

## How to Practice Servant Leadership<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** As the focus has changed from the teacher to the learner and the teaching patterns emphasize the cultivation of learners' learning abilities rather than simply teaching skills and knowledge, the teachers' teaching capacity or leadership is of particular importance. This article deals with a new leading style: servant-leadership, and explores some applications in English teaching.

**Key words:** servant-leadership; education; practice

Currently, college teachers are overwhelmed by challenges ranging from high expectation from students and administrators, pressure to raise the passing rate to research efforts. But, it is a rewarding career for being a teacher allows you to become a better and fully developed person in time. And we are being evaluated by the intelligent young people all the time. Our students are remembering us for good or bad. The important thing is we can make all the differences in their lives because in the process of language learning, the students are exposed to all these aspects. While learning the language, they are absorbing the culture and the ideology and everything that may contribute to their character building. On the other hand, a vicious circle exists in language teaching in China. Different factors such as the test-oriented learning, much focus on the language itself, lack of motivation and confidence are at work. It is true to say that something is seriously missing in language teaching. How to make teaching more effective? How to educate students both in their academic development and moral development? In this article, a new role of teachers will be dealt with in depth.

Teachers actually play different parts in classroom teaching. They are judges, participants, organizers, and also leaders. There are various styles of leadership observed in class. Some teachers are commanders; some lead by counseling or coaching; some lead by inspiring, encouraging, or empowering. And there are also teachers that manage to lead by example, which particularly refers to their personhood and character. Teachers cannot expect their students to be influenced by them if they don't live up to their own vision and values. In short, teachers need to lead by example and model. Students follow not because they have to or want to but because of who their teachers are and what the teachers represent. To lead is to guide by influencing. To clarify this, it is quite necessary to explain a new term--"servant leadership" here. According to Dwight D. Eisenhower, leadership is the ability to decide what is to be done, and then to get others to want to do it. True leadership, not to be confused with dictatorship, does not take away an individual's freedom, choice, accountability, or responsibility. Just as the leader is to be serving and taking into account the ideas and needs of those they lead, those following that lead are to be doing the same thing. In doing so, they, along with the leader, practice self-restraint, develop character,

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integrate discipline, and practice love and respect for other people. This creates a kind of self-leadership at all levels of the group. It promotes a self-leadership environment where all are empowered and working toward the good of the whole because it is in the best interest of all. Then, what is servant leadership? The words “servant” and “leader” are thought of as being opposites. A servant is weak while a leader is strong. A servant does as he or she is asked while a leader gives commandments. A servant always serves others while a leader is to be satisfied by other’s work. When two opposites are brought together in a creative and meaningful way, a paradox emerges. Life is full of curious and meaningful paradoxes. Servant-leadership is one such paradox. The term was first coined by Robert K. Greenleaf (1904–1990) in a 1970 essay titled “The Servant as Leader” in which he wrote, “It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. 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 is: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” Maxwell said, “servant hood is not about position or skill, it’s about attitude”. He defines that attitude as an inward feeling expressed by behavior. That is why attitude and behavior can be seen without a word being said. A servant-leader demonstrates the power of a serving attitude. The concept was originated in the Bible when Jesus challenged his followers, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:25-28)

Servant-leadership has slowly but surely gained hundreds of thousands of adherents over the past 40 years. Greenleaf’s idea of servant-leadership continues to create a quiet revolution in different fields around the world. Servant-leadership truly offers hope and guidance for a new era in human development. In essence, effective leaders know how to motivate people, build consensus, and develop a culture of shared responsibility.

Larry Spears, who has served for nearly 20 years as the head of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, has extracted 10 characteristics of servant-leadership: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment and building community. Now, the focus is on how to practice servant-leadership by applying these 10 characteristics.

1. Listening. The teachers are good listeners. William Arthur Ward believes that we must be silent before we can listen. We must listen before we can learn. We must learn before we can prepare. We must prepare before we can serve. We must serve before we can lead. Such servant-like teachers need to be reinforced by a deep commitment to listening intently to others. He or she seeks to listen receptively to what is being said. It directs to successful two-way communication. Effective communication opens the door to people’s hearts and meets their needs. Leadership is a dialogue, not a monologue. A good dialogue establishes relationship with the students who are being helped. Activities such as group work or pair work are preferred. Teachers set an appropriate time limit for topic discussion, walk around listening and observing, and finally ask the spokesman or spokeswoman to report the group’s ideas to the class.

2. Empathy. Such teachers strive to understand and empathize with students. Each individual is born with the need to be accepted and recognized for his or her unique spirit. Such teachers must learn to show full acceptance and make sure their students are loved for who they are. Resist the temptation of judging, comparison and conditional love. It is advisable to exemplify appreciation for it is a touchstone in leadership. Appreciation is one type of self-expression that creates value. It energizes people and makes people want to exceed their goals and perceived limits”. The culture in which the author grew up did not express appreciation to people, much less give them credit. We have a false conception that showing our appreciation or giving credit to our staff will diminish the power we have. That is absolutely not correct. Appreciation is the substance that unifies teams, builds cultures, fosters commitment, and bonds people to an organization. Maxwell also stated that only secure leaders give power and credit to others. Above all, the greatest things happen only when leaders understand and practice the power of appreciation

3. Healing. One of the great strengths of servant-leadership is the potential for healing one's self and others. The servant-teachers recognize that they have an opportunity to "help make whole" those

students with whom they come in contact. It is advisable to start a small face-to-face talk with one student at a time in which the healing power can work in the student.

4. Awareness. General awareness, and especially self-awareness, strengthens the servant leader. Awareness also aids one in understanding issues involving ethics and values. Therefore, it's fortunate for students to have a teacher who is aware. The secret is to keep learning, increase one's professional awareness and make reflection his or her second nature. These teachers are open to changes because they may lead to improvements in teaching. Also, they reach out to the world and move up in the academic rank.

5. Persuasion. Another characteristic is that the servant-like teachers prefer persuasion to direction. They seek to convince others to want to do something that they are supposed to do. The most powerful form of persuasion is through example. As Leduc said, "Don't tell others what you expect. Work toward what you'd like to see". Fairholm provides another insightful perspective on how to use effective persuasion in leadership. According to Fairholm, persuasion is an influential form of communication that is different from informing or ordering. It implies equality, caring, and respect for the ideas and thoughts of the other person. As a servant-leader, a teacher should avoid using his or her authority or manipulation to get things done. This particular element offers one of the clearest distinctions between the traditional role of teachers and that of servant-like teachers. Here, personhood may exert a striking influence over the students. In other words, teachers lead by example. Their social behavior, way of life, value judgment can have direct impact on the growth of students.

6. Conceptualization. Servant-leaders seek to nurture their abilities to "dream great dreams." The ability to look at a problem from a conceptualizing perspective means that one must think beyond day-to-day realities. Servant leaders are called to seek a delicate balance between conceptual thinking and a day-to-day focused approach. Such teachers have a vision and they have high expectations of their students. They strive to plant long-term values in the students and they constantly need upgrading of the knowledge in the teaching field.

7. Foresight. He or she has foresight, which is a characteristic that enables the servant leader to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of teaching for the future. It is also deeply rooted within the intuitive mind. Although people may hold the view that it is born with, training and charging and brainstorming prove to be effective approaches to cultivation of foresight. Servant-like teachers have a big vision, a long vision, an exciting vision. They are able to see the big picture, not only in its potential and scope, but in its long term implications. They also have the ability to enlist others into their vision so it gains enthusiastic acceptance and ownership. They will set goals and have plans for action but not be so slavishly bound by them that the vision can become boxed in by words.

8. Stewardship. Peter Block has defined stewardship as "holding something in trust for another." Servant-leadership, like stewardship, assumes first and foremost a commitment to serving the needs of others. It also emphasizes the use of openness and persuasion rather than control. This attitude is of great importance to the teacher-student relationship. As servant leaders, they are responsible for maintaining a set of standards that is line with higher laws. Again, we are not to impose our own thinking, wants and desires on those we lead, but to apply those standards that are the best for the whole. Naturally, this is implemented with respect for and two-way communication with those the teachers serve.

9. Commitment. These teachers are interested in the growth of students. Servant leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions. As a result, the servant leaders are deeply committed to the growth of each and every individual within the class. The servant leaders recognize the tremendous responsibility to do everything possible to nurture the growth of the students so that they become stronger, more intelligent and better. In their eyes, teaching is a career and they forget the difference between in and out of the classroom.

10. Building community. Greenleaf said: "All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant leaders to show the way, not by mass movements, but by each servant leader demonstrating his or her own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group." The most successful servant teacher manages to pass this serving spirit on to the students and transform them into followers of servant leadership.

Servant-leadership has influenced many noted writers, thinkers, and leaders. It is also increasingly in use in both formal and informal education and training programs in the United States and other countries. Why do we value servant leadership in class at universities? It's because it plays greater importance on the students rather than on the teacher who indulges himself or herself with absolute obedience from the students. It helps to develop and sustain trust between teachers and students.

Analyze students' performance and we will find the improvements and progress are closely related to a healthy, trustful relationship. And teacher's authority will only work when it is based on a good teacher-student relationship. Without first establishing a relationship with our students, our influence will be only an ideal not a reality. All of our lives are impacted by relationships. We cannot make any impact on students' lives without building relationship first. Most students think of teachers as the authority, therefore the most common way of handling the relationship is to keep a safe distance from their teachers. For that reason, teachers need to take the initiative in building relationships with students. The best way to build relationship is through serving. Our influence and the quality of our relationships with people depend on the depth of our concern for others. Servant leadership definitely reduces the distance between us as leaders and those we desire to influence, our students. That is why it is so important for teachers to willingly serve. The biggest change in the classroom is that students learn and try new things enthusiastically. They have the confidence and the support of the teachers to try just about anything in the classroom. They are motivated to learn attentively and reap the benefits of this teaching style. The evangel is that the students are gradually molded into followers of servant leaders and may influence others with good example.

Finally, in pursuing excellence in leadership, the following suggestions are recommended. In the first place, he or she must continue to raise his or her own level of leadership. Leadership ability always determines his or her level of effectiveness. The higher the level of leadership is, the greater the effectiveness is. In the second place, a teacher must continue his or her own development as an instructor. Though knowledge or degree alone will not ensure leadership ability, a positive correlation exists between effectiveness as a leader and a teacher's knowledge and ability. Teachers may restrict their influence without a solid knowledge foundation. Servant leaders must, as part of their growth, "master the context" by remaining lifelong students of learning. Being a teacher allows you to grow in all aspects and allows you to become a better and fully developed person in time. Remember that you can make all the differences in students' life. For the teaching staff, it is advisable to start with what students know; build with what they have. When the tasks are accomplished, they will all say, "We have achieved it ourselves." With this belief in mind, university teachers will move forward on their servant leadership journeys more hopefully.

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