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How Great Leaders Value People

By Marcel Schwantes

Editor's Note: In the November 2015 edition of The Stepping Stone¹, executive coach Marcel Schwantes outlined how great leaders display authenticity—one of the foundations of effective servant leadership. Here Schwantes returns for Part 2 of a six-part series that delves into the best practices of how a servant leader values people.

Organizations of all sizes and industries are reimagining work cultures in this relationship economy. It's all about the people. Consequently, servant leadership quickly is becoming the preferred practice for some of the biggest and best companies in the world.

Before we dive in and explore how great leaders value their people, let's review the six foundational behaviors of great leaders based on the extensive research work of Dr. Jim Laub. Professor Laub is a scholar who developed the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA)—arguably the best and most accurate tool in the market to assess organizational health based on the foundation of effective servant leadership.

1. They display authenticity.
2. They value people.
3. They develop people.
4. They build community.
5. They provide leadership.
6. They share leadership.

Here are three profound ways great leaders go about valuing their people.

GREAT LEADERS TRUST AND BELIEVE IN THE PEOPLE THEY LEAD

In his book *The Speed of Trust*, Stephen M.R. Covey says that a team with high trust will produce results faster and at lower cost. And most thought leaders are agreeing that sustaining trust among team members starts with leaders who demonstrate a combination of these factors:

- A commitment to purpose or vision that inspires others to follow



- A strong character that does not compromise values
- A strong inclination to serve the needs of others before their own
- Keeping their word and delivering what they promise
- Genuine caring and compassion for their people—looking after their best interests, being receptive and engaging in non-judgmental listening
- Competence and expertise in their chosen field

Not surprisingly, insurers and other companies in financial and professional services sectors that made *Fortune* magazine's "100 Best Companies to Work For" list this year are characterized by high levels of trust and transparency—especially employees' belief in the credibility of their leaders. The research² behind what makes those companies get on that list is conducted by the folks at Great Place to Work, who report that 92 percent of employees surveyed at these companies believe that management is transparent in its business practices.

And as new confirmation for servant leadership, the study found that the "Best Companies to Work For" have leaders who, to ensure success, do several things year in, year out that correlate well with leadership trust behaviors:

- They keep the lines of communication open.
- They share their vision for the future with employees.
- They take the pulse of the organization by constantly listening and responding to what they hear so they can serve the needs of their people. Whether it's sharing quarterly financials or making strategic decisions, they make sure to listen.

- They offer employees ample opportunities for training and development.

GREAT LEADERS SHOW RESPECT FOR THEIR EMPLOYEES

Cheryl Bachelder, CEO of Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen, wrote a book called *Dare to Serve: How to Drive Superior Results by Serving Others*, in which she tells the story of her leadership journey. When she was named CEO in 2007, profit was in the negative, and the company stock price had taken a nosedive from \$34 in 2002 to \$13. The brand suffered, and franchise owners were running around with their hair on fire.

By 2014, Popeyes did a 180-degree turn. Sales were up 25 percent, and profits were up 40 percent. Market share had grown from 14 percent to 21 percent, and the stock price was over \$40. The franchisees were giddy with the turnaround and began reinvesting

Insurers that made *Fortune* magazine's "100 Best Companies to Work For" list in 2015 include ACUITY at No. 3, USAA at No. 33, Aflac at 49, Allianz at 68 and Nationwide Mutual, joining the list for the first time at No. 95.

in the brand, many remodeling their restaurants and building new ones around the world.

The difference?

Bachelder says that it was a conscious decision to create a new workplace (with rigorous measures in place) where people were treated with *respect* and dignity, yet were challenged to perform at the highest level. Silos were broken, managers began to listen, and self-serving leaders went bye-bye as collaboration increased. Workers were valued.

GREAT LEADERS ARE AWARE OF, AND RESPONSIVE TO, THE NEEDS OF THEIR EMPLOYEES

Great leaders show an interest in their people's jobs and career aspirations. They look into the future to create learning and development opportunities. They find out what motivates their best people by getting to know what desires will drive each tribe member. This is about emotional engagement.

Let's suppose you manage the Web development function of your insurance carrier. Take three developers on your project team:

- One comes to work every day just to fill a financial need for the family.
- Another fulfills a deep need to design software to serve the needs of her carrier community.
- The third eats, drinks and sleeps user design interface to understand how it will work holistically for both end users and stakeholders.

Knowing what makes each one of them get up in the morning can help you develop tasks and provide incentives they will actually care about—and make sure that it plays to their individual strengths to keep them engaged and learning on the job.

Let's end with a question to think about:

In what meaningful and sustainable ways do you value your people at work?

Editor's Note: Watch for Part 3 of this series—"How Great Leaders Develop Their People"—in the May 2016 edition of The Stepping Stone. And check out these additional articles published online in Carrier Management by Schwantes that provide background and introduce his premise that the best way to engage workers to perform at a high level is by applying daily practices of servant leadership:

- Making a Case for Servant Leadership, <http://www.carriermanagement.com/features/2015/04/14/138109.htm>
- Five Reality Checks True Leaders Must Give Themselves, <http://www.carriermanagement.com/features/2015/01/02/133749.htm> ■



Marcel Schwantes is principal and co-founder of Leadership from the Core. His company's biggest calling is to help leaders build high-trust cultures and achieve optimal organizational health through servant leadership. Reach him at info@coachmarcel.com or sign up for free teleseminars at www.leadershipfromthecore.com.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ You can access the November 2015 issue of *The Stepping Stone* online at www.SOA.org/LD.
- ² Source: White paper titled "Industry-Specific Strategies of Winning Companies: An Analysis by Great Place to Work," page 7, available for download on the Great Place to Work website.