



LEADERSHIP TIPS

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

WHAT IS SERVANT-LEADERSHIP?

Servant-leadership is a practical philosophy which supports people who choose to serve first, and then lead as a way of expanding service to individuals and institutions. Servant-leaders may or may not hold formal leadership positions. Servant-leadership encourages collaboration, trust, foresight, listening, and the ethical use of power and empowerment.

Robert Greenleaf, the man who coined the phrase, described servant-leadership in this way:

“The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. He or she is sharply different from the person 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, will they not be further deprived?”

Taken from the *Servant as Leader* published by Robert Greenleaf in 1970.

RELEVANCE TO SPJ

SPJ was created out of a need for student journalists on DePauw University’s campus to band together for academic and professional support. As more professionals joined the ranks of the Society, the organization became more focused on free press and a written code of ethical journalism. Today, SPJ is the nation’s most broad-based journalism organization, dedicated to the free practice of journalism and stimulating high standards of ethical behavior.

SPJ leaders should watch for an **ownership** attitude, vastly different from servant-leadership. These leaders prioritize their own chapter over SPJ as a national organization. The preservation of the chapter, rather than the overall mission, becomes the focus. Leaders become the identity of the organization in those types of chapters.

Nowhere in that mission is the individual power of a leader prioritized over the lofty mission of the Society itself. SPJ serves the public. It serves the field of journalism. It serves professional and student journalists. The Society promotes servant-leadership with its strategic pillars:

- We are champions for journalists.
- We are fighters for the first amendment.
- We are stewards for ethical journalism.
- We are producers of journalism’s future.

ACTION STEPS FOR SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

- Start chapter meetings with a reading of the SPJ mission and/or the pillars above.
- Set goals in accordance with the four pillars.
- Recognize and reward members who exemplify the pillars.
- Discuss the concept of ownership at officer transition time to be proactive.
- Address unhealthy ownership behaviors in the leadership in the moment.
- Refocus on overall chapter goals and SPJ’s mission.