

Leadership Change

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Too many leaders have held the belief that the people who live under them have obligations to their leaders. Indeed, it is still largely the popular belief today. However, the perception should be reversed: the leader should have obligations to the led. A new philosophy, called servant leadership, should be adopted. A bad leader is one who disregards those being led and is prone to becoming corrupt.

One must be distinct when defining servant leadership. R. K. Greenleaf (1977) once proposed that a leader should be a servant first and foremost. He claims that he got this idea after having read *Journey to the East* by Hermann Hesse. The story in question is merely a passable example of what is being advocated, as the main character starts and finishes as a literal servant, but the group undertaking the titular journey is revealed to be overly dependent on his guidance, and the journey comes to an unfinished conclusion when he disappears. The reason why this story is a weak example of servant leadership is that the ideal leader should develop enough strength and independence in the followers so that they do not need to scatter in disarray once the leader has gone. Empires have collapsed that way, thus proving their leaders' ineffectiveness by their failure to build a society that was sustainable.

What is the true definition of servant leadership? Greenleaf (1977) explains that the leader should exist to serve the people, instead of the other way around as has often been the case throughout history and even to a great extent in the present. The leader, Greenleaf writes, should place priority on the welfare of others before himself or herself. An example can be found in a story by Shane Claiborne (2010), who spent some time in India with Mother

Theresa. During that time, Claiborne noticed that her feet were deformed and, after inquiring, found it to be the result of her deliberately choosing the worst pair of shoes whenever donations came in over the years.

In contrast, any leader who prioritizes him- or herself runs the risk of becoming corrupt, something that is to be avoided at all costs. Corruption has caused the downfall of many leaders throughout history. There are other dangers that come with the leader placing too much emphasis on himself or herself. Sophocles (440 BCE) gives a fair warning in his play about Ajax, commander of the Greek contingent from Salamis in the Trojan War. In the play, Ajax becomes so distraught by what his fellow Greeks think of him after he has been deceived by the goddess Athena that he is driven to commit suicide. This example illustrates that preoccupation with oneself can lead to negative consequences not only for those being led, but also for the leader, even if suicide is not necessarily the end result.

The age-old belief that the leader should be prioritized must be done away with because the leader has obligations to those who are being led. The best course of action is the adoption of a new philosophy, called servant leadership. Although the idea originates from a story of a servant who was so influential to the extent that those he served scattered in disarray after his disappearance, this example is not an indicator of an effective leader. That sort of definition means that the leader was unable to achieve sustainability. Rather, ideal leaders should place the lowest priority on themselves and the highest priority on others. Otherwise, corruption could set in. With corruption comes decay, and with decay comes collapse. Furthermore, preoccupation with oneself on the leader's part presents other risks, namely the possible

consequence of the leader's worrying about possibly losing his or her reputation with those being led.

References

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