Principles of servant-leadership can be a powerful remedy for the persistent anger, hostility and conflict that plagues modern society. Greenleaf (2002) described leaders as servants first, attuned to the needs of those who follow. Servant-leaders demonstrate awareness, listening, empathy, and healing towards others, especially in inimical circumstances (Spears, 2002). Ferch (2012) described this leadership approach as one that sees other individuals as beloved and treats them as such. Song (2020) further elucidated that all of humanity is tied together as one. People are connected to one another whether in physical proximity, blood relation, or in spirit.

Greenleaf (2002) stated that both good and evil are byproducts of the imaginations, intentions, and responses of individuals. Because of humanity’s inherent fallibility, this can happen to even the best of people, and as Tutu (1999) explained, while having a remarkable aptitude for good, individuals can also harvest much evil. He also explained that despite our imperfections, people are not necessarily evil in and of themselves and must be differentiated from their acts (Tutu, 1999).

When one allows their inner turmoil to overtake their ability to control their emotions, there is little good that can result. An example of the encompassing and destructive enmity that seems to surround
humanity on a frequent basis, my wife, son, and I witnessed a physical altercation walking through a retail parking lot. While one individual attempted to drive away in their vehicle, another person opened the driver’s door and literally jumped in and began to assault the driver in an assortment of ways while shouting expletives in their direction. I do not know what instigated the aggression or why the individual attacked the driver of the vehicle in the way that they did, but it left an indelible impression on my mind of what ensues when anger turns into unmanageable rage. Goleman (2006) adeptly defined this uncontrollable outburst as an “emotional high jacking.” Even though this disheartening experience did not directly involve my family or I, it was considerably troubling.

In this article, I outline several situations from my life that demonstrate the discomfort caused by conflict and how it can be corrected through principles of servant-leadership. This begins with the concern and love for others. Ferch (2012) stated that love can find a way to settle the conflict in our lives and present an eternal perspective over a temporal roadblock. This corridor of love commences with faith that there is a much better way than bitterness and hostility, even when it may be hard to envision. As Greenleaf (2002) affirmed, “Faith is the choice of the nobler hypothesis” (p. 28). Life therefore remains meaningless unless there is something beyond our own selves to embrace (Frankl, 2000). The process of discovery therefore typically involves choice, deliberate action, and corresponding growing pains. In his book, Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness, Greenleaf (2002) asked readers what it meant to be great. I contend greatness is revealed in one’s decision and ability to love and forgive consistently, genuinely, and unashamedly. It is all too easy to give into the instinctual and profaner emotions that so easily beset humanity. Consequently, I will highlight characteristics of servant-
leadership and how they can help individuals overcome their obstacles and demonstrate a greater capacity for love and forgiveness for the optimal benefit and existence of humanity.

CONFLICT: THE BREEDING GROUND FOR ESTRANGEMENT AND SUFFERING

Unresolved conflict can be a challenging and destructive condition between acquaintances and loved ones. Based on my experiences, if not addressed empathetically, conflict can harm relationships in substantial ways. To demonstrate, I received a text message from my wife stating that her brother had threatened our 3-year-old son with a loaded gun. She had taken our son to her parents’ home for a friendly visit. My wife’s brother had been living in their parents’ home and left a loaded gun on the counter in his rush to leave for a personal matter elsewhere. Thankfully, she found the gun sitting on the countertop within our child’s reach before he did. She was understandably not happy and sent a pointed text message to her brother chastising him for his potentially fatal mistake and insisted he be more responsible in the future. He was not pleased with her tone and responded that he was going to leave out several loaded guns in our son’s reach when he knew my family would visit their home again. My wife’s brother has a history of erratic behavior and has assaulted several individuals, so we took his threat seriously.

I do not believe it was anyone’s intention to develop unfavorable feelings towards one another, however, my wife’s family arrived there quickly in this situation and defended it adamantly. Wiesenthal (1997) declared that in our freedom of choice, it is wholly in our ability to determine our attitude in any situation. My family did just that, albeit not in a positive manner. My wife’s parents took the side of their son and blamed my wife for making him upset, while my wife’s sister and her family took our side considering their brother’s behavior a threat against their children as well. This chasm created hard feelings amongst loved
ones and on occasion, when there was communication between both sides, it was not healthy. While criticism may bear useful fruit in certain circumstances, its overuse amongst our family, especially by me, was not producing healthy results (Greenleaf, 2002). As Greenleaf (2002) illuminated further, there is much harm in listening too often to the analyst and too little to the artist.

Freire’s (2015) posted video interview of Abraham Joshua Heschel explained that there is meaning beyond the irrational,

Let them be sure that every little deed counts, that every word has power and that we can – everyone – do our share to redeem the world in spite of all the absurdities and all the frustrations and all the disappointments. And above all, remember that the meaning of life is to build a life as it were a work of art.

Over-analysis of this situation made things far more difficult than had we listened to each other’s perspectives and exercised empathy and loving concern towards one another. This begins with the very origination of thought and every subsequent word and deed, notwithstanding how minor, as Heschel counseled. This was no different for my family and I.

Our family’s steadfast silence and brief and bitter conversations prevented reconciling. Wiesel (2006) stated that silence emboldens the tormentor while harming those tormented. Unfortunately, both sides of the family played equal parts and refused to acquiesce. We declined to let our guards down, disregard prevailing pride and be moved along a far more enlightened path (Greenleaf, 2002). To return to the once enjoyed and loving relationships, something had to go (Greenleaf, 2002). Overcoming deeply held bitter feelings and unyielding self-righteousness was the only way forward.

Regardless of the challenges people face in life, they can gain much by attuning themselves to principles of servant-leadership that include
listening to and being aware of the feelings of others and moving forward with love. Having empathy and working towards healing can lead to restored relationships.

There was a way for our family to discover new inspiration and something more beautiful, and that resolution was through love (Greenleaf, 2002). Ray (2011) shared a story of two estranged and yet beloved individuals that allowed too much time to pass before reconciling. In his chapter, How We Fall in *American Masculine*, Ray (2011) described Benjamin and Sadie’s dysfunctional relationship that transitioned from love to infidelity and back again. For a time, they remained together and maintained a somewhat loving companionship. Their flawed relationship eventually gave way and Sadie left Benjamin for a rather difficult life on the street or at one lover’s home or another all the while abusing addictive substances. Despite conflict, time may influence the way individuals perceive situations and heal the heart. Much like Sadie’s return to Benjamin several years later, my wife’s family decided to make amends and reconcile. Though our family lost previously valued relationships for a brief period, it was almost as if those involved had to be separated to strengthen bonds and feel more at home (Greenleaf, 2002).

My wife’s family was forced out of the old and comfortable, and as Greenleaf (2002) stated, into something new and fresh. It is not easy to move from anger and hostility of being wronged to a position of reconciliation, however, strength surfaces from pain (Ferch, 2012). There were several awkward meetings, tears, and disagreements, but our family managed to work through much of the problems. While there may have been hope that the situation would have simply disappeared and miraculously corrected itself on its own, we had to choose to walk the challenging road to proactively redeem loving feelings.

There was much healing and growing that took place within our
family by facing our demons head-on and passing through the dark valley we could not have been discovered nor cherished in any other way. Camus (1957) quoted Emerson who expressed the belief that “every wall is a door” (p. 14) and that resolution is often discovered “in the very thick of battle” (p. 14). I advance the notion that there is an escape hatch in nearly every challenge people face. It may not be the most desired or easiest path, but it is often the only way to resolution.

Things are much better today within our family. I do not believe things will return to where they were before the threatening incident between siblings because all have learned and grown in different ways. Paradoxically, as Greenleaf (2002) expressed, to fully uncover and comprehend meaning in this life, one must experience both the good and the bad. I have learned from personal experience that there is more to learn from one’s mistakes than successes. Each personal failure has pushed me to learn from my errors and become better. This is not a condition exclusive to my life. All individuals encounter trials throughout life (Greenleaf, 2002), however, how people deal with those hurdles separates the weak from the strong.

This challenge rings especially true for leaders, more particularly servant-leaders. Individuals with responsibility must learn from their mistakes and put self-interests aside for the betterment of others, even when it hurts or is uncomfortable. Leading people is not easy. It takes a certain level of maturity to lead and heal others when an assortment of perspectives and human emotions are involved (Ferch, 2012). This level of self-sacrifice and love generally does not happen overnight and takes time and commitment (hooks, 2001).

I have determined that the family unit serves the distinctive purpose of helping its members learn how to be loving and forgiving. It had always been my belief that if there was a group of people that should be loving, caring, and forgiving with one another it should be members of a
family. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. Despite the challenges, families seem to be the perfect schoolhouse for life and leadership responsibility. In this sacred unit, people must realize and accept the fact that while families may be the perfect schoolhouse, individuals are not faultless (Greenleaf, 2002). People love deeply, and sometimes they are drawn into harsher agonies. As Fraser (1988) stated, “I love, therefore I am human” (p. 138). She also surmised that life can at times feel much like war and be viewed positively if one survives (Fraser, 1988). Life and family are intertwined regardless of where individual journeys take them. Additionally, love can be developed between friends in such a way that they become as close, if not more so, than family. Such is the case of a friend of mine of over 20 years. Much like many family relationships, our friendship has had a few ups and downs along the way and has offered useful insight into growing as a servant-leader.

My friend, Scott, and I became acquainted shortly after I returned home from spending two years as an out-of-state proselyting missionary. Scott had just started his recovery from a lifetime of substance abuse and was getting a second chance at life in his mid-forties. I was just beginning college and full of hope in my early twenties. Scott and I both shared in a powerful thought expressed by Greenleaf (2002), “for something great to happen there must be a great dream. Behind every great achievement is a dreamer of great dreams” (p. 30).

Scott pursued a career in the mortgage industry, while I followed a career path in higher education. After watching Scott move from one job in the home lending business to the next, I suggested he start his own mortgage company, which he did. I acquired a mortgage license to support and help him along the way since I have some experience in launching businesses and consulting others how to do so.

In the process of time, I realized Scott’s definition of hard work differed from mine. I often found myself dealing with his procrastination
tendencies and consequent last-minute emergencies. It did not take long for my patience to wear thin. I found myself emotionally high jacked and said things I should not have, while he also had a few remarks for me. Over time, a few sour remarks turned into hurt feelings and a harmed relationship. Like Farah’s (2020) account of coming to the realization that he needed to ask forgiveness from his mother after harboring feelings over a lifetime for her and his father’s divorce, I too recognized things were not great between Scott and I.

Happiness is discovered in consequence of the virtuous choices people make daily, including loving and serving others or pursuing meaningful causes (Frankl, 2000). Furthermore, Greenleaf (2002) believed that one truly finds themself after becoming lost enough.

Through Scott’s and my mutual suffering, an opportunistic door opened that would allow our relationship to become stronger than it was before.

There was a need on my part to ask Scott to sit down with me face-to-face for the purpose of asking his forgiveness for my failings. It was an unusual request in our relationship as I did not explain my intent, however, he obliged quickly. When Scott and I met, I stated that I did not deserve a positive response due to my past behavior and expressed my regret and asked for his forgiveness for my lack of patience and sharp words. He was surprised that I had asked to meet with him for something like that and stated I had nothing to be forgiven for. He countered that he should be the one asking for clemency (S. Roestenburg, personal communication, April 7, 2023). While I was not expecting that response, I listened to him share his feelings when I lost my temper. His recollections were painful for me as I realized I cannot allow myself to hurt another person like that. Scott expressed that he was genuinely touched that I approached him with my regret and said it made a positive impact on his day.

Scott and I came to understand what McCord (2020) stated that in
forgiveness people return to a place of love and respect by putting misunderstanding and pain in the past, and move beyond previous embarrassment to cultivate strengthened characters, and unite in closer togetherness in the process. Servant-leaders learn to do this well in pursuit of worthwhile purposes. Greenleaf (2002) referred to a poem by his friend Robert Frost and explained one acquires what they are prepared and open to receive. The same can be said for humanity’s willingness to leave the pangs of its personal and professional relationships behind, thereby thrusting open the windows of our souls to offer and accept greater love and forgiveness.

Based upon my observations, the tension and animosity experienced in my wife’s family and between Scott and I are unfortunately not uncommon between loved ones. Contention in one form or another has been part of the human experience since its beginning. Despite a history of anger and hostility, an emotionally charged and violent response is not acceptable. Justice may require a fitting response to maintain social order, but love and mercy offer a more life affirming outcome (Ferch, 2012). Martin Luther King, Jr. was a strong example of not letting his emotions get the better of him and withholding retaliation when others intended harm on him or his family. In early 1956, King was away from home attending meetings to further civil right efforts, while his wife, Coretta, young daughter, Yolanda, and family friend, Mary Lucy Williams, were settling in for the night. During their preparations, they heard a thump at the front door. They promptly moved to the back of the house where it was safer due to concerns of their house being bombed by those who opposed King’s work. This was fortuitous as the loud thump indeed turned out to be a bomb that exploded shortly thereafter. When Mr. King returned home, instead of demanding an immediate and forceful response from the supportive yet angry crowd that had gathered outside his family’s home, he preached love and peace, especially
towards the instigators of the heinous act (King, 1993). He practiced the servant-leadership qualities of empathy and healing for everyone, including his antagonists.

Fast forward 65 years, and although of a different character, our world experienced another contentious circumstance with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The United States was already reeling from a variety of partisan political controversies as well as other world disasters and an onslaught of everyday stress and anxiety. With a 24-hour news cycle and widespread social media use, one is never far from aggression and disagreement. A worldwide pandemic added to this did not assuage differences or cool tempers. Political factions become more pronounced and prejudiced, and moods flared hotter. I am not sure what was more dangerous to our civilization, a contagious disease, or the onslaught of relentless antagonism. As Wiesenthal (1997) affirmed, I too could understand the position of those who are continuously inflicted and begin to lose their faith.

I found myself concerned and upset when others treated the COVID-19 pandemic or those it worried with little regard. My wife and son both have health issues that put them at a heightened risk for serious disease with lung-inflicting pathogens. I was not happy with the provocation of conspiracy theories and lies that pervaded society and put individuals at greater risk for serious illness or worse. When the issue became political, I was in disbelief.

Living in a constant state of fear and anger left me susceptible to my lesser manners. While I never lost control, I was more anxious and vulnerable to an emotional high jacking when the opportune situation arose. Unfortunately, I found myself giving in on a few occasions. I believed that if I could let loose some of the anger, it would make me feel better. What I found was that while it brought momentarily relief, it did not solve the problem and I felt worse soon afterwards. I experienced
what Frankl (2000) described as an existential vacuum or feeling of meaninglessness and emptiness. I recognized that anger was not a short or long-term solution, especially for the enduring hollowness inside. The more a person gives in to these baser actions, the more they crave it, and yet the further away they move from healing and resolution. This was particularly true in the situations with my wife’s family and Scott. When each person engaged in this degenerate way of thinking and behaving, everyone became more interwoven in a continual battle of argument and stuck in the past without a way forward (Ramsey, 2020). The relationship with my family and Scott suffered when each was treated like objects rather than people (Farah, 2020).

A LIFE-AFFIRMING SOLUTION

The patterns of continual anger and hostility that plague society can be reversed by practicing principles of servant-leadership, particularly awareness, intentional listening, empathy, and healing. People cannot wait for these problems to be legislated away by a political hero or solved by “someone else.” Greenleaf (2002) reasoned that the foundation of a healthy society is established by serving one other. Change originates in the heart of the individual and people become what they think (Ferch, 2012). Recognition is a critical first step and efforts for restoration cannot progress if sincere remorse is absent (Wiesenthal, 1997). There is hope, according to Tutu (1999), because humanity has room for growth if it can discard denial and defensiveness and ask for forgiveness for its wrongs.

Relating this to my own experiences, I must look inside and recognize my limitations before creating change in myself. While I would appreciate an easier way like White Man’s Dog hope for a “stronger medicine” in the fictional text, Fools Crow, I realize it was up to me to find my own power (Welch, 1986). There are no shortcuts. After speaking with my wife about the relational encounters I have dealt with
as a leader and teacher, she commented that I struggle with patience when others are not at the same intellectual or experience level (K. Stoddard, personal communication, March 20, 2023). Her comments stung.

In a separate discussion with my sister, she commented I can lack empathy when irritated by others, corroborating observations by my wife (K. Hargreaves, personal communication, March 20, 2023). Imprisoned in my own world of self-interest and lack of tolerance, I have on occasion failed to respond with concern for followers and students that I originally intended when beginning employment in academia (Powers & Moore, 2005). As I contemplated my wife and sister’s observations and various interactions with employees and students, I realized my own weakness and hypocrisy and the necessity to eradicate these behaviors. Even though I had been down the same road as my students, I let personal matters take precedence over their needs. Wilson (2011) noted that people who find similarities in life circumstances with others are much more able to develop perspective on why people find themselves in the situations they do. As an instructor, I determined that I must be more tolerant of my student’s concerns and hospitable to their questions and expectations since I had been through similar circumstance in my life. I believe a good place to begin this process is by utilizing principles of servant-leadership.

Servant-leadership as a term was conceived by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970, who wrote a formative and thought-provoking article titled, “The Servant as Leader.” After spending the first 40 years of his career at AT&T, he established The Center for Applied Ethics, where he further refined his vision of servant-leadership. He spent another 25 years as a thought-leader authoring several articles and books and consulting numerous organizations in this discipline. Greenleaf’s definition of servant-leadership states,
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. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions... 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? (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 27)

Horsman (2008) added,

The servant-leader promotes the valuing and development of people; the building of community; the practice of authenticity; the providing of leadership for the good of those led; and the sharing of power and status for the common good of each individual, the organization as a whole, and those served by the organization. (p. 86)

Ferch (2012) noted that people have innate value and are beloved. If that worth is to be fully realized, individuals must commit to a better way of living together. In addition to the four characteristics of servant-leadership including awareness, listening, empathy, and healing, Spears (2002) also identified six from Greenleaf’s works on servant-leadership that can mend angry feelings, lead to improved relationships, and enhance the standard of living worldwide. These include persuasion, conceptualizing, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Spears, 2002). The above-mentioned characteristics highlight not only the importance of the leader, but also the significance of those being served and the measure of service being rendered for the good of society. Communities do not flourish when selfishness and egotism reign, however, true power and greatness are
realized when one is focused on others (Ramsey, 2020). As Tutu (1999) stated, all that people are and have is a gift benevolently given and received. The health of our society is sustained when people are more concerned and helpful towards others rather than primarily on their own needs and desires.

Based on my experience, strong relationships are founded on listening and empathy. Song (2020) stated that individuals must take this further and exercise deep listening. This means individuals listen intently, contemplating what those who are being listening to are currently experiencing. Words have meaning behind them, and listeners are dialed into the emotions and feelings being expressed through audible sound and nonverbal signals. Instead of listening to respond and then move on, people must learn how to listen to understand (Covey, 1989) so they can support and lift. There is much that being silent can teach people if individuals simply listen (Wiesenthal, 1997).

Insightfully, Greenleaf (2002) stated that language is a significant obstruction to our understanding. Words have diverse meanings to different people based on deeply personal experiences. For instance, the meaning behind the words “love” and “family” for an individual who grew up in a home with supportive and caring parents and siblings stands in stark contrast to another who was raised in an abusive household. Whitehead as cited in Greenleaf (2002), explained that there must be a leap in imagination to understand the nuances of language between individuals and groups. Moreover, both speaker and listener must exhibit a certain degree of linguistic imagination to link the symbols expressed with words to their suitable meanings (Greenleaf, 2002). If individuals listen with empathy, they imagine themselves in another person’s shoes and consider what their needs are if they were in their position. Additionally, and powerfully, genuine listening builds capacity in other people (Greenleaf, 2002).
To restore that which is broken, “we must grasp life at its depths” (Van Gogh, as cited in Ferch, 2012). In healing, individuals look inward and realize their weakness and transform themselves (Ferch, 2012). Healing encompasses the recovery and restoration of both self and others. This proved especially true in the example of my wife’s family and between my friend Scott and I. The promise of servant-leaders is the healing they offer others (Ferch, 2012). Healing efforts can be significant or small in nature. I recall a seemingly unremarkable situation while working at a hospital that demonstrates this principle. Several colleagues and I were attempting to help a divorced associate and her son through a challenging time. On one occasion I felt rather weighed down in my efforts while sitting at my desk. Another person who was aiding in our collective actions walked towards me and put her arm around me to give me encouragement. I do not know if she sensed I was struggling emotionally, but that small act healed my inner stress and allowed me to move forward.

Maintaining self and other-awareness and being conscious of one’s surroundings, as well as properly conceptualizing situations allows people to become more effectual servant-leaders and caring individuals. Song (2020) proposed four conceptual dimensions of awareness, namely, spirit-awareness or our connection to a higher purpose; self-awareness, our ability to be in tune with oneself; other-awareness, our stewardship to the needs of others; and time-awareness, our cognizance of the past, present, and future and how they all flow together. People need to be aware of and responsible to themselves and their existence (Frankl, 2000) and how their being affects the lives of others.

Being aware also means having the ability to lead with foresight. Song (2020) explicated that leaders must understand what was learned from the past and comprehend how that affects both the present and future. Greenleaf (2002) defined foresight, or intuition, as a “feel for
patterns” (p. 37). The efforts of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as described by Tutu (1999) offered insight into the powerful effects foresight had on the future security and prosperity of South Africa by utilizing restorative practices that allowed perpetrators to go free if they acknowledged their heinous and racist acts against others. Rather than condemning and punishing the offender in a retributive manner, the TRC allowed individuals to admit to their grievous errors, ask for forgiveness, and then work towards healing by living a better life moving forward. These efforts could have backfired and furthered animosities, however, the TRC exercised effective foresight by instituting practices of penitence and forgiveness that changed their country for the better with very few resulting problems (Tutu, 1999).

Servant-leaders also advocate persuasive influence rather than dictating orders through command-and-control methods. They lead through virtue rather than traditional authority or power (Muoneme, 2020). I recall the story of a friend I have invited to speak to my students. He recounted that when younger, he had responsibility for the removal of snow from his family’s driveway after storms. When finished, his mother would often remark that their elderly neighbor needed their driveway shoveled and it would be nice if someone took care of that. He knew what that meant. After my friend finished shoveling the neighbors snow, his mother would likewise name another elderly neighbor and express how wonderful it would be if someone helped them as well. There was no order directed towards him, but a persuasive suggestion of service. My friend’s mother’s intention worked effectively and made a significant impact on his life thereafter. As Greenleaf (2002) posited, things work out better when one is persuaded instead of compelled, otherwise the intentions work contrary to their purposes (Greenleaf, 2002).

Finally, the servant-leader sets themself apart by a commitment to the growth of people and building the community. It is difficult for an
individual to serve with their whole heart and not impact the growth of other people. Greenleaf (2002) stated integrity and deference for one another are preserved through cherished community bonds. Conversely, when one person is harmed, others are as well. As Tutu (1999) believed, people are all brothers and sisters to one another, and I argue, deeply connected.

Despite the wide availability of knowledge at our fingertips, humanity remains imperfect. Ferch (2012) stated, “evil goes on, unaccountable and full of fury, chaos, and trouble. But love finds order in chaos and asserts the eternal over the temporary” (p. 170). Human fallibility with its associated and strong emotions can lead individuals into an emotional high jacking if not continually self-vigilant and open to love. Deep and abiding love lifts and heals, then restores and brings back to life (Ferch, 2012). Greenleaf (2002) proposed that while love is impossible to define, its expressions are gentle and yet inestimable. Love is ultimately characterized by “unlimited liability” (p. 52). Likewise, forgiveness stretches, strengthens, and relieves both the oppressed and oppressor. The characteristics distinctive to servant-leadership, especially awareness, listening, empathy and healing, are grounded in love and forgiveness and lead to more durable relationships. Wiesel (2006) postulated that God allows people to fall and then repent and change because it makes humans better. Through humility and sincerity, forgiveness asking and granting develops responsibly as well as inclusion and recognition of humanity’s relation to one another (Muoneme, 2020).

CONCLUSION

In this article, I explored several challenging situations from my life and how implementing a servant-leader approach improved affected personal relationships for the better. As I became aware of harmed associations and the part I played in them, I was better prepared to look
at situations empathetically and move towards love and forgiveness. Challenged and wounded relationships are not exclusive to my life. It is an affliction and opportunity for growth that affects most people’s lives. It is easy to fall into the trap of letting one’s harsher emotions cause discord with beloved others. Consequently, it is important that individuals develop as Greenleaf (2002) described, a “tolerance of imperfection” (p. 34) for oneself and others. Ferch (2012) stated that through “awareness we encounter the imagination and determination necessary to turn atrocity into meaning and meaning into transcendence” (p. 142). Conflict is a regular part of existence and with a servant-leadership approach, can become an opportunity to strengthen relationships with others.

Four characteristics of servant-leadership, namely awareness, listening, empathy and healing, allow individuals to transcend conflict and build stronger relationships. This is not an excuse for harsh words or inappropriate conduct to be resolved later; however, it does demonstrate the potential for positive transformation when needed. Additionally, the impact love and forgiveness can have on our efforts to improve our most cherished associations is immeasurable. The future of civilization relies on its willingness and ability to apply principles of servant-leadership, demonstrate love, and ask for and grant forgiveness.

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