

# Servant Leadership

## What is Servant Leadership?

While servant leadership is a timeless concept, the phrase “servant leadership” was coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in *The Servant as Leader*, an essay that he first published in 1970. In that essay, Greenleaf said:

*“The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions...The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.*

*“The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, 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?”*

A servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong. While traditional leadership generally involves the accumulation and exercise of power by one at the “top of the pyramid,” servant leadership is different. The servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first, and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible.

## What are the qualities of a servant leader?

**Listening** – Servant leaders listen to others and themselves. They listen for what those they are leading want or need, listen to their inner voice, and spend time reflecting.

**Empathy** – Servant leaders understand others and empathize with them. They are accepting of all and see the good in everyone.

**Healing** – Servant leaders have the power and potential to heal relationships through service.

**Awareness** – Awareness and self-awareness strengthen a servant leader’s ability to lead by deepening their understanding of the world.

**Persuasion** – Servant leaders rely on persuasion, rather than authority. They are able to gently persuade people and groups to consensus rather than relying on using their authority.

**Conceptualization** – Servant leaders think beyond the day to day and look at what could be possible - they dream big!

**Foresight** – The ability to anticipate the outcome of a situation or to learn from past experiences and mistakes and apply them to the present is foresight – a characteristic of servant leaders that takes practice.

**Stewardship** – Servant leaders are stewards of whatever/whoever they are leading. This means they are trusted with the care of that group.

**Commitment to the growth of people** – Servant leaders want to see people reach their full potential and are committed to supporting them in this.

**Building Community** – Servant leaders understand the value of community and seek to foster community within those they lead and serve.