



Altenheim Resource Services

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Making the World a Better Place: Becoming a Servant Leader
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In 1970 [Robert K. Greenleaf](#) coined the term “servant leader” in an essay where he defined Servant Leadership as “a non-traditional leadership philosophy, embedded in a set of behaviors and practices that place the primary emphasis on the well-being of those being served.” Even for 1970 this was revolutionary. Today, there are hundreds of books, podcasts and articles on the topic. There are even [college courses](#) being taught on servant leadership! For those who have never heard of servant leadership you may be wondering what it’s all about and if it can really make a difference in our world.

[Larry C. Spears](#) from Regent University has identified ten characteristics of servant leaders. He begins by identifying the servant leader as one who is deeply committed to **listening** intently to others. He also says that the servant leader strives to understand and **empathize** with others. Servant leaders are able to **heal** themselves and their relationships with others. Servant leaders have developed an **awareness** in understanding issues involving ethics, power and values. The servant leader is effective at building consensus within groups and has mastered the skill of **persuasion**. Servant leaders conceptualize and dream great dreams. Another characteristic of the servant leader is **foresight** which helps a person understand the lessons of the past, the realities of the present and the likely consequence of a decision for the future. **Stewardship** is a key element in being a servant leader who holds his/her organization in trust for the greater good of society. The servant leader is **committed to the growth of each and every individual** within his/her organization. The servant leader seeks to **build community** among those who work with an organization.

[The National Society of Leadership and Success](#) says that servant leaders “invest in their team members and put them first, which builds a high level of trust and respect, encouraging team growth and satisfaction.” They point out that it is a highly effective leadership style because it focuses on empowerment rather than management. In their book *The Servant Leader: Transforming Your Heart, Head, Hands and Habits*, Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges point out that the way you serve the vision of the organization is by developing people so that they can work on that vision even when you’re not around. Blanchard and Hodges write that “the daily pressures of leadership can isolate and diminish a leader’s effectiveness and focus.” They encourage the servant leader to develop five habits of leadership. These include **solitude** for spiritual renewal, **prayer** for spiritual strength, **storing up “the Word of God”** (however we see God and whatever scriptural tradition we follow) to help meet the challenges we don’t know how to handle, faith in **unconditional love**, and **accountability relationships** and truth-tellers who can keep us on course.

Becoming a servant leader takes time and commitment. It doesn’t just happen. But once you begin that path toward servant leadership, what do you do with it? In his book *Developing the Leader Within You* John C. Maxwell writes that leaders “use their influence at the right time for the right reasons ... add value to the people and organizations they lead ... work for the benefit of others and not personal gain ... understand that an institution is the reflection of their character ... follow a moral compass that points in the right direction regardless of the trends.” Each of us is called to be a servant leader. We simply need to put it into practice.