

**TRANSFORMING LEADERSHIP INTERNATIONALLY THROUGH THE
TEACHING OF “THE 10 CHARACTERISTICS PLUS 2” OF
SERVANT-LEADERSHIP**

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INTRODUCTION

The practice of organizational leadership in developing countries is largely prescribed by cultural norms based in what constitutes a leader. The model of leadership that most fits this cultural norm in many African countries is “*bwana mkubwa*” (big man), which is modeled after a combination of colonially-inspired, top-down command and control practices and by traditional styles of leadership in village-based societies. In both cases, leaders are to be listened to and followed, regardless of whether the directives issued are in the best interest of the follower. This perception of leadership is acted upon in faith-based non-governmental organizations as much as it is in government and industry offices. Although faith-based organizations have alternative models of leadership at their disposal, the cultural perceptions of leadership prevents the alteration of the basic model.

In an MBA program in leadership development, offered jointly by World Vision International (WVI) and Eastern University, an alternative model of leadership was taught – that of servant-leadership. The model challenges current cultural norms by introducing “The 10 Characteristics Plus 2” of servant leadership.

In this paper, I first present a brief discussion on servant-leadership and then present an overview of the curriculum of the course. Thereafter, I discuss the results achieved by 28 African students (who are all middle managers in their respective World Vision national organizations) in implementing servant leadership. The transformational qualities of implementing this curriculum will constitute the conclusion of the paper.

LEADERSHIP AND SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

Leadership studies are at a significant crossroads: the number of books on leadership multiplies daily and ranges from “how to” books to biographies of positional leaders who have been successful “captains” of industry. Leadership theorists and practitioners have developed a number of approaches rooted in such fields as psychology, business, military science, religious studies, political science, and anthropology. Despite this explosion of resources, there is no one unified theory of leadership.

This information is shared with the participants of the joint WVI/Eastern University MBA program in the introductory course “Foundations of Leadership.” After discussing the different theories and approaches to leadership, a course on Servant-Leadership is taught as the preferred model. Servant-leadership – advocated by Robert Greenleaf in his many works, and in the works of the Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership – is composed of more than 50 different characteristics of leadership. The Greenleaf Center, headed by Larry Spears, distilled these 50+ into 10 core characteristics. These are: Listening, Empathy, Healing, Awareness, Conceptualization, Persuasion, Foresight, Stewardship, Commitment to the Growth of People,

and Building Community. The practice of these characteristics has produced organizational change in such companies as TWIndustries, ServiceMaster, Southwestern Airlines, Visa and others.

In teaching the Servant-Leadership course, I added two other characteristics: Love and Humility. In general, we can say that the first four characteristics incorporate personal qualities of the leader, while the latter six are organizational qualities, i.e., those qualities that are necessary for organizational effectiveness. The “plus 2” are also personal characteristics, and fit most appropriately in the Christian organizational setting of World Vision.

In teaching and learning these characteristics, course participants are urged to move away from the “command and control” model of leadership to that of a servant – one who takes his/her role as one of stewardship and leads through the practice of the 10 characteristics plus 2. Once the characteristics have been adopted and put into practice by the leader, it is anticipated that significant changes will take place in the organization. In moving the organization from a top-down leadership approach to one that is more focused on empowerment of staff at all ranks, the organizational structure is expected to change. In Greenleaf’s terms, “Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” In essence, by facilitating the change in leadership, the organization empowers each staff member to be a full contributor to organizational effectiveness. The results sought in teaching the course are nothing less than a transformation in thinking and practice.

CURRICULUM

The context in which the Servant-Leadership course is taught is an MBA Program in Leadership Development. The program is offered in five different global locations – South Africa, Austria, Canada, Thailand, and Ecuador – largely to World Vision employees. The format includes 20 hours of classroom instruction per course followed by a 10-week period of project work (for each course) that is conducted interactively with faculty over E-mail.

The program offers the following courses:

- YEAR ONE: Foundations of Leadership; Servant-Leadership; Strategic Thinking & Organizational Development; Human Resources Management
- YEAR TWO: Perspectives on Poverty and Development; Managing Cultural Differences; Advocacy, Public Policy & Civil Society; and Spiritual Formation

AWARD OF CERTIFICATE

- YEAR THREE: Applied Research; Managerial Accounting/Financial Management & Control; MIS; Spiritual Formation
- YEAR FOUR: Marketing, Communications & Fundraising for the NGO; Relief & Mitigation for Disasters & Complex Humanitarian Emergencies; The Global Economy in the 21st Century; Integration Seminar

AWARD OF MBA

Over the four-year program, participants must identify a mentor who may be anyone outside of the organization, and a coach who is the participant’s supervisor. By building this type of support system, it is envisioned that the participant will be able to access the knowledge, spiritual

and personal support needed to undergo the program while keeping up a full-time, very demanding job.

By launching the program with the Servant-Leadership course, participants gain a foundational understanding of the type of leader they can become. In addition to learning how to be a servant-leader in their respective organizations, participants also learn how to serve each other and encourage each other in studies over e-mail correspondence.

The Servant-Leadership course is arranged in the following manner: 1) Pre-work on *The Servant as Leader* and women in leadership; 2) 20 hours of interactive, applied work on the 10 Characteristics Plus 2; 3) homework readings and reflection assignments on each of the characteristics; and 4) a paper entitled “Myself as a Project.”

THE ASSIGNMENT: MYSELF AS A PROJECT

The final paper, “Myself as a project: Drawing the Path of the Inner Journey,” requires participants to explain the ways in which they have practiced the 10 Characteristics Plus 2 and the results they obtained. In this practical exercise, participants were to take what they had learned and apply it to their own work environment, trying out the many different characteristics to determine if practicing servant-leadership made a difference in the way the organization operated. The remainder of this paper outlines the difference each characteristic made and the transformation that resulted.

Listening: When in the residency, participants learned – through an exercise in active listening – what it felt like to really be listened to. When asked to reflect on what they had learned in undertaking this exercise, many shared that they were not very good listeners and always seemed to be too occupied with other work to give someone their full attention. When challenged to put this characteristic into practice, these are the results they recounted:

- Integration of ideas; team commitment
- Clears misunderstandings; reconciliation
- Understanding of fears & strengths
- Improved working relationships
- More open; greater confidence
- There are two sides to every story
- Ability to mentor others
- Reduction of one-up culture
- Policy changes
- Everyone included in the conversation

Empathy: Akin to listening, this characteristic called upon participants to “walk in another’s shoes” to gain an understanding of the constraints and difficulties with which staff members are dealing. By listening with empathy, and acting empathically, participants documented the following results:

- Brings us together
- Greater trust
- Holding the head “high”
- Transformed personal relationships

- Greater participation by staff in decision-making
- Greater concern for each other's welfare
- Putting a "human face" to our work
- Grow from the experience of others

Healing: During the residency participants all indicated that not only their organizations needed healing, but that they – themselves – required healing. As in so many global relief and development organizations, staff members are overworked, overcommitted, and unable to draw boundaries. When introduced to the characteristic of healing, participants saw themselves and their organizations in a different light:

- Realization of self worth
- Not afraid of challenges
- "Smashing" of prejudices
- Internal support relationships
- Lead a more balanced life
- Work within official working hours
- Creation of work schedules
- Overcome bitterness & suffering
- Help others be more productive
- Improved "sloppy" performance
- Respect for each other's boundaries
- Greater forgiveness

Awareness: A personal characteristic that requires an individual to be "reasonably disturbed" about how the organization works and the types and quality of services it offers, awareness calls upon participants to be keenly cognizant of what they are doing and the effects they are having on their various client populations. Instead of just accepting events as they occur, they are encouraged to ask "why" a program is being implemented in a particular way toward the goal of improving program delivery. A heightened awareness produced the following results:

- Awareness of limitations
- Greater interest; participation; commitment
- Regular training schedule
- Greater delegation and shared burdens; accountability
- Changed orientation processes
- I ask others to be my mirrors and watchdogs
- I know what hurts and what builds up
- Collaboration replacing competition
- Awakened spirituality & sensitivity to own values and practices

Persuasion: In teaching this characteristic, facilitators focus on the development of different techniques of moving others to action. Rather than ordering people to do certain tasks, participants practice different ways of incorporating others in the decision-making process so that performing a particular task is taken as part of the workload. Participants reported the following results:

- Greater teamwork, involvement
- Acceptance of new systems

- Greater motivation; being more pro-active
- Discovery of the positive
- Increased cooperation

Conceptualization: “Dreaming great dreams” is the focus of this characteristic. Participants are taught to think outside of the “box,” to do some “zig-zag” thinking to brainstorm how to implement different development programs and to work to achieve results. In conceptualizing, i.e., spending time thinking about alternative means of designing and delivering programs, participants generated the following results:

- Less waste of time; more time to pursue other tasks
- Greater risk-taking
- A new, owned vision
- Greater empowerment of front-line staff
- Room for self-expression
- More sharing of information
- Tightened procedures
- Devolution of patriarchy
- Greater appreciation of structure
- Increased patience after “planting” to wait for the “harvest”

Foresight: This is the characteristic that helps participants understand the range of variables that need to be taken into account when ascertaining programmatic concerns for the future. By learning how to assess environmental and organizational trends, participants had the following results:

- On-time delivery of goods and services
- Ideas coming from different sources
- Redeployment instead of layoff
- Increased monitoring and evaluation of effort
- Being prepared for emergencies
- Greater satisfaction of staff and intended beneficiaries
- Increase collaboration with other organizations
- Succession planning and training
- Better choices

Stewardship: This characteristic is taught as responsibility not only for financial resources, but also of human resources. Participants are taught how to ascertain the particular gifts and talents of each staff member, and how to utilize these to enhance organizational effectiveness.

Participants are also taught how to reward staff for a job well done and how, systematically, to grow strengths. The results achieved include:

- Greater Accountability & Responsibility
- Shared Knowledge
- Freer Communications
- Changed Structure
- More Evenly Distributed Benefits
- Enforcement of Standards
- Shared Ownership

- Decentralized Decision-Making
- Choosing Service Over Self-Interest

Commitment to the Growth of Others: Related to the stewardship of people, during the teaching of this characteristic participants learn that the greatest asset the organization has is its human capability. To enhance the growth of individual capacities, to chart a growth trajectory with staff members, and to develop personal development plans were all elements of the learning on this characteristic. In implementing growth, participants reported the following results:

- Greater satisfaction; confidence
- Improved horizontal and vertical communications
- Growth in respect, recognition, encouragement and trust
- More effective operations
- Growth in professional competencies
- More opportunities for staff development
- Greater empowerment for women
- Understanding of importance to the organization

Build Community: Since so much time is spent in the organization – at least 50 hours per week – it was assumed by some participants that their workplace was a community. When we explored the meaning of community, many realized that they did not have one. In coming to an understanding of how to be intentional creators of community, participants undertook many community-building exercises that resulted in the following:

- Care for each other
- Collective responsibility for the past and the future
- Common sense of ownership
- Greater consensus
- Greater appreciation of interdependence
- Walking the walk together; a clearer idea of “citizenship” in the organization
- Sharing stories and celebrations

Humility: The personal quality of humility was one of the more difficult elements of servant-leadership for participants to grasp and practice, largely due to their perceptions of leadership. It was believed by many that humility was acting in a subservient manner toward the “big bosses,” rather than knowing yourself, your own strengths and weaknesses. When this new understanding of humility was reached and practiced, the following resulted:

- Honesty in sharing weaknesses
- Understanding of the need for others to grow and develop
- Position does not get in the way of asking for help
- Closer relationships with clients
- Greater staff accessibility

Love: As a Christian organization, World Vision advocates acting in the same way Christ did toward others – in love. Much discussion ensued when trying to reach an understanding of what Christian love meant in an organizational setting. Demonstrated in many different ways, participants had the following results:

- Increased commitment to mission
- Recognition of our common humanity

- More reconciliation
- More pleasant workplace
- Understanding of love as an active verb
- When you invest love, you also receive it
- As I am treated, so I treat others

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

The results each participant achieved in practicing the 10 Characteristics Plus 2 were made possible for three fundamental reasons:

- The concept of Servant-Leadership was “Demystified,” thus enabling participants to analyze the qualities and determine what each one meant in the transformation of their own behavior
- Participants were required to obtain a theoretical grounding in the literature
- Participants were given the opportunity to practice and apply what they had read/learned and to document the changes that resulted.

In utilizing the process of action/reflection, participants were able to participate in and observe their own transformation. They learned from an academic though applied approach that change can occur in themselves and in their organizations. In the design and delivery of this particular MBA program, participants are challenged to change – to adopt what they have learned to generate best practice. In presenting the results of the Servant-Leadership course, I have demonstrated one strategy of creating personal and organizational transformation.