

**The Bill Blackwood
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Educating Supervisors in Servant Leadership

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**By
Larry Berg**

**Belton Police Department
Belton, Texas
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ABSTRACT

A boat without a rudder can easily stray off course, so can a police agency without proper leadership. The traditional view of leadership in a paramilitary police organization is a top down rank structure approach. Officers get discouraged without clear vision and strong leadership and often bounce from one agency to another. Servant leadership should be introduced at every level of leadership within modern police agencies. Police officers are leaders in their mere presence. People see the uniform in a crisis and look for guidance. The moment officers arrive on scene, people look to those officers for help and leadership. Right or wrong, people will often follow their direction. Servant leadership develops the character of the leader and positively effects those being led. Servant leadership is transformational leadership, which has begun to take root in colleges, businesses and various organizations. Servant leadership addresses the development of the community and the police organization in a framework designed as a partnership. Finally, those who serve in a manner consistent with servant leadership principals understand the extraordinary liability they face in making decisions. They strive to make decisions based on their dedication to the value of human life. This paper addresses the benefits of servant leadership and the positive impact it has on the morale of an agency dedicated to servant leadership philosophy. Servant leadership focuses on the development of character traits most desired in society as a whole, creating leaders who will be assets not only as police officers, but citizens as well.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction	1
Position	3
Counter Position	7
Recommendation	10
References	12

INTRODUCTION

People are often promoted in rank without ever questioning what makes a leader. Leaders can inspire and influence people by sharing core values and vision or they can govern in ways that create animosity and resentment. Many law enforcement agencies are looking for leaders to emerge from within their ranks. Most officers want to be employed in a profession of respect, not fear. Robert Greenleaf wrote on the "Servant Leadership" model in 1977. Greenleaf believed people should lead from a deep belief and understanding that leaders are called to serve those who are following them. He said followers will be responsive but only to those who lead them. The leader needs to have the values of humility, empathy, and honor. The leader needs the drive to build the community by building the individuals (Greenleaf, 1977). True leaders will choose the right path regardless of the popularity of their choice. They will not compromise their principals, and they will always stand for what is good.

The Commissar of the Moldovan National Police Training Academy stated there is a need for Jesus Christ in the police force and their training academy (G. Chirita, personal communication, September 4, 2012). He further explained they needed the moral fiber of Christ's teachings. Moldova's police force is plagued with corruption. During a training mission, their traffic enforcement division would not interact with an American police liaison because they were humiliated by the bribes they take. The general population is fully aware the corruption exists; even the Secretary of Interior's office acknowledges the problem, but can do little. Moldova is battling the corruption brought on by self-serving leadership found in socialist communism. The Commissar is correct in his assessment. Scholars recognize Jesus Christ's teaching to his disciples

as the ultimate example of servant leadership (Lanctot & Irving, 2010; Parris & Peachey, 2013).

The concept of servant leadership echoes in the works of Abraham Lincoln, Mother Theresa, Moses, Harriet Tubman, Susan B. Anthony, Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer and many other historic, religious, and current world changing leaders. These great leaders were not trying to get famous; they were simply trying to do what was right (K.M. Keith, personal communication, April 30, 2008). Police agencies throughout the United States are asking themselves if hope exists for the future. Law enforcement officers in America could be facing a similar future of isolation from the general population as found in Moldova, if leadership training is not addressed. Maxwell (2011) stated true leadership is not acquiring a position or title, nor is it a matter of rank. Being chosen for promotion is only a single step in a process of becoming a leader who can develop others. Leaders are morally obligated to develop people, invest in them, embrace the talents employees have and grow them through empowerment. Leadership is not about being the boss. Leadership is leading in a way that is best for others and the organization, while accomplishing the mission.

Law enforcement leadership style is routinely paramilitary and authority based; however, the average supervisor could not identify his own style or source of leadership without formal training. Leadership techniques can become a learned behavior, eventually out of focus from what was initially intended. They become disciplinarians rather than coaches and mentors. Supervisors usually scurry around rectifying problems, often left feeling tired and dispirited. These frustrated law enforcement agencies are crossing "the thin blue line" and looking to business and education to

develop their leaders. The chief executives are transitioning from the top down chain of command model to a transformational style of leadership often referred to as servant leadership. The structure of rank remains, but the power is not in the position but in the relationships. This paper examines why servant leadership should be taught to law enforcement supervisors at every level.

POSITION

This research will address four main reasons why servant leadership should be taught to supervisors. First, servant leadership training promotes the character and internal values of the leader. This occurs in daily training rather than during conflict or challenge. It grows people for advanced levels of leadership. Wright (2009) stated the qualities of effective leadership is creating vision, influencing others, and effectively communicating. Spears (2004) lists the following character traits "listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building the community" (p. 8-9). The traits listed are needed to build a leadership style that will develop and mature the subordinate. The core values found in a servant leader can lead to benefits outside of the agency. Servant leaders will lead their families in a more positive and nurturing way. They are more likely to be involved in community building and service organizations. Servant leaders can usually be found in their church leadership. Servant leaders get involved to make a difference in the world which they live in. It is this type of leadership that causes people to willingly sacrifice and give their lives for a shared vision. The unique characteristic of servant leadership is humility. The humility of servant leaders can be

seen in their ability to work behind the scenes, working on the small things, and making decisions that go unrewarded and unnoticed (Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008).

Servant leadership is being taught now in both formal and informal settings. Some people are studying it on their own and applying principles, while others are attending courses specific to their work place environment. Courses in developmental and transformational leadership are being added in businesses, colleges, and various organizations throughout the country (Spears, 2004). People seem to understand that leadership and management are different. Leaders are developed rather than trained. With the education system embracing servant leadership theory, the Millennial generation is being exposed to this style of leadership. The education system is not the same for the Millennials as it was Generation X or Baby Boomers. There are more technological advances and collaboration between peers. The educational focus is very different. The Millennials are educated in the application of technology. They are not afraid of the speed in which technology changes and seem to adapt well. They want to know why and how something is being done. If they can figure out a more resourceful and efficient way of doing something, they will. Often the Millennials challenge those teaching them. Millennials absorb information quicker than previous generations (Junginger, 2008). The common paramilitary style of leadership is foreign to them. They do not like being yelled at and expect the world to treat them as special. They have been told how unique they are from birth and embrace special relationships with their parents. Servant leadership addresses the needs of people and ensures employees get what they need to be successful in their careers, which is important to Millennials as well as all generations.

Yet another reason for training supervisors in servant leadership is that it develops the community along with the police organization. It causes leaders to reflect and examine themselves as a leader in order to determine their leadership style. It causes an evaluation of the motivating force behind the supervisor aspiring to be a leader. Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) stated “servant leaders are distinguished by both their primary motivation to serve (what they do) and their self construction (who they are) and from this conscious choice of “doing” and “being” they aspire to lead” (as cited in Parris & Peachey, 2013, p. 379). Most everyone enjoys working for employers who will invest time and resources to help them improve and grow. If a person feels valued they are more likely to take steps toward further development. Some people separate servant leadership from transformational leadership; however, Spears (2004) stated, at its core, servant leadership is a long-term transformational approach to life and work, it becomes a way of living and a way of being. It has the potential for creating positive change throughout society. Parris and Peachey (2013) concluded, “servant leadership can perhaps provide the ethical grounding and leadership framework needed to help address the challenges of the twenty-first century” (p. 390). These challenges range from technology to demographics.

Finally, another reason behind servant leadership training for supervisors is that decisions facing modern law enforcement can be challenging and often weighted with liability, not only for the officer but the organization as well. Police complaints are common occurrences for the internal affairs or professional standards divisions. Many of the complaints that occur are often the result of poor leadership. Supervisors occasionally see issues in an officer's performance or behaviors that they know may

lead to future complaints. Supervisors may avoid conflict by not challenging the assumptions and wrong actions occurring in the workplace. Servant leadership addresses both the supervisor's failure to lead and the officer's basic behavior. Warren (2012) stated that organizations using servant leadership remove many of the common obstacles and give employees and supervisors the resources necessary to fulfill the vision. The result is that officers enjoy helping citizens, as well as fellow officers achieve beneficial goals. One of the goals of any agency should be customer service and satisfaction. The problem with traditional paramilitary leadership is that very little concern is shown for the citizens, and officers often feel citizens are beneath them. This is where the mindset of "us vs. them" takes shape. Law enforcement often forgets society is a consumer of their service. Cortrite (2007) believes that the deterioration of public trust translates into reductions in public safety. Citizens are far less likely to form partnerships with their local police officers to reduce crime when they don't trust the officers who patrol their streets. The mission statement of many modern police agencies includes a portion relating to a partnership between the citizens and the police department and its officers. This partnership is based on trust more so than any other bond, and if trust does not exist, the partnership will most likely fail.

Agencies who embrace servant leadership develop a clear vision at the center of their philosophy. Their mission statement is understood and addresses the concerns of the stakeholders. Their philosophy imparts core values to each department member. Russell (2000) offered that leaders should evaluate their leadership styles against their basic beliefs in order to identify whether or not they are leading from a power base or a servant base. Often supervisors find it difficult to self examine themselves and

determine the base of power in their leadership. Those who find servant leadership easiest to embrace will be those who strongly feel called to lead and recognize the constant need for change. Unfortunately, the disenchantment coming from traditional leadership occasionally causes good officers to leave agencies. The servant leader becomes a facilitator within the organization allowing followers to embrace the shared vision (Greenleaf, 1977). Interestingly, Greenleaf (1977) believed they were living in a time when people who led from a power base often lacked the support of those being led. Their actions are often called into question because of a lack of trust. Still, today, this holds true; many communities do not trust the police, who are sworn to protect them. Curiously, many police do not trust those in positions of leadership. Gardner and Reece (2012) summed it up best, "Law enforcement agency executives are accountable to their political leaders, their communities, and their employees for inspiring leadership and effective management" (p. 2). Leaders need to challenge the assumptions that all is well and make the changes necessary to leave the desired legacy. Society wants the core values found in servant leadership style within their officers and police leadership.

COUNTER POSITION

There are three counter positions to be addressed within this research. First, people occasionally make the argument that there is no clear cut leadership or management style. Leadership is not a one size fits all. Ketter (2009) stated that there are many forms of leadership development programs. There is no way of developing a one-size fits all leader development program. You have to develop leaders not just train them. Ketter (2009) quoted Richard S. Wellins, senior vice president of Development Dimensions International, as saying, "One of the biggest mistakes we have made as

leadership development practitioners is to assume there is one model effective for leadership” (p. 2). People can only be exposed to all types of leadership and decide for themselves if they are capable of leading by a particular model. Ketter (2009) further quoted Doug Lynch, vice dean of the Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania as saying, “Many times, we pull people out to take a course—it’s like going to a monastery. You contemplate life, and then you get thrown back into the real world” (p. 2). While it is true that there are many ways to teach leadership development, it should be pointed out that servant leadership shapes the character of a man. In order for a person to be followed, they must have something within themselves worthy of being followed. Maxwell (2011) stated that the leadership journey has the potential to take individuals through a life-long process in three phases: learn, earn, and return. Many supervisors are satisfied with the basic knowledge obtained while working the streets. They get along with only managing or coping skills. They may earn recognition, money, or influence. It is only when they learn, earn, and return to others what they have learned and been given that they become the one who creates the legacy for others to follow.

Another argument heard is that servant leadership is weak. Leaders may run the risk of being manipulated. Nayab (2011) stated that a major servant leadership criticism comes in its soft approach, which is unsuited in a competitive environment. This argument is countered by the United States Army indicated by Vicalvi (2006) who quoted Major General John M. Schofield during his August 1879 address to the Corps of Cadets at West Point: “The discipline which makes the soldiers of a free country reliable in battle is not to be gained by harsh tyrannical treatment. On the contrary,

such treatment is far more likely to destroy than to make an Army” (p. 51). He concluded his address with these words, “He who feels the respect which is due to others cannot fail to inspire in them regard for himself, while he who feels, and hence manifests, disrespect toward others, especially his inferiors, cannot fail to inspire hate against himself” (as cited in Vicalvi, 2006, p. 51). The military is a structured and traditional system, but great leaders in the military have embraced the concept of servant leadership. Vicalvi (2006) listed the “Army values – loyalty, duty, respect, honor, integrity, and personal courage” (p. 51). He said some leaders memorize them, while others learn to live them. He said, “I pray that, no matter whether we wear stripes, bars, leaves, eagles, or stars, we will continually get back to the basics of true soldiering – of true servant leadership” (Vicalvi, 2006 p. 52). Sendjaya, Sarros, and Santora (2008) stated that the positive core values and self image found in servant leaders enables them to be vulnerable and accountable to others. Servant leaders are easily identified in conflict by the absence of self defensiveness.

Finally, an argument that is commonly heard against servant leadership is based on Christianity and not all employees believe in Jesus Christ. Servant leadership is the embodiment of values, a sense of purpose, and a strong desire to serve others. While these characteristics are found in biblical scripture, they can also be found in religion, laws, and personal beliefs worldwide. A form of the golden rule can be found in most every society around the world. Rangarajan quoted a fourth century B.C. Indian scholar: “the king (leader) is a paid servant and enjoys the resources of the state, together with the people” as cited in (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012, p. 555). Whetstone

(2002) believed a servant leader treated people fairly, showing them dignity and respect. He believed leadership was based on personal relationships.

Leadership is a calling. Supervisors are called to guide, lead, mentor, and coach those people intrusted to them. Leadership is not a religion. Leadership is not a title. Leadership is a core understanding that leaders are developed to serve, placing the needs of the community, organization, and others before themselves.

RECOMMENDATION

Cleary, servant leadership has a place in modern law enforcement culture and can benefit the executives in implementing vision. Gardner and Reece (2012) stated that supervisors should create a work environment that causes workers to feel like part of the team and energizes them while they are working. This, in turn, makes them excited about reaching organizational goals and empowers them as solution finders. A paramilitary style of leadership can contribute to people becoming discouraged and moving from organization to organization, thus being labeled gypsy cops. Supervisors should desire to become leaders who will leave a legacy and change the culture of their department for generations to come. Gardner and Reece (2012) felt there was a myth about the weakness of servant leadership. They knew the truth was that leaders serve in the best interest of the department and the employees; inspiring people to greatness, and leading with boldness. Law enforcement agencies need to take a very serious look at the advantages of servant leadership and educate supervisors in their agencies to this philosophy and training. The research clearly supports the benefits to the individual officers, the organization, the city, and the citizens. It is a winning situation for all. Buhler (1995) believed that chief executives should seek out opportunities for

leadership development based on quality management and servant leadership. Servant leadership is not a fad, based on previous or outdated models it is a way of being better. Buhler (1995) believes that leadership occurs at every level. He believes in the need for clear vision, a commitment to service, and policing that adds value to the community.

Servant leadership promotes positive traits in those it reaches. The employees thrive in the mentoring atmosphere where their opinions are valued and they know they have worth. Servant leadership enhances and develops character qualities the citizens want to see in their law enforcement officers. The research reflects a strong support for servant leadership training in law enforcement, business, psychology, and academia. The arguments made against servant leadership training are easily disputed by the fact these character traits are desired in the profession of law enforcement. Maxwell (2011) seemed to understand the biblical principal of reaping and sowing. If a person invests in an employee and serves them with resources they need, they will be planting the seeds of leadership. As leaders mature in leadership, they will produce similar results and multiply the effects of servant leadership for a future that has yet been seen.

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