

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

Several misconceptions about servant-leadership make its understanding and acceptance more difficult. They are:

1. *Servant-leadership is a weak form of leadership.* Quite the opposite. It is a strong leadership style that requires discipline, strength, and character. This misconception arises from the notion of servanthood as weak rather than fundamentally strong. The person who aspires to lead as an act of service rather than an indulgence of the ego must be willing to listen, to be wrong, and to follow when more effective leaders emerge. Servant-leadership is not a form of servitude; it does not require us to be doormats. Instead, it requires us to act on strong principles that may bring dismay or even hostility to those who follow.
2. *Only powerful people can be servant-leaders.* Servant-leadership is not a form of leadership that only works from the top-down. By its very nature, servant-leadership is meant to infuse an organization. Transformation can begin at the lowest levels of an organization as well as at its highest, although, of course, the implementation of any form of leadership is facilitated by buy-in from top management.
3. S-L is not the same as service leadership which is based in service rather than servicing. The nuance is important. One can be of service without being a servant. One cannot, on the other hand, be a servant without being of service. Servant-leadership requires a commitment to helping other people achieve their highest potential, which is a more complex goal than merely being of service to them.
4. Servant-leadership sounds good in theory, but it's not practical. Servant-leadership is practicality itself because of its profound effect on organizations and those who work for them. Servant-leadership is based on pragmatic principles that have been judged valid for centuries and that are consonant with both religious traditions and secular philosophies that describe the way in which people are to interact with one another. Servant-leadership has been tested in for-profit and non-profit organizations and has proven superior to obsolete, autocratic styles of management, particularly in an area of rapid change. To suggest that servant-leadership is impractical is the same as to say that honesty is nice in theory, but it's impractical in the real world.

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