



Trainers as Leaders of Learning

What characteristics and behaviors would you expect an exceptionally good trainer to have? I have had the opportunity to experience several extraordinary trainers. One was Jan. She knew the subject well, was organized, used creative teaching approaches, understood the needs of her students, and met all of the basics of being an excellent trainer. But Jan did so much more. She encouraged and challenged me to ask thought-provoking questions and allowed participants to learn from each other. The primary difference in Jan and other trainers like her I've encountered is their ability to serve people as a leader of learning.

A number of years ago I was introduced to the work of Robert Greenleaf, author of *The Servant as Leader*. Through his work with organizations and his career with AT&T, he developed the idea for a new kind of leadership model that put serving others, including employees, customers, and community, as the number 1 priority. Referring to Greenleaf's work, Sandra J. Reinke of Augusta State University wrote: "Scholars are showing an interest in exploring the importance of values and trust in work relationships, and the impact of values, leadership, and particularly trust on work productivity and organizational climate."

By John L. Bennett

The servant-leader model can inspire
you to be an exceptional trainer.

Greenleaf's primary definition of servant leadership is being servant first. It begins with the feeling that one *wants* to serve, above all. "The conscious choice being to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first...."

A commonly asked question for gauging one's servant-leader capacity is, "Do those who are served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?" As professionals involved in training and developing individuals and organizations, we are in a servant-leadership profession. Do we act as servant-leaders? If so, what is our role? How can we develop our capacity to serve? And what actions can we take to demonstrate servant leadership?

Larry Spears, CEO of the not-for-profit Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, cites 10 characteristics of servant leadership, which can inspire trainers in their profession:

Listen. Be receptive to what other people have to say. You'll learn more about their needs and desires, which you can use to help them or someone else. That will help you develop your ability to respond proactively.

Heal. Seek ways to heal yourself and others from broken spirits and emotional hurts. Individuals, teams, and organizations can be in need of healing.

Persuade. Use persuasion rather than your position or authority to convince rather than coerce.

Conceptualize. Create opportunities for you and other people to generate concepts. Many of the ideas will die, but others will come to fruition.

Develop. Create and take full advantage of opportunities for other people

and yourself to develop and grow personally, professionally, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually.

Dream. Remain rooted in the past while living in the present and focusing on the future. Take full advantage of opportunities that come your way and build on them. You are creating your tomorrows.

Trust and build. Through trusting other people and developing relationships in which we can be trusted, we are able to work at a deeper, more meaningful level with greater impact.

Communicate. That means open, honest, and direct communication to the right person at the right time, by the right person in the right way.

Evolve. Seek to be wise as well as knowledgeable. That means growing, developing, and emerging as a person and as a professional.

Promote. Share the successes of other people so they can be recognized and can benefit from accomplishments.

With those characteristics in mind, ask yourself some questions about your servant-leadership:

Am I attempting to use my position of authority to obtain agreement?

Do I listen to what other people are saying through their work and actions, as well as to what they're not saying?

Do I seek ways to heal my personal pain and that of other people?

Do I communicate effectively through my words and behavior? Are my words and actions aligned?

Do I take time for personal reflection on a regular basis as a way to grow?

Do I seek challenges for personal and professional growth?

Do I advocate for others even when it means I may not get what I want?

We can be servant-leaders by taking these actions:

Get to truly know our participants. What are their needs for knowledge and experience? How can we most effectively communicate with them?

Know our stuff.

Be willing to experiment. We can learn in the process of teaching.

Listen for the wisdom of our learners. Just because we're the instructors doesn't mean we have all of the answers.

Encourage continued growth through resource materials, making ourselves available after training, and giving assignments that go beyond designated classroom time.

Recognize and appreciate the contributions of other people.

Find appropriate ways to acknowledge and encourage learning and growth.

Use many ways of communicating with learners. People are not all alike. We need information presented in many different ways.

Seek feedback, and use it for our personal growth.

You can add to the list from your own experience and by asking other people for theirs.

By linking servant leadership—characterized by openness, stewardship, and vision—to personal values, we can enhance individual, team, and organizational performance.

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