A JOURNEY IN SERVANT-LEADERSHIP
—LARRY C. SPEARS

Welcome to our 2023 edition of The International Journal of Servant-Leadership. I would like to offer my special thanks to all of our contributing authors in this journal. Each edition of IJSL contains a wonderful array of articles and papers, poetry and research, film reviews and reflections from around the world that demonstrate many remarkable journeys in servant-leadership.

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP AND EQUALITY

Foreword by Larry C. Spears to Servant-Leadership, Feminism,
This servant-leadership anthology, Servant-Leadership, Feminism, and Gender Well-Being: How Leaders Transcend Global Inequities Through Hope, Unity, and Love is a beautiful collection of writings. It makes a very strong case for servant-leadership as a compelling approach to leadership and service that also provides a powerful and unifying way forward for women and men. The chapters in this compilation offer up a deep wellspring of wisdom, powerful questions, and helpful practices for all who desire to grow as aspiring servant-leaders.

The term servant-leadership was first coined in a 1970 essay by Robert K. Greenleaf (1904–1990), entitled The Servant as Leader. Greenleaf spent most of his organizational life in the field of management research, development, and education at AT&T. Following a forty-year career there, he founded the Center for Applied Ethics in 1964 and enjoyed a second career that lasted another twenty-five years. In 1985, the Center for Applied Ethics was renamed The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, where I served as President & CEO and as Senior Fellow & President Emeritus from 1990-2007.

Since 1970, more than a half-million copies of Robert Greenleaf’s books and essays have been sold worldwide. Slowly but surely, his writings on servant-leadership have helped to transform both people and organizations around the world. In many ways, it may be said that the times are only now beginning to catch up with Robert Greenleaf’s visionary call to servant-leadership. The idea of servant-leadership, now in its sixth decade as a concept bearing that name, continues to create a quiet revolution around the world.

But what does servant-leadership entail? Who is a servant-leader? Greenleaf said that the servant-leader is one who is a servant first and a leader second. In Servant-Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness, the 25th Anniversary Edition, Greenleaf (1977/2002) writes,

> 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 . . . 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 . . . is this: 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 not be further deprived? (p. 27; emphasis in original)
The words servant and leader are usually thought of as being opposites. In deliberately bringing those two words together in a meaningful way, Robert Greenleaf gave birth to the paradoxical term servant-leader. His writings on the subject of servant-leadership helped to get this global movement started, and his views have had a profound and growing effect on many organizations and thought-leaders. Organizations like AFLAC, Chick-fil-A, The Container Store, Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, Synovus Financial Corporation, TDIndustries and many more are recognized today for nurturing servant-led cultures. These institutions and many more have been encouraged and supported by a long list of servant-leadership thought-leaders such as James Autry, Cheryl Bachelder, Warren Bennis, Ken Blanchard, Peter Block, John Carver, Stephen Covey, Max DePree, Shann Ferch, Don Frick, John Horsman, James Kouzes, Parker Palmer, M. Scott Peck, Peter Senge, Margaret Wheatley, and Danah Zohar, to name but a handful of today’s cutting-edge authors and advocates of servant-leadership.

In 1992, I conducted a study of Robert Greenleaf’s writings. From that analysis, I was able to codify a set of ten characteristics that Greenleaf wrote about in various writings, and which he considered as being central to the development of servant-leaders. These include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. My analysis showed these to be the ones that Greenleaf mentioned most often in his writings, and which led me to compile them into a list and to begin to write about them. While these ten characteristics of servant-leadership are by no means exhaustive, they do serve to communicate the power and promise that this concept offers to servant-leaders who are open to its invitation and challenge. Like Robert Greenleaf, I am convinced that
it is possible to become an increasingly authentic servant-leader through the conscious development of these and other characteristics.

It is helpful to understand that servant-leadership starts within each one of us, and that it is first-and-foremost a personal philosophy and commitment that we can choose to practice in any environment. If we understand Greenleaf’s best test as the fundamental understanding of servant-leadership, then it becomes clear that the choice to seek to practice servant-leadership is ours to make. Our personal embracing of servant-leadership does not require the approval of our supervisor, or our organization’s chief executive. We don’t need anyone’s permission to personally do our best to act as a servant-leader. It is our choice.

Something similar can also be said of understanding and practicing feminism and gender equality through servant-leadership.

For some people, the word *servant* may prompt an initial negative connotation due to the oppression that many people—especially women, people of color and LGBTQ—have historically endured. However, upon closer analysis many come to appreciate the inherent spiritual nature of what Greenleaf intended by the pairing of *servant* and *leader*. The startling paradox of the term *servant-leadership* serves to prompt new insights.

Here are just a few examples of commentary on servant-leadership by women leaders in their writings on servant-leadership—

Cheryl Bachelder (2018), former CEO of Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen, writes of six servant-leadership principles that guided their actions. These include:

- We are passionate about what we do.
- We listen carefully and learn continuously.
- We are fact-based and planful.
- We coach and develop our people.
• We are personally accountable.
• We value humility.

Juana Bordas has written:

Many women, minorities and people of color have long traditions of servant-leadership in their cultures. Servant-leadership has very old roots in many of the indigenous cultures. Cultures that were holistic, cooperative, communal, intuitive and spiritual. These cultures centered on being guardians of the future and respecting the ancestors who walked before. (As cited in Spears, 1995, p. 12)

Women leaders are writing and speaking about servant-leadership as a leadership philosophy that is most appropriate for both women and men to embrace. Patsy Sampson, former president of Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri, is one such person. She wrote: “So-called (service-oriented) feminine characteristics are exactly those which are consonant with the very best qualities of servant-leadership” (as cited in Spears, 1995, p. 12).

Danah Zohar (1997), in her book, *Rewiring the Corporate Brain*, had this to say,

To qualify as servant-leaders in the deepest sense, I think that leaders must have four essential qualities.

• They must have a deep sense of the interconnectedness of life and all its enterprises.
• They must have a sense of engagement and responsibility, a sense of “I have to.”
• They must be aware that all human endeavor, including business, is a part of the larger and richer fabric of the whole universe.
• And perhaps most important of all, servant-leaders must
know what they ultimately serve. They must, with a sense of humility and gratitude, have a sense of the Source from which all values emerge. (p. 153)

Margaret Wheatley (2015), author of *Leadership and the New Science* and many other books has written the following,

A few phrases come to mind from a wonderful gospel song, “We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.” This is the time for which we have been preparing, and so there is a deep sense of call. Servant-leadership is not just an interesting idea, but something fundamental and vital for the world, and now the world that truly needs it. The whole concept of servant-leadership must move from an interesting idea in the public imagination toward the realization that *this is the only way we can go forward*. I personally experience that sense of right-timeliness to this body of work called servant-leadership. I feel that for more and more of us we need to realize that it will take even more courage to move it forward, but that the necessity of moving it forward is clear. It moves from being a body of work to being a movement—literally a movement—how we are going to move this into the world. I think that will require more acts of courage, more clarity, more saying *this has to change now*. I am hoping that it will change now. (p. 119; emphasis in original)

As the authors in this anthology make clear, the decision to seek equality, and to embrace both feminine and masculine qualities as servant-leaders, is to be found within ourselves.

*Servant-Leadership, Feminism, and Gender Well-Being* reveals many pathways available to people and institutions desiring a better way of working together, coupled with greater acceptance of one another. This book also shows how servant-leadership attributes of
healing, listening, awareness, community-building and others can be used as an antidote to some of our current inequities. So many caring people are working to break down negative beliefs, and to infuse our relationships through serving and leading.

_Servant-Leadership, Feminism, and Gender Well-Being_ is a wise and hopeful book.

WRITINGS

Here is a list of some of the servant-leadership writings with which I have been associated in 2022-2023:

- “On Servant-Leadership in the Modern Era,” _The International Journal of Servant-Leadership_ (Volume 17,
• The Palgrave Handbook of Servant-Leadership, edited by Satinder Dhiman and Gary Roberts (2023, Palgrave/Springer), has recently been published. This is a two-volume (1,724 pages) reference work on servant-leadership research. Included among the contributing authors are a number of Gonzaga University folks. Larry C. Spears, (IJSI Senior Advisory Editor, Servant-Leadership Scholar, and CEO of The Spears Center for Servant-Leadership) has contributed both the Foreword and a closing chapter to the volumes titled, “Chapter 66: An Overview and Reflections on My Journey in Servant-Leadership.” DPLS alum Philip Mathew has contributed two chapters, “Chapter 30: Teachers as Servant-Leaders: Enriching Teacher-Student Relationships Through the Application of Robert K. Greenleaf’s Servant-Leadership Philosophy” and, “Chapter 63: Neuroscience and Servant-Leadership: Underpinnings and Implications for Practice.” John H. Horsman, Debra K. Heiser, Christine K. Hassing, Diana L. Steer, Lopez Sergio, and Adam L. Gierlach are co-authors of, “Chapter 31: Harmony-Listening and Soft-Listening: Servant-Leader Values and Skills.”


Field Guide is a groundbreaking book. While many books have been written about servant-leadership in recent years, this is the first one written specifically for nonprofit professionals, and it is outstanding in all respects. Through his analysis of servant-leadership characteristics including listening, empathy, building a sense of community, and others, Evan Wildstein offers many compelling and practical tips for fundraisers, executives, board members, and others associated with non-profit organizations. This will be a must-have book for years to come.”—Larry C. Spears


- Back Cover Endorsement of Simple Truths of Leadership: 52 Ways to Be a Servant Leader and Build Trust/Making Common Sense Common Practice, by Ken Blanchard and Randy Conley (Polvera Publishing, 2022). “Simple Truths of Leadership contains that rare combination of inspiration and practical advice that I love in a book. Read it to strengthen your relationships at work and in life.”—Larry C. Spears


- “A Personal Remembrance of Robert K. Greenleaf,” by


**COURSES**

It is a great honor and joy to teach for Gonzaga University. Since 2008, I have taught over 2,000 graduate students in over one hundred courses. In 2022-2023, I have taught the following classes:

- Spring A 2022: Servant-Leadership (ORGL 530)
- Spring B 2022: Listen Discern Decide (ORGL 535)
- Summer 2022: Listen Discern Decide (ORGL 535)
- Fall B 2022: Servant-Leadership (ORGL 530)
- Spring A 2023: Servant-Leadership (ORGL 530)
- Spring B 2023: Listen Discern Decide (ORGL 535)
- Summer 2023: Listen Discern Decide (ORGL 535)
- Fall A 2023: Servant-Leadership (ORGL 530)
- Fall B 2023: Listen Discern Decide (ORGL 535)

**ON APPRECIATION AND AWARENESS**

In this, our 2023 edition of *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership*, and as always, I continue to feel a deep sense of appreciation and gratitude surrounding the wonderful contributors to this publication, and to all those who have contributed to our previous editions since we began in 2005. As ever, I offer a special note of appreciation for the unflagging work and imagination of our stellar editors, Shann Ferch and Jenny Song, for their beautiful work
in putting this issue together. I am grateful to serve as Senior Advisory Editor of *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership*; and, for the friendship and intellectual journey shared with so many servant-leaders at Gonzaga University and around the world who continue to deepen my own understanding and appreciation of servant-leadership.

References


Larry C. Spears is president and CEO of the Spears Center for Servant-Leadership (www.spearscenter.org), Indianapolis, and he serves as Servant-Leadership Scholar for the School of Leadership Studies at Gonzaga University, Spokane. He is a writer-editor-teacher and contributing author to forty books on servant-leadership, including the critically acclaimed *Insights on Leadership* (1996), *Fortuitous Encounters* (2013, with Paul Davis); and, with Shann
Ferch, *The Spirit of Servant-Leadership* (2011) and *Conversations on Servant-Leadership* (2015). He also served as editor on all five books of writings by Robert K. Greenleaf; and, since 2005 he has served as editor or co-editor of nine servant-leadership anthologies. Larry serves as senior advisory editor of *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership*. From 1990-2007, Larry served as president and CEO, and also as Senior Fellow and President Emeritus, of The Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership.

Among other honors, Larry has received the “Outstanding Leadership Award” from Chapman University in California (2002); the “Dare to Lead” Award from the International Leadership Network (2004); the Community Leadership Award from DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana (2008); a special recognition from the Greenleaf Centre-United Kingdom (2015); and, as the inaugural inductee into Gonzaga University’s School of Leadership Studies’ Hall of Honor (2018).

In 2004, Larry was interviewed by NBC reporter Stone Phillips for a segment on servant-leadership that appeared on NBC’s DATELINE news program, which was seen by ten million viewers.