

**“Insights on Leadership”**  
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**Reviewer: Michael L Schwartz**

This book is a collection of essays, written by business experts, on the subject of Servant Leadership.

I found the concept of a leader being a servant first very interesting. The idea of looking to the needs of others first is an ages old concept, very rarely put into practice.

I looked into the Web Site of *The Robert K Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership*, <http://www.greenleaf.org/>, where I found Mr. Spears’ description of Servant Leadership

“As we near the end of the twentieth century, we are beginning to see that traditional autocratic and hierarchical modes of leadership are slowly yielding to a newer model – one that attempts to simultaneously enhance the personal growth of workers and improve the quality and caring of our many institutions through a combination of teamwork and community, personal involvement in decision making, and ethical and caring behavior. This emerging approach to leadership and service is called *servant-leadership*.”

Robert Greenleaf, who coined the phrase Servant Leadership, describes it as:

“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. He or she is sharply different from the person who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. For such it will be a later choice to serve – after leadership is established. 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 manifest 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, will they not be further deprived?”

Taken from <http://www.greenleaf.org/>.

As with most collections, I found some of the essays more interesting and meaningful than others. There were two essays that were particularly interesting to me. These were:

*Dharamshala Dreaming: A Travelers Search for the Meaning of Work* by Susana Barciela

And

*Quaker Foundations for Greenleaf's Servant-Leadership and Friendly Disentangling Method* by Richard P. Nielsen.

Ms. Barciela's work struck a cord with me. Perhaps it is because she, as an immigrant to this country, must have grown up with conflicting cultures, Cuban and American. As a grandchild of immigrants, growing up in a very ethnically oriented family and neighborhood, felt like I had conflicting cultures, Russian-Jewish and American. Although the conflicts involve different cultures, the concept of "where do you belong" remains the same. Perhaps, it is because her essay recounts a personal event in her life, which I find much more meaningful than someone's opinion, regardless of what that opinion is founded on.

So, when I began to read her story and the emotions she described, I felt that I understood and could relate.

Concepts from this essay that I found valuable are:

"...the only way to change the world is to change yourself." (p 105)

We so often focus on what is *wrong* with everyone and everything else that we fail to recognize and acknowledge that we have our own faults and shortcomings. Perhaps if we each looked inward and made some small, incremental change in ourselves, it would serve as an example and in total the world would change greatly.

"When you feel you have to hide something,..., ask yourself whether you should be doing that something" (p 107)

Or, as I have heard it put with regards to ethics: Ask yourself if you'd want what you're doing to show up on the front page of your hometown newspaper. If the answer is "NO", you probably shouldn't be doing it. That should be pretty much self explanatory.

The entire section, beginning on page 109, entitled "facing What We Fear".

This section talks about introspection. What do we fear? What do we let hold us back? Face those things, put them out in the open and then you can move on. And, you free-up all that mental energy that you've been wasting on these thoughts. This is easy to say and hard to do.

Mr. Nielsen's essay was of interest in that it discussed the foundation of Mr. Greenleaf's concept of Servant Leadership and showed example of how he used it in the 1950's and 60's while at AT&T. Seeing an actual example is almost always much more meaningful to me than reading about the concept.

I see his method as: finding a common ground, discussing things in a cooperative manner, looking for the "root cause" of the problem, and agree on a trail to prove out the consensual solution. This also has strong relations to the concept of Emotional Intelligence with recognizing and understanding the other person's emotions and influencing them towards a positive objective.

Of particular interest was that Mr. Greenleaf used his method well before EEOC was enacted and had equal, or superior, results in the promoting of women and African-Americans to managerial positions in AT&T.

Applications of these valuable principles will be to:

Look for small, incremental ways I can "improve" myself.

Try not to do things that I would not want *to show up on the front page of my hometown newspaper.*

Look for ways to let go of things. The looking for lessons learned is not, in itself, harmful, it is the continual doing so.

Strive even harder to turn adversarial, confrontational events into cooperative efforts. This can be a challenge with so many people who still think that "he who shouts loudest and longest wins".

Another resource for Servant Leadership information:

Center for Servant Leadership <http://www.servantleadership.org/>