

Leaders Serve.

One of the things that I love about working for my organization is the commitment to service. Sure, we have a commitment to serve our guests, but we also serve one another.

One time, I spent a week with leaders in another organization. These were truly some outstanding people for whom I have deep love and respect, but during the course of the week, while I was under their leadership, I noticed a certain anxiety building in me. By the end of the week, I identified the anxiety. It was the absence of being in the presence of servant leadership. During this time with these leaders, they practiced privilege rather than service. When there was a line, they were at the front. When we ate, they were served first. At events, they had premium seating. When others needed help, they allowed someone else to do it.

The absence of servant leadership that I experienced helped me to value what I may have taken for granted in my organization. **Leadership is a tremendous responsibility to not only lead, but also to serve those we lead.** In my organization, it is imbedded into our culture that leaders are the first to arrive and the last to leave. Leaders ensure that everyone is served before serving themselves. They give deference to others and do not expect, nor accept, privilege.

For a number of years, I had the privilege of reporting to a leader that both modeled and taught servant leadership. This particular executive began working as a teenager in a restaurant for a leader that provided a servant leadership model for him to follow. Thirty-five years later, this executive has personally modeled the same servant leadership that he learned from his boss when he was a teenager. The impact of one person on one teenage team employee, later turned executive, has helped shape the behaviors of an entire organization. Thousands of employees have been tremendously influenced to put service above privilege and millions of customers have received remarkable service experiences.

What are a few key behaviors of servant leadership?

1. Don't expect others to do what you are unwilling to do. One of the things that I learned from my leader was working side by side with my staff is very important. When they are in the trenches, I need to be in the trenches with them. When there is a challenging opportunity, we need to be right beside helping to solve the problem. He is a leader that won't be found in the box seats at the game, but instead, working alongside employees that are serving the fans in the stands.

2. Acknowledge that every member of the team is important. In traveling to some of our business outlets with my leader, I watched as the very first thing he did was to introduce himself to every member of the team, learning names and asking questions to know them better. He rarely forgets a face or a name and people often feel valued that he takes the time to know them personally. Like his boss did for him when he was a teenager, he remembers to thank everyone for their service.

3. If there is a line, be the last one in it. Recently, I attended a company-wide event and we provided bus transportation for all of our employees to the event. As 1200 people took turns boarding the buses, this same executive was the very last one on the last bus. All the while, he was talking and visiting with employees, using the time to catch up both personally and professionally with people from all areas of the company. Putting others above yourself is the hallmark of a servant leader.

4. Share opportunities and privileges with those who might otherwise never have the opportunity. Not long after I joined my company, I was flying on a charter flight with my husband to our annual company meeting. I was an entry level employee and just grateful to be invited to the meeting. When we boarded the plane, we found our seats in first class. I watched as company executives passed through the first class section to take their seats in the economy cabin.

5. Be inclusive. Another leader in my company, who calls himself the 'curator of the culture,' learned from his father, the founder, and knows that inclusivity is important to creating and growing a compelling culture. He seeks opinions and spends time with employees in all areas of the business and particularly enjoys connecting with leaders and employees in our business outlets.

At our corporate office, there are no reserved parking spots for executives or private executive dining rooms. The 350 plus capacity childcare center is available on a first come, first served basis available to all full-time employees. The fitness center and the free group training and exercise classes operate on the same basis. Award winning leaders in the business units often have special celebrations to share their honors with their employees who have helped them achieve high goals. This type of inclusivity strengthens the culture at all levels of the organization. Individuals truly feel a part of the mission of the organization and feel treated with honor, dignity and respect.

Simon Sinek wrote in his book, *Leaders Eat Last*, "the true price of leadership is the willingness to place the needs of others above your own. Great leaders truly care about those they are privileged to lead and understand that the true cost of the leadership privilege comes at the expense of self-interest."

You want to be a leader? Find somebody to serve.

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