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# PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

## How Great Leaders Provide Leadership

By Marcel Schwantes

*Editor's Note: In the November 2015 through August 2016 issues of The Stepping Stone,<sup>1</sup> executive coach Marcel Schwantes outlined how great leaders display authenticity, value and develop people, and share leadership—four of the foundations of effective servant leadership. Now Schwantes returns for Part 5 of a six-part series, discussing how to reconcile leading and serving.*

**A**s we build on the principles presented in this series on servant leadership, we get to a core idea that raises an obvious question. The core principle: Servant leaders provide leadership. The question: “How can I be a servant and lead?” Or restated: “How can I lead and be a servant?”

Providing leadership is a necessary side of the servant leader—the traits that we are more familiar (and comfortable) with that

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speak to the “hard” people side of the leadership equation: drive, results, urgency, goals and metrics. Yet, in context, the practice of a servant leader remains a paradox: You cannot lead without serving if you want to get the best out of your people.

While there are countless ways to provide leadership, the most influential leaders consistently act on these four things.

### THEY ENVISION THE FUTURE AND GET OTHERS TO DO THE SAME

We hear so much about how leaders need to “motivate their teams.” And that’s certainly true. However, no motivation in the world will stick if the person you’re trying to pound it into doesn’t buy into your vision. So how do you get people to hop on the wagon?

*Inspiration.*

Inspiration in its most authentic form appeals on an emotional level. To truly get your people to buy into your vision, first pump the fear out of the room and then play on the heartstrings of what motivates them by hearing their collective voices.

True and honest servant leaders will put great importance on their tribe and inspire each person to see the vision like they do. Doing so shows you value your tribe and care enough about them to grant them a VIP pass into your long-term strategy—a field-level seat right behind the home dugout.

Metaphorically speaking (unless you’re in construction), you want to give them shovels and pickaxes to work alongside you in making that vision you communicated a working reality. That’s empowerment, and you have inspired them on an emotional level.

### THEY TAKE INITIATIVE AND ACT

The best leaders won’t sit on decisions waiting for urgency to come knocking. They take risks and create urgency with intent and purpose, driving the bus closer toward the goal.

Don’t confuse this with the controlling and impulsive leader (or leadership team) that steamrolls ahead without soliciting varied perspectives or receiving enough feedback before making a decision that may hurt the team or company.

And unlike some detached and disengaged leaders with their own personal agendas, leaders who lead and serve take initiative with *fierce resolve and humility* (the qualities of “Level 5 leaders”). They are driven and want results, but not at the expense of people. They balance personal will and commitment with the best interest of their tribe members in mind.

### THEY CLARIFY GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS

Great leaders provide leadership by communicating consistently about where the bus is headed. A Gallup research study<sup>3</sup> that I have mentioned in previous articles measured the top reasons employees are disengaged, leading to turnover. One of the top five reasons is not having clear goals and expectations.

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Gallup’s research shows that many great workplaces have defined the right outcomes; leaders/managers will set goals for their people or work with them to set their own goals. They do not just define the job but define success on the job.

### THEY COMMUNICATE WITH THEIR MOUTHS AND EARS

The best way to strengthen relationships at work is through more communication. Intentionally spend time with your tribe members to learn more about them—their personal lives, what



they're working on—and to discover their strengths and interests. You do so by listening intently, with the other person's needs in mind. The upside for you? You may identify opportunities where they could contribute more to other projects.

The best form of communication is still done the old-fashioned way: through one-on-one meetings. But before you push back with the complaint that there's no time on your schedule, know that one-on-one meetings actually become time savers when used on a recurring basis. First, you need to know how to structure them so that they work to your advantage. This is going to test your servant leadership skills.

Follow these five tips for getting started:

1. **Make one-on-one meetings short.** They don't have to be any longer than 15 minutes; the shorter, the better.
2. **It is you, the boss, that sets the meeting date and time.** That shows you have an interest in them and it tests your follow-through and commitment. And please be prompt. If they request a meeting and you respond two weeks later, your credibility goes out the window.
3. **It is the employee that provides the agenda.** That puts the focus on them and pushes the responsibility on them to tell you what they need to address and what they want to talk about. So let them drive that meeting by giving you an agenda.

4. **Meet at least once every two weeks.** If possible, depending on the level of responsibility for that employee, meet weekly. Use your best judgment and situational leadership skills.
5. **Focus on what the employee wants to talk about.** Ask if there's anything else that needs to be addressed and if they have everything they need. Then you can communicate your part: new expectations and direction that need to be handed down, good news, bad news, praise.

Please show your employees that these meetings are valued and important by treating them as a priority. And it goes without saying, if a meeting has to be postponed, reschedule promptly.

*Editor's Note: This six-part article series will conclude in our next issue with a final article about how great leaders build community. ■*



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#### ENDNOTES

- 1 Available online at [www.SOA.org/ld](http://www.SOA.org/ld).
- 2 Level 5 leaders are described in Jim Collins' popular leadership book, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't*.
- 3 <https://q12.gallup.com/Public/en-us/Features>