

Chapter 2

Servant Leadership and the Emergency Services

A noble leader answers not to the trumpet calls of self-promotion, but to the hushed whispers of necessity.

—Mollie Marti

Abstract This chapter presents a brief history of the philosophy, its identified characteristics, constructs, and attributes along with its place within the emergency services. Robert K. Greenleaf first penned the modern concept of servant leadership philosophy in 1970. Since that time, the philosophy has spread throughout organizations. Today there are thousands of books, articles, research projects, and centers that teach the philosophy. Universities throughout the world have adopted the philosophy in their management and leadership programs, teaching servant leadership across the globe. Recently, works and research projects involving servant leadership within the emergency services have emerged.

There exists a power within the philosophy of servant leadership that does not exist in any other leadership approach; it all has to do with a commitment to placing the needs of people within an organization above all else (Greenleaf 1977/2002; Keith 2008). The practice of servant leadership brings out the best in others by meeting their needs, which in turn strengthens the organization and benefits the servant leader (Neuschel 1998; Russell 2016). The approach is one that requires the humbling of one's self (not weakening or lessening) in order to lead others (Hayes and Comer 2010; Nielsen et al. 2010; Patterson 2003). The philosophy transcends all others due to its legitimacy forged in a love for people and practiced through humility (Ferch 2004; Hayes and Comer 2010; Hunter 2004; Patterson 2003). Greenleaf (1977/2002) first theorized the modern philosophy of servant leadership because he desired to give to the world a different approach towards leadership, one that involved realizing success by harnessing the power of people by serving their needs. As Greenleaf (1977/2002) wrote,

Servant leadership begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. He 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 (p. 27).

Greenleaf's (1977/2002) philosophy is made up of three questions. The first, "do those served grow as persons" (Greenleaf 1977/2002, p. 27)? Second, "do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants" (Greenleaf 1977/2002, p. 27)? Third, "what is the effect on the least privileged in society, will they benefit or at least not be further deprived" (Greenleaf 1977/2002, p. 27)? Greenleaf (1977/2002) argued that this leads to strengthening a leader's legitimate power through the service of others, finding people become loyal to those that serve them and in-turn serve their leaders (Greenleaf 1977/2002; Hunter 2004; Russell 2016; Spears 2010).

The philosophy of servant leadership revolutionized leadership thought and academics by bringing an approach to the world that is opposite of a desire to lead first (Sipe and Frick 2009). Greenleaf's (1977/2002) work embeds a desire to serve others, to meet their needs, arguing that the path to true happiness comes from the idea of serving others (Greenleaf 1977/2002; Keith 2008). However, unlike current leadership theory, servant leadership bases itself on the notion that the servant leader is one that possesses specific characteristics, thus a servant's pathway (Spears 2010). Again, the idea of servant leadership is not the weakening of leaders and subduing their legitimacy but rather, strengthening their role through service (Greenleaf 1977/2002), empathy (Spears 2010), and humility (Hayes and Comer 2010). As it is with the emergency services profession, being a servant leader gives meaning to one's life (Keith 2008; Russell 2014).

When writing on the individual, Greenleaf (1977/2002) argued the idea of those who wish to serve transcend to a position of legitimate leadership, which evolves as byproduct of serving. The philosophy places the individual within society, regardless of stature, in service to the needs of others (Greenleaf 1977/2002). Such a notion involves the improvement and development of others as the cornerstone. Spears (2010) held such a concept, the committing oneself to the betterment and growth of others, as a core characteristic of the servant leader. Here is the individual, impressive, educated and self-aware, committing their life to the service of others for their betterment (Greenleaf 1977/2002).

The essential component of Greenleaf's (1977/2002) philosophy is the individual and the power they receive from being in the service to others. Greenleaf (1977/2002) posed two specific questions about servant leadership: the first involved whether the leader grows as an individual and the second involved the growth of the individual served. Greenleaf (1977/2002) places the idea of putting people first as the central tenant of success for an organization, he argued that the institution that puts the needs of its people before all else will in fact realize positive outcomes. Such an idea is based upon the notion that if one's people are taken care

of, they in turn will take care of everything else. Greenleaf (1977/2002) wrote that the institution that practices servant leadership flourishes because those served desire to make it so.

The Characteristics of Servant Leadership

It was from the roots of servant leadership that Spears (2010) established what are known the ten characteristics of the servant leader. Spear's (2010) work took Greenleaf's (1970) writings regarding servant leadership from a theory to a usable and identifiable model based upon ten characteristics identified in the works. Because of Spear's (2010) work, the theory of servant leadership now contained specific and measurable characteristics one could use to identify servant leadership qualities within individual leaders.

Derived from an interpretation of Greenleaf's (1970) original essay, the characteristics of the servant leader are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Spears 2010). As his work progressed, future works were identified—calling and nurturing the joy of spirit, and added to servant leadership characteristics. The characteristic work is specific and yet not exhaustive areas to describe the servant leader (Spears 2010). Besides being able to use these characteristics to measure servant leaders, they also function as a way to look inward into one's own leadership characteristics. These characteristics form the foundation of this book.

The Servant Leadership Model

With the expansion of conceptual writings by celebrated authors regarding the philosophy of servant leadership, Farling et al. (1999) argued for the need of empirical studies as well as the development of models and measurement instruments. A major study that followed was by Laub (1999), whose research led to the development of one of the first instruments to be used to study servant leadership known as the Organizational Leadership Assessment Instrument (OLA). Developed through a Delphi study, the OLA became a sought after instrument to assess the presence and amount of servant leadership in organizations (Laub 1999). Continued within Laub's (1999) OLA is the Servant Leadership Model that identified six specific areas of measurement for servant leadership: values people, develops people, builds community, displays authenticity, provides leadership, and shares leadership. Since publication, the OLA has led to dozens of published dissertations and theses. Like the characteristics, Laub's (1999) findings helped shape this work.

The Constructs of Servant Leadership

A groundbreaking work by Patterson (2003) moved beyond the notion of characteristics of the philosophy into the virtues that make up servant leadership. The constructs of servant leadership derived from Patterson's (2003) work involved identifying specifics within Greenleaf's (1970) servant leadership philosophy. Unlike the 10 characteristics that Spears (2010) established that described the servant leader, or Laub's (1999) discovery for measuring servant leadership, the seven virtuous constructs embody the theoretical core of Greenleaf's (1970) original essay *The Servant as Leader*. Patterson (2003) argued that the theory of servant leadership extended from and beyond the transformational leadership model and therefore demanded its own set of parameters, leading to the seven virtuous constructs specific to servant leadership. Patterson (2003) identified differences, which led to the creation of *seven virtuous constructs* specific only to the practice of servant leadership. In order, these constructs are *agapao love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service*. Patterson (2003) displayed how each construct flows into the next with the pinnacle being that of *service*. It is these constructs that exist within an emergency responder's desire to serve (Russell 2014).

A Place for Servant Leadership in the Emergency Services

The career of the emergency services professional still holds true to the same traditions and passions as those who came before and the love of serving others is still the foundation of what it means to be an emergency services responder (Fleming 2010; Lasky 2006; Morris 1955; Smeby 2005). Leadership in the emergency services poses a unique set of challenges, where leaders must take two separate, yet simultaneous paths. The first path is leadership associated with on-scene emergency management; this situation involves a direct-authoritative role, including giving commands and orders to crews (Anglin 2001; Coleman 2008; van Doren 2006). On the emergency scene, a command and control style of leadership is necessary for safe and effective operations (Smeby 2005). Command and control of an emergency scene is a complex system, where time is of the essence and the environment is one of danger and risk (Bigley and Roberts 2001). Within the emergency services this system needs to exist for safety and order during emergency operations, for the more lethal the task the more ridged the structure of command and control. However, this control has little place outside of emergency response (Kirschman 2004). This is where the philosophy of servant leadership has its place, not in the command and control of the emergency operations, but rather, within the community of responders.

The second path is leadership apart from an emergency scene, which is a very different role. As stated before, the emergency services become a personal identifier

for the individuals that operate in the career field. The majority of emergency services responders' work 24–48-h shifts and live with one another in a family-like community; emergency services personnel commonly refer to their stations as houses. Therefore, relationships go beyond the stereotypical coworker to a brotherhood/sisterhood (Salka and Neville 2004; Sargent 2006; Seigal 2006; Smith 1972; Smoke 2010).

Servant Leadership and the Emergency Responder

There is a commonality between the philosophy of servant leadership and the desire to serve that brings the professional emergency services responder to the career field. Specifically, servant leadership and the emergency services responder, seemingly share the same virtues, *agapao* love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service (Patterson 2003; Russell 2014).

It begins with love. Patterson (2003) placed *agapao* love as the first virtuous construct of servant leadership. For the emergency services, it is a love for people that brings the individual to the profession, and it is love that allows one to remain (Lasky 2006). The conscientious decision to enter into a emergency services career comes with an understanding of the inherent dangers associated with the profession (Salka and Neville 2004). It is a love of serving others in their most vulnerable time of need that throughout history has called individuals to the profession (Morris 1955).

Hayes and Comer (2010) argued that humility is humanity, and for the emergency services responder, that humility shows outwardly with acts of self-sacrifice and care. The emergency services responder deals with others in their most vulnerable situations and in their most critical time of need (Smeby 2005). Through humility, one can reach out to others (Nielsen et al. 2010).

Invited into the life of others, the emergency services responder becomes the humble servant, who when called upon, is willing to give their all (Smith 1972; Useem et al. 2005). Such an act is altruism in its purest form, the giving of oneself for another (Patterson 2003). The altruistic nature of the emergency services profession is one that reaches out to others through a willingness to sacrifice in order to save strangers. Altruism stems from those with a passion to serve others without question and in so doing, willing to give another one's all (Day 2004).

For the emergency services, vision involves seeing the needs of the community one serves and ensuring those needs are met. Bell and Habel (2009) argued that the visionary rejects complacency and looks towards the future. Inwardly, vision protects the emergency services profession, keeping the career field viable by meeting future needs (Whetstone 2002). The emergency services professional remains committed to being at the ready, which includes taking on different responsibilities for individuals within the organization, as well as the community in which they serve (Anglin 2001; Fleming 2010).

The nature of the emergency services operation is built upon trust. Individuals thrust into emergencies must rely not only of their own abilities, but also the abilities of others (Klinoff 2012). At the core of the operation is a trust between leaders and followers, as well as coworkers. This trust involves believing in the abilities of those in command to make the right decisions and from this trust, comes a willingness to carry out orders without question (Caldwell et al. 2009). A responder earns trust in the emergency services; it does not come automatically with a position (Sargent 2006). Instead, it comes over time through one's actions (Caldwell et al. 2009). Furthermore, trust must exist from the leader to the follower, where the actions, commitment, and abilities of the follower allow for the leader to trust them to operate without direct supervision (Caldwell and Hayes 2007; Smoke 2010).

The trust of others leads to a willingness of leaders to empower their followers. Within the emergency services, centralized leadership is a standard practice that seemingly flows over from the emergency scene to the day-to day activities. Ndoye et al. (2010) argued for removing centralized leadership practices as a way to share the decision making and empower followers. The very nature of the emergency response organization involves multiple independent companies controlled by junior officers who operate in designated strategic areas (Choo et al. 2011; Fleming 2010; Smoke 2010). Companies and crews are empowered to respond to emergencies and make tactical and patient decisions, depending on the size and severity of the situation, free from the direct supervision of chief officers (Coleman 2008; Salka and Neville 2004; Smeby 2005). Therefore, the emergency services profession operates in a continuous state of trust and empowerment. Leaders have no choice but to empower their officers in order for the service to function.

As Patterson (2003) explained, the constructs come together to form the core construct of service, which Sipe and Frick (2009) argued was the absolute giving of self to service of others. Service is indeed the core value of the emergency services responder; it is in that essential desire to serve that the individual steps forward. As Greenleaf (1977/2002) wrote, it is from a desire to serve that the leader appears. Therefore, it is from that same desire to serve that the emergency services professional steps forth and through that desire, leads.

Summary

Servant leadership is at the core of the emergency services profession, because the constructs that bring forth the individual and formulate their desire to serve, are the very same that make up the servant leader (Carter 2007; Patterson 2003; Russell 2014). Harnessing that desire and putting it forth as a leadership philosophy for the profession the promise of overcoming poor and destructive leadership habits. Cortrite (2007) found that the practice of servant leadership showed promise for overcoming toxic leadership practices that stifle human relationships and often times lead to destructive work environments within public safety organizations. In addition, as noted earlier, Greenleaf (1977/2002) argued that the practice of servant

leadership could overcome toxic practices within organizations, the emergency services being among them.

The philosophy of servant leadership is a completely different way of approaching leadership. For most, becoming the servant leader means being the leader they desired to work for. The philosophy is based upon serving others, not in servitude, but rather, as one who recognizes when the needs of followers are met they in turn can grow and self-actualize. The philosophy is not “doormat-leadership” because the servant leader is one that sees potential in followers and strives to bring that potential to life. It is a natural fit for the emergency services because it consists of the very constructs of what calls you and others to the profession, a desire to serve.

Case Study

You are a newly appointed assistant chief of the inspection and investigations division for a large metro fire and rescue department. You will be overseeing twelve uniformed and sworn personnel and three support staff. One thing you immediately notice upon taking your position is that the members of your division don’t seem to get along. In fact, within weeks you have witnessed hostilities, gossip, and passive-aggressive behaviors when interacting with individuals or small groups. Besides this, you also realize that there is a backlog of investigations and commercial inspections that have yet to be completed.

Reflective Case Study Questions

1. How can building a servant leadership culture improve relationships?
2. What specific steps would you take?
3. What do you see being a driving force behind the backlog of work?

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