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# Reflections on Leadership

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## REFLECTIONS ON LEADERSHIP

*Robert H. Jerry, II\**

**A**LTHOUGH I have devoted approximately one-third of my professional life to academic leadership positions, I still find leadership to be a difficult concept to explain and describe, let alone fully comprehend. Some aspects of leadership are simple, intuitive, and straightforward, but others are complex, profound, and difficult to articulate.

In trying to understand leadership, the long-recognized distinction between leadership and management is a useful starting point. For a newspaper publisher in a city of even modest size, considerable management skills are required to get thousands of newspapers delivered on time every day. On many days this management problem no doubt produces headaches for the publisher. But other problems such a publisher must confront involve a number of difficult, far-reaching questions: What is the future of print news and other print media in a rapidly changing, Internet-driven, technological age? How should the newspaper evolve to deal with its changing environment? How does one persuade those who must make decisions about the newspaper's strategic plan to embrace the changes needed to succeed in a rapidly changing world? Understanding the newspaper's management issues is an important part of articulating answers to these questions, but management skills alone are not enough. Indeed, the landscape is littered with the defunct remnants of businesses—such as slide rule and eight-track tape manufacturers, outdoor drive-in theaters, and even many first-generation computer manufacturers—that did not have leadership capable of imagining the future and positioning their enterprises to survive in changing environments. Articulating, persuading, and implementing a vision requires much more than outstanding management skills. Understanding how we get to a better future and how we move people, communities, and institutions forward requires leadership. James MacGregor Burns discussed this concept in his seminal book *Leadership*, published in 1978:

I define leadership as leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations—the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations—of both leaders and followers. And the genius of leadership lies in the manner in which leaders see and act on their own and their followers' values and motivations.<sup>1</sup>

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1. JAMES MCGREGOR BURNS, *LEADERSHIP* 19 (Harper & Row 1979) (1978).

Beyond the important difference between management and leadership, it is useful to draw a further distinction between the *mechanics* of leadership and a *philosophy* of leadership. By “mechanics of leadership,” I refer to the specific behaviors and actions that an effective leader must embrace. Many of these behaviors are externally manifested and observable by those who work with or for a leader, but some behaviors are more in the category of subjective attitudes that may be neither known nor observable by others but are nonetheless integral parts of the leader’s toolbox. In other words, the mechanics of leadership are those ideas that would be expected to appear in a “how to lead” manual. By “philosophy of leadership,” I refer to a set of ideas and concepts that establish the governing code, or set of first principles, forming the foundation for the articulation of the mechanics of effective leadership. It is the philosophy of leadership that makes the mechanics of leadership meaningful and relevant. Some might ask why leadership matters. The answer to the question will not be found in the manual because the mechanics do not speak to the ends for which leadership is exercised. Instead, leadership philosophy explains why leadership matters and why it is important. An effective leader must be able to perform the mechanics, but effective leadership also presupposes an underlying philosophy that frames the mechanics.

When I first sought to become more familiar with the available academic literature on leadership a few years ago, I encountered servant-leadership theory and the writings of Robert Greenleaf. In those materials I found a much more developed articulation of this philosophy, and it is the essence of that philosophy of leadership that I embrace. Stated succinctly, leadership has its roots in service, and effective leadership is based on service to others. Effective leadership comes from the desire to put the well-being of others first—whether they are students, faculty, employees, customers, or community—and to give priority to the interests of communities, institutions, or organizations, as opposed to one’s own interests.<sup>2</sup>

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2. Servant-leadership has received mention as a theory of leadership in legal literature, including prior Leadership in Legal Education Symposia published by this Review. See E. Thomas Sullivan, *Decanal Leadership: Managing Relationships*, 31 U. TOL. L. REV. 749, 750 (2000) (referencing servant-leadership in discussion of relationship management); Mark A. Sargent, *An Alternative to the Sectarian Vision: The Role of the Dean in an Inclusive Catholic Law School*, 33 U. TOL. L. REV. 171, 173-74 (2001) (discussing the role of the dean in a Catholic institution as a “servant leader”); Thomas M. Mengler, *What’s Faith Got To Do With It? (With Apologies to Tina Turner)*, 35 U. TOL. L. REV. 145, 145 (2003) (describing the mission of law school where its author serves as dean “to educate students to become, in the words of Robert Greenleaf, servant-leaders”); Lynn R. Buzzard, *A Christian Law School: Images and Vision*, 78 MARQ. L. REV. 267, 278 (1995) (describing the training of law students as creating “servant leaders”). Professor Victor Romero drew upon servant-leadership theory when discussing the challenges facing coalition building among disenfranchised groups. See Victor C. Romero, *Rethinking Minority Coalition Building: Valuing Self-Sacrifice, Stewardship and Anti-Subordination*, 50 VILL. L. REV. 823, 828 (2005). Some judges and practitioners have referenced the theory in explaining leadership in the workplace or in other contexts. See, e.g., Keith Jackson, *A Perspective on the Alabama State Bar’s 2006 Leadership Forum Class II*, 67 ALA. LAW. 332, 332 (2006) (bar member invoking “servant leadership” to urge increased bar participation); Janine Geske, *Why Do I Teach Restorative Justice to Law Students?*, 89 MARQ. L. REV. 327, 329 (2005) (retired Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice

Of course, a great many handbooks articulate “principles” of leadership, but by and large these writers are speaking to the mechanics of leadership. Rudy Giuliani’s recent book *Leadership*<sup>3</sup> is a thoughtful and engaging book that identifies what he calls universal principles of leadership—essentially a compilation of what he considers essential leadership traits. For example, to be an effective leader, one must know in what she *believes*; the leader must know and be able to explain what is important to her—in other words, where the leader wants to go and why she wants to go there.<sup>4</sup> *Optimism* is important because people like to follow someone who offers solutions to problems and who has hope for a better future; people gravitate toward the optimist and do not like to invest in the vision of the pessimist.<sup>5</sup> Effective leadership presupposes having the *courage* to stand up for one’s beliefs, even at great personal cost.<sup>6</sup> To lead effectively, one must prepare, and *prepare relentlessly*; a skilled hip-shooter may hit the target eighty percent of the time, but a twenty percent error rate is too high for effective leadership.<sup>7</sup> In modern organizations, no one person can do it all, and progress is accomplished through *teamwork*.<sup>8</sup> An effective leader assembles and understands the value of selecting team members whose strengths complement the leader’s weaknesses. Effective leadership presupposes an ability to *communicate* to people what is expected of them.<sup>9</sup>

To Giuliani’s points I would add a series of observations that have been stated in different ways by many others in countless books and articles on leadership: a leader must *set the example* the leader wants others to follow; a leader must *listen* to the ideas of others because no leader has all the right answers, and others in the organization often have better ideas; a leader must be comfortable *delegating authority* because, beyond the fact that effective management requires delegation, an institution will grow stronger if others work with the leader to carry out the leader’s vision; an effective leader *sets standards* for subordinates, and then allows them to do their jobs; a leader is able to *tolerate mistakes*, but a leader is also *intolerant of repeated mistakes* and is able to deliver discipline for

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stating that “[r]estorative justice processes develop those necessary skills that will insure that our students can be agents for change and servant leaders in the community”); John Voorhees, *Global Environmental Solutions: Management Systems and Synchronicity*, 28 STETSON L. REV. 1155, 1156 (1999) (practicing lawyer discussing servant-leadership in the context of finding long-range solutions to environmental problems).

“Servant-leadership,” as explained by Greenleaf and as discussed in this essay, is not to be confused with the use of the phrase in some conservative Christian traditions to reference what is believed to be the wife’s obligation to submit to the leadership of her husband and to serve as the husband’s helper. See, e.g., The Baptist Faith and Message, sec. XVIII (2000 Statement adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention), <http://www.utm.edu/staff/caldwell/bfm/2000/18.html> (last visited Mar. 13, 2007).

3. RUDOLPH W. GIULIANI, *LEADERSHIP* (2002).

4. *Id.* at 171-83.

5. *Id.* at 120-22.

6. *Id.* at 265-84.

7. *Id.* at 51-68.

8. *Id.* at 107-14.

9. *Id.* at 183-95.

repeated errors; in this connection, a leader *can be intolerant when it is appropriate to be so*, as is the case when the leader encounters sloppiness, inattention, or chronic ineffectiveness; a leader must be able to *recognize and reward the meritorious*; a leader *works toward consensus* and getting everyone to pull in the same direction; and a leader must be *decisive*, thereby avoiding the opposing evils of hip-shooting (with its excessively high error rate in most situations) and unreasonable procrastination (which generates frustration among others in the organization).

The principles, points, and ideas mentioned above are examples of the mechanics of leadership and represent some of the important ideas to be included in the leadership manual or handbook. But simply understanding the contents of the manual is not enough; effective leadership also requires possession of a sense of why the manual says what it says. Eventually, all leaders encounter a decision point where the manual provides no clear answer; unless the leader has an underlying philosophy of leadership in which the content of the manual is grounded, the odds that the leader will move the organization successfully to its next landing area are reduced. Consider a golfer's swing as a metaphor: if I know how to swing the club properly and can do so consistently, I will probably succeed most of the time in moving the golf ball down the course; but if I do not understand *why* it is important that I swing the club in a particular way, I lack the contextual framework necessary to figuring out how to construct a shot when I find myself in deep rough composed of a kind of thick grass I have never seen. In that predicament, the absence of contextual knowledge on which the understanding of the golf swing is predicated makes it much more difficult to extricate myself from the rough, and the odds become higher that my effort—or my leadership—will fail.

As those who have pursued the academic study of leadership know well, the use of the term servant-leadership to describe a philosophy of leadership first appeared in a 1970 essay by Robert Greenleaf titled *The Servant as Leader*.<sup>10</sup> Robert Greenleaf was born in Terre Haute, Indiana (which coincidentally is my own hometown) in 1904.<sup>11</sup> He spent a full professional life with AT&T, where he did management research and education for the company, until his retirement in 1964.<sup>12</sup> He then began a second career as a consultant for several major companies and educational institutions, and this career lasted until his death in 1990.<sup>13</sup> Greenleaf essentially devoted his career, both at AT&T and thereafter, to studying—and trying to figure out—how organizations get things done.<sup>14</sup> As described by others who have chronicled his career and his work, and as explained more fully in his seminal 1970 essay on servant-leadership, the

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10. ROBERT K. GREENLEAF, *THE SERVANT AS LEADER* (Robert K. Greenleaf Center 1973) (1970).

11. Robert K. Greenleaf, Wikipedia, [http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Greenleaf](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Greenleaf) (last visited Oct. 15, 2006).

12. *Id.*

13. *Id.*

14. *Id.*

inspiration for his thinking about servant-leadership came in the 1960s when he read Herman Hesse's short novel, *Journey to the East*.<sup>15</sup>

Retracing Greenleaf's steps is perhaps the most direct route to grasping the essence of his leadership philosophy. *Journey to the East* tells the story of a group of people on a spiritual quest.<sup>16</sup> Leo, the central figure in the book, accompanies the group as their servant, and he tends to their various needs with a cheerful attitude and spirit.<sup>17</sup> At the outset, the journey is a very successful one, but this only lasts while Leo is with the group; Leo suddenly disappears one day, and the group quickly falls apart, causing the journey to be abandoned.<sup>18</sup> Without the presence of their servant Leo, the group cannot go on.<sup>19</sup> The narrator of the book then proceeds on a lengthy quest to find Leo.<sup>20</sup> After many years of searching, the narrator finds him and is taken into the religious order that had sponsored the original journey.<sup>21</sup> There, he discovers that Leo, whom he first knew as a servant, is actually the great and noble leader of the order.<sup>22</sup> After reading the book, Greenleaf distilled the central meaning of *Journey to the East* as follows: a great leader is first experienced as a servant to others, and this simple fact is central to a leader's greatness.<sup>23</sup> In other words, true leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a deep desire to help others. Greenleaf writes that leadership "begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first,"<sup>24</sup> meaning that effective leadership is grounded in giving priority to the needs of others.

For nearly twenty years, I have thought from time to time about a statement made to me by a highly respected Kansas judge during a conversation in my office. He was near the end of a successful career on the bench, and I was still early in my own professional career. As we shared reflections on what we hoped to accomplish during the remainder of our working years, he said in roughly these words: "Life is much simpler when ambition is no longer a part of it." Although I have given his statement much thought, I am still not certain what he meant. Perhaps he was trying to give me a warning, hoping to encourage me to think more carefully about where I wanted to go and why. If he meant that ambition is not a good thing for a leader, I have decided that I do not necessarily agree with him. When members of my administrative team manifest ambition, I am usually pleased because ambition is typically accompanied by a desire to improve, to succeed, and to accomplish good things. I am inclined to think, however, that the judge was explaining that, in his opinion, life becomes

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15. GREENLEAF, *supra* note 10, at 1.

16. HERMANN HESSE, *THE JOURNEY TO THE EAST* (Hikla Rosner trans., Noonday Press 26th prtg. 1973) (1956).

17. *Id.* at 25.

18. *Id.* at 37-49.

19. *Id.*

20. *Id.* at 51-62.

21. *Id.* at 63-98.

22. *Id.* at 99.

23. GREENLEAF, *supra* note 10, at 2.

24. *Id.* at 7.

simpler—meaning the life of a leader—when one is primarily motivated not by a desire to enhance one’s own wealth, status, power, or position, but by a desire to do a job well because the well-being of others will be enhanced. Stated otherwise, the leader becomes more effective if those who follow believe that the leader’s purpose is to enhance a set of values of which self-interest (including personal ambition) plays little or no part.

I am convinced that Robert Greenleaf deserves much credit for articulating the meaning of servant-leadership, but it also seems clear enough that others had this idea before he did. Indeed, servant-leadership plays a significant role in many religious traditions. For example, many of the great lessons of Judaism are based on stories of servant-leaders like Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and David. One of the central themes of the story of Moses being advised by his father-in-law to delegate responsibility to others is that Moses was, first and foremost, a servant of the people.<sup>25</sup> In the Christian religious tradition, Jesus makes at least two important statements about servant-leadership. When Jesus spoke to the sons of Zebedee and their mother, he said that “whoever would be first among you must be your servant.”<sup>26</sup> At the Last Supper, as described in Luke, Jesus said, “let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.”<sup>27</sup> In Islam, the Prophet Mohammed described the role of the imams, who are the temporal legal and theological leaders in this faith, as leaders who serve.<sup>28</sup> The Dalai Lama has said, in summarizing one portion of a few thousand years of the Buddhist religious tradition: “If you seek enlightenment for yourself simply to enhance yourself and your position, you miss the purpose; if you seek enlightenment for yourself to enable you to serve others, you are with purpose.”<sup>29</sup> There are several points embedded in the statement of the Dalai Lama and in Islamic and Judeo-Christian teachings, but a prominent one is that servant-leadership involves the leader recognizing that authority and power are not to be used for the leader’s satisfaction or to secure the leader’s privileges. Rather, effective leadership involves using authority and power in the service and promotion of the well-being of the entire community.

This philosophy of leadership has no shortage of complexities when one seeks to apply it in the business world, where the reason for the existence of many

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25. *Exodus* 18:1-27, including *Exodus* 18:14 (referring to Jethro, Moses’s father-in-law, seeing “all that he was doing for the people”).

26. *Matthew* 20:26 (New Oxford Annotated Bible).

27. *Luke* 22:26 (New Oxford Annotated Bible).

28. See Carol Baass Sowa, *Roles of Leaders in the Three Abrahamic Traditions Discussed at Oblate, TODAY’S CATHOLIC* (San Antonio, Tex.), available at [http://www.satodayscatholic.com/Archives/2006%20archives/120806/Trifaith\\_pt2.htm](http://www.satodayscatholic.com/Archives/2006%20archives/120806/Trifaith_pt2.htm) (last visited Mar. 12, 2007) (reporting the comments of Imam Omar Shakir at an October 2006 presentation); Gurkan Celik & Yusuf Alan, Fethullah Gülen as a Servant Leader, in *Proceedings of Second International Conference on Islam in the Contemporary World: The Fethullah Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice* 113-14 (Mar. 4, 2006), <http://www.fethullahgulenconference.org/dallas/proceedings/GCelik&YAlan.pdf> (“The idea of a leader as a servant has been part of Islam since its beginning . . .”).

29. Brendon Burchard, *The Three Principles of Leadership: How to be an Effective Leader*, [http://www.studentleader.com/orig\\_02-10-2003.htm](http://www.studentleader.com/orig_02-10-2003.htm) (last visited Mar. 8, 2007) (quoting the Dalai Lama).

organizations is the generation of wealth, and it can be difficult to square profit-maximization strategies with promoting the well-being of all constituencies with which the organization interacts. But this philosophy is particularly well-suited to academic leadership, which generally has a close nexus with public service. The philosophy provides a moral compass for how academic leaders should exercise their discretion and authority, supplies a framework for the difficult judgments that must be made on a daily basis, and offers the contextual framework for carrying out the mechanics of leadership.

