

## THE 12 CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

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**1. Love** – An intense affection for another person based on familial or personal ties; the feeling of benevolence, kindness, or brotherhood towards others. God's love is completely unmerited, undeserved; it is always a gift and we can do nothing to earn it; God's love is steadfast; there is nothing we can do to keep God from loving us; God's love for us is suffering love; God never stands aloof, insulated from our sufferings; God's love knows no bounds; it transcends boundaries constructed by human societies; the paradigm for loving our enemies is found in God's own character; God does not discriminate in loving.

### **Key Considerations in Exercising Love:**

Without love, all other characteristics are just techniques

Love is the demonstration of who you are in Jesus Christ

Love is understanding the other's faults (as well as your own), but trying to find a way to work together regardless

**2. Humility** – Lack of pride; marked by meekness or modesty in behavior, attitude, or spirit; showing deferential or submissive respect. / Lowliness, being humble, God and the humble, God humbling people, humbling oneself.

### **Key Considerations in Exercising Humility:**

Be a servant, first

Give others the recognition they deserve

Don't ask others to do what you would not be willing to do yourself

**3. Listening** – Leaders have traditionally been valued for their communication and decision-making skills. While these are also important skills for the servant-leader, they need to be reinforced by a deep commitment to listening intently to others. The servant-leader seeks to identify the will of a group and helps clarify that will. He or she seeks to listen receptively to what is being said (and not said!). Listening also encompasses getting in touch with one's own inner voice and seeking to understand what one's body, spirit, and mind are communicating. Listening, coupled with regular periods of reflection, is essential to the growth of the servant-leader.

### **Key Considerations in Listening:**

Listen, first, as a natural servant does

Listen intently to others

Listen with a desire to understand

Listen receptively to what is said and NOT said

Listen so as to encourage thoughtful silence

Listen to your own inner voice

Listen with reflection on what is being said

**4. Empathy** – The servant-leader strives to understand and empathize with others. People need to be accepted and recognized for their special and unique spirits. One assumes the good intentions of coworkers and does not reject them as people, even while refusing to accept their behavior or performance. The most successful servant-leaders are those who have become skilled empathetic listeners.

### **Key Considerations in Empathizing:**

Demonstrate interest in and affection for others

Recognize and accept (never reject) the gifts and talents of others

Tolerate imperfection; no one is perfect except Jesus

Assume the good intentions of co-workers

**5. Healing** – Learning to heal is a powerful force for transformation and integration. One of the great strengths of servant-leadership is the potential for healing one's self and others. Many people have broken spirits and have suffered from a variety of emotion hurts. Although this is a part of being human, servant-leaders recognize that they have an opportunity to "help make whole" those with whom they come in contact.

### **Key Considerations in Healing:**

Address broken spirits and emotional hurts

Help make others whole while doing the same for yourself

**6. Awareness** – General awareness, and especially self-awareness, strengthens the servant-leader. Making a commitment to foster awareness can be scary – you never know what you may discover! Awareness also aids one in understanding issues involving ethics and values. It lends itself to being able to view most situations from a more integrated, holistic position.

### **Key Consideration in Awareness:**

Be self-aware and cultivate a sense of inner serenity

Foster awareness in others

Be “sharply awake” and “reasonably disturbed”

**7. Persuasion** – Reliance on persuasion, rather than using one’s positional authority, in making decisions within an organization is another key characteristic of servant-leadership. The servant-leader seeks 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.

**Key Considerations in Persuasion:**

Convince others rather than coerce

Build consensus within groups

**8. Conceptualization** – Servant-leaders seek to nurture their abilities to “dream great dreams.” The ability to look at a problem (or an organization) from a conceptualizing perspective means that one must think beyond day-to-day realities. For many managers this is a characteristic that requires discipline and practice. The traditional manager is consumed by the need to achieve short-term operational goals. The manager who wishes to also be a servant-leader must stretch his or her thinking to encompass broader-based conceptual thinking. Within organizations, conceptualization is, by its very nature, the proper role of boards. Unfortunately, boards can sometimes become involved in the day-to-day operations (something that should always be discouraged!) and fail to provide the visionary concept for an institution. Trustees need to be mostly conceptual in their orientation, staffs need to be mostly operational in their perspective, and the most effective CEOs and managers probably need to develop both perspectives. Servant-leaders are called to seek a delicate balance between conceptual thinking and a day-to-day focused approach.

**Key Considerations in Conceptualization:**

Nurture people’s ability to “dream great dreams”

Think beyond day-to-day realities – be visionary

**9. Foresight** – Closely related to conceptualization, the ability to foresee the likely outcome of a situation is hard to define, but easy to identify. One knows it when one sees it. Foresight is a characteristic that enables the servant-leader to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future. It is also deeply rooted within the intuitive mind.

### **Key Considerations in Exercising Foresight:**

Foresee the likely outcome of a situation

Understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequences of a decision for the future

**10. Stewardship** – Holding something in trust for another calls CEOs, staffs, and boards to hold their institutions in trust for the greater good of society. Servant-leadership, like stewardship, assumes first and foremost a commitment to serving the needs of others. It also emphasizes the use of openness and persuasion rather than control.

### **Key Considerations in Exercising Stewardship:**

Hold something in trust for another

Take care of (not caretake) others

Choose service over self-interest

Be accountable for outcomes without being controlling

Share responsibility for what the organization will become

Feel ownership in the success of the organization

**11. Commitment to the Growth of People** – Servant-leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As such, the servant-leader is deeply committed to the growth of each and every individual within his or her institution. The servant-leader recognizes the tremendous responsibility to do everything within his or her power to nurture the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of employees. In practice, this can include (but is not limited to) concrete actions such as making available funds for personal and professional development, taking a personal interest in the ideas and suggestions from everyone, encouraging worker involvement in decision making, and actively assisting laid-off workers to find other employment.

### **Key Considerations in Making the Commitment to the Growth of People:**

Believe that people have intrinsic value

Be committed to and demonstrably foster the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of all in the organization

**12. Building Community** – the servant-leader senses that much has been lost in recent human history as a result of the shift from local communities to large institutions as the primary shaper of human lives. This awareness causes the servant-leader to seek to identify some means for building community among those who work within a given institution. Servant-leadership

suggests that true community can be created among those who work in business and other institutions.

**Key Considerations in Building Community:**

Recognize your organization as a community and build it

Understand that your community can shape human lives and change perceptions