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INSIGHTS ON LEADERSHIP: SERVICE, STEWARDSHIP, SPIRIT, AND SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

EDITED BY LARRY C. SPEARS. JOHN WILEY & SONS, 1998.

Reviewed by Lois K. Draina

Thirty years ago, Robert K. Greenleaf wrote his famous essay, "The Servant as Leader." Since Greenleaf's death in 1990, his philosophy and insights on leadership continue to be promulgated by the Indianapolis-based Robert K. Greenleaf Center. Larry C. Spears, executive director of the Center, has edited a superb collection of essays reflecting Greenleaf's concept of servant-leadership titled *Insights on Leadership: Service, Stewardship, Spirit, and Servant-Leadership*.

Insights on Leadership taps current and respected authors/scholars for their thoughts and strategies on shared responsibility, leading by example, and establishing a sense of community—all hallmarks of Greenleaf's servant-leadership legacy.

The text comprises 33 essays organized around four themes: service, stewardship, spirit, and servant-leadership. The essays are refreshing because they are rooted not only in a spiritual domain but also in exemplary and successful practice. For example, Jack Lowe, Jr., CEO of TDIndustries, an employee-owned company, addresses the role trust plays in a servant-leadership organization. He summarizes for readers a practical perspective on how servant-leadership is implemented and the results of "trusting relationships" enjoyed by all employees. Not surprisingly, in 1993 TDIndustries was included in the best-selling book *The 100 Best Companies to Work for in America*. Similarly, in another compelling essay, James Conley and Fraya Wagner-Marsh provide a number of specific examples of corporations successfully attempting to infuse a kind of value-driven spirituality and stewardship in the workplace.

With a recent proliferation of mass-market business writing that includes an element of the spiritual, it is safe to assume the themes of service and stewardship could become redundant and stale. Yet *Insights on Leadership* offers a variety of approaches, with fresh and singular perspectives. This is due partly to the different disciplines the authors represent as well as the creative approaches these authors take to applying the servant-leadership philosophy and model to specific work problems. Dr. Robert E. Kelly, author

and adjunct professor of business at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, addresses the opposite side of leadership—followership—and explores descriptors of exemplary follower strategies. Peter Block, consultant and author, challenges readers to shift in focus from “leadership” to “citizenship.” Dr. Judith Sturnick, former college president and now president of a consulting firm and author, writes that it is critical that organizations concentrate on developing healing leadership, which is really servant-leadership, in the turbulent work world of the future.

This text should be extremely popular with Catholic educators. The essays speak to and challenge living out mission, vocation, and the real purpose of work. More specifically, the essays are based on the servant-leadership paradigm, clearly a dominant management philosophy being discussed today. For example, Ken Blanchard, co-author of the *One-Minute Manager*, explores the fact that servant-leadership begins only when vision, direction, and goals are clear and the hierarchical pyramid is “turned upside down.” John J. Gardiner explores the theme of “quiet presence” as a place where leadership and the spirit meet. Parker J. Palmer, an inspiring writer and teacher, suggests that “we should all strive to discover our own spiritual nature, which may open our capacity for compassionate, moral leadership.”

This excellent text will serve well a broad Catholic education audience: church and school leaders at all levels, faculty, staff, and board members. Its pages demand quiet reflection followed by personal and professional discourse. The 10 characteristics of the servant-leader, outlined concisely in the introduction, might be used to spark discussion at chancery, parish, or school team-building sessions or may be helpful as a checklist against which an institution’s core values/vision/mission statements may be compared and analyzed.

Students of leadership theory and practice will do well to explore Greenleaf’s many approaches to empowerment. Although this type of leadership may be elusive, sometimes defying definition and universal clarity, this volume on servant-leadership provides a rich texture around which the concept takes on a new and future-oriented face. How the reader assimilates the concepts and turns them into life-producing ways of doing business, with colleagues at the heart of the enterprise, is a critical question.

Compelling examples of servant-leadership in the corporate world are numerous in this text. This is based on the fact that Greenleaf’s ideas on the tremendous importance of common purpose and vision, coupled with a corporate sense of leadership diversity, grew out of his 36-year career at AT&T. Ken Melrose tells the story of Toro, a Fortune 500 company, which found a way for management to “lead by genuinely valuing others, to create a genuinely trusting and valuing organization.” James Autry, past president of Meredith Corporation’s Magazine Group, a \$500-million operation with over 900 employees, tells an uplifting story titled “Bearing Witness,” reminding

readers of the need to be thankful for work, for people, and for spirit. John P. Schuster, a certified management consultant, describes the most successful servant-leaders as possessing both healthy egos and grace of spirit and calls work “a daily sacrament.” Indeed, substantive challenges from very successful business leaders!

Insights on Leadership is extraordinarily readable and profoundly inspiring. From the forward by Stephen Covey, a world-renowned consultant and author, most notably of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and *Principle-Centered Leadership*, to the final essay by Margaret Wheatley, motivational speaker and author of the widely read *Leadership and the New Science*, the story of Greenleaf’s call to service, while calling others to serve, is told and retold with passion and purpose. Each essay is carefully reasoned, clearly expressed, and devoid of management jargon.

Insights on Leadership should be on the reading list of those in positions of leadership who wish to transform themselves and their organizations by embracing the fact that they are servants and stewards of those with whom they work.

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