accepted narrative of the American experience. This growth in consciousness and commitment to telling these stories seem to demonstrate a significant shift in perspective or what the psychologist Jerome Bruner calls a “turning point.”

For the servant-leader, or those who aspire to be one, an awareness of these changing moments, where a shift occurs, is a necessary part of our personal journey. We might surmise that Bruce's legal entanglement with his agent was a turning point of sorts. His loss of trust in others, the feeling of something such as owning and recording his own music was threatened, and this process led him to question the narratives he had created in earlier albums. In a song he titled, “The Promise,” a song that appears on the 2010 release that bears that name, Bruce captures the experience of someone who has chased the dreams so evident in “Born to Run” and “Thunder Road,” only to fall short of that dream. The result of his failed pursuit describes a “broken spirit” and “something in your heart grows cold.”



While there is a long history of art and activism being intertwined, what is intriguing about the shift in Mr. Springsteen's music beginning with the *Darkness* album is that his narrative approach to music becomes more clearly a depiction of real people in real situations. So instead of colorful characters such as "Spanish Johnny," "Mary, Queen of Arkansas," "Crazy Janey," "Wild Billy," "Sandy," "Kitty," and others described in earlier records, the characters on the *Darkness* album reflect a different type of narrative.

Influenced by his observations of his parents' and others' struggles to make ends meet, on the *Darkness* album we are introduced in the first song, "Badlands," to a different world. "*Lights out tonight trouble in the heart-land, Got a head-on collision smashin' in my guts, man I'm caught in a fire that I don't understand...*" This awareness of daily struggles, and the desire to find some meaning or purpose in life, becomes the central theme in the lives of his characters. Songs such as "Factory" capture the lives of everyday people, and it "praises the un-romanticized heroism of those who do what they have to in order to do their jobs, finish their work, and meet their responsibilities to those who depend on them" (Symynkywicz 2008, 47).

In this sense, Bruce Springsteen becomes a servant in telling the stories of everyday heroes, those that society does not glamorize, or idolize. Stories of those either marginalized or simply ignored become compelling narratives that are heard on the radio, sung at massive concert venues and recited over and over by fans. This effective blend of art and compassion became the tool that Bruce utilized to reshape the thinking and refocus the attention of society toward those whose stories are not told.

THE TEN CHARACTERISTICS OF A SERVANT-LEADER

In 1992, Larry Spears extracted from Greenleaf's original writings a set of ten characteristics of the servant-leader. In the intervening years, these characteristics have come to be understood as being of critical importance—central to the development of servant-leaders. Two decades later, this work now involves a deepening understanding of these characteristics and how they contribute to the meaningful practice of servant-leadership. The ten characteristics are as follows:

1. Listening
2. Empathy



3. Healing
4. Awareness
5. Persuasion
6. Conceptualization
7. Foresight
8. Stewardship
9. Commitment to the Growth of People
10. Building Community

Characteristics of Servant-Leadership through the Spirited Lens of Springsteen's Life and Art.

What follows is our look at these ten servant-leader characteristics, supplemented with some examples drawn from the lyric poetry found in several Springsteen songs.

Listening

Leaders have traditionally been valued for their communication and decision-making skills. Although these are also important skills for the servant-leader, they need to be reinforced by a deep commitment to listening intently to others. The servant-leader seeks to identify the will of a group and helps to clarify that will. He or she listens receptively to what is said and unsaid. Listening also encompasses hearing one's own inner voice. Listening, coupled with periods of reflection, is essential to the growth and well-being of the servant-leader.

There are two dimensions of listening present in the work of Bruce Springsteen. Listening to one's inner voice requires an ability to simultaneously hear one's inner urgings and be present to the other. Bruce's first few albums were very much about his own experiences, "twisted autobiographies" he called them. His early writing came from a "very unselfconscious place. Your early songs come out of a moment when you're writing with no sure prospect of ever being heard. Up until then it is just you and your music." This period of finding your own voice provides a foundation for the servant-leader. This process, though often difficult and involving loss and change, allows one to move forward and begin to engage with others in an authentic fashion. The second dimension of listening involves a relational focus.

In the *Darkness on the Edge of Town* album, Bruce begins to give voice to those who toil unrecognized in the hopes of something better and with the



commitment to autonomy and freedom. Through his ability to listen to his own voice and capture the experiences of others, his stories serve to inspire and redeem. From “Badlands”:

I don't give a damn
For the same old played out scenes
I don't give a damn
For just the in between
Honey, I want the heart, I want the soul
I want control right now
talk about a dream
Try to make it real
you wake up in the night
With a fear so real
Spend your life waiting
for a moment that just don't come
Well, don't waste your time waiting

In Robert Coles's book, *Bruce Springsteen's America* (2003), Coles captures the impact of Bruce's music on others and reflects on his capacity for listening to the lives of those he sings about. One person in his book tutors at-risk kids. “When I go to tutor this kid Charlie, and I hear him talking and sneering, I'll think of that song of the Boss; and I'll think of the ‘Badlands’ one...all those ‘agricultural workers’... upping the notch—they're in Springsteen songs, and one after another he reaches out and sings about them (maybe to them), because he know that (a) they're doing very valuable stuff, and (b) they're getting a lousy deal, for all the backbreaking, dawn-to-dusk work they put on the line for the growers...”

For Greenleaf, and for servant-leaders in any context, listening serves as a starting point for living a servant's life.

Empathy

The servant-leader strives to understand and empathize with others. People need to be accepted and recognized for their special and unique spirits. One assumes the good intentions of co-workers and colleagues and does not reject them as people, even when one may be forced to refuse to accept certain behaviors or performance. The most successful servant-leaders are those who have become skilled empathetic listeners.



One of the seminal strengths of Springsteen's songwriting has always been his ability to put himself into the lives of others—a deep empathy for people, and for the joy and pain that we experience as human beings. This may be seen in many of his songs, including “Badlands,” where he writes:

Endless juke joints and Valentino drag
Where dancers scrape the tears
Up off the street dressed down in rags
Running into the darkness
Some hurt bad some really dying
At night sometimes it seemed
You could hear the whole damn city crying

Here we see a prime example of Springsteen's ability to put himself into the dancing shoes of others—others who are also in great pain. The imagery of the entire city crying shows us an even deeper understanding of a certain kind of sadness that we seldom see clearly, but that we sometimes sense in others.

Blame it on the lies that killed us
Blame it on the truth that ran us down
You can blame it all on me Terry
It don't matter to me now.
 (“Backstreets,” *Born to Run*)

Here, Springsteen's empathy, both for Terry and for the narrator of the song, is displayed through an awareness of our frequent inner demons and the search for someone or something to blame. Springsteen's ability to empathize with others through his songs is a great example of his understanding as a servant-leader.

Healing

The healing of relationships is a powerful force for transformation and integration. One of the great strengths of servant-leadership is the potential for healing one's self and one's relationship to others. Many people have broken spirits and have suffered from a variety of emotional hurts. Although this is a part of being human, servant-leaders recognize that they have an opportunity *to help make whole* those with whom they come in contact. In his



essay *The Servant as Leader*, Greenleaf writes, “There is something subtle communicated to one who is being served and led if, implicit in the compact between servant-leader and led, is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something they share.”

Here slipping through the ether
A voice is coming through
So keep me in your heart tonight
And I’ll save my love for you
(“Save My Love,” *The Promise*)

While Springsteen’s lyrical content covers every aspect of human emotion—and these characteristics—we believe that a major reason for Springsteen’s deeply committed fans (who now span at least three generations of music lovers and concertgoers) has to do with Bruce’s own commitment to them (us). It is the healing power of his words and music that resonate so strongly with us.

Awareness

General awareness, and especially self-awareness, strengthens the servant-leader. Awareness helps one in understanding issues involving ethics, power, and values. It lends itself to being able to view most situations from a more integrated, holistic position. As Greenleaf observed: “Awareness is not a giver of solace—it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed. They are not seekers after solace. They have their own inner serenity.”

While we accept Greenleaf’s description of able leaders as often possessing their own inner serenity, that is not always the case. Springsteen’s core message is most often directed to those who rarely have the opportunity to view themselves as leaders. Many of the characters in his songs inhabit positions in the service industry, or in the rapidly fading industrial industries. For many—those with jobs and those without—the American dream increasingly appear as a ghostly afterimage.

In these most poignant lines from the title song, “The Promise,” Springsteen echoes the hard-edged truths that are part of our daily lives. The depth of Springsteen’s awareness sometimes provides solace; but, more often than not, there is a strong element of awakening, and disturbances of the soul.



When the promise is broken you go on living
But it steals something from down in your soul
Like when the truth is broken and
it don't make no difference
Something in your heart turns cold
("The Promise," *The Promise*)

Persuasion

Another characteristic of servant-leaders is reliance on persuasion, rather than on one's positional authority, in making decisions within an organization. The servant-leader seeks to convince others, rather than coerce compliance. This particular element offers one of the clearest distinctions between the traditional authoritarian model and that of servant-leadership. The servant-leader is effective at building consensus within groups. This emphasis on persuasion over coercion finds its roots in the beliefs of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)—the denominational body to which Robert Greenleaf belonged.

In the past ten years, a great deal has been written about the importance of storytelling for leaders. Gardner suggests that "stories are the single most powerful weapon in a leader's literary arsenal" (Gardner 1995, 43). Stories speak to both the head and heart as a means of engaging and gaining the attention of an audience. Bruce Springsteen utilizes a narrative approach in his music. These parables that he shares serve the purpose of humanizing his characters in such a way as to influence others' perceptions of them. In "Factory," Bruce offers insight into the quiet heroism that is involved in working:

Early in the morning factory whistle blows,
Man rises from bed and puts on his clothes,
Man takes his lunch, walks out in the morning light,
It's the working, the working, just the working life.
Through the mansions of fear, through the mansions
of pain,
I see my daddy walking through them factory gates
in the rain,
Factory takes his hearing, factory gives him life,
The working, the working, just the working life.

The music serves as a means toward workers feeling the dignity and the worth of their sacrifices. However, it also serves as a challenge to those who lead in organizations to appreciate the emotional, physical, and spiritual costs of work that does not feed the soul or provide meaning. Parables such as



“Factory” challenge us, they confront us, and they force us to come face to face with the quiet heroism of the subjects in his stories. In *Working on a Dream: The Progressive Political Vision of Bruce Springsteen* (2010), Masciotra urges political activists to explore Springsteen’s work as a way to understand his ability to raise the consciousness of his audience through a “danceable education.” Likewise, for those aspiring servant-leaders there is much to learn from Springsteen about the power of crafting and communicating compelling narratives as an extraordinary tool for persuasion and conversion.

Conceptualization

Servant-leaders seek to nurture their abilities to *dream great dreams*. The ability to look at a problem or an organization from a conceptualizing perspective means that one must think beyond day-to-day realities. For many leaders, this characteristic requires discipline and practice. The traditional leader is consumed by the need to achieve short-term operational goals. The leader who wishes to be a servant-leader must stretch his or her thinking to encompass broader-based conceptual thinking. Within organizations, conceptualization is, by its very nature, a key role of boards of trustees or directors. Unfortunately, boards can sometimes become involved in the day-to-day operations, and thus fail to provide the visionary concept for an institution. Trustees need to be mostly conceptual in their orientation, staffs need to be mostly operational in their perspective, and the most effective executive leaders probably need to develop both perspectives within themselves. Servant-leaders are called to seek a delicate balance between conceptual thinking and a day-to-day operational approach.

This is seldom easy, but it is what makes servant-leadership stand out from some other leadership approaches. The challenge of being visionary and keeping one’s feet on the ground is a challenge all servant-leaders must come to grips with. We have found that in narrative form Bruce displays a remarkable ability to capture the tension between current reality and compelling vision that is being sought. This can be described as being a source of power and strength. We observe this creative tension in songs such as “The Promised Land”:

The dogs on Main Street howl
‘cause they understand
If I could take one moment into my hands
Mister I ain’t a boy, no I’m a man
And I believe in a promised land



I've done my best to live the right way
I get up every morning and go to work each day
But your eyes go blind and your blood runs cold
Sometimes I feel so weak I just want to explode
Explode and tear this whole town apart
Take a knife and cut this pain from my heart
Find somebody itching for something to start

Chorus

There's a dark cloud rising from the desert floor
I packed my bags and I'm heading straight into the
storm
Gonna be a twister to blow everything down
That ain't got the faith to stand its ground
Blow away the dreams that tear you apart
Blow away the dreams that break your heart

While the hope and vision evident in "Promised Land" acknowledge the presence of a vision and something to live for, "Something in the Night" addresses the temptation of hopelessness that one can feel in the dark times or when movement toward a vision is out of sight.

I'm riding down Kingsley,
figuring I'll get a drink
Turn the radio up loud,
so I don't have to think,
I take her to the floor,
looking for a moment when the world
seems right,
And I tear into the guts,
of something in the night.
You're born with nothing,
and better off that way,
Soon as you've got something they send
someone to try and take it away,
You can ride this road 'till dawn,
without another human being in sight,
Just kids wasted on
something in the night.

This desperation and the experience of things being taken away from us on our journeys leave us scarred. We can give up and become like the "kids



wasted on something in the night” or carry these scars forward to a deeper, richer life. To live life in pursuit of a vision is to struggle. In “Prove It All Night,” the main character acknowledges the cost:

Everybody’s got a hunger, a hunger they can’t resist,
There’s so much that you want, you deserve much
more than this,
But if dreams came true, oh, wouldn’t that be nice,
But this ain’t no dream we’re living through tonight,
Girl, you want it, you take it, you pay the price.

The price is to be scarred, or as Joan Chittester (2005) puts it in the title of her book, “scarred by struggle, transformed by hope.” The servant-leader must live with a vision in mind, but rooted in the earth.

Foresight

Closely related to conceptualization, the ability to foresee the likely outcome of a situation is hard to define, but easier to identify. One knows foresight when one experiences it. Foresight is a characteristic that enables the servant-leader to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future. It is also deeply rooted within the intuitive mind. Foresight remains a largely unexplored area in leadership studies, but one most deserving of careful attention.

In Bruce Springsteen’s more recent works such as *The Rising*, *Devils and Dust*, and *Magic*, his work demonstrates the importance of learning from past mistakes in terms of foreign and domestic policies, and also how we must look forward toward the possible impact of our policies in other countries. But one can observe his ability to demonstrate foresight in the integrative approach to his music where the links between the past, present, and future are made in the song “Adam Raised a Cain”:

In the Bible Cain slew Abel
and East of Eden he was cast
You’re born into this life paying
for the sins of somebody else’s past
Daddy worked his whole life for nothing but the pain
Now he walks these empty rooms looking for some-
thing to blame
You inherit the sins, you inherit the flames
Adam raised a Cain



In this story, the son realizes that he has inherited his father's passion and dreams, but he envisions a different possibility for himself. Rather than rejecting the past, in the form of his father's life, the son carries it with him—scars and all—into the future. This ability to understand the past but also move forward allows a servant-leader to move forward with wisdom, and not simply trying to avoid repeating the past.

Stewardship

Peter Block (author of *Stewardship* and *The Empowered Manager*) has defined stewardship as “holding something in trust for another.” Robert

Greenleaf's view of all institutions was one in which CEO's, staffs, and trustees all played significant roles in holding their institutions in trust for the greater good of society. Servant-leadership, like stewardship, assumes first a commitment to serving the needs of others. It also emphasizes the use of openness and persuasion, rather than control.

Where Bruce's first three albums reflected the stories of individuals in pursuit of a dream, redemption, or meaning, characters in *The Darkness of the Edge of Town* are bound to a place, or a person, or relationships. In “Prove it All Night” the character of the story is in pursuit of a goal or a “hunger they can't resist,” but on this album the character is not alone. He and his partner will pursue it together:

I've been working real hard, trying to get my hands clean,
Tonight we'll drive that dusty road from Monroe to
Angeline,
To buy you a gold ring and pretty dress of blue,
Baby just one kiss will get these things for you,
A kiss to seal our fate tonight,
A kiss to prove it all night.

Chorus

Prove it all night,
Girl there's nothing else that we can do,
So prove it all night, prove it all night,
And girl I'll prove it all night for you.
Everybody's got a hunger, a hunger they can't resist,
There's so much that you want, you deserve much
more than this,



But if dreams came true, oh, wouldn't that be nice,
But this ain't no dream we're living through tonight,
Girl, you want it, you take it, you pay the price.

She is invited to trust in him and he returns the trust by “working real hard” for her. He is holding the relationship in trust. There is a feeling of responsibility and commitment evident here. In another song, “Racing in the Street,” we hear the story of a street racer who lives life freely with his friend Sonny. They travel from town to town pursuing their dreams. However, the racer falls in love with someone. As time passes, he must come to grips with the life he led before this relationship, and with his partners’ feelings of desolation.

I met her on the strip three years ago
In a Camaro with this dude from L.A.
I blew that Camaro off my back and drove that little
girl away
But now there's wrinkles around my baby's eyes
And she cries herself to sleep at night
When I come home the house is dark
She sighs “Baby did you make it all right”
She sits on the porch of her daddy's house
But all her pretty dreams are torn
She stares off alone into the night
With the eyes of one who hates for just being born
For all the shut down strangers and hot rod angels
Rumbling through this promised land
Tonight my baby and me we're gonna ride to the sea
And wash these sins off our hands

It is significant that the ride to the sea is not for his partner alone to ride. While others continue to race in the streets, the character in this story travels with her and together they face their future. This is what stewardship looks like in everyday relationships. The commitment overrides the desire to be free of responsibility. For servant-leaders, this commitment to the welfare of those he/she leads is not easy or free.

Commitment to the Growth of People

Servant-leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As such, the servant-leader is deeply committed to the growth of each individual within his or her organization.



The servant-leader recognizes the tremendous responsibility to do everything in his or her power to nurture the personal and professional growth of employees and colleagues. In practice, this can include (but is not limited to) concrete actions such as making funds available for personal and professional development, taking a personal interest in the ideas and suggestions from everyone, encouraging worker involvement in decision making, and actively assisting laid-off employees to find other positions.

There are two themes that are woven into Bruce's music that reflect a deep commitment to the intrinsic worth of others who are often overlooked. Bruce has taken everyday people, those never romanticized, and they become the heroes of his stories. These stories, especially songs such as "Factory," "Badlands," and "Promised Land," make epic the daily grind of holding a job, raising a family and doing what's right. In this, he sanctifies the ordinary.

The second theme that reflects a commitment to growth is punctuated best in the title song of the album. In "Darkness on the Edge of Town," we are challenged to pursue what we want, who we are, and what we want for ourselves. But we often find our deepest truths, our greatest wisdom, in the struggles we face and in the demons we carry:

Everybody's got a secret Sonny
Something that they just can't face
Some folks spend their whole lives trying to keep it
They carry it with them every step that they take
Till some day they just cut it loose
Cut it loose or let it drag 'em down
Where no one asks any questions
Or looks too long in your face
In the darkness on the edge of town
Some folks are born into a good life
Other folks get it anyway anyhow
I lost my money and I lost my wife
Them things don't seem to matter much to me now
Tonight I'll be on that hill 'cause I can't stop
I'll be on that hill with everything I got
Lives on the line where dreams are found and lost
I'll be there on time and I'll pay the cost
For wanting things that can only be found
In the Darkness on the edge of town

For the servant-leader, the journey toward authenticity and living a true commitment to growth and the service others necessarily involves coming



to grips with our own darkness. It is through this journey that we discover our authentic life as servant-leaders. As leaders and mentors to others, the gift we offer is to help others know that their own struggles, failures, and demons can become a great source of strength and wisdom.

Building Community

The servant-leader senses that much has been lost in recent human history because of the shift from local communities to large institutions as the primary shapers of human lives. This awareness causes the servant-leader to seek to identify some means for building community among those who work within a given institution. Servant-leadership suggests that true community may be created among those who work in businesses and other institutions. Greenleaf said, “All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servan-leaders to show the way, not by mass movements, but by each servant-leader demonstrating his or her unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group.” Bruce Springsteen, in a lovely song titled “Someday (We’ll Be Together),” puts it this way:

Someday we’ll be together and
the night will fall around us
This love will last forever
Someday you’ll be mine
Someday we’ll be together and
the night will fall around us
This will last forever

These ten characteristics of servant-leadership are by no means exhaustive. However, they do serve to communicate the power and promise that this concept offers to those who are open to its invitation and challenge.

CODA

Another perspective that reveals Bruce’s impact on the building of communities involves the inclusive nature of his work. Thomas and Rappaport suggest, “Art is a powerful means for communicating the narratives that interpret experience and shape our collective understanding of ourselves” (Thomas and Rappaport 1990, 317). The servant-leader as a



builder of community must be adept at surfacing the dominant narrative as well as those that are not told or permitted to be told. The servant-leader better serves a community by understanding the variety of narratives by which a community understands itself, and effectively builds a more inclusive community by surfacing and giving voice to the stories of those not often included.

Through the stories told in Bruce Springsteen's music, the listener becomes aware of characters whose stories are often not told. The factory worker, the character who works in "his daddy's garage," and the rest who "get it any way anyhow" are people whose stories we come to know. They are no longer safely ignored or taken for granted. Their stories are woven into the larger community narrative. And that servant-leadership narrative is richer, broader and more inclusive because of it.

As Masciotra suggests, in speaking of Mr. Springsteen's political impact, "Art also has the potential to be politically disruptive—shaking up the status quo, awakening people from their indifference to suffering and injustice, and discomfiting the powerful who depend on societal conformity and apathy. It can influence its followers but also enable the artist to project a courageous example of freedom, independence and self-expression" (Masciotra 2010, 249). Springsteen's music serves to challenge and inspire many people—and both of us—while on the servant's journey.

Closing thought: Servant-leadership often occurs naturally within individuals; and, like many natural tendencies, it can be enhanced through learning and practice. In Bruce Springsteen, we see what Robert Greenleaf termed "the natural servant-leader": one to whom others are naturally drawn because they sense the empathy and caring within that person. Through decades spent reading Robert Greenleaf's writings and listening to Bruce Springsteen's music and lyrics, we see both men as contemporary prophets of the spirit of servant-leadership. Each has left a trail of helpful markers for those who follow in their footsteps—markers that aid us in our search for the Promised Land.

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