

10 Foundation Stones in Servant-Leadership

Based on work from Robert Greenleaf





In 1970, in an essay entitled "The Servant as Leader," Robert Greenleaf developed and popularized the concept of servant leadership for various institutions, including businesses. You can find it on many websites. Of course, the concept flows from the gospels. It jumps off the pages of the New Testament in the passages we reflected on above. It is also found in many other religious traditions. Chanakya, a popular strategic thinker in ancient India, wrote about servant leadership in his 4th century book Arthashastra. He stated clearly that "the king [leader] shall consider as good, not what pleases himself but what pleases his subjects [followers]".

The 10 foundation stones that I will describe are by no means exhaustive. But they are some of the most important qualities that a servant-leader brings to a community (to a local community, to the poor, to the Church, etc.):



1. Listening

Traditionally, leaders have been valued for their decision making and communication skills. Servant-leaders must reinforce these important skills by making a deep commitment to listening intently to others. Servant-leaders seek to identify and clarify the will of a group. They seek to listen receptively to what is being and said (and not said). Listening also encompasses getting in touch with one's inner voice, and seeking to understand what one's body, spirit, and mind are communicating.

Do people believe that you want to hear their ideas and will value them? Servant leaders are very good listeners. They are receptive and genuinely interested in the views and input of others. People instinctively understand that servant leaders want them to share their ideas and that these ideas will be valued.

Listening is a skill that can be learned and is essential for those who desire to be a servant leader. Without good listening skills, many of the other characteristics that I will list cannot be achieved.

2. Empathy

Servant-leaders strive to understand others and empathize with them. People need to be accepted and recognized for their special gifts. One must assume the good intentions of coworkers and not reject them as people, even when forced to reject their behaviour or performance.

Do people believe that you will understand what is happening in their lives and how it affects them? Servant leaders can “walk in others’ shoes”.

They empathize with others’ circumstances and problems. Leaders who are empathetic have earned confidence from others by understanding what difficulties they face. This characteristic is a skill that comes more naturally to some people than others, but it is pertinent for all who aspire to be a servant leader





3. Healing

Learning to heal is a powerful force for transformation within a group. One of the great strengths of servant-leadership is the potential for healing one's self and others.

Do people come to you when the chips are down or when something traumatic has happened in their lives?

Servant leaders are people who others want to approach when something traumatic has occurred. They are good at facilitating the healing process, and others gravitate toward them when emotional needs arise. The ability to create an environment that encourages emotional mending is crucial for those who want to become great servant leaders.



4. Awareness

Awareness of what is going on in a group, and especially self-awareness, strengthens the servant-leader. Making a commitment to foster awareness can be scary – one never knows that one may discover! Awareness does not always bring solace – just the opposite. It may disturb. But servant leaders are not seekers of solace. They have their own inner security.

Do others believe you have a strong awareness for what is going on? Servant leaders have a keen sense for what is happening around them. They are always looking for cues from the environment to inform their opinions and decisions. They know what's really happening within a group and will rarely be fooled by appearances. This skill is crucial to the development of servant leaders.



5. Persuasion

Servant-leaders rely on persuasion, rather than the authority of their position in making decisions. They seek to convince others, rather than coerce compliance. This particular element offers one of the clearest distinctions between the traditional authoritarian model and that of servant-leadership. The servant-leader is effective at building consensus within groups.

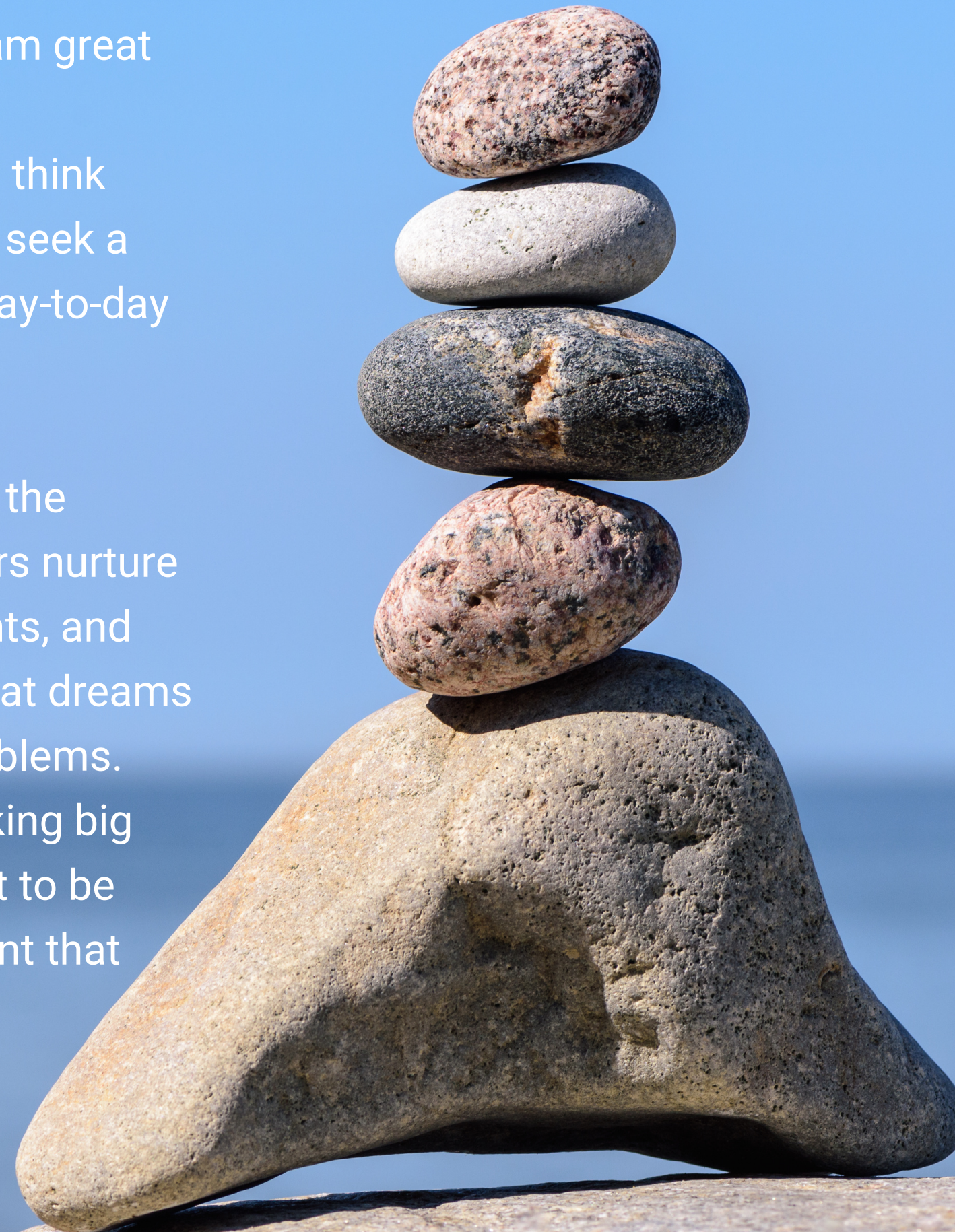
Do others follow your requests because they want to or because they believe they “have to”? Servant leaders seek to persuade others to do things rather than relying on formal authority. They have the ability to convince and offer compelling reasons when they make requests. This ability is important for servant leaders to develop.



6. Vision

Servant-leaders seek to nurture the ability to "dream great dreams." The ability to look at a problem (or an organization) with creativity means that one must think beyond day-to-day realities. Servant-leaders must seek a delicate balance between long-range vision and day-to-day focus.

Do others communicate their ideas and vision for the organization when you are around? Servant leaders nurture the ability to think creatively about the world, events, and possibilities. They encourage others to dream great dreams and avoid getting bogged down by day-to-day problems. They foster an environment that encourages thinking big and valuing the creative process. Those who want to be great servant leaders must develop an environment that fosters conceptualization.



7. Planning for Future

Foresight is a characteristic that enables servant-leaders to understand lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision in the future. It is deeply rooted in the intuitive mind.

Do others have confidence in your ability to anticipate the future and its consequences? Servant leaders have the ability to anticipate future events. This is not to say they are psychic or always right, but they are adept at picking up patterns in the environment and seeing what the future will bring. They usually anticipate consequences of decisions with great accuracy. Those who want to be effective servant leaders need to have and develop this foresight.





8. Stewardship

Servant-leaders recognize that trustees, CEO's, directors, and staff members all play significance roles in holding their institutions in trust for the great good of the community (the poor, the church, etc.).

Do others believe you are preparing the organization to make a positive difference in the world? Servant leaders are often characterized by a strong sense of stewardship.

Stewardship stems from medieval times when a 'steward' would be assigned to hone the skills and development of a young prince — to prepare him for his reign. The kingdom relied on the steward to teach and hold the prince in trust so that he would be a successful king. Today the term stewardship involves many of the same things. A steward in an organization is responsible for preparing it for its destiny, usually for the betterment of society. When we describe a leader as having a strong sense of stewardship, we refer to a desire to prepare the organization to contribute to the greater good of society — not unlike preparing the prince to serve the greater good of the kingdom. Making a positive difference in the future is characteristic of the stewardship mentality. Those who desire to be servant leaders need to have a sense of stewardship.



9. Commitment to the Growth of Individuals

Servant-leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As such, servant-leaders are deeply committed to a personal, professional, and spiritual growth of each and every individual within the organization.

Do people believe that you are committed to helping them develop and grow? Servant leaders have a strong commitment to the growth of people. They believe that all people have something to offer beyond their tangible contributions. Servant leaders work hard to help people in a number of ways — spiritually, professionally, personally. Those who want to be servant leaders need to connect to others' developmental needs and actively find ways to meet these needs.



10. Building Community

Servant-leaders are aware that the shift from local communities to large institutions as the primary shaper of human lives has changed our perceptions and caused a sense of loss. Servant-leaders seek to identify the means for building community among those who work within a given institution.

Do people feel a strong sense of community in the organization that you lead? Servant leaders have a strong sense of community spirit and work hard to foster it in an organization. They believe that an organization needs to function as a community. Those who want to be servant leaders need to work hard to build community in the organization.

