

Chapter Ten

Model Servant Leadership

Too often in business, the boss asks only others to serve and sacrifice. If times are difficult for the company, it's the lowest paid workers who are laid off or have their pay cut. Only by doing that which you ask others to do, and by serving and sacrificing for employees, shareholders and customers, can any business leader expect his/her followers to serve and sacrifice for the company. According to Pat Williams in *Secrets from the Mountain*, "The actions of anyone who wants to be a real leader must show a readiness and willingness to serve others." Throughout the Gospels, we are told stories of Jesus serving and sacrificing for others.

Scriptural Examples

In Matthew 23:2-4, Jesus said, "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them." Similarly, in Luke 11:46, Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them." Jesus, in Matthew 23:11-12

put it this way, "The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever humbles himself, will be exalted."

From the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus told the disciples that to follow him required service to others. In Matthew 20:20-22, (this story is also found in Mark 10:35-45) a mother requested that her two sons be given the seats to the left and right of Jesus in the Kingdom of Heaven. Upon hearing this, Jesus said, "You don't know what you are asking for." Jesus then called his disciples together and said, in Verses 25-28, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

In Luke 14: 7-14, Jesus tells a wonderful parable designed to highlight the importance of humility and service to others. Jesus said to the crowd, all of whom had jockeyed with each other for the places of honor at a banquet, that "when you are invited to a wedding feast, do not take the seat of honor, but . . . take the lowest place, so that when your host comes he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed."

In John 10:11-13, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away." Jesus was telling his disciples to act like owners of sheep; to put the interests of others first, and their own interests last.

John 13 describes the events of the Last Supper. During the Last Supper, Jesus got up from the meal and grabbed a washbasin and a towel to begin washing the feet of the 12 disciples. Simon Peter, for one, objected to this act of service. Jesus replied, in Verse 13-15, "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord', and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set for you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

The ultimate sacrifice by Jesus was, of course, his crucifixion on the cross at Golgotha. Each Gospel describes the terrible events of Jesus' death.

In Mark 8: 34-35 (also in Matthew 16:24-25), Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life (or soul) will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me, and for the gospel, will find it." Verse 36 continues, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"

In Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus said, "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the market place doing nothing. He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' 'Because no one has hired us,' they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.' "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' "The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received

a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Modern Business Examples

Jesus was certainly asking a lot from people when he said, “the last will be first, and the first will be last.” Servant leadership is easy to say, but difficult to implement. Part of servant leadership relates to the principles discussed in the chapter *Treat Everyone with Dignity and Respect*. Getting your own coffee, making your own copies, and answering your own telephone are all small examples of servant leadership.

In ***Loving Monday***, John D Beckett talks about the importance of “The Serving Organization.” His firm’s “corporate roadmap,” or printed statement of core beliefs and values says, “We commit to being very attentive to our customers, going beyond serving them to satisfying their highest expectations. We pledge to be responsive, following through on commitments while avoiding any kind of arrogance or indifference. We desire to be predictable, reliable, and trustworthy, to go the extra mile for something we believe in.”

In ***ENDURANCE, Shackleton’s Incredible Voyage***, author Alfred Lansing, describes Sir Ernest Shackleton, the leader of the ill-fated 1914-16 voyage to the South Pole. Through hard work, determination, and sheer will power, Shackleton kept all 27 members of his crew alive through two harsh years in the frozen Antarctic wasteland. Though he possessed many leadership traits, perhaps none were as strong as his desire to

serve his men. Says Alfred Lansing of Shackleton, “he wanted to appear familiar with the men. He even worked at it, insisting on having exactly the same treatment, food, and clothing. He went out of his way to demonstrate his willingness to do the menial chores, such as taking his turn . . . to get the mealtime pot of hoosh from the galley to his tent. And he occasionally became furious when he discovered that the cook had given him preferential treatment because he was the “Boss.”

As previously discussed, during my tenure at Banc One, we implemented a strategy that resulted in the termination of a number of professionals in the tax-exempt origination department. Several of those asked to leave were administrative assistants. The departure of these assistants required that the remaining public finance investment bankers share the remaining administrative assistants. In some cases, this required four or five bankers to share only one assistant. Soon it became pretty apparent that having four or five bankers to one administrative assistant was hampering the productivity of the group. The assistants were overburdened and the bankers were frustrated that their work was not being done in a timely fashion.

Not long before this restructuring, my own administrative assistant had unexpectedly resigned. According to the human resources policy at Bank One, the position held by a terminated administrative assistant could not be filled until the expiration of one year, while an assistant that resigned could be replaced at any time. To help alleviate this staffing problem, I decided to hire an administrative assistant to replace the one that had worked for me, but I directed this new assistant to primarily support two other bankers—bankers whose assistant had recently been terminated. This move allowed us to comply with the HR policy on replacing fired assistants and two of our best bankers now had an administrative assistant that they shared only with me. In fact, I placed the new assistant at a desk in front of these two bankers, rather than at the desk outside my office. Over time, she did less and less work for me and more and more work for them. Even though I knew that it was the right thing to do, at first

I thought that sharing “my assistant” was going to be a real pain. I soon realized, however, that this arrangement was better for everyone. The other two professionals needed her more than me and I was able to more efficiently accomplish many of the tasks I had heretofore assigned to an administrative assistant.

In *Secrets from the Mountain*, author Pat Williams quotes legendary Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne, now a U.S. Congressman, as saying, “The essence of teamwork is servanthood. When players see the needs of others being as important as their own needs, they begin to reach out to those around them . . . as one player reaches out to another and demonstrates a willingness to sacrifice personal goals for team objectives, the attitude often spreads.”

Take Away

Jesus modeled servant leadership. He constantly stressed the importance of serving and sacrificing for others. From washing the feet of the disciples to dying on the cross at Golgotha, Jesus always put the interests of others before his own. Business leaders who put themselves last, and shareholders, customers, and fellow employees first, will have committed and dedicated followers.