



Servant Leadership

A new approach to creating a culture of success.

Servant leaders have many things in common. Perhaps the most important is that they put their people first. But servant leadership extends beyond the leaders themselves. Organizations that want to embrace servant leadership need to support their leaders through skill development, knowledge, tools, and human resource systems and processes. They need to help their leaders understand their people and meet their needs. And ultimately, they must create the mindset to foster a culture shift that values people and results. In this collection of articles, we explore the concepts and paradigm shifts organizations must consider to become true servant leaders.

Profit is the
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What Leading Companies Do

by Ken Blanchard

Servant leaders care about *both* people *and* results—they know the only way to get results is through their people. So how does this both/and philosophy play out in organizations today?

In the past, the predominant thought was that the only reason to be in business was to make money. Given that point of view, customers were certainly somewhat important, since they used the products and services, but people were dispensable. You could downsize them, rank them, get rid of the bottom 10 percent, and take other liberties because they were perceived as commodities. That's as far from servant leadership as you can get.

Great leaders realize that their number one customer is their people. If they take care of their people, train them, and empower them, those people will become fully engaged and gung-ho about what they do. In turn, they will reach out and take care of their second most important customer—the people who buy their products or services—and turn them into raving fans. These raving fan customers will keep coming back and will tell their friends, thereby becoming part of the salesforce. When that happens, the company becomes financially sound, which takes care of their third most important customer: the stockholders.

When you talk about servant leadership, you are talking about companies such as Disney in entertainment, Nordstrom in retail, Ritz-Carlton in hospitality, SAP in information technology, Southwest Airlines in transportation, Synovus in finance, Wegman's in grocery—they are all leaders in their respective industries and they all believe in results through people. Rather than profit being the reason for being in business, these companies realize that profit is the applause you get for creating a motivating environment for your people so that they will take care of your customers.

What does this all have to do with Blanchard and why we say our approach is one of servant leadership? The following section will explain how a servant leadership message is central to the concepts of our SLII® leadership development program, performance management, One Minute Management, and customer service.

People and Results

In many ways, our SLII leadership development program, with its focus on both people and results, is servant leadership in action. When some people hear the phrase *servant leadership*, they are confused. They immediately conjure up thoughts of the inmates running the prison, or trying to please everyone. Others think servant leadership is only for church leaders. The problem is that they don't understand leadership. They think you can't lead and serve at the same time. Yet you can if you understand that servant leadership has two parts: vision/direction and implementation.

In the visionary role, leaders define the direction and the desired results. It's their responsibility to communicate what the organization stands for and wants to accomplish. Kids look to their parents, players look to their coaches, and employees look to their organizational leaders for direction. The visionary role is the leadership aspect of servant leadership.

Once people are clear on where they are going, the leader's role shifts from being responsible for vision/direction to being responsive to their people through implementation—the second part of servant leadership. Implementation is the servant aspect of servant leadership where leaders feel their role is to help people achieve their goals. They constantly try to find out what people need to perform well and live according to the vision. Servant leaders want to make a difference in the lives of their people and, in the process, impact organizational results. Servant leadership is about bringing out the magnificence in people.

Servant Leaders Meet the Needs of Their People

A key aspect of servant leadership is performance management. An effective performance management system has three components: performance planning, performance coaching, and performance review. Which of these three do most organizations devote the greatest amount of time to? Unfortunately, it's performance review.

Some organizations do a respectable job on performance planning by setting very clear goals. However, after goal setting, what do you think happens to those goals? Most often they get filed away and no one looks at them until they are told it's time for a performance review. Then everybody runs around, bumping into each other, trying to find the goals.

Of the three aspects of an effective performance management system, which one do people spend the least time on? The answer is performance coaching. Yet this is the most important aspect of managing people's performance, because it's during performance coaching that the implementation aspect of servant leadership happens on an ongoing basis.

In SLII, we teach that leaders need to master three skills: goal setting, diagnosing, and matching. All three of these skills are part of performance planning between the leader and direct report. If you aren't clear on goals, you can't be an effective leader because the second skill is to diagnose a person's development level on a specific goal or task. It's important to realize, when using SLII, that leaders need to use not only different strokes for different folks, but also different strokes for the same folks on different parts of their job. Why? Because development level varies for each person depending on the specific task or goal. The final skill for the leader is to match the appropriate leadership style to the person's development level on that task or goal.

An effective performance management system has three components: performance planning, performance coaching, and performance review.

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Once the leader and direct report have agreed on the goals, the direct report's development level on each of those goals, and the appropriate leadership style, the leader moves to the second key aspect of managing people's performance as an effective leader: performance coaching (implementation). Now is when the leader applies the agreed-upon leadership style for the direct report's development level on the task or goal.

The emphasis in the performance coaching aspect of SLII is to help people win and accomplish their goals so that when they get to the performance review, it really is a review because leader and direct report have been working together throughout the designated performance period.

Three Secrets Every Servant Leader Knows and Uses

In terms of helping people win, the three simple secrets Spencer Johnson and I describe in our book, *The New One Minute Manager*—One Minute Goals, One Minute Praisings, and One Minute Redirects—are helpful and powerful behaviors that every servant leader practices regularly. People want to be able to bring their brains to work and contribute as early as possible. They want a sense of autonomy, a good relationship with their boss and colleagues, and continual growth in their competence. Servant leaders know this, so they are more collaborative in every way.

The first secret, One Minute Goals, is all about vision/direction and performance planning. All reliable performance starts with clear goals—and servant leaders work alongside their people to develop and agree on clear, concise goals.

Servant leaders know that the second secret, One Minute Praisings, is all about walking around, catching people doing things right, and praising them. They also understand that—although praising people will always be important—it is also necessary for people to eventually learn to recognize and praise their own performance.

The third secret, One Minute Redirects, gets people back on track when they're struggling to achieve a goal or task. Like One Minute Praisings, the goal is to equip people to redirect their own behavior and not always depend on their manager to point out when they might be veering off course.

Great Results and Human Satisfaction

To be servant-oriented means to have the heart of a servant leader; to give direction and support as we describe in our SLII leadership development program; and to set goals, praise, and redirect like a One Minute Manager. These leadership models both have the same goal: to help people gain confidence and competence so that they can manage their own behavior in as many aspects of their job as possible—eventually becoming autonomous. When that happens, you'll know you have an organization that is servant-oriented, where the environment enables people to find meaning in their work and profit is a byproduct. Servant-oriented organizations focus on their people. They develop and encourage them to be the best they can be so that they can take care of the customers who eventually take care of the profit. It all goes together. Leaders who practice servant leadership know how to achieve *both* great results *and* great human satisfaction.

Performance partnership means each individual understands the value they bring to the organization and to their role.

Performance Partnerships

by Cathy Huett and Joni Wickline

Servant leaders care about people and about performance. They understand that the most important success factor in their career, as well as the careers of their people, is positive performance partnerships. Servant leaders get results—and they do so through people.

Building a performance partnership with an individual takes commitment, time, and diligence. It is a practice that demands ongoing effort, clear communication, risk taking, influence, recovery from mistakes, changes in course, and caring. A servant leader takes ownership of the process and commits the focus and energy required to build positive performance partnerships. There is a sense of accountability for the successful performance of others.

Performance partnership means every individual understands the value they bring to the organization and to their role. It's about supporting people to continually learn, grow, and intentionally build their brand. If you have ever had a leader who encouraged you and helped you achieve more than you thought you could, you have experienced a positive performance partnership with a servant leader.

Performance partnership has three imperatives:

1. Why and What: Clear Purpose and Goals
2. From and To: Achievement Discussions and Alignment
3. Here and There: Growth, Development, and Positive Cycle

Why and What—Clear Purpose and Goals

Each of us needs to know the purpose of our role. Purpose answers questions such as: *Why am I in this role? What benefit do I provide? and What is my brand, my special contribution?*

In his book *Start with Why*, Simon Sinek states that to discover your purpose, you should ask the question, *Why is that important?* Five times. Sinek believes that under the layers of ordinary answers lies the nugget of purpose.

Servant leaders help their people uncover this nugget so that they are clear on both their purpose and their value proposition. Then the leader connects the dots from the individual's purpose and role to organizational strategies. Knowing the overarching reason for one's role can mitigate frustrations, guide actions, add energy, and provide long-term perspective.

In a survey conducted by Blanchard, only 37 percent of 700 respondents said they routinely discussed their goals with their leader. We have been taught about the importance of setting goals, yet both leaders and direct reports tend to resist this essential practice. Why is that?

We resist goal setting because we feel it takes too much time, we don't feel competent to write goals perfectly, we don't believe in the goal or align with the plan, or we don't want to be held accountable or hold others accountable.

People often have too many goals, all of equal priority. This creates confusion and a sense of being overwhelmed with the pressure of too many expectations before performance even gets started. Then there is the reality of change. When change is in the air (and isn't it everywhere?) it is hard to maintain goal relevance.

What if you had only one goal to worry about? Like Jack Palance's character, Curly, said in the movie *City Slickers*, "It's the one thing ..." that is important. If your purpose is clear, your key goal can become clear as well. What is the top goal that must be achieved, no matter what?

Picture a leader who helps you understand your purpose for being in your role and then clarifies the most important goal you need to focus on. Picture understanding how your role and goal align with the organization's strategies. Picture yourself being able to zero in on what has to be done because of this understanding and clarity. This is a picture of success and satisfaction for you and your leader!

In goal setting, less is more. It may not be possible to have only one key goal, but at least be clear on the most important goal. Clear and meaningful goals get accomplished.

From and To—Achievement Discussions and Alignment

Servant leaders discuss with their people where they need to come from (current state) and where they need to go to (goal attained). Achievement and performance go hand in hand. What must be achieved and what are the metrics? Defining the measurables of a role is not always easy, but it sets a clear picture for the individual of what needs to be accomplished.

Achievement metrics should be linked to the why and the what. Things to consider when setting up achievement metrics include:

- What can be measured to monitor the progress of the individual? Where should they come from and go to?
- What metrics should be used for the one key goal? Where should they come from and go to?

Once the metrics are set for the role, measurement can happen and achievement discussions are set up for success. Having clear metrics linked to the *why* and the *what* makes the conversation between leader and direct report easier.

If the servant leader has built a positive performance partnership ensuring that the purpose, key goal, and metrics are clear, feedback can be a laser-focused and professional discussion between partners. Feedback is not information to be given only by the leader. Rather, it is to be gathered and shared by both leader and individual. It is not brutal but it is honest. It is based on facts and metrics.

Servant leaders can create a positive space to share feedback through achievement discussions that consist of a current assessment of progress toward the key goal.

Servant leaders discuss with their people where they need to go from (current state) and where they need to go to (goal attained).

Servant leaders know it is their responsibility to create an environment of honesty, measurement, and shared information leading to achievement of the key goal.

The achievement discussion can include:

- Accomplishments to date
- Unexpected changes
- What still needs to be achieved
- Facts, news, status, and other updates
- Maintaining goal focus
- Obstacles to overcome
- Moving the goal forward
- Resources required
- Expanding the key goal

Both individual and leader contribute to this discussion and make appropriate commitments. Achievement discussions build résumés and give the individual the gift of awareness of the metrics that gauge their value contribution. Servant leaders know it is their responsibility to create an environment of honesty, measurement, and shared information leading to achievement of the key goal.

Where there is alignment, discussions are productive and positive. Servant leaders create alignment among the organization's strategies, team deliverables, and individual responsibilities. Without alignment, you can have busy people working in their own silos on goals that do not connect to the organization's goals and strategies. Without alignment, precious time and money can be wasted.

Blanchard recently conducted a survey about alignment of goals and priorities. Participants in training classes were asked whether their manager clarifies and aligns goals and priorities for them. Of 455 participants in the survey, fewer than 20 percent reported this kind of alignment.

Alignment is the undercurrent that causes people in organizations to move in the same direction. It is essential for long-term success.

Here and There—Growth, Development, and Positive Cycle

Growth and development are paths to performance. Servant leaders put their people first, displacing their own egos, agendas, personal needs, insecurities, and ambitions. They realize people are the most valuable asset a team or organization has and that the value proposition flows both ways.

People want to grow personally and develop and expand their skills and competencies. A smart leader makes resources available and keeps conversations flowing about growth and development.

You've probably heard the phrase, *Bloom where you are planted*. People want to bloom! The servant leader is the gardener tending the plants and trees, giving them what they need to grow, pulling weeds, shielding from frost, harvesting fruit, and pruning when necessary.

Development opportunities can be formal and obvious by way of structured training, or subtler by way of exposure and opportunities. Learning new tech skills, mastering public speaking, attending seminars given by thought leaders, or simply being encouraged to think in new ways, pursue a different perspective, or tune into personal values and beliefs are all ways for people to grow.

The specifics of what individuals decide to learn or how they choose to develop aren't as significant as the fact that their servant leader knows the importance of growth and development, makes opportunities available, and encourages people to build their skills and knowledge.

Begin this positive cycle today and start creating future servant leaders.

When an individual understands the overarching purpose and value proposition of their role, focuses on one key goal, contributes to positive experiences of feedback through achievement discussions, and is planted in soil fertile for growth and development, that person will grow and flourish. They develop self-reliance and confidence and are soon ready to take on whatever comes their way.

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Three basic psychological needs lie at the heart of every human being's ability to thrive: autonomy, relatedness, and competence.

What Servant Leaders Understand about Motivation

by Susan Fowler

Human beings long to thrive. We are learners who want to grow, enjoy our work, be productive, make positive contributions, and build lasting relationships—not because of pressure or promises of external rewards, but because it is our nature to make these things happen. Our desire to thrive may be innate, but thriving doesn't happen automatically—especially at work. People gravitate toward psychological growth and integration, but that doesn't guarantee it will happen. Human thriving in the workplace is a dynamic potential that requires nurturing.

Despite your best intentions as a leader, you may unwittingly be trapped in counterproductive practices proven to thwart people's optimal motivation, ultimately leading to a disengaged workforce. The scary thing is that you believe you are doing the right thing. Motivation is one of the most essential yet misunderstood aspects of leadership. Without an understanding of the true nature of human motivation, contemporary science, and alternatives to carrots and sticks, you are probably struggling to find methods that bring out the best in people and sustain their positive energy.

The essence of servant leadership is to recognize that your leadership can either facilitate your people's growth or obstruct it.

Do You Know What Is Motivating Your Employees at Work?

When individuals' rankings of what motivates them are compared to what managers think motivates their employees, the results over the past sixty years continue to prove the point that managers simply misinterpret what motivates their people.

Why the big disconnect? One reason is that leaders depend on their observations of external behaviors and conditions to evaluate their employees' motivation. Unfortunately, it is nearly impossible to understand another person's internal state of motivation by observing their external behavior. For this reason, leaders need to have conversations with their people about their motivational outlook on goals that have been delegated to them.

Do Employees Know What Motivates Them at Work?

Ironically, another reason for the disconnect between employees and their managers when it comes to motivation is that employees don't understand the true nature of their own motivation.

An employee who feels trapped in her job, feels she is being taken advantage of, or feels overwhelmed by what is being asked of her may ask for more money. Under her breath, she is saying, *They don't pay me enough to put up with this.* What she doesn't understand is that there will never be enough money to make up for the void created when her psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence are not satisfied. People cannot ask for what they don't know they need.

What Motivates People—The Real Story

Optimal motivation is the result of satisfying three basic psychological needs that lie at the heart of every human being's ability to thrive: autonomy, relatedness, and competence. When people are optimally motivated, they have the positive energy and sense of well-being required to flourish while sustaining the pursuit and achievement of meaningful goals.

The bad news is that we have paid a high price for working with traditional approaches to motivation: stifled creativity and innovation, mental and physical disabilities, high insurance rates, absenteeism and turnover, weak performance, escalating costs and expectations for incentivizing desired behavior, and compliance and defiance rather than alliance on goals and initiatives.

The good news is that this is where the real science of motivation emerges as both a radical departure and an exciting opportunity. However, you might find it challenging to take advantage of evidence-based techniques for creating an optimally motivating workplace if you don't examine deeply embedded beliefs that influence, and maybe even sabotage, your approach to motivation.

Your Beliefs Determine the Way You Lead

How would you complete these belief statements?

1. It's not personal, it's just _____.
2. The purpose of business is to _____.
3. Leaders are in a position of _____.
4. The only thing that really matters is _____.
5. If you cannot measure it, it _____.

These are particularly sticky beliefs that can erode motivation. They are so entrenched in our consciousness, we accept them without question. This poses a potential problem: unexplored beliefs become the basis for rules, processes, actions, and your leadership behaviors.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to challenge these beliefs by examining how they undermine your people's optimal motivation, and then consider alternative beliefs and best practices.

Challenge the First Eroding Belief: It's not personal, it's just *business*.

Every day you deliver information, feedback, or news to those you lead that affects their work, livelihood, opportunities, status, income, mood, health, or well-being. How is this not personal? Employees spend more of their waking hours connected to work and interacting with their coworkers than at home with family members. Yet managers believe their actions are not personal and are just business. Are you kidding? Whatever your beliefs, one thing is true: What you say and do feels personal to the people you lead. Challenge the belief that it's not personal, it's just business. Activate optimal motivation with someone you lead by adopting a different belief: If it is business, it is personal.

The nature of human motivation is not in making money. It is in making meaning.

**Challenge the Second Eroding Belief:
The purpose of business is to *make money (a profit)*.**

Think about how your decisions and actions would be different with the following belief: The purpose of business is to serve.

It's true that an organization—even a nonprofit—must make a profit to sustain itself. But to conclude that profit is therefore the purpose of business is an illogical leap. You need air to live, plus water and food. But the purpose of your life is not to breathe, eat, and drink. Your purpose is richer and more profound than basic survival.

To paraphrase Ken Blanchard, profit is the applause you get from creating an optimally motivating environment for your people so they want to take care of your customers.

The nature of human motivation is not in making money. It is in making meaning.

Challenge the belief that the purpose of business is to make money and consider an optimal motivation belief: The purpose of business is to serve—both your people and your customers. Profit is a byproduct of doing both of these well.

**Challenge the Third Eroding Belief:
Leaders are in a position of *power*.**

“Managers need to be incredibly mindful and clear about the types of power they have and use. Most leaders will be surprised by the potentially negative emotional impact that results from having and using their power, in almost all its forms.” These are the words of Dr. Drea Zigarmi, who found himself surprised by the strength of his own research on how a leader's power affects people's motivational outlooks.

Your power demands that people exert more energy self-regulating to experience autonomy, relatedness, and competence. As Zigarmi puts it, “Power is very precious stuff. It entices leaders into flights of self-delusion and separateness from those they lead.”

Challenge the belief that leaders are in a position of power. Consider the difference with this optimal motivation belief: Leaders are in a position of empowering others.

**Challenge the Fourth Eroding Belief:
The only thing that really matters is *results*.**

The evidence is clear: People can achieve the results you want, even if their psychological needs are thwarted in the process. But their negative energy and lack of well-being make it rare for them to sustain or repeat those results—let alone exceed them.

You can help people shift to a more optimal motivational outlook by clarifying the underlying values of your dashboard metrics. Frame the desired results differently and trust individuals will still achieve necessary metrics.

A focus on results may yield short-term gains. However, those gains are compromised when people feel pressure instead of autonomy, disconnection instead of relatedness, and exploitation with no sense of the competence they have gained.

Reframe the belief that the only thing that matters is results. Consider this optimal motivation belief instead: In the end, what matters is not just the results people achieve, but why and how they achieve them.

Challenge the Fifth Eroding Belief:

If you cannot measure it, it *doesn't* matter.

As in life, the most rewarding aspects of work are the things most difficult to measure. If you believe the statement, If you cannot measure it, it doesn't matter, ask yourself why. Is it outside your comfort zone to deal with the emotional nature of things not easily measured? Is it because you believe your job is to control things, and it is difficult to control something not easily measured?

Challenge the belief that if you cannot measure it, it is not important. Put this optimal motivation belief into practice instead: If you cannot measure it, it is probably very important.

Challenging Motivation Beliefs, Perceptions, and Outdated Practices

At the end of every workday, your leadership beliefs will either promote or undermine people's opportunity to flourish in the workplace. Is your focus on what you want from people, or what you want for people? If you are a servant leader whose focus is on what you want for people, you will get the results you want from people.

“The true test of a leader is what happens when you are not there.

... and for virtual leaders, that’s all the time!”

—Ken Blanchard

Servant Leadership in a Virtual Environment

by Carmela Southers

It’s a universal truth: we judge ourselves by our intentions and others judge us by our actions. For virtual leaders, the impact of this perceptual disconnect is multiplied because most of our actions are invisible to those we lead.

Virtual team members experience your emails, texts, written reports, conference calls, the occasional one-on-one call, and, if they are lucky, a face-to-face meeting. What does your communication reveal?

Review the last fifteen emails you have written. Would you describe them as servant-oriented? Or are they reactive—requesting immediate responses, monitoring work, or providing answers without diagnosing the development needs behind the question?

What was the nature of your last few conference calls or video conferences? Did they engage the hearts and minds of attendees, or do you suspect that one or two people showed off their expertise while everyone else caught up on their email?

We all intend to be servant leaders. Here’s how to make that intention visible in the world of virtual leadership:

- Make servant leadership your top priority
- Be accessible
- Respect brain time
- Show personal interest
- Respect differences
- Ask for feedback—and act on it
- Take control of your technology, time, and energy

Make Servant Leadership Your Top Priority

Most leaders have deliverables and project responsibilities beyond leadership. Without employees at your door asking for attention, it’s easy to focus on your own priorities first and your people second. Whether or not you are aware of it, your team can sense when they are not your priority. You can accomplish impressive results on your own, but it’s important to remember that the value you add is multiplied when you focus on leading your team toward success.

Focusing on others makes them feel important and fosters inspiration and challenge. Inspired and challenged employees take the initiative and often suggest process improvements to make work easier and provide better results. They also take the lead on their own projects and tasks. As your team becomes more competent and committed, they help you achieve your results.

Be Accessible

Between phone, email, text, instant message, video chat, and whatever technology comes up with next, do your team members know the best way to reach you? Choose just two ways to be accessible to your people—one for urgent matters and one for non-urgent matters—and stick with them. The goal is not to limit the variety or effectiveness of communication between you and your team; in fact, it is to optimize access so that you can be a responsive leader.

- **Urgent accessibility:** Choose one method for people to use when they need to reach you immediately. If you sit at a desk, IM might be best. If you are on the go, perhaps a text message or phone call would work better. Whatever you choose, emphasize to team members that this method is to be used only for urgent issues—and that you will always respond immediately. Establish team agreements that align everyone on the few critical situations that demand instant response.
- **Non-urgent accessibility:** Your staff needs to know you will be there to provide whatever mix of direction and support they need. Choose a different method for regular, non-urgent communications and discipline yourself to respond quickly and thoughtfully to these messages. For example, an email may alert you to a voicemail, online report, or post. Your response may be to set up a phone call to discuss the issue further.

Respect Brain Time

Because virtual leaders aren't often face-to-face—or even in proximity—with their direct reports, some require frequent progress reports to ensure work is being done. When constant activity reporting combines with an always-on, instant-access culture, the likely outcome is overloaded team members working at a frenetic pace. Exhausted from operating reactively and documenting every detail, these knowledge workers have no time left to reflect, innovate, or collaborate thoughtfully to solve problems.

Build the expectation in your team that constructive quiet time is not only allowed but also honored, for individuals as well as groups. Establish norms that clarify purpose and parameters. Brain time should be

- Writing, planning, or project focused
- Limited in duration
- Not be used as a way to avoid others
- Include a backup strategy to handle urgent issues
- Planned and respected

Show Personal Interest

As a leader, you know that understanding your people, their motivations, and their career and personal goals is critical to building trust, inspiring loyalty, and providing appropriate direction and support when needed. Trust is built on visible demonstrations of care.

Build the expectation in your team that constructive quiet time is not only allowed but also honored.

Be deliberate also about getting to know each person on your team. Learn about each member's culture and be open to differences in values, attitudes, and viewpoints.

So how do you show people on your team that you care without the casual connection that happens naturally when people work face-to-face? In one-on-one as well as team meetings, great virtual leaders encourage transparency and personal relationships. They also freely share information about themselves.

Whether you share vacation photos in meetings, ask about family and hobbies in one-on-one conferences, send thank-you gift cards at the end of a project, or conduct virtual team-building activities, servant leadership means deliberately making time and space to build relationships in ways that are meaningful to your people, even if you are thousands of miles apart.

Respect Differences in Time Zones, Ethnicities, Cultures, and Points of View

It's tempting to always hold meetings at times that are convenient for the majority of team members, even when some members are on other continents. But, in consideration of people who live in other time zones, why not rotate the times of your virtual meetings? Doing so demonstrates visible respect for everyone's contribution. This way, no one person or group is repeatedly inconvenienced by having to meet at odd hours.

Be deliberate also about getting to know each person on your team. Learn about each member's culture and be open to differences in values, attitudes, and viewpoints. An engineer and salesperson from the same culture may be more diverse in how they approach a problem to be solved than are two individuals of different nationalities who do the same job.

Ask for Feedback and Act on It

Can you identify an action you believe your leader could take to be more effective that you haven't shared with him or her? Of course! Giving constructive but unsolicited feedback to a leader feels so risky most never attempt it.

As a virtual leader, you can't observe visual clues such as shifts in body language or eye contact that might signal discomfort, misunderstanding, or ineffective communication. Leaders of virtual teams must admit that we usually have no idea how our messages are being received by our team members.

Complicating this issue is that the symptoms of lack of trust and low engagement levels aren't obvious in a virtual workplace. These symptoms include withdrawal, doing the minimum amount of work required, and discounting the contributions of others.

A lack of awareness combined with invisible symptoms means virtual leaders may be blind to escalating team problems. To be effective, we must put our egos aside and solicit honest feedback from team members. These three questions can work wonders if you ask them regularly and act on them cheerfully:

- What do I do that helps you?
- What do I do that gets in your way?
- What could I do to help you be more successful?

If you don't get feedback the first time you ask, repeat the questions regularly. And when the gift of feedback comes, accept it graciously and use it to strengthen and benefit your relationship with your team members. They will appreciate your efforts.

Take Control of Your Technology, Time, and Energy

It doesn't matter whether as a virtual leader you love or hate technology—or even have both feelings simultaneously. Choose a couple of types of technology and master them.

- Manage your email carefully so that you are not overwhelmed and you don't overwhelm others. The book *The Hamster Revolution* by Mike Song, Vicki Halsey, and Tim Burrell (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2008) has useful tips for conquering email overload.
- Control your calendar so that you have time to dedicate to servant leadership and serious brain work.
- Figure out what type of communication works best for you and your team.
- Choose a virtual meeting platform and become competent with it. Use it to encourage participation through polls and chats and to capture brainstormed ideas. Make sure everyone knows how to share their screen to learn best practices from their teammates.

Remember, technology is not the master—it's the servant. Don't let it rule you. Answering emails while eating is bad for your digestion, weight, and energy. And sleeping with your cell phone is not good leadership—it's obsession.

Servant leadership starts with taking care of yourself. As they say before a flight, "Put on your own oxygen mask first, then help others with theirs." Be kind to yourself. Pay attention to what exhausts you and what energizes you to better manage your health, energy, spirit, and mood.

Being a servant leader in a virtual environment is a challenge. So go beyond good intentions—take action to show your team members they are your top priority. Follow these guidelines to demonstrate what is most important: people.

People who take better care of themselves are able to think more strategically and make better decisions.

The Neuroscientific Argument for Servant Leadership

by Madeleine Homan Blanchard

Advances in the study of the brain are furiously piling up, as are the implications for managing an optimal workplace environment. It turns out that the concepts Ken Blanchard has been talking about for the past 40-plus years—such as catching people doing things right, using the right leadership style for each employee’s development level on a task, and holding regular one-on-one meetings—aren’t just nice-to-haves or good management practices. They work. And it’s because of the way our brains are wired.

The body of work in social neuroscience is massive, but these two fundamental concepts have specific implications for the workplace:

1. The part of the brain we need the most at work gets very tired, which affects creativity, problem-solving, and the ability to behave ourselves.
2. Our brains truly are hardwired for social connection—the more we feel included by our work group and connected to our peers and leaders, the more productive we will be.

People who take better care of themselves can think more strategically and make better decisions. Leaders who are more coach-like demonstrate behaviors—listening carefully, empathizing, supporting others in finding answers to problems—that require enormous self-control. Exceptional self-care is required to perform at this high level, and research supports that it’s worth the effort.

The Most Important Part of Our Brains Tires Easily

Decision fatigue is real and we need to be aware of it. The brain is roughly 2 percent of body weight, yet it consumes 25 percent of our oxygen and 70 percent of our glucose. The part of the brain where the most important functioning—executive functioning—happens is called the prefrontal cortex (PFC) and it is the most recent to evolve. The PFC’s job is to

- Inhibit inappropriate behaviors, thoughts, and shows of emotion
- Inhibit interference from external and internal distractions
- Be conceptual rather than concrete
- Self-regulate and organize behavior toward long-term goals
- Encode (pay attention to events to remember) and retrieve appropriate memories from long-term storage for use in current thought processes
- Make qualified decisions, explore insights, and choose proper judgment
- Organize and plan for the short- and long-term future, and delay gratification
- Multitask and sort through large amounts of information, switching attention and goals as necessary

- Understand what others are thinking and decode their intentions and motivations
- Monitor errors, knowing what is real versus what is imagined/remembered

Our brain is what neuroscientists call a resource hog. It's as if we fill up our gas tank with sleep, rest, and glucose, but every choice, every inhibition, and every decision uses up gas in our tank. And here is the most crucial point: when our PFC runs out of gas, we don't know it. Think of it this way: when we go to the gym and do a bicep workout, we feel our muscles give out when they are exhausted. When our car is low on gas, we see the fuel gauge go down or the warning light go on. But when our PFC is worn out, there's no indication—until we behave in a way that we hadn't planned.

For example, let's say you get up in the morning and decide what to wear, what to have for breakfast, how to arrange for your kid's after-school event that requires a change in the routine, and which route to take to work so you can stop for gas. At work, you wisely choose not to have a donut at a staff meeting or not to tell an inappropriate joke. The day wears on and you have to be nice to cranky customers, deal with a broken printer, watch your language when a vendor is rude, edit out the snarky comments in an email, and make a cup of tea in the break room where someone has left a double-chocolate cake. If you are a manager, you must listen to and empathize with your people all day long. You must choose the leadership styles that will best serve their development needs. When nobody else has the answer to a problem, you must provide one, even if you don't have enough information. Perhaps you skip lunch and then get called into a late meeting to revise a long-term strategy due to a big shift in world events.

By the time you get home, the only thing you want to do is rip open a bag of sour cream and onion chips—despite your intentions to stick with green leafy vegetables and quinoa—because your self-control is simply used up. And then you berate yourself for not having willpower. You shouldn't. If it feels exhausting, it's because it is. Your PFC has given out.

What does this mean in terms of how to manage ourselves at work? Here are a few tips:

- Everything we know about overall health is doubly true for brain care. Sleep is not optional. Everyone has to find their own ideal amount, but powering through without enough sleep will eventually make it harder to stay on an even keel.
- Eat right and often. This isn't just true for weight control, it's true for being able to think straight through your workday. Don't skip lunch—ever.
- Do the hard stuff first. Planning, creative problem-solving, brainstorming, and making decisions all use up critical PFC resources. Even if you keep your hydration and glucose steady, as the day goes on, your PFC isn't as fresh as it is first thing in the morning.

If you are a manager, you must listen to and empathize with your people all day long.

Positive social interaction and the perception of fairness among peers activates the reward system in the brain.

- Plan for tomorrow, tonight. Use up the last of your PFC's resources on the small decisions—like what you will wear and have for breakfast—before you go to bed so you don't have to fatigue your PFC in the morning. The more routine you build into dealing with recurring basics, the fresher you will be when you get to work.
- Know when not to make a decision or get into an emotionally loaded conversation. The only indication you may have that your PFC is done in might be a slightly heightened perception of light and sound, and possibly emotional sensitivity. You just don't know what the final straw will be, and you don't want to risk reacting in a way you will regret. For example, if you have a 4:00 p.m. meeting with a difficult person, try to move it to an earlier hour.
- Take breaks, and make your people take breaks. Research shows that exercise makes us smarter and more creative, so if you can do a walking meeting instead of a sit-down, try it.

The Social Brain

We are absolutely hardwired to make friends, create nurturing relationships, and be part of a group. Social connection and inclusion are critical to every aspect of health. It isn't just a nice-to-have—it's a have-to-have.

With new imaging techniques, neuroscientists can now see what happens in the brain. When we have physical pain, certain areas of brain are clearly activated. When we experience social pain—specifically rejection or social humiliation—the areas that are activated overlap. It's now believed the same brain systems that are activated by physical pain are activated by social pain. Emotional pain is real and debilitating, even though we don't feel it the way we feel sensory pain. It affects neurochemicals and prevents the PFC from operating at full capacity. The old nursery rhyme "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me" is simply not true. Words hurt just as much as a physical injury—in fact, more. Memory of physical pain can fade over time, but memory of emotional pain often remains starkly fresh. On the flip side, there is evidence that positive social interaction and the perception of fairness among peers activates the reward system in the brain, which keeps it humming smoothly.

What does this mean for the workplace?

- You aren't being a drama queen if you feel terrible when you're left out. Your brain is designed to react that way.
- Taking time to ensure everyone involved in a project feels included is critical to a brain-friendly atmosphere. It isn't just about being nice. It's good business.
- Having regular one-on-one meetings increases relatedness and a sense of connectedness with each employee. Again—brain friendly.
- Genuine positive feedback and regular affirmative reinforcement has the same effect on the brain as a gift of chocolate or money: it activates the reward system in the brain and allows the PFC to operate at full capacity.

It takes enormous neurological resources to show up at work on time, properly dressed, and with an organized agenda to think creatively, visualize the future, solve complex problems, and generally get along all day. Leaders who understand this will be more effective—and more willing to go the extra mile to create a brain-friendly environment in which their people will thrive.

Servant Leadership as the Key to Success

by Scott Blanchard

Blanchard makes the case for servant leadership based on the fundamental premise that senior leaders in organizations will get better results, more profits, and more long-term success if they lead their people using leadership practices that put people first.

When my father, Ken Blanchard, and his associates founded our company in 1979, their mission was to make a difference in the lives of managers, employees, and the organizations they served. They accomplished this by embracing some radical ideas for the time, such as

- Power and control are not necessary to run a healthy and profitable organization.
- Leaders can become more effective if they learn to be flexible in their leadership style.
- Successful leaders believe their job is not to control but to free their employees to use their heads and hearts at work.

Decades later, the ideas that formed the foundation of our company as well as the larger leadership development industry are no longer revolutionary thoughts promoted by a few radical thought leaders. They have become proven tenets and practices for the most successful companies in the world. In my prior role as a consultant, and now as our company president, I have had the pleasure and honor of working with many of these highly admired firms.

When speaking to the senior executives of these industry-leading organizations today, I always ask, "What is the key to your company's success? Why are you at the top of your industry?" Interestingly, every time I ask these questions, I get a similar response: "It is our people who have created our success. Our people are the best in the world. And since they are so important to our success, we not only treat them well but also invest in them, challenge them, and give them chances to grow and develop." In short, the leaders of the best companies get it: People come first, second, and third.

In contrast, when I speak with leaders of firms that are not at the top of their industry and, in fact, may be struggling to achieve financial success, I ask these questions: "What is the reason your firm is failing to lead your industry? What does the leading firm in your industry do or have that your firm does not? Why are they more successful?" These leaders often respond that their lack of success is attributed to some sort of strategic failure or disadvantage the firm cannot overcome. "Our competitor got a head start on us with their winning product." "They beat us to the punch." "They are better at executing their plans." And so on. What I do not hear is what I believe to be the true reason for the difference between their faltering organization and the leaders of their industry: poor or mediocre organizations do not invest in, or practice, servant leadership.

The most successful firms have a clear and compelling vision for their company, products, and services that not only states what they do, but also why it matters to the world.

Leaders of the most successful firms in the world have an advantage because they employ a disciplined approach of servant leadership. These leaders possess a clear and compelling vision for their company and its products and services that clearly states what they do and why it matters to the world. This kind of vision compels people—employees, managers, customers, and shareholders—to get involved.

Leaders of the most successful firms in the world attract and hire the best people they can get and then treat their people as appreciating assets who are worth investing in and retaining.

Leaders of the most successful firms in the world take leadership—from the top of the organization to the front lines—very seriously. Since profit is the applause that results from taking care of employees as well as customers, prepared and effective leaders are essential. It is no surprise that the best organizations spend more money as a percentage of sales on leadership and employee development than do other firms.

Leaders of the most successful firms in the world identify servant leadership as the key to their success. I have heard many leaders of these respected organizations say virtually the same thing: “We couldn’t have achieved this level of success if we hadn’t put our people first.”

Research by renowned economist Lauri Bassi has proven that firms who put people first, as measured by the highest scores on the Human Capital Management (HCM) scale, have outperformed the S&P 500 over the past 25 years in periods of financial prosperity as well as in more challenging times. Most notably, firms with higher HCM scores can endure and recover more quickly from cyclical downturns in the economy than can firms with lower HCM scores.

Simply stated, leaders of the best and most successful firms understand that all they have and all they hope for is due to their people—and as a result, they practice servant leadership.

Blanchard® is a global leader in leadership development, consulting, and coaching. For more than 40 years, Blanchard has partnered with organizations to maximize individual achievement and organizational performance – bringing measurable progress and true transformation. Blanchard’s SLII® is the global leadership model of choice, powering inspired leaders for more than 10,000 organizations worldwide. Blanchard also offers a suite of award-winning solutions through flexible delivery modalities to meet the specific needs of clients and learners.

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