

Servant Leader, Spiritual Leader: The Case for Convergence

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The authors show how the concept of servant leadership can be enhanced by combining it with spiritual leadership. In fact, a true servant leader should also be a spiritual leader. The authors demonstrate that one of the earliest servant leaders, Moses, was also a spiritual leader. Abraham Lincoln is also used as an example.

INTRODUCTION

One valuable idea in leadership studies that has its roots in the Bible is that of servant leadership (Sendjaya and Sarros, 2002). Robert K. Greenleaf first introduced this concept in an essay he wrote in 1970 (Greenleaf, 1970). The servant leader is the antithesis of the autocratic, authoritarian, leader who is primarily concerned with power and wealth – one who believes in “leader first.” Servant leaders are not concerned with personal aggrandizement and self-interest. Rather, their focus is on others: they care about people, empower others and are facilitators, and want all of their subordinates to be successful (Greenleaf, 1978; Greenleaf, 1977). Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) developed a scale to measure the construct of servant leadership and found “strong relationships with positive outcomes such as employees’ extra effort, employees’ satisfaction, and perceptions of organizational effectiveness.” Van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2010) also developed an instrument to measure servant leadership. Hayden (2011) found that servant leadership did have positive effects on followers. The strongest effect found by Hayden was on health. Organizations headed by servant leaders will create an environment where followers feel and, indeed, are healthier.

Spears (2004) found ten characteristics in the servant leader:

- Listening* – Listening intently and receptively to what others say. This, of course, means that one has to be accessible.
- Empathy* -- Having empathy for others and trying to understand them.
- Healing* -- Possessing the ability of healing the emotional hurts of others.
- Awareness* -- Possessing awareness and self-awareness.
- Persuasion* -- Having the power of persuasion; influencing others by convincing them, not coercing them.
- Conceptualization* -- Possessing the knack of being able to conceptualize and to communicate ideas.

- Foresight* -- Having foresight; which also includes the ability to learn from the past and to have a vision of the future.
- Stewardship* -- Seeing themselves as stewards, i.e., as individuals whose main job is to serve others.
- Commitment to the Growth of People* -- Being firmly dedicated to the growth of every single employee.
- Building Community* -- A commitment to building community in the institutions where people work.

Russell and Stone (2002) reviewed the literature dealing with servant leadership. They found that there are 20 attributes of servant leadership: nine are classified as functional attributes and 11 are accompanying attributes. The functional attributes are “the operative qualities, characteristics, and distinctive features belonging to leaders and observed through specific leader behaviors in the workplace.” The nine functional attributes are: vision, honesty, integrity, trust, service, modeling, pioneering, appreciation of others, and empowerment. Note that many are quite similar to Spear’s 10 attributes.

- Vision* — Conceptualization and foresight mentioned by Spears are related to vision. The servant leader has to develop a vision for an organization.
- Honesty* — Russell and Stone (2002) cited a huge number of sources that state that honesty and integrity are “integral parts of good leadership.” Without it, it is highly unlikely that one will be able to inspire followers.
- Integrity* — This is very similar to honesty except that “honesty relates more to truthfulness, whereas integrity reflects adherence to an overall moral code.” Integrity is also connected to ethics. Honesty and integrity are closely related to the accompanying attribute of credibility.
- Trust* — Followers are much more likely to rely on a leader that is perceived as being honest and having integrity. The accompanying attribute of competence is related to trust; without competence it is very difficult to establish trust.
- Service*— A servant leader must be willing to serve others. Stewardship, which also includes empowerment, is a key part of service.
- Modeling*— The servant leader is a role model via personal example for everyone in the organization. Modeling helps establish the vision of the leader. Visibility is an accompanying attribute since the servant leader has to be visible to followers in order to serve as a model and to inspire them.
- Pioneering*— Servant leaders have to be innovators and willing to take risks.
- Appreciation of others*— Servant leaders “visibly appreciate, value, encourage, and care for their constituents.” This is accomplished by listening to others and providing encouragement.
- Empowerment*— By empowering others, leaders are established at all levels of the organization. Servant leaders teach and coach others and delegate responsibility.

In addition to these nine functional attributes Russell and Stone (2002) listed 11 accompanying characteristics of servant leadership: communication, credibility, competence, stewardship, visibility, influence, persuasion, listening, encouragement, teaching, and delegation.

Despite the positive attributes often associated with servant leaders there still remains a serious problem with the concept itself. That is, it appears that it is quite possible to consider some undeserving leaders as servant leaders. These may be individuals who care about their organizations but disregard the needs of society. For example, a CEO may think of herself as a servant leader because she has a vision and makes money for everyone in her firm. This is not enough if, say, the organization is causing harm to others. Some firms make a great deal of profits by not considering broader societal needs and objectives. Companies might be using sweat shops in Asia, dumping pollutants into rivers in order to improve profits and selling either inferior or dangerous products in other countries all to boost profits.

One suspects that Lloyd C. Blankfein, CEO of Goldman Sachs, may have seen himself as a type of servant leader for a number of years. His company was making huge profits and employees shared in the bonuses. Later on it became clear that the firm may have been doing well but the firm made quite a bit of money betting against the very financial products it sold to its own customers.

There are also leaders who have been good for their own countries but wreaked havoc with other countries. This reminds one of the famous quote from Peter Drucker: "Leadership is all hype. We've had three great leaders in this century – Hitler, Stalin, and Mao." Drucker also believed: "The only definition of a leader is someone who has followers." It is scary to think that Hitler, Stalin, and Mao might partially fit the bill as servant leaders. After the swift German victory over France, Hitler may have been among the most popular leaders in history. Hitler was seen as someone who brought jobs to the people; there was full employment. Millions of German soldiers engaged in plundering the wealth of people (mainly Jews) living in the occupied territories and sending it back home (Aly, 2007: 28-29; Kershaw, 2008). Scholars may not agree on whether it was greed, full employment, anti-Semitism, revenge for the humiliation of World War I, or all of the above. One thing, however, is quite clear: Hitler was extremely popular with the German people almost until the end.

SHORTCOMINGS OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP CONCEPT

One of the shortcomings of the concept of servant leadership is that servant leaders might easily focus too much on the needs of followers rather than the needs of the organization. A servant leader might also be more concerned with the needs of followers without considering the needs of society. In fact, a servant leader might do what is best for his followers without necessarily considering the higher values of truth, justice, peace, compassion, and human dignity.

A servant leader who is obsessed with the needs of followers might not see any reason to be concerned about world poverty. One might even be able to rationalize dumping hazardous wastes into rivers and oceans in places where there is no regulation if it would allow a firm to provide bonuses for all employees and survive. One can easily argue that compassion has no place in a firm headed by a servant leader. Why should a firm go out of its way to hire, say, people with Down's syndrome or other handicaps if it will make other employees uncomfortable and not help the bottom line? What happens when a firm has the opportunity to add to everyone's bonuses but in order to do so must engage in legal, but immoral business practices? Google decided not to do business in China because of the way it treated its citizens. Of course, this kind of attitude can result in reduced bonuses for employees.

Unlike a servant leader, a spiritual or transformational leader focuses on the needs of the organization (Stone, Russell, and Patterson, 2004; Fry, Matherly, Whittington, and Winston, 2007). Fry (2003) believed that a spiritual leader "must primarily motivate workers intrinsically through vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, task involvement, and goal identification. He felt that workplace spirituality involved:

1. creating a vision wherein organization members experience a sense of calling in that their life has meaning and makes a difference;
2. establishing a social/organizational culture based on altruistic love whereby leaders and followers have genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others, thereby producing a sense of membership and being understood and appreciated.

The spiritual leader ensures that there will be spirituality in the workplace. Workplace spirituality has been defined as:

A framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees' experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected in a way that provides feelings of compassion and joy (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003: 13).

Admittedly, the two concepts of spiritual leadership and servant leadership are close. Scholars have noted that the literature has little to say about motives, values, and conditions that cause one to become a servant leader (Yukl, 2010, Freeman, 2011). It has been suggested that spiritual individuals are much

more likely to become servant leaders than those who are not (Freeman, 2011). This theory is quite plausible given that those possessing spiritual values such as humility, integrity, and empathy/compassion are thought to facilitate servant leadership (Freeman, 2011).

Sendjaya (2007) developed and validated a scale for measuring spiritual leadership. Interestingly, interview questions used in the development of the scale included: “Does the term ‘spiritual leadership’ or ‘servant leadership’ mean anything to you?” “How would spiritual/servant leadership be different from other leadership approaches or styles?” and “Do you think the concept and practice of spiritual/servant leadership in organizations can contribute to better organizational performance? How?” Sendjaya appears to combine the two concepts of spiritual and servant leadership; after all, they do overlap somewhat.

Perhaps the concept of servant leader requires additional examination to make it a stronger and more useful concept; conceivably, to be a true servant leader, one also has to be a spiritual leader. To further examine spiritual and servant leadership, this paper draws on the Hebrew Bible, specifically the Five Books of Moses (the Torah), and the leadership of Moses an early paradigm of both approaches to leadership.

MOSES AS THE PARADIGMATIC SERVANT LEADER

Moses, arguably the greatest of Biblical leaders, is praised as being a “servant of God” (Deuteronomy 34: 5). Moses was the paradigmatic servant leader; he cared more for the people than for himself. Moses was not jealous of anyone and declared (Numbers 11: 29): “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put His spirit upon them.” Moses would have been quite satisfied had all the Israelites become prophets and God communicated directly with them, even if this meant that he was no longer needed.

The Bible describes what happened when Moses became an adult and left the palace (Exodus 2:11): “And it came to pass, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren.” Moses had a difficult choice to make. Should he ignore his brethren and remain a prince of Egypt or should he join the slaves and give up everything? The Midrash (Exodus Rabbah 1:26) believes that Moses was 20 years old when he went out to see his brethren. When he saw the backbreaking work they had to do he *cried*. He tried to help them with their burdens. God was very impressed with Moses and the fact that he cast aside his royal position to “share the sorrow of Israel” and treat them like a brother.

This characteristic of Moses defines the ultimate servant leader. This was a leader who felt the pain of his subordinates when they had to work too hard. Moses was a leader who identified with his people and tried to reduce their burdens. This is what Spears (2004) referred to as empathy. However, Moses had more than empathy. Moses gave up his privileged life as a prince of Egypt because of the harsh treatment of the Hebrew slaves (Exodus 1-2). He fled Egypt after killing an Egyptian taskmaster for viciously beating one of the slaves. In fact, he went from being a royal prince to a lowly Midianite shepherd.

Moses was deeply concerned with justice. The Bible (Exodus 2: 11-17) relates three different stories about him when he became an adult. First, he killed an Egyptian taskmaster who was striking a Hebrew slave. The next day he got involved when he saw two Hebrew slaves fighting with each other. When he fled Egypt and found himself in Midian, he interceded when he saw Midianite shepherds trying to steal water drawn by Jethro’s daughters for their father’s sheep. The Bible is showing us that Moses would not stand by when any injustice was being committed. His sense of justice was not only for his own people, the Hebrews. He was outraged by any injustice, even wrongs committed against strangers and women. One assumes that in ancient times women were not treated well, but Moses, a fugitive from Egypt, stuck his neck out to help Midianite women. Not a smart move for a fugitive that got into trouble for interceding on behalf of a Hebrew slave and barely escaped Egypt with his life.

Clearly, Moses was concerned about wrongs committed against strangers. Treating the stranger well and/or not oppressing him becomes an important law in the Torah and is mentioned no less than 36 times.

Moses had no problem standing up to God when he felt that an injustice had been committed. The first time Moses spoke to Pharaoh and asked him to let the people go in order to hold a feast in the wilderness, Pharaoh responded very harshly (Exodus 5:1- 15). The slaves were told that the quota of bricks that they had to produce would remain the same but that they would have to find the straw; no one would bring straw to the slaves; they would have to go gather straw for themselves. Moses did not understand what God was doing and lashed out saying (Exodus 5: 22): “My Lord, why have you harmed this people? Why have you sent me?” This is the way one expects a servant leader to speak when his flock is hurting.

Moses was much more than empathetic; he identified very strongly with his people even when they made serious mistakes. After the incident of the Golden Calf, God was ready to destroy the Israelites. Moses stood up to God and demanded (Exodus 32:32): “But now, please forgive their sin — but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.” According to most commentaries, Moses was telling God to remove him from the book of life, i.e., kill him, if He did not forgive the people for the sin of the Golden Calf. That is what true servant leadership is all about: a great love for followers so that one is willing to die for them. We do not expect CEOs to be willing to die for employees but they should have this kind of passion. Moses’ love for his people was the kind of love a parent has for a child.

The Israelites made another serious blunder in believing the false report of the spies (Numbers 13-14). God made a very tempting offer to Moses (Numbers 14:12): “I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of you a greater nation and mightier than they.” Moses, a true servant leader, could not be enticed to abandon his flock with any offer, no matter how good. His people came first.

Moses was a humble man. We know that God had to plead with Moses to take a position of leadership (Exodus 3: 7 – 4: 17). Moses used five different arguments with God as to why he should not be the one to go to Pharaoh and lead the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt. Moses was 80 years old at the time and had been living in Midian and working as a shepherd for many years. The Bible attests to Moses’ great humility even after leading the Israelites. Scripture (Numbers 12:3) explicitly states: “Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else upon the face of the earth.”

Moses did not use his position of power to enrich himself. He had clean hands and was able to say to God (Numbers 16:15): “I have not even taken a single donkey of theirs, nor have I wronged even one of them.” When Moses dies alone on Mount Nebo, he is buried by God Himself.

Feiler (2010) posited that Moses is an American icon; it is no surprise that many great Americans, including Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr., have compared themselves and been compared to him. According to Feiler, Moses represents “the ideals of American justice” and reminds us that “a moral society is one that embraces the outsider and uplifts the downtrodden.” How many politicians and CEOs can make this claim?

WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY

Based on the above discussion, one might make the mistake of thinking that a servant leader has such a great love for the people and the organization that they come first. Yes and no. The well being of the organization may come before the needs of the leader but there is something that comes before everything. A truly great leader is a “servant of God” first or, at least, a believer in spiritual values. Spirituality may have its roots in religion but it can be viewed as a separate concept. In fact, one researcher stated that “spirituality unites, but religion divides” (Hicks, 2002:380). Still, most scholars acknowledge the connection between spiritual leadership and religious theology (Sendjaya, 2007).

Spiritual values that are cherished by the Bible include compassion for the weak and helpless (the orphan, widow, and stranger mentioned in the Bible are usually the ones taken advantage of), love for peace, concern for human dignity, integrity, and justice for all. Isaiah (1:10) rebuked the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem and called them “chiefs of Sodom,” criticizing them for not pursuing justice and not taking care of society’s unfortunates; all they cared about was their own personal aggrandizement. Clearly, leaders such as Hitler, Mao, Stalin, and Genghis Khan did not have spiritual values and no sane person

would consider them “servants of God.” Many feel that what they had was not even leadership since leadership is not about coercion.

Moses may have placed the needs of the people above his own but he was not only a servant of Israel, he was also a servant of God. Moses understood that his role as leader was to mold the people into upright, righteous individuals who would obey the core values of the Bible. In fact, the ancient Israelite kings were commanded to always have a Torah scroll near them as a reminder of what power was really about (Deuteronomy 17: 18-19). Much of Deuteronomy is about Moses telling the Israelites the consequences of not following the laws of the Torah (e.g., Deuteronomy 28: 15-69). The people were warned that they would be banished from the Promised Land if they did not obey God’s covenant with them (Deuteronomy 29:9-28). Moses made it clear to them (Deuteronomy 7:6) that they had to be spiritual and do what is moral: “For you are a holy people unto the Lord your God.” This idea is also expressed in Leviticus (19:2): “You shall be holy, for holy am I, the Lord your God.” Moses told them exactly what God required of them (Deuteronomy 10:12): “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”

Of the 613 precepts in the Torah, more than 100 deal with honesty in business. These laws cover many different areas of business ranging from honest weights and measures to paying employees on time (Friedman, 2000). The Bible makes it clear (Deuteronomy 6:18): “You shall do that which is fair and good in the eyes of God so that it will be good for you.” If you act in a way that is not fair and good, the threat is quite clear. CEOs that run businesses have to ensure that a firm behaves in an ethical and socially responsible manner. Caring about employees is not enough.

A spiritual servant leader understands that the company and employees – albeit important – do not come first. There are certain core spiritual values that trump even a company’s existence. Moses warned the Israelites that the Promised Land was theirs but only if they obeyed the core values of the Torah. Indeed, the Israelites were warned by numerous prophets that they would be forced into exile if they did not abide by the spiritual values that were the pre-condition for living in the Promised Land. In a similar vein, a firm that does not abide by key ethical values does not have a right to exist. There are quite a few ethical/spiritual values that companies should make part of their mission statement. Friedman and Friedman (2009) provided a checklist for firms that are interested in becoming more virtuous.

Thus, the spiritual servant leader possesses two additional characteristics.

Sacrifice—Having a willingness to give up everything including his job, wealth, and even his life for his subordinates. *Principles First*— An organization without values is not worth protecting. The true servant leader is not only a servant of the people; she is a servant of God or spiritual values. This means that virtue comes first, even before the organization. An organization must be virtuous to be worth defending.

In the workplace, the spiritual servant leader has to be a proponent of workplace spirituality.

Workplace Spirituality—The servant leader is committed to including spirituality in the workplace. People want their jobs to provide a sense of meaning and fulfillment.

Unfortunately, over the past several years, we have seen many counterexamples to the spiritual servant leader. Most CEOs today are quite happy to shut down factories, putting hundreds of people out of work, to save relatively small amounts and collect their own outrageously high salaries. One cannot imagine a CEO crying because of the burdens of his or her employees. Most CEOs would not shed one tear for closing down a factory and turning a thriving town into a place filled with despair and misery. The Great Recession of 2008 would not have occurred if corporate leaders cared more for their own employees than for their bonuses. It is now clear what happened in that debacle. In order to earn huge bonuses, CEOs took inordinate amounts of risk. After all, why not risk the jobs and pensions of millions of people for millions of dollars in bonuses? Politicians were just as guilty. They sacrificed the country in order to obtain money from the special interest groups (e.g., in this case, Wall Street). What mattered most to them was obtaining political donations so that they could finance their campaigns and stay in

office. The action of these politicians can be easily compared — negatively— to those of the American political icon Abraham Lincoln.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE: ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Abraham Lincoln, who has been compared to Moses (Feiler, 2010), is an example of a leader who put principles before his own needs. In the summer of 1864 the war was going poorly for the North; the Democrats nominated General McClellan for president on a peace platform. It appeared quite likely that the Republican Party might split among several candidates. President Lincoln was visited by a "radical" Republican who warned him he might lose the election since the country was tired of the war. Lincoln replied, "You think I don't know I am going to be beaten, but I do and, unless some great change takes place, badly beaten" (Waugh, 2001: 267). Despite this, Lincoln was more concerned about doing what was best for America (not allowing the South to secede) than winning the election. Lincoln would probably have lost the election had not Sherman's burning of Atlanta and march to the sea done wonders for Lincoln's campaign. Sherman's victory damaged the claim of the Democrats that the war could never be won (Waugh, 2001: 296-297).

CONCLUSION

Servant leadership is a valuable approach in politics and industry. Adding the spiritual component —striving to build a spiritual workplace and working to improve society— completes the paradigm and makes it more valuable as a leadership theory. Another Biblical figure offers an important lesson for all leaders. God appeared to King Solomon in a dream and offered him anything that he wanted (I Kings 3). Rather than asking for wealth, power, or long life, Solomon asked for the following: "Give therefore your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and bad; for who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" Solomon understood what a leader needs to be successful: wisdom, a passion for justice, and concern for people. A concern for the people is not enough by itself.

The Psalmist (Psalms 15) describes some of the attributes of a virtuous individual. These attributes are just as important for leaders and organizations: "One who walks in total integrity, deals righteously, and speaks the truth from his heart. One who has no slander on his tongue, who has done his fellow human no evil nor cast disgrace upon his close one... Whoever does these things shall never falter." The spiritual servant leader does no harm to "his fellow human"; it is not only about one's own organization or country.

The Bible uses the metaphor of shepherd to indicate a leader (Numbers 27:17). This metaphor is also used by Ezekiel in Chapter 34. When leaders did not help the people but enriched themselves at their expense, the prophet Ezekiel exclaimed (34: 2-4):

Woe unto the shepherds of Israel that have tended themselves [and not tended their flock]! Should not the shepherds tend the sheep? You eat their fat and you wear their wool; you slaughter the healthy ones; but you tend not the sheep. The frail you have not strengthened; neither have you healed that which was sick; neither have you bound up those who were broken; neither have you brought back those who strayed or searched for those that were lost; instead, you ruled over them with force and rigor.

According to the Midrash (Exodus Rabbah 2:2-3), Moses was selected as a leader because of his gentleness and concern for the sheep when he worked as a shepherd for Jethro. Moses was also careful when grazing the sheep making sure they never strayed into private property. This Midrash (as well as the passage in Ezekiel) is describing the servant leader, i.e., one who treats his people with great compassion and tenderness. This is important since leaders that are despised for being uncaring or indifferent to the people are unlikely to have the ability to transform them into morally upright individuals.

The shepherd metaphor is also used to describe God in Psalms 23. “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...” Here, the Psalmist asserts that “He leads me on the path of *tzedek* (righteousness and justice) for His Name’s sake.” The Shepherd has to do more than care for his flock. He needs divine help to ensure that the flock is on the right path and does not stray.

Hillel’s (ca. 60 B.C.E. – ca. 10 C.E.) statement (Ethics of the Fathers 1:14) could be a touchstone for a spiritual servant leader: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? The servant leader who is only for “myself,” i.e., focuses on his own needs, the needs of the organization, or needs of employees but is indifferent to spiritual values is not the model leader. The ideal leader must serve man and must also have the moral compass to be a spiritual servant leader.

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