Thoughts on Servant-Leadership in the Modern Era

—Compiled by Larry C. Spears

“Servant-leadership is now part of the vocabulary of enlightened leadership. Bob Greenleaf, along with other notables such as McGregor, Drucker, and Follett, has created a new thought-world of leadership that contains such virtues as growth, responsibility and love.”

Warren Bennis, author of On Leadership

“I truly believe that servant-leadership has never been more applicable to the world of leadership than it is today.”

Ken Blanchard, author of The Heart of Leadership

“We are each indebted to Greenleaf for bringing spirit and values into the workplace. His ideas will have enduring value for every generation of leaders.”

Peter Block, author of Stewardship

“Serve the people well. And the rest will take care of itself.”

Cheryl Bachelder, author of Dare to Serve
“Our Servant Leadership School focuses on walking with those seeking to deepen their spiritual practices as they serve those on the margins. Through the gift of spirituality as leadership, we continue to walk this road together.”

**Cheryl Broetje**, Broetje Family Trust

“Anyone can be a servant-leader. Any one of us can take initiative; it doesn’t require that we be appointed a leader; but it does require that we operate from moral authority. The spirit of servant-leadership is the spirit of moral authority.”

**Stephen R. Covey**, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*

“The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant.”

**Max DePree**, author of *Leadership is an Art*

“Servant-leadership represents an ideal form of leading, by empowering and serving others.”

**Satinder K. Dhiman**, editor-in-chief, *The Palgrave Handbook of Servant-Leadership*

“Greenleaf upheld the idea that the essence of servant-leadership flows beneath the inherent potential of the human community and can be genuinely approached by people of all faiths and leaders of all creeds.”

**Shann Ray Ferch**, author of *Forgiveness and Power in the Age of Atrocity*
“The servant-leader is servant first. Becoming a servant-leader begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first.”

Robert K. Greenleaf, author of The Servant as Leader

“With its deeper resonances in our spiritual traditions, Greenleaf reminds us that the essence of leadership is service, and therefore the welfare of people. Anchored in this way, we can distinguish between the tools of influence, persuasion, and power from the orienting values defining leadership to which these tools are applied.”

Ronald Heifetz, author of Leadership Without Easy Answers

“The most difficult step, Greenleaf has written, that any developing servant-leader must take, is to begin the personal journey toward wholeness and self-discovery.”

Joseph Jaworski, author of Synchronicity

“Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love.”

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., minister and civil rights activist

“Robert K. Greenleaf’s work has struck a resonant chord in the minds and hearts of scholars and practitioners alike. His message lives through others, the true legacy of a servant-leader.”

James Kouzes, co-author of The Leadership Challenge

“Freedom is not a state; it is an act. It is not some enchanted garden perched high on a distant plateau where we can finally sit down and rest. Freedom is the continuous action we all must take, and each generation must do its part to create an even more fair, more just society.”
Rep. John Lewis, civil rights pioneer and U.S. Representative from Georgia

“I stand here before you, not as a prophet, but as a humble servant of you, the people.”

Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa

“Robert Greenleaf takes us beyond cynicism and cheap tricks and simplified techniques into the heart of the matter, into the spiritual lives of those who lead.”

Parker Palmer, author of The Courage to Teach

“Servant-leadership is more than a concept. As far as I’m concerned, it is a fact. I would simply define it by saying that any great leader, by which I also mean an ethical leader of any group, will see herself or himself primarily as a servant of that group and will act accordingly.”

M. Scott Peck, author of The Road Less Traveled

“No one in the past 30 years has had a more profound impact on thinking about leadership than Robert Greenleaf. If we sought an objective measure of the quality of leadership available to society, there would be none better than the number of people reading and studying his writings.”

Peter M. Senge, author of The Fifth Discipline

“Servant-leadership, in its ethic of love, care and service to the least privileged, is a potential antidote to patriarchal binds.”

Jiying Song, co-author/co-editor of Servant-Leadership, Feminism, and Gender Well-Being
“Servant-leadership offers hope and wisdom for a new era in human development, and for the creation of better, more caring institutions.”

**Larry C. Spears**, Servant-Leadership Scholar, Gonzaga University

“Real leaders are not blinded by the trappings of power but recognize their role as servant.”

**Archbishop Desmond Tutu**, human rights activist and theologian

“I believe that Greenleaf knew so much when he said the criterion of successful servant-leadership is that those we serve are healthier and wiser and freer and more autonomous, and perhaps they even loved our leadership so much that they also want to serve others.”

**Margaret Wheatley**, author of *Leadership and the New Science*

“Those being served must grow and evolve as persons, and those least privileged in society should benefit.”

**Lea Williams**, author of *Servants of the People*

“Despite all the buzz about modern leadership techniques, no one knows better than Greenleaf what really matters.”

*Working Woman* magazine

“I think servant-leadership is the heart of what could be a whole overarching, all-embracing new philosophy of organizations, and particularly business, a philosophy that could help us do what has to be done, which is to reinvent capitalism.”

**Danah Zohar**, author of *Spiritual Capital*
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.