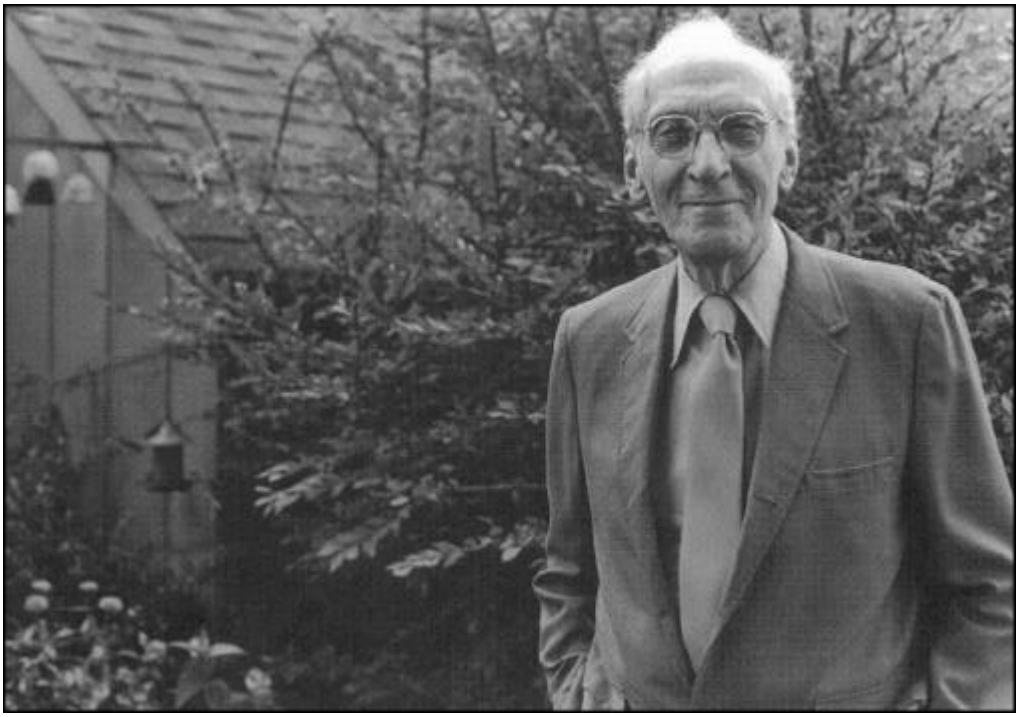
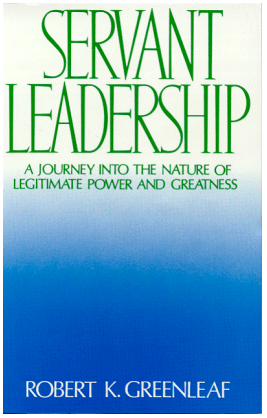


# The Servant as Leader

## by Robert K. Greenleaf



# The Servant as Leader

SERVANT AND LEADER — can these two roles be fused in one real person, in all levels of status or calling? If so, can that person live and be productive in the real world of the present? My sense of the present leads me to say yes to both questions. This paper is an attempt to explain why and to suggest how.

The idea of *The Servant as Leader* came out of reading Hermann Hesse's *Journey to the East*. In this story we see a band of men on a mythical journey, probably also Hesse's own journey. The central figure of the story is Leo who accompanies the party as the *servant* who does their menial chores, but who also sustains them with his spirit and his song. He is a person of extraordinary presence. All goes well until Leo disappears. Then the group falls into disarray and the journey is abandoned. They cannot make it without the servant Leo. The narrator, one of the party, after some years of wandering finds Leo and is taken into the Order that had sponsored the journey. There he discovers that Leo, whom he had known first as *servant*, was in fact the titular head of the Order, its guiding spirit, a great and noble *leader.*

One can muse on what Hesse was trying to say when he wrote this story. We know that most of his fiction was autobiographical, that he led a tortured life, and that *Journey to the East* suggests a turn toward the serenity he achieved in his old age. There has been much speculation by critics on Hesse's life and work, some of it centering on this story which they find the most puzzling. But to me, this story clearly says that *the great leader is seen as servant first,* and that simple fact is the key to his greatness. Leo was actually the leader all of the time, but he was servant first because that was what he was, *deep down inside.*

Leadership was bestowed upon a man who was by nature a servant. It was something given, or assumed, that could be taken away. His servant nature was the real man, not bestowed, not assumed, and not to be taken away. He was servant first. I mention Hesse and *Journey to the East* for two reasons. First, I want to acknowledge the source of the idea of *The Servant as Leader.* Then I want to use this reference as an introduction to a brief discussion of prophecy. Fifteen years ago when I first read about Leo, if I had been listening to contemporary prophecy as intently as I do now, the first draft of this piece might have been written then. As it was, the idea lay dormant for eleven years until, four years ago, I concluded that we in this country were in a leadership crisis and that I should do what I could about it. I became painfully aware of how dull my sense of contemporary prophecy had been. And I have reflected much on why we do not hear and heed the prophetic voices in our midst (not a new question in our times, nor more critical than heretofore) .

I now embrace the theory of prophecy which holds that prophetic voices of great clarity, and with a quality of insight equal to that of any age, are speaking cogently all of the time. Men and women of a stature equal to the greatest of the past are with us now addressing the problems of the day and pointing to a better way and to a personeity better able to live fully and serenely in these times.

The variable that marks some periods as barren and some as rich in prophetic vision is in the interest, the level of seeking, the responsiveness of the hearers. The variable is not in the presence or absence or the relative quality and force of the prophetic voices. Prophets grow in stature as people respond to their message. If their early attempts are ignored or spurned, their talent may wither away.

It is *seekers*, then, who make prophets, and the initiative of anyone of us in searching for and responding to the voice of contemporary prophets may mark the turning point in their growth and service. But since we are the product of our own history, we see current prophecy within the context of past wisdom. We listen to as wide a range of contemporary thought as we can attend to. Then we *choose* those we elect to heed as prophets — both *old and* new — and meld their advice with our own leadings. This we test in real-Iife experiences to establish our own position.

Some who have difficulty with this theory assert that their faith rests on one or more of the prophets of old having given the "word" for all time and that the contemporary ones do not speak to their condition as the older ones do. But if one really believes that the "word" has been given for all time, how can one be a seeker? How can one hear the contemporary voice when one has decided not to live in the present and has turned that voice off?

Neither this hypothesis nor its opposite can be proved. But I submit that the one given here is the more hopeful choice, one that offers a significant role in prophecy to every individual. One cannot interact with and build strength in a dead prophet, but one can do it with a living one. "Faith," Dean Inge has said, "is the choice of the nobler hypothesis".

One does not, of course, ignore the great voices of the past. One does not awaken each morning with the compulsion to reinvent the wheel. But if one is *servant*, either leader or follower, one is always searching, listening, expecting that a better wheel for these times is in the making. It may emerge any day. Anyone of us may find it out from personal experience. I am hopeful.

I am hopeful for these times, despite the tension and conflict, because more natural servants are trying to see clearly the world as it is and are listening carefully to prophetic voices that are speaking *now*. They are challenging the pervasive injustice with greater force and they are taking sharper issue with the wide disparity between the quality of society they know is reasonable and possible with available resources, and, on the other hand, the actual performance of the whole range of institutions that exist to serve society.

A fresh critical look is being taken at the issues of power and authority, and people are beginning to learn, however haltingly, to relate to one another in less coercive and more creatively supporting ways. A new moral principle is emerging which holds that the only authority deserving one's allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader. Those who choose to follow this principle will not casually accept the authority of existing institutions. *Rather, they will freely respond only to individuals who are chosen as leaders because they are proven and trusted as servants.* To the extent that this principle prevails in the future, the only truly viable institutions will be those that are predominantly servant-led.

I am mindful of the long road ahead before these trends, which I see so clearly, become a major society-shaping force. We are not there yet. But I see encouraging movement on the horizon.

What direction will the movement take? Much depends on whether those who stir the ferment will come to grips with the age-old problem of how to live in a human society. I say this because so many, having made their awesome decision for autonomy and independence from tradition, and having taken their firm stand against injustice and hypocrisy, find it hard to convert themselves into *affirmative builders* of a better society. How many of them will seek their personal fulfillment by making the hard choices, and by undertaking the rigorous preparation that building a better society requires? It all depends on what kind of leaders emerge and how they — we — respond to them.

My thesis, that more servants should emerge as leaders, or should follow only servant-leaders, is not a popular one. It is much more comfortable to go with a less demanding point view about what is expected of one now. There are several undemanding, plausibly-argued alternatives to choose. One, since society seems corrupt, is to seek to avoid the center of it by retreating to an idyllic existence that minimizes involvement with the "system" (with the "system" that makes such withdrawal possible). Then there is the assumption that since the effort to reform existing institutions has not brought instant perfection, the remedy is to destroy them completely so that fresh new perfect ones can grow. Not much thought seems to be given to the problem of where the new seed will come from or who the gardener to tend them will be. The concept of the servant-leader stands in sharp contrast to this kind of thinking.

Yet it is understandable that the easier alternatives would be chosen, especially by young people. By extending education for so many so far into the adult years, the normal participation in society is effectively denied when young people are ready for it. With education that is preponderantly abstract and analytical it is no wonder that there is a preoccupation with criticism and that not much thought is given to "What can *I* do about it?"

Criticism has its place, but as a total preoccupation it is sterile. In a time of crisis, like the leadership crisis we are now in, if too many potential builders are taken in by a complete absorption with dissecting the wrong and by a zeal for instant perfection, then the movement so many of us want to see will be set back. The danger, perhaps, is to hear the analyst too much and the artist too little.

Albert Camus stands apart from other great artists of his time, in my view, and deserves the title of *prophet,* because of his unrelenting demand that each of us confront the exacting terms of our own existence, and, like Sisyphus, *accept our rock and find our happiness in dealing with it.* Camus sums up the relevance of his position to our concern for the servant as leader in the last paragraph of his last published lecture, entitled *Create Dangerously:*

> One may long, as I do, for a gentler flame, a respite, a pause for musing. But perhaps there is no other peace for the artist than what he finds in the heat of combat. 'Every wall is a door', Emerson correctly said. Let us not look for the door, and the way out, anywhere but in the wall against which we are living. Instead, let us seek the respite where it is — in the very thick of battle. For in my opinion, and this is where I shall close,

> it is there. Great ideas, it has been said, come into the world as gently as doves. Perhaps, then, if we listen attentively, we shall hear, amid the uproar of empires and nations, a faint flutter of wings, the gentle stirring of life and hope. Some will say that this hope lies in a nation, others, in a man. I believe rather that it is awakened, revived, nourished by millions of solitary individuals whose deeds and works every day negate frontiers and the crudest implications of history. As a result, there shines forth fleetingly the ever-threatened truth that each and every man, on the foundations of his own sufferings and joys, builds for them all.

One is asked, then, to accept the human condition, its sufferings and its joys, and to work with its imperfections as the foundation upon which the individual will build wholeness through adventurous creative achievement. For the person with creative potential there is no wholeness except in using it. And, as Camus explained, the going is rough and the respite is brief. It is significant that he would title his last university lecture *Create Dangerously*. And, as I ponder the fusing of servant and leader, it seems a dangerous creation: dangerous for the natural servant to become a leader, dangerous for the leader to be servant first, and dangerous for a follower to insist on being led by a servant. There are safer and easier alternatives available to all three. But why take them?

As I respond to the challenge of dealing with this question in the ensuing discourse I am faced with two problems.

First, I did not get the notion of the servant as leader from conscious logic. Rather it came to me as an intuitive insight as I contemplated Leo. And I do not see what is relevant from my own searching and experience in terms of a logical progression from premise to conclusion. Rather I see it as fragments of data to be fed into my internal computer from which intuitive insights come. Serving and leading are still mostly intuition-based concepts in my thinking.

The second problem, and related to the first, is that, just as there may be a real contradiction in the servant as leader, so my perceptual world is full of contradictions. Some examples: I believe in order, and I want creation out of chaos. My good society will have strong individualism amidst community. It will have elitism along with populism. I listen to the old and to the young and find myself baffled and heartened by both. Reason and intuition, each in its own way, both comfort and dismay me. There are many more. Yet, with all of this, I believe that I live with as much serenity as do my contemporaries who venture into controversy as freely as I do but whose natural bent is to tie up the essentials of life in neat bundles of logic and consistency. But I am deeply grateful to the people who are logical and consistent because some of them, out of their natures, render invaluable services for which I am not capable.

My resolution of these two problems is to offer the relevant gleanings of my experience in the form of a series of unconnected little essays, some developed more fully than others, with the suggestion that they be read and pondered on separately within the context of this opening section.

## Who Is the Servant-leader?

The servant-leader *is* servant first — as Leo was portrayed. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is *leader* first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. For such it will be a later choice to serve — after leadership is established. The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served,* become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And,* what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?

As one sets out to serve, how can one know that this will be the result? This is part of the human dilemma; one cannot know for sure. One must, after some study and experience, hypothesize — but leave the hypothesis under a shadow of doubt. Then one acts on the hypothesis and examines the result. One continues to study and learn and periodically one re-examines the hypothesis itself.

Finally, one chooses again. Perhaps one chooses the same hypothesis again and again. But it is always a fresh open choice. And it is always an hypothesis under a shadow of doubt. "Faith is the choice of the nobler hypothesis." Not the *noblest;* one never knows what that is. But the *nobler,* the best one can see when the choice is made. Since the test of results of one's actions is usually long delayed, the faith that sustains the choice of the nobler hypothesis is psychological self-insight. This is the most dependable part of the true servant.

The natural servant, the person who is *servant first,* is more likely to persevere and refine a particular hypothesis on what serves another's highest priority needs than is the person who is *leader first* and who later serves out of promptings of conscience or in conformity with normative expectations.

My hope for the future rests in part on my belief that among the legions of deprived and unsophisticated people are many true servants who will lead, and that most of them can learn to discriminate among those who presume to serve them and identify the true servants whom they will follow.

## Everything Begins with the Initiative of an Individual

The forces for good and evil in the world are propelled by the thoughts, attitudes, and actions of individual beings. What happens to our values, and therefore to the quality of our civilization in the future, will be shaped by the conceptions of individuals that are born of inspiration. Perhaps only a few will receive this inspiration (insight) and the rest will learn from them. The very essence of leadership, going out ahead to show the way, derives

from more than usual openness to inspiration. Why would anybody accept the leadership of another except that the other sees more clearly where it is best to go? Perhaps this is the current problem: too many who presume to lead do not see more clearly and, in defense of their inadequacy, they all the more strongly argue that the "system" must be preserved — a fatal error in this day of candor .

But the leader needs more than inspiration. A leader ventures to say: "I will go; come with me!" A leader initiates, provides the ideas and the structure, and takes the risk of failure along with the chance of success. A leader says: "I will go; follow me!" while knowing that the path is uncertain, even dangerous. One then trusts those who go with one's leadership.

Paul Goodman, speaking through a character in *Making Do,* has said, "If there is no community for you, young man, young man, make it yourself."

## What Are You Trying to Do?

"What are you trying to do?" is one of the easiest to ask and most difficult to answer of questions.

A mark of leaders, an attribute that puts them in a position to show the way for others, is that they are better than most at pointing the direction. As long as one is leading, one always has a goal. It may be a goal arrived at by group consensus, or the leader, acting on inspiration, may simply have said, "Let's go this way." But the leader always knows what it is and can articulate it for any who are unsure. By clearly stating and restating the goal the leader gives certainty and purpose to others who may have difficulty in achieving it for themselves.

The word *goal* is used here in the special sense of the overarching purpose, the big dream, the visionary concept, the ultimate consummation which one approaches but never really achieves. It is something presently out of reach; it is something to strive for, to move toward, or become. It is so stated that it excites the imagination and challenges people to work for something they do not yet know how to do, something they can be proud of as they move toward it.

Every achievement starts with a goal — but not just any goal and not just anybody stating it. The one who states the goal must elicit trust, especially if it is a high risk or visionary goal, because those who follow are asked to accept the risk along with the leader. Leaders do not elicit trust unless one has confidence in their values and competence (including judgment) and unless they have a sustaining spirit (entheos) that will support the tenacious pursuit of a goal.

Not much happens without a dream. And for something great to happen, there must be a great dream. Behind every great achievement is a dreamer of great dreams. Much more than a dreamer is required to bring it to reality; but the dream must be there first.

## Listening and Understanding

One of our very able leaders recently was made the head of a large, important, and difficult-to-administer public institution. After a short time he realized that he was not happy with the way things were going. His approach to the problem was a bit unusual. For three months he stopped reading newspapers and listening to news broadcasts; and for this period he relied wholly on those he met in the course of his work to tell him what was going on. In three months his administrative problems were resolved. No miracles were wrought; but out of a sustained intentness of listening that was produced by this unusual decision, this able man learned and received the insights needed to set the right course. And he strengthened his team by so doing.

Why is there so little listening? What makes this example so exceptional? Part of it, I believe, with those who lead, is that the usual leader in the face of a difficulty tends to react by trying to find someone else on whom to pin the problem, rather than by automatically responding: "I have a problem. What is it? What can I do about my problem?" The sensible person who takes the latter course will probably react by listening, and somebody in the situation is likely to say what the problem is and what should be done about it. Or enough will be heard that there will be an intuitive insight that resolves it.

I have a bias about this which suggests that only a true natural servant automatically responds to any problem by listening first. When one is a leader, this disposition causes one to be *seen* as servant first. This suggests that a non-servant who wants to be a servant might become a natural servant through a long arduous discipline of learning to listen, a discipline sufficiently sustained that the automatic response to any problem is to listen first. I have seen enough remarkable transformations in people who have been trained to listen to have some confidence in this approach. It is because true listening builds strength in other people.

Most of us at one time or another, some of us a good deal of the time, would really like to communicate, really get through to a significant level of meaning in the hearer's experience. It can be terribly important. The best test of whether we are communicating at this depth is to ask ourselves first: Are we really listening? Are we listening to the one we want to communicate to? Is our basic attitude, as we approach the confrontation, one of wanting to understand? Remember that great line from the prayer of St. Francis, "Lord, grant that I may not seek so much to be understood as to understand."

One must not be afraid of a little silence. Some find silence awkward or oppressive, but a relaxed approach to dialogue will include the welcoming of some silence. It is often a devastating question to ask oneself — but it is sometimes important to ask it — "In saying what I have in mind will I really improve on the silence?"

## Language and Imagination

Alfred North Whitehead once said, "No language can be anything but elliptical, requiring a leap of imagination to understand its meaning in its relevance to immediate

experience." Nothing is meaningful until it is related to the hearer's own experience. One may hear the words, one may even remember them and repeat them, as a computer does in the retrieval process. But *meaning*, a growth in experience as a result of receiving the communication, requires that the hearer supply the imaginative link from the hearer's fund of experience to the abstract language symbols the speaker has used. As a leader (including teacher, coach, administrator) one must have facility in tempting the hearer into that leap of imagination that connects the verbal concept to the hearer's own experience. The limitation on language, to the communicator, is that the *hearer* must make that leap of imagination. One of the arts of communicating is to say just enough to facilitate that leap. Many attempts to communicate are nullified by saying too much.

The physicist and philosopher Percy Bridgman takes another view of it when he says, "No linguistic structure is capable of reproducing the full complexity of experience. ...The only feasible way of dealing with this is to push a particular verbal line of attack as far as it can go, and then switch to another verbal level which we might abandon when we have to ... Many people ... insist on a single self-consistent verbal scheme into which they try to force all experience. In doing this they create a purely verbal world in which they can live a pretty autonomous existence, fortified by the ability of many of their fellows to live in the same verbal world." This, of course, is what makes a cult — a group of people who thus isolate themselves from the evolving mainstream. By staying within their own closed verbal world they forfeit the opportunity to lead others. One of the great tragedies is when a proven able leader becomes trapped in one of these closed verbal worlds and loses the ability to lead.

A commentator once observed: "If you have something important to communicate, if you can possibly manage it — put your hand over your mouth and point." Someday we will learn what a great handicap language is.

## Withdrawal — Finding One's Optimum

People who go for leadership (whether they are servants or non-servants) may be viewed as one of two extreme types. There are those who are so constituted physically and emotionally that they like pressure — seek it out — and they perform best when they are totally intense. And there are those who do not like pressure, do not thrive under it, but who want to lead and are willing to endure the pressure in order to have the opportunity. The former welcome a happy exhaustion and the latter are constantly in defense against that state. For both the art of withdrawal is useful. To the former it is a change of pace; to the latter it is a defense against an unpleasant state. The former may be more the natural leader; the latter needs a tactic to survive. The art of withdrawal serves them both.

The ability to withdraw and reorient oneself, if only for a moment, presumes that one has learned the art of systematic neglect, to sort out the more important from the less important — and the important from the urgent — and attend to the more important, even though there may be penalties and censure for the neglect of something else. One may govern one's life by the law of the optimum (optimum being that pace and set of choices that give one the best performance over a lifespan) — bearing in mind that there are always emergencies and the optimum includes carrying an unused reserve of energy in

all periods of normal demand so that one has the resilience to cope with the emergency.

Pacing oneself by appropriate withdrawal is one of the best approaches to making optimal use of one's resources. The servant-as-leader must constantly ask: How can I use myself to serve best?

## Acceptance and Empathy

These are two interesting words, acceptance and empathy. If we can take one dictionary's definition, *acceptance* is receiving what is offered, with approbation, satisfaction, or acquiescence, and *empathy* is the imaginative projection of one's own consciousness into another being. The opposite of both, the word *reject*, is to refuse to hear or receive — to throw out.

The servant always accepts and empathizes, never rejects. The servant as leader always empathizes, always accepts the person but sometimes refuses to accept some of the person's effort or performance as good enough.

A college president once said, "An educator may be rejected by students and must not object to this. But one may never, under any circumstances, regardless of what they do, reject a single student."

We have known this a long time in the family. For a family to be a family, no one can ever be rejected. Robert Frost in his poem "The Death of the Hired Man" states the problem in a conversation on the farmhouse porch between the farmer and his wife about the shiftless hired man, Silas, who has come back to their place to die. The farmer is irritated about this because Silas was lured away from his farm in the middle of the last haying season. The wife says that theirs is the only home he has. They are then drawn into a discussion of what a home is. The husband gives his view:

"Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in."

The wife sees it differently. What is a home? She says, "I should have called it something you somehow haven't to deserve."

Because of the vagaries of human nature, the halt, the lame, half-made creatures that we all are, the great leader (whether it is the mother in her home or the head of a vast organization) would say what the wife said about home in Robert Frost's poem. The interest in and affection for one's followers which a leader has — and it is a mark of true greatness when it is genuine — is clearly something the followers "haven't to deserve." Great leaders, including "little" people, may have gruff, demanding, uncompromising exteriors. But deep down inside the great ones have empathy and an unqualified acceptance of the persons of those who go with their leadership.

Acceptance of the person, though, requires a tolerance of imperfection. Anybody could lead perfect people — if there were any. But there aren't any perfect people. And the parents who try to raise perfect children are certain to raise neurotics.

It is part of the enigma of human nature that the "typical" person — immature, stumbling, inept, lazy — is capable of great dedication and heroism *if* wisely led. Many

otherwise able people are disqualified to lead because they cannot work with and through the half-people who are all there are. The secret of institution building is to be able to weld a team of such people by lifting them up to grow taller than they would otherwise be.

People grow taller when those who lead them empathize and when they are accepted for what they are, even though their performance may be judged critically in terms of what they are capable of doing. Leaders who empathize and who fully accept those who go with them on this basis are more likely to be trusted.

## Know the Unknowable — Beyond Conscious Rationality

The requirements of leadership impose some intellectual demands that are not measured by academic intelligence ratings. They are not mutually exclusive but they are different things. The leader needs two intellectual abilities that are usually not formally assessed in an academic way: he needs to have *a sense for the unknowable* and be able to *foresee the unforeseeable.* Leaders know some things and foresee some things which those they are presuming to lead do not know or foresee as clearly. This is partly what gives leaders their "lead," what puts them out ahead and qualifies them to show the way.

Until quite recently many would attribute these qualities of knowing the unknowable and foreseeing the unforeseeable to mystical or supernatural gifts — and some still do. Now it is possible at least to speculate about them within a framework of natural law. The electrical body-field theory suggests the possibility of an interconnection between fields and could explain telepathy. Some are willing to explore the possibility of memory traces being physical entities, thus providing a basis for explaining clairvoyance. In far-out theorizing, every mind, at the unconscious level, has access to every "bit" of information that is or ever was. Those among us who seem to have unusual access to these "data banks" are called "sensitives". What we now call intuitive insight may be the survivor of an earlier and greater sensitivity. Much of this is highly speculative but it is inside the bounds of what some scientific minds are willing to ponder within the framework of what is known about natural phenomena. Information recall under hypnosis is suggestive of what is potentially available from the unconscious.

What is the relevance of this somewhat fanciful theory to the issue at hand, the thought process of a leader? One contemporary student of decision making put it this way: " If, on a practical decision in the world of affairs, you are waiting for *all* of the information for a good decision, it never comes." There always is more information, sometimes a great deal more, that one might have if one waited longer or worked harder to get it — but the delay and the cost are not warranted. On an important decision one rarely has one hundred percent of the information needed for a good decision no matter how much one spends or how long one waits. And if one waits too long, one has a different problem and has to start all over. This is a terrible dilemma of the hesitant decision maker.

As a practical matter, on most important decisions there is an information gap. There usually is an information gap between the solid information in hand and what is needed. The art of leadership rests, in part, on the ability to bridge that gap by intuition, that is, a

judgment from the unconscious process. The person who is better at this than most is likely to emerge the leader because of the ability to contribute something of great value. Others will depend on such persons to go out ahead and show the way because their judgment will be better than most. Leaders, therefore, must be more creative than most; and creativity is largely discovery, a push into the uncharted and the unknown. Every once in a while a leader needs to think like a scientist, an artist, or a poet. And a leader's thought processes may be just as fanciful as theirs — and as fallible.

Intuition is a *feel* for patterns, the ability to generalize based on what has happened previously. Wise leaders know when to bet on these intuitive leads, but they always know that they are betting on percentages. Their hunches are not seen as eternal truths.

Two separate "anxiety" processes may be involved in a leader's intuitive decision, an important aspect of which is timing, the decision to decide. One is the anxiety of holding the decision until as much information as possible is in. The other is the anxiety of making the decision when there really isn't enough information — which, on critical decisions, is usually the case. All of this is complicated by pressures building up from those who "want an answer." Again, trust is at the root of it. Has the leader a really good information base (both hard data and sensitivity to feelings and needs of people) and a reputation for consistently good decisions that people respect? Can the leader defuse the anxiety of other people who want more certainty than exists in the situation?

Intuition in a leader is more valued, and therefore more trusted, at the conceptual level. An intuitive answer to an immediate situation can be a gimmick and conceptually defective. Overarching conceptual insight that gives a sounder framework for decisions (so important, for instance, in foreign policy) is the greater gift.

## Foresight —The Central Ethic of Leadership

The common assumption about the word "now" is that it is this instant moment of clock time — *now*. In usage, we qualify this a little by saying *right now*, meaning this instant, or *about now*, allowing a little leeway. Sometimes we say, "I'm going to do it now," meaning "I'm going to start soon and do it in the near future," or "I have just now done it," meaning that I did it in the recent past. The dictionary admits all of these variations of usage.

Let us liken "now" to the spread of light from a narrowly focused beam. There is a bright intense center, this moment of clock time, and a diminishing intensity, theoretically out to infinity, on either side. As viewed here, *now* includes *all* of this — all of history and all of the future. As one approaches the central focus, the light intensifies as this moment of clock time is approached. All of it is *now* but some parts are more *now* than others, and the central focus which marks this instant of clock time moves along as the clock ticks. *This is not the way it is!* It is simply an analogy to suggest a way of looking at *now* for those who wish better to see the unforeseeable — a mark of a leader.

Prescience, or foresight, is a better than average guess about *what* is going to happen *when* in the future. It begins with a state of mind about *now*, something like that suggested by the light analogy. What we note in the present moment of clock time is merely the

intense focus that is connected with what has gone on in the past and what will happen in the future. The prescient man has a sort of "moving average" mentality (to borrow a statistician's term) in which past, present, and future are one, bracketed together and moving along as the clock ticks. The process is continuous.

Machiavelli, writing three hundred years ago about how to be a prince, put it this way. "Thus it happens in matters of state; for knowing afar off (which it is only given a prudent man to do) the evils that are brewing, they are easily cured. But when, for want of such knowledge, they are allowed to grow so that everyone can recognize them, there is no longer any remedy to be found." The shape of some future events can be calculated from trend data. But, as with a practical decision mentioned earlier, there is usually an information gap that has to be bridged, and one must cultivate the conditions that favor intuition. This is what Machiavelli meant when he said "knowing afar off (which it is only given a prudent man to do)." The prudent man is one who constantly thinks of "now" as the moving concept in which past, present moment, and future, are one organic unity. And this requires living by a sort of rhythm that encourages a high level of intuitive insight about the whole gamut of events from the indefinite past, through the present moment, to the indefinite future. One is at once, in every moment of time, historian, contemporary analyst, and prophet — not three separate roles. This is what the practicing leader is, every day of his life.

Living this way is partly a matter of *faith.* Stress is a condition of most of modern life, and if one is a servant-leader and carrying the burdens of other people — going out ahead to show the way, one takes the rough and tumble (and it really is rough and tumble in some leader roles) — one takes this in the belief that, if one enters a situation prepared with the necessary experience and knowledge at the conscious level, *in the situation* the intuitive insight necessary for one's optimal performance will be forthcoming. Is there any other way, in the turbulent world of affairs (including the typical home), for one to maintain serenity in the face of uncertainty? One follows the steps of the creative process which require that one stay with conscious analysis as far as it will carry one, and then withdraw, release the analytical pressure, if only for a moment, in full confidence that a resolving insight will come. The concern with the past and future is gradually attenuated as this span of concern goes forward or backward from the instant moment. The ability to do this is the essential structural dynamic of leadership.

Foresight is seen as a wholly rational process, the product of a constantly running internal computer that deals with intersecting series and random inputs and is vastly more complicated than anything technology has yet produced. Foresight means regarding the events of the instant moment and constantly comparing them with a series of projections made in the past and at the same time projecting future events — with diminishing certainty as projected time runs out into the indefinite future.

The failure (or refusal) of a leader to foresee may be viewed as an *ethical* failure, because a serious ethical compromise today (when the usual judgment on ethical inadequacy is made) is sometimes the result of a failure to make the effort at an earlier date to foresee today's events and take the right actions when there was freedom for initiative to act. The action which society labels "unethical" in the present moment is often really one of no choice. By this standard a lot of guilty people are walking around with an air of

innocence that they would not have if society were able always to pin the label "unethical" on the failure to foresee and the consequent failure to act constructively when there was freedom to act.

Foresight is the "lead" that the leader has. Once leaders lose this lead and events start to force their hand, they are leaders in name only. They are not leading, but are reacting to immediate events, and they probably will not long be leaders. There are abundant current examples of loss of leadership which stem from a failure to foresee what reasonably could have been foreseen, and from failure to act on that knowledge while the leader had freedom to act.

There is a wealth of experience available on how to achieve this perspective of foresight, but only one aspect is mentioned here. Required is that one live a sort of schizoid life. One is always at two levels of consciousness. One is in the real world — concerned, responsible, effective, value oriented. One is also detached, riding above it, seeing today's events, and seeing oneself deeply involved in today's events, in the perspective of a long sweep of history and projected into the indefinite future. Such a split enables one better to foresee the unforeseeable. Also, from one level of consciousness, each of us acts resolutely from moment to moment on a set of assumptions that then govern one's life. Simultaneously, from another level, the adequacy of these assumptions is examined, in action, with the aim of future revision and improvement. Such a view gives one the perspective that makes it possible for one to live and act in the real world with a clearer conscience.

## Awareness and Perception

Framing all of this is awareness, opening wide the doors of perception so as to enable one to get more of what is available of sensory experience and other signals from the environment than people usually take in. Awareness has its risks, but it makes life more interesting; certainly it strengthens one's effectiveness as a leader. When one is aware, there is more than the usual alertness, more intense contact with the immediate situation, and more is stored away in the unconscious computer to produce intuitive in- sights in the future when needed.

William Blake has said, "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything will appear to man as it is, infinite." Those who have gotten their doors of perception open wide enough often enough know that this statement of Blake's is not mere poetic exaggeration. Most of us move about with very narrow perception — sight, sound, smell, tactile — and we miss most of the grandeur that is in the minutest thing, the smallest experience. We also miss leadership opportunities. There is danger, however. Some people cannot take what they see when the doors of perception are open too wide, and they had better test their tolerance for awareness gradually. A qualification for leadership is that one can tolerate a sustained wide span of awareness so that one better "sees it as it is".

The opening of awareness stocks both the conscious and unconscious minds with a richness of resources for future need. But it does more than that: it is value building and value clarifying and it armors one to meet the stress of life by helping build serenity in the

face of stress and uncertainty. The cultivation of awareness gives one the basis for detachment, the ability to stand aside and see oneself in perspective in the context of one's own experience, amidst the ever present dangers, threats, and alarms. Then one sees one's own peculiar assortment of obligations and responsibilities in a way that permits one to sort out the urgent from the important and perhaps deal with the important. Awareness is not a giver of solace — it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed. They are not seekers after solace. They have their own inner serenity.

Leaders must have more of an armor of confidence in facing the unknown — more than those who accept their leadership. This is partly anticipation and preparation, but it is also a very firm belief that in the stress of real life situations one can compose oneself in a way that permits the creative process to operate.

This is told dramatically in one of the great stories of the human spirit — the story of Jesus when confronted with the woman taken in adultery. In this story Jesus is seen as a man, like all of us, with extraordinary prophetic insight of the kind we all have to some degree. He is a leader; he has a goal — to bring more compassion into the lives of people.

In this scene the woman is cast down before him by the mob that is challenging Jesus' leadership. They cry, "The *law* says she shall be stoned. What do *you* say?" Jesus must make a decision; he must give the *right* answer, *right* in the situation, and one that sustains his leadership toward his goal. The situation is deliberately stressed by his challengers. What does he do?

He sits there writing in the sand — a withdrawal device. In the pressure of the moment, having assessed the situation rationally, he assumes the attitude of withdrawal that will allow creative insight to function.

He could have taken another course; he could have regaled the mob with rational arguments about the superiority of compassion over torture. A good logical argument can be made for it. What would the result have been had he taken that course?

He did not choose to do that. He chose instead to withdraw and cut the stress — right in the event itself — in order to open his *awareness* to creative insight. And a great one came, one that has kept the story of the incident alive for two thousand years: "Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone."

## Persuasion-Sometimes One Man at a Time

Leaders work in wondrous ways. Some assume great institutional burdens, others quietly deal with one person at a time. Such a man was John Woolman, an American Quaker, who lived through the middle years of the eighteenth century. He is known to the world of scholarship for his journal, a literary classic. But in the area of our interest, leadership, he is the man who almost singlehandedly rid the Society of Friends (Quakers) of slaves.

It is difficult now to imagine the Quakers as slaveholders, as indeed it is difficult now to imagine anyone being a slaveholder . One wonders how the society of two hundred

years hence will view "what man has made of man." in our generation. It is a disturbing thought.

But many of the eighteenth-century American Quakers were affluent, conservative slaveholders, and John Woolman, as a young man, set his goal to rid his beloved Society of this terrible practice. Thirty of his adult years (he lived to age fifty-two) were largely devoted to this. By 1770, nearly one hundred years before the Civil War, no Quakers held slaves.

His method was unique. He didn't raise a big storm about it or start a protest movement. His method was one of gentle but clear and persistent persuasion.

Although John Woolman was not a strong man physically, he accomplished his mission by journeys up and down the East Coast by foot or horseback visiting slaveholders — over a period of many years. The approach was not to censure the slaveholders in a way that drew their animosity. Rather the burden of his approach was to raise questions: What does the owning of slaves do to you as a moral person? What kind of an institution are you binding over to your children? Man by man, inch by inch, by persistently returning and revisiting and pressing his gentle arguments over a period of thirty years, the scourge of slavery was eliminated from this Society, the first religious group in America formally to denounce and forbid slavery among its members.

One wonders what would have been the result if there had been fifty John Woolmans, or even five, traveling the length and breadth of the Colonies in the eighteenth century *persuading* people one by one with gentle non-judgmental argument that a wrong should be righted by individual voluntary action. Perhaps we would not have had the war with six hundred thousand casualties and the impoverishment of the South, and with the resultant vexing social problem that is at fever heat one hundred years later with no end in sight. We know now, in the perspective of history, that just a slight alleviation of the tension in the 1850's might have avoided the war. A few John Woolmans, just a *few*, might have made the difference. Leadership by persuasion has the virtue of change by convincement rather than coercion. Its advantages are obvious.

John Woolman exerted his leadership in an age that must have looked as dark to him as ours does to us today. We may easily write off his effort as a suggestion for today on the assumption that the Quakers were ethically conditioned for this approach. All persons are so conditioned, to some extent — enough to gamble on.

## One Action at a Time — The Way Some Great Things Get Done

Two things about Thomas Jefferson are of special interest here. First, as a young man he had the good fortune to find a mentor, George Wythe, a Williamsburg lawyer whose original house still stands in the restored village. George Wythe was a substantial man of his times, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a member of the Constitutional Convention. But his chief claim to fame is as Thomas Jefferson's mentor. It was probably the influence of mentor on understudy, as Jefferson studied law in Wythe's office, that moved Jefferson toward his place in history and somewhat away from his natural disposition to settle down at Monticello as an eccentric Virginia scholar (which he

remained, partly, despite Wythe's influence). The point of mentioning George Wythe is that old people may have a part to play in helping the potential servant-as-leader to emerge at his optimal best.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Jefferson, more important in history than the Declaration of Independence or his later term as President, was what he did during the war. With the publication of the Declaration the war was on and Jefferson was importuned to take important roles in the war. But he turned them all down. *He knew who he was* and he resolved to be his own man. He chose his own role. He went back to Virginia and didn't leave the state for the duration of the war.

Jefferson believed that the war would be won by the Colonies, that there would be a new nation, and that that nation would need a new system of law to set it on the course that he had dreamed for it in the Declaration of Independence. So he went back to Monticello, got himself elected to the Virginia legislature, and proceeded to write new statutes embodying the new principles of law for the new nation. He set out, against the determined opposition of his conservative colleagues, to get these enacted into Virginia law. It was an uphill fight. He would go to Williamsburg and wrestle with his colleagues until he was slowed to a halt. Then he would get on his horse and ride back to Monticello to rekindle his spirit and write some more statutes. Armed with these he would return to Williamsburg and take another run at it. He wrote one hundred and fifty statutes in that period and got fifty of them enacted into law, the most notable being separation of church and state. For many years Virginia legislators were digging into the remaining one hundred as new urgent problems made their consideration advisable.

When the Constitution was drafted some years later Jefferson wasn't even around; he was in France as our Ambassador. He didn't have to be around. He had done his work and made his contribution in the statutes already operating in Virginia. Such are the wondrous ways in which leaders do their work — when they know who they are and resolve to be their own men and will accept making their way to their goal by one action at a time, with a lot of frustration along the way.

## Conceptualizing — The Prime Leadership Talent

Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig, whose adult life was the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century, is known as the Father of the Danish Folk High Schools. To understand the significance of the Folk High School one needs to know a little of the unique history of Denmark. Since it is a tiny country, not many outside it know this history, and consequently Grundtvig and his seminal contribution are little known. A great church dedicated to his memory in Copenhagen attests the Danish awareness of what he did for them.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Denmark was a feudal and absolute monarchy. It was predominantly agricultural, with a large peasant population of serfs who were attached to manors. Early in the century reforms began which gave the land to the peasants as individual holdings. Later the first steps toward representative government were taken.

A chronicler of those times reports: “The Danish peasantry at the beginning of the nineteenth century was an underclass. In sullen resignation it spent its life in dependence on estate owners and government officials. It was without culture and technical skill, and it was seldom able to rise above the level of bare existence. The agricultural reforms of that time were carried through without the support of the peasants, who did not even understand the meaning of them. ... All the reforms were made *for the sake of the peasant*, but not *by* him. In the course of the century this underclass has been changed into a well-to-do middle class which, politically and socially, now takes the lead among the Danish people.”

Freedom — to own land and to vote — was not enough to bring about these changes. A new form of education was designed by Grundtvig explicitly to achieve this transformation. Grundtvig was a theologian, poet, and student of history. Although he himself was a scholar, he believed in the active practical life and he conceptualized a school, the Folk High School, as a short intensive residence course for young adults dealing with the history, mythology, and poetry of the Danish people. He addressed himself to the masses rather than to the cultured. The “cultured” at the time thought him to be a confused visionary and contemptuously turned their backs on him. But the peasants heard him, and their natural leaders responded to his call to start the Folk High Schools — with their own resources.

“The spirit (not knowledge) is power.” “The living word in the mother tongue.” “Real life is the final test,” as contrasted with the German and Danish tendency to theorize. These were some of the maxims that guided the new schools of the people. For fifty years of his long life Grundtvig vigorously and passionately advocated these new schools as the means whereby the peasants could raise themselves into *the* Danish national culture. And, stimulated by the Folk High School experience, the peasant youth began to attend agricultural schools and to build cooperatives on the model borrowed from England.

Two events provided the challenge that matured the new peasant movement and brought it into political and social dominance by the end of the century. There was a disastrous war with Prussia in 1864, which resulted in a substantial loss of territory and a crushing blow to national aspiration. And then, a little later, there was the loss of world markets for corn, their major exportable crop, as a result of the agricultural abundance of the New World.

Peasant initiative, growing out of the spiritual dynamic generated by the Folk High Schools, recovered the nation from both of these shocks by transforming its exportable surplus from corn to “butter and bacon,” by rebuilding the national spirit, and by nourishing the Danish tradition in the territory lost to Germany during the long years until it was returned after World War I.

All of this, a truly remarkable social, political, and economic transformation, stemmed from one man’s conceptual leadership. Grundtvig himself did not found or operate a Folk High School, although he lectured widely in them. What he gave was his love for the peasants, his clear vision of what they must do for themselves, his long articulate dedication — some of it through very barren years — and his passionately communicated faith in the worth of these people and their strength to raise themselves — *if only their spirit*

*could be aroused.* It is a great story of the supremacy of the spirit.

## And Now!

These three examples from previous centuries illustrate very different types of leadership for the common good. They are not suggested as general models for today, although some useful hints may be found in them. What these examples tell us is that the leadership of trailblazers like Woolman, Jefferson, and Grundtvig is so "situational" that it rarely draws on known models. Rather it seems to be a fresh creative response to here-and-now opportunities. Too much concern with how others did it may be inhibitive. One wonders, in these kaleidoscopic times, what kind of contemporary leadership effort will be seen as seminal one hundred years from now, as we can now see the three I have described. Let me speculate.

The signs of the times suggest that, to future historians, the next thirty years will be marked as the period when the dark skinned and the deprived and the alienated of the world effectively asserted their claims to stature, and that they were not led by a privileged elite (like Woolman, Jefferson, and Grundtvig) but by exceptional people from their own kind.

It may be that the best that some of today's privileged can do is to stand aside and serve by helping when asked *and* as instructed. Even the conceptualizing may be done better, not by an elite as Grundtvig did it in his times, but by leaders from among the dark skinned, the alienated, and the deprived of the world. A possible role for those who are now favored by the old rules may be, as Miguel Serrano has said, that of diving under this big wave and taking with them the accumulated wisdom as they see it, in the hope of coming up on the other side prepared to make it available when the turbulence of these times has passed and the dark skinned and the deprived and the alienated have found their way and can freely choose that which they find useful from what the now-privileged have stored away. Not many of today's privileged may elect this course. But those among them who see themselves as *servants first* may want to consider it as a possible best course for them.

I do not have the prescience to know what will come of all of this. And I am not predicting a golden age, not soon. But I do believe that *some* of those of today's privileged who will live into the twenty-first century will find it interesting *if* they can abandon their present notions of how they can best serve their less favored neighbor and wait and listen until the less favored find their own enlightenment, then define their needs in their own way and, finally, state clearly how they want to be served. The now-privileged who are natural servants may in this process get a fresh perspective on the priority of others' needs and thus they may again be able to serve by leading. In the meantime, Paulo Freire has offered the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to ponder while they heed John Milton's advice, "They also serve who only stand and wait."

For those of today's privileged who feel more like joining the fray and serving and leading actively as best they can during what promises to be a long period of unusual turbulence, Woolman, Jefferson, and Grundtvig are suggested as models to be studied

closely. Study them not to copy the details of their methods but as examples of highly creative men, each of whom invented a role that was uniquely appropriate for him as an individual, that drew heavily on his strengths and demanded little that was unnatural for him, and that was very right for the time and place he happened to be.

## Healing and Serving

Twelve ministers and theologians of all faiths and twelve psychiatrists of all faiths had convened for a two-day off-the-record seminar on the one-word theme of *healing.* The chairman, a psychiatrist, opened the seminar with this question: "We are all healers, whether we are ministers or doctors. Why are we in this business? What is our motivation?" There followed only ten minutes of intense discussion and they were all agreed, doctors and ministers, Catholics, Jews, and Protestants. "For our own healing," they said.

This is an interesting word, healing, with its meaning, "to make whole." The example above suggests that one really never makes it. It is always something sought. Perhaps, as with the minister and the doctor, the servant-leader might also acknowledge that his own healing is his motivation. There is something subtle communicated to one who is being served and led if, implicit in the compact between servant-leader and led, is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something they share.

Alcoholics Anonymous is regarded by some who know as recovering more alcoholics from this dreadful illness than all other approaches combined. Legend has it that the founding meeting to incorporate the organization was held in the office of a noted philanthropist, a very wealthy man. In the course of the discussion of the principles that would guide the new organization, the philanthropist made a statement something like this: "From my experience I think I know about the things that can be done with money and the things that cannot be done with money. What you in AA want to do cannot be done with money. You must be poor. You must not use money to do your work."

There was more conversation but this advice profoundly influenced the course of AA. The principles that have guided the work of AA over the years were born at that meeting: they will be poor; no one but an alcoholic can contribute money to AA's modest budget; AA will own no real property; the essential work of AA, one recovered (or partly recovered) alcoholic helping another toward recovery, will not be done for money.

Here are two quite different perspectives on healing and serving. Whether professional or amateur, the motive for the healing is the same: for one's own healing.

## Community — The Lost Knowledge of These Times

Men and women once lived in communities, and, in the developing world, many still do. Human society can be much better than it is (or was) in primitive communities. But if community itself is lost in the process of development, will what is put in its place survive? At the moment there seems to be some question. What is our experience?

Within my memory, we once cared for orphaned children in institutions. We have largely abandoned these institutions as not good for children. Children need the love of a real home — in a family, a community.

Now we realize that penal institutions, other than focusing the retributive vengeance of society and restraining anti-social actions for a period, do very little to rehabilitate. In fact they dehabilitate and return more difficult offenders to society. What should we do with these people? It is now suggested that most of them should be kept in homes, in community.

There is now the beginning of questioning of the extensive building of hospitals. We need some hospitals for extreme cases. But much of the recent expansion has been done for the convenience of doctors and families, not for the good of patients — or even for the good of families. Only community can give the healing love that is essential for health. Besides, the skyrocketing cost of such extensive hospital care is putting an intolerable burden on health-care systems.

The *school,* on which we pinned so much of our hopes for a better society, has become too much a social-upgrading mechanism that destroys community. Now we have the beginnings of questioning of the school as we know it, as a specialized, separate-from-community institution. And much of the alienation and purposelessness of our times is laid at the door, *not of education,* but of the *school.*

We are in the process of moving away from institutional care for the mentally retarded and toward small community-like homes. Recent experience suggests that, whereas the former provides mostly custodial care, the small community can actually lift them up, help them grow.

Now the care of old people is a special concern, because there are so many more of them and they live so much longer. But the current trend is to put them in retirement homes that segregate the old from normal community. Already there is the suggestion that these are not the happy places that were hoped for . Will retirement homes shortly be abandoned as orphan homes were?

As a generalization, I suggest that human service that requires love cannot be satisfactorily dispensed by specialized institutions that exist apart from community, that take the problem out of sight of the community. Both those being cared for and the community suffer.

*Love* is an undefinable term, and its manifestations are both subtle and infinite. But it begins, I believe, with one absolute condition: unlimited liability! As soon as one's liability for another is qualified *to any degree,* love is diminished by that much.

Institutions, as we know them, are designed to limit liability for those who serve through them. In the British tradition, corporations are not "INC" as we know them, but "LTD" — Limited. Most of the goods and services we now depend on will probably continue to be furnished by such limited liability institutions. But any human service where the one who is served should be loved in the process requires community, a face-to-face group in which the liability of each for the other and all for one is unlimited, or as close to it as it is possible to get. Trust and respect are highest in this circumstance and an accepted ethic that gives strength to all is reinforced. Where there is not community, trust, respect,

and ethical behavior are difficult for the young to learn and for the old to maintain. Living in community as one's basic involvement will generate an exportable surplus of love which the individual may carry into his many involvements with institutions which are usually not communities: businesses, churches, governments, schools.

Out of the distress of our seeming community-less society, hopeful new forms of community are emerging: young people's communes, Israeli kibbutzes, and therapeutic communities like Synanon. Seen through the bias of conventional morality, the communes are sometimes disturbing to the older generation. But among them is a genuine striving for community, and they represent a significant new social movement which may foretell the future.

The opportunities are tremendous for rediscovering vital lost knowledge about how to live in community while retaining as much as we can of the value in our present urban, institution-bound society.

All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant-Ieaders to show the way, not by mass movements, but by each servant-Ieader demonstrating his own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group.

## Institutions

We differ from the primitives in that it is our task to rediscover the elementary knowledge of community while we refine and radically improve much of the vast non-community institutional structure on which we depend and without which we could not survive. A hopeful sign of the times, in the sector of society where it seems least expected — highly competitive business — is that people-building institutions are holding their own while they struggle successfully in the market place. It is not a great revolutionary movement but it is there as a solid fact of these times. And it is a very simple approach. The first order of business is to build a group of people who, under the influence of the institution, grow taller and become healthier, stronger, more autonomous.

Some institutions achieve distinction for a short time by the intelligent *use* of people, but it is not a happy achievement, and eminence, so derived, does not last long. Others aspire to distinction (or the reduction of problems) by embracing "gimmicks": profit sharing, work enlargement, information, participation, suggestion plans, paternalism, motivational management. There is nothing wrong with these in a people-building institution. But in a people-using institution they are like aspirin — sometimes stimulating and pain relieving, and they may produce an immediate measurable improvement of sorts. But these are not the means whereby an institution moves from people-using to people-building. In fact, an overdose of these nostrums may seal an institution's fate as a people-user for a very long time.

An institution starts on a course toward people-building with leadership that has a firmly established context of *people first.* With that, the right actions fall naturally into place. And none of the conventional gimmicks may ever be used. (For a fuller discussion of institutions, see another paper, "*The Institution as Servant*.")

## Trustees

Institutions need two kinds of leaders: those who are inside and carry the active day-to-day roles, and those who stand outside but are intimately concerned, and who, with the benefit of some detachment, oversee the active leaders. These are the *trustees.*

Trustees are what their title implies, persons in whom ultimate trust is placed. Because institutions inevitably harbor conflict, trustees are the court of last resort if an issue arises that cannot be resolved by the active parties. If tangible assets are involved, trustees legally hold them and are responsible to all interested parties for their good use. They have a prime concern for goals and for progress toward goals. They make their influence felt more by knowing and asking questions than by authority, although they usually have authority and can use it if need be. If, as is usual, there are several trustees, their chairman has a special obligation to see that the trustees as a group sustain a common purpose and are influential in helping the institution maintain consistent high-Ievel performance toward its goals. The chairman is not simply the presider over meetings, but also must serve and lead the trustees as a group and act as their major contact with the active inside leadership. Although trustees usually leave the "making of news" to active persons in the enterprise, theirs is an important leadership opportunity.

So conceived, the role of trustees provides a great opportunity for those who would serve and lead. And no one step will more quickly raise the quality of the total society than a radical reconstruction of trustee bodies so that they are predominantly manned by able, dedicated servant-leaders. Two disturbing questions: Is there now enough discerning toughness strategically placed to see that this change takes place, in the event that able, dedicated servant-leaders become available in sufficient numbers to do it? And are enough able people now preparing themselves for these roles so that this change *can* be made in the event that it is possible to make it? (For a fuller discussion of the trustee role, see the two papers, "*The Institution as Servant*" and "*Trustees as Servants.*")

## Power and Authority — The Strength and the Weakness

In a complex institution-centered society, which ours is likely to be into the indefinite future, there will be large and small concentrations of power. Sometimes it will be a servant's power of persuasion and example. Sometimes it will be coercive power used to dominate and manipulate people. The difference is that, in the former, power is used to create opportunity and alternatives so that individuals may choose and build autonomy. In the latter, individuals are coerced into a predetermined path. Even if it is "good" for them, if they experience nothing; else, ultimately their autonomy will be diminished.

Some coercive power is overt and brutal. Some is covert and subtly manipulative. The former is open and acknowledged, the latter is insidious and hard to detect. Most of us are more coerced than we know. We need to be more alert in order to know, and we also need to acknowledge that, in an imperfect world, authority backed up by power is still necessary because we just don't know a better way. We may one day find one. It is worth

searching for. Part of our dilemma is that all leadership is, to some extent, manipulative. Those who follow must be strong!

The trouble with coercive power is that it only strengthens resistance. And, if successful, its controlling effect lasts only as long as the force is strong. It is not organic. Only persuasion and the consequent voluntary acceptance are organic.

Since both kinds of power have been around for a long time, an individual will be better off by at some point being close enough to raw coercion to know what it is. One must be close to both the bitterness and goodness of life to be fully human.

Servants, by definition, are fully human. Servant-leaders are functionally superior because they are closer to the ground — they hear things, see things, know things, and their intuitive insight is exceptional. Because of this they are dependable and trusted, they know the meaning of that line from Shakespeare's sonnet: "They that have power to hurt and will do none. ..."

## How Does One Know the Servant?

For those who follow — and this is everyone, including those who lead — the really critical question is: Who is this moral individual we would see as leader? Who is the servant? How does one tell a truly giving, enriching servant from the neutral person or the one whose net influence is to take away from or diminish other people? Rabbi Heschel had just concluded a lecture on the Old Testament prophets in which he had spoken of true prophets and false prophets. A questioner asked him how one tells the difference between the true and the false prophets. The rabbi's answer was succinct and to the point. "There is no *way!"* he said. Then he elaborated, "If there were a *way*, if one had a gauge to slip over the head of the prophet and establish without question that he is or he isn't a true prophet, there would be no human dilemma and life would have no meaning.'.

So it is with the servant issue. If there were a dependable *way* that would tell us, "These people enrich by their presence, they are neutral, or they take away," life would be without challenge. Yet it is terribly important that one *know*, both about oneself and about others, whether the net effect of one's influence on others enriches, is neutral, or diminishes and depletes.

Since there is no certain way to know this, one must turn to the artists for illumination. Such an illumination is in Hermann Hesse's idealized portrayal of the servant Leo whose servanthood comes through in his leadership. In stark modern terms it can also be found in the brutal reality of the mental hospital where Ken Kesey (in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest)* gives us Big Nurse — strong, able, dedicated, dominating, authority-ridden, manipulative, exploitative — the net effect of whose influence diminished other people, literally destroyed them. In the story she is pitted in a contest with tough, gutter-bred Mac Murphy, a patient, the net effect of whose influence is to build up people and make both patients and the doctor in charge of the ward grow larger as persons, stronger, healthier — an effort that ultimately costs Mac Murphy his life. If one will study the two characters, Leo and Mac Murphy, one will get a measure of the range of possibilities in the role of servant as leader.

## In Here, Not Out There

A King once asked Confucius' advice on what to do about the large number of thieves. Confucius answered, "If you, sir, were not covetous, although you should reward them to do it, they would not steal." This advice places an enormous burden on those who are favored by the rules, and it establishes how old is the notion that the servant views any problem in the world as *in here,* inside oneself, not *out there.* And if a flaw in the world is to be remedied, to the servant the process of change starts *in here,* in the servant, not *out there.* This is a difficult concept for that busybody, modern man.

So it is with joy. Joy is inward, it is generated inside. It is not found outside and brought in. It is for those who accept the world as it is, part good, part bad, and who identify with the good by adding a little island of serenity to it.

Hermann Hesse dramatized it in the powerful leadership exerted by Leo who ostensibly served only in menial ways but who, by the quality of his inner life that was manifest in his presence, lifted men up and made the journey possible. Camus, in his final testament quoted earlier, leaves us with: "Each and every man, on the foundations of his own sufferings and joys, builds for them all."

## Who Is the Enemy?

Who is the enemy? Who is holding back more rapid movement to the better society that is reasonable and possible with available resources? Who is responsible for the mediocre performance of so many of our institutions? Who is standing in the way of a larger consensus on the definition of the better society and paths to reaching it?

Not evil people. Not stupid people. Not apathetic people. Not the "system." Not the protesters, the disrupters, the revolutionaries, the reactionaries.

Granting that fewer evil, stupid, or apathetic people or a better "system" might make the job easier, their removal would not change matters, not for long. The better society will come, if it comes, with plenty of evil, stupid, apathetic people around and with an imperfect, ponderous, inertia-charged "system" as the vehicle for change. Liquidate the offending people, radically alter or destroy the system, and in less than a generation they will all be back. It is not in the nature of things that a society can be cleaned up once and for all according to an ideal plan. And even if it were possible, who would want to live in an aseptic world? Evil, stupidity, apathy, the "system" are not the enemy even though society building forces will be contending with them all the time. The healthy society, like the healthy body, is not the one that has taken the most medicine. It is the one in which the internal health building forces are in the best shape.

The real enemy is fuzzy thinking on the part of good, intelligent, vital people, and their failure to lead, and to follow servants as leaders. Too many settle for being critics and experts. There is too much intellectual wheel spinning, too much retreating into "research," too little preparation for and willingness to undertake the hard and high risk

tasks of building better institutions in an imperfect world, too little disposition to see "the problem" as residing *in here* and not *out there.*

*In short, the enemy is strong natural servants who have the potential to lead but do not lead, or who choose to follow a non servant.* They suffer. Society suffers. And so it may be in the future.

## Implications

The future society may be just as mediocre as this one. It may be worse. And no amount of restructuring or changing the system or tearing it down in the hope that something better will grow will change this. There may be a better system than the one we now have. It is hard to know. But, whatever it is, if the people to lead it well are not there, a better system will not produce a better society.

Many people, finding their wholeness through many and varied contributions make a good society. Here we are concerned with but one facet: *able servants with potential to lead will lead, and, where appropriate, they will follow only servant-leaders.* Not much else counts if this does not happen.

This brings us to that critical aspect of realism that confronts the servant-leader, that of *order.* There must be some order because we know for certain that the great majority of people will choose some kind of order over chaos even if it is delivered by a brutal non-servant and even if, in the process, they lose much of their freedom. Therefore the servant-leader will beware of pursuing an idealistic path regardless of its impact on order. The big question is: What kind of order? This is the great challenge to the emerging generation of leaders: Can they build better order?

Older people who grew up in a period when values were more settled and the future seemed more secure will be disturbed by much they find today. But one firm note of hope comes through — loud and clear; we are at a turn of history in which people are growing up faster and some extraordinarily able, mature, servant-disposed men and women are emerging in their early and middle twenties. The percentage may be small, and, again, it may be larger than we think. Moreover, it is not an elite; it is all sorts of exceptional people. Most of them could be ready for some large society-shaping responsibility by the time they are thirty *if* they are encouraged to prepare for leadership as soon as their potential as builders is identified, which is possible for many of them by age eighteen or twenty. Preparation to lead need not be at the complete expense of vocational or scholarly preparation, but it must be the *first priority.* And it may take some difficult bending of resources and some unusual initiatives to accomplish all that should be accomplished in these critical years *and* give leadership preparation first priority. But whatever it takes, it must be done. For a while at least, until a better-led society is assured, some other important goals should take a subordinate place.

All of this rests on the assumption that the only way to change a society (or just make it go) is to produce people, enough people, who will change it (or make it go). The urgent problems of our day — the disposition to venture into immoral and senseless wars, destruction of the environment, poverty, alienation, discrimination, overpopulation — are

here because of human failures, individual failures, one person at a time, one action at a time failures.

If we make it out of all of this (and this is written in the belief that we will make it), the "system" will be whatever works best. The builders will find the useful pieces wherever they are, and invent new ones when needed, all without reference to ideological coloration. "How do we get the right things done?" will be the watchword of the day, every day. And the context of those who bring it off will be: all men and women who are touched by the effort grow taller, and become healthier, stronger, more autonomous, *and* more disposed to serve.

Leo the *servant*, and the exemplar of the *servant-leader*, has one further portent for us. If we may assume that Hermann Hesse is the narrator in *Journey to the East* (not a difficult assumption to make), at the end of the story he establishes his identity. His final confrontation at the close of his initiation into the Order is with a small transparent sculpture two figures joined together. One is Leo, the other is the narrator. The narrator notes that a movement of substance is taking place within the transparent sculpture.

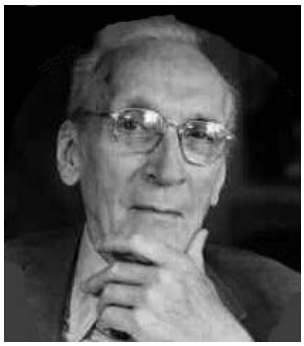
> I perceived that my image was in the process of adding to and flowing into Leo's, nourishing and strengthening it. It seemed that, in time ... only one would remain: Leo. He must grow, I must disappear.
>
> As I stood there and looked and tried to understand what I saw, I recalled a short conversation that I had once had with Leo during the festive days at Bremgarten. We had talked about the creations of poetry being more vivid and real than the poets themselves.

What Hesse may be telling us here is that Leo is the symbolic personification of Hesse's aspiration to serve through his literary creations, creations that are greater than Hesse himself; and that his work, for which he was but the channel, will carry on and serve and lead in a way that he, a twisted and tormented man, could not — except as he created.

Does not Hesse dramatize, in extreme form, the dilemma of us all? Except as we venture to create, we cannot project ourselves beyond ourselves to serve and lead.

To which Camus would add: *Create dangerously!*

# Who was Robert K. Greenleaf ?



ROBERT K. GREENLEAF was an American original, an essayist in the tradition of Emerson. Back in 1970, he wrote a small essay called *The Servant As Leader*, which introduced the term "servant-leadership." That and other writings have influenced an entire generation of management experts and institutional leaders.

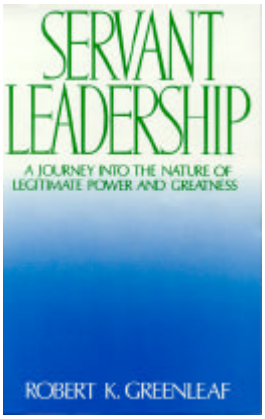
Bob Greenleaf (1904-1990) spent his first career in management research, development and education at AT&T. After retirement, he began a second career teaching and consulting at institutions ranging from Harvard Business School to the Ford Foundation to scores of churches and not-for-profit institutions. During the tumultuous 1960s, Greenleaf tried to understand why so many young people were in rebellion against America's institutions, especially universities. He concluded that the fault lay with the institutions: they weren't doing a good job of serving, therefore, they were doing a poor job of leading.

In 1970, Greenleaf wrote *The Servant as Leader*, a powerful little essay that continues to gain influence today. In it, Greenleaf described some of the characteristics and activities of servant-leaders, providing examples which show that individual efforts, inspired by vision and a servant ethic, can make a substantial difference in the quality of society. Greenleaf said true leaders are chosen by their followers. He discussed the skills necessary to be a servant-leader; the importance of awareness, foresight and listening; and the contrasts between coercive, manipulative, and persuasive power.

A few years later, (1972) Greenleaf published a second essay, *The Institution As Servant*, which was based on the idea that institutions could also be servants. Greenleaf said that much of the caring for persons in today's society is mediated by large, complex institutions. The Institution As Servant challenges conventional wisdom about hierarchical organization and the use of power in our major institutions. Trustees and leaders in churches, businesses, and universities will think about organizational structure in a fresh way after reading this essay.

As he continued to reflect on the way organizations operate, Greenleaf realized that institutions were controlled by trustees. This reflection prompted a third essay in 1974, *Trustees As Servants.* It's a must-read for any trustees or directors who would venture to become powerful forces in regenerating trust. This essay seeks to address the needs of senior executives for sustained, caring (but demanding) assistance from able trustees. Drawing on a lifetime of experience in institutions, Greenleaf addressed the ambiguity of the trustee role and offered ideas on how each trustee group can claim its rightful functions.

Until his death in 1990, Robert Greenleaf kept writing on the themes of management, servanthood, organizations, power and spirituality.

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