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SERVANT- LEADERSHIP

TOUGH ON RESULTS
TENDER ON PEOPLE

Lannoo
Campus

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PROLOGUE

*‘Leadership is not a function or position you take,
it is a service you give.’*

— Simon Sinek, expert and author in leadership development

Do you remember what you wanted to be as a child? Maybe you dreamed of becoming a fireman, draughtsman, accountant, lawyer, social worker, engineer, craftsman, nurse or teacher. But manager? Perhaps for the first few years of your career, you practised the profession for which you initially felt a calling. Now you are leading a team, or steering an organisation. Whether you work in advertising or education, in production or in services, healthcare or banking: you accomplish something and you do this together with other people.

But just as a good footballer is not necessarily a successful coach, being a driven professional does not automatically make you an effective manager. After all, leadership is an entirely different metier, a profession in its own right. The other day, during the break of a leadership programme, I heard a manager say that it was simple after all, that you just had to make sure your employees were happy. In essence, I agreed with him; after all, your employees are the organisation’s capital strength. But is it that simple? What about the other stakeholders around your employees: your customer or product, your organisation and last but not least yourself?

In managing your people, you might recognise the following challenges: you notice a tension between time and priority in your time management. You want to delegate, but you’re concerned about how it will work with some colleagues. You notice that this makes it difficult to let go of some executive tasks. You don’t find it easy to select the right people for vacant positions in your team. You notice that some colleagues need clear feedback or boundaries rather than yet another

casual chat about a recurring issue. You see individual differences between the people you work with, but you also want to treat everyone as ‘equal before the law’. You already have a framework for leadership in your head, but find the gap between theory and practice sometimes quite large. You do want to bring peace to your team, but often things happen that make you yourself unsettled as a manager. Often, your work is thwarted by things over which you have no direct influence: people speak to you about colleagues or expectations of the environment or organisational changes. This can create extra pressure.

You want to create a collective ambition with your people; you want to strive for a good product or excellent service and for motivated employees. This is only possible if they experience DRIVE in their jobs: if they can take on their responsibilities, if they work efficiently, if they believe in what they do support the organization’s objectives, if they feel connected with each other and develop their talents. You want to be tough on results but soft on relationships. This book is about how to achieve these things in your organisation.

It aims to bridge the gap between scientific research, effective tools and the often much more complex reality. Servant-leadership helps you implement these in your own leadership, your own team or organisation. It requires a combination of obligatory choices on the one hand and gradual personal development on the other. To illustrate this, the book concludes with a case study in which Servant-Leadership was implemented in a hospital. The biggest challenge for you as a leader, at least in my view, is to get more satisfaction and enjoyment from your task. To feel good and comfortable in this role, I think it is crucial to deepen your own vision of leadership. That way, you can best influence your employees, the organisation as a whole, the stakeholders and yourself, by acting on your own values and beliefs.

I wish for you, dear reader, that your leadership may have a beneficial impact on yourself, on everyone around you and on the quality of your work together.

Philippe van der Wal
CEO Human Mobility Group

INTRODUCTION

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

'You might obey a leader who has power and is authoritarian. You might do what he asks you to do. But you will not necessarily strive to serve him or the organisation in a way that brings out the best and most engaged version of yourself. That is, unless you and the people you work with also truly respect and appreciate the leader for who he is and what he does.'

*— Dan B. Allender, professor and author of *Leading with a Limp**

Servant-leadership, fortunately, is not hype. Nor is it anything new. As the quote from Lao-Tzu at the front of this book illustrates, it has been around for centuries. More than that, almost everyone applies it in their daily lives. Parenting, for example, is often a form of servant-leadership. Consider your function as a parent when teaching your little son to ride a bike:

You take your son outside on a sunny day and provide a safe environment. After all, you won't let him practise on a busy brick road or a sloping street strewn with pebbles. You explain to him how cycling works, put him on the saddle and guide him the first few metres with your hand. When, after some practice, your son zig-zags his first metres, you shout at him that he is doing great. When he falls that inevitable first time, you are quick to be near him. You rub the sore knee, advise where necessary and boost his confidence.

When he falls a second time and throws his brand new bike in the street, crying, you speak to him about it. You make it clear that you understand that he is frustrated and therefore crying, that all beginnings are difficult and he will learn.

After a few weeks of practice, you decide together that the training wheels can come off. You explain to your son that he has made it all by himself so far. When you finally see him cycling up and down the street smiling, you beam with pride.

When you teach your little son to cycle, you will naturally start looking for the perfect balance between leading and serving. Of course, you have already cycled many miles yourself, so he can still learn a lot from you. But most of all, you want him to learn on his own, so that soon he will be able to go out on his own. In servant-leadership it is the same: you look for the balance between leading and serving, between limiting and giving space, between making rules and letting people discover for themselves.

Servant-leadership as a philosophy starts from the idea that as a leader, you do not create followers, but new leaders. A servant leader helps his employees develop, and teaches them to inspire others to do the same. It calls on the leader to create a working environment where his employees can unleash their talents and passion, and where they visibly contribute to the organisation's mission and goals.

The development of the employee is central, and this is because the servant leader believes that the real capital of an organization is in his employees. He wants them to succeed and be able to achieve success. After all, the success of the employees is the success of the company, or in other words, the results of an organisation are determined by the performance of its employees. For the servant leader, it is therefore of the utmost importance for his employees to flourish within his organisation.

The effectiveness of this approach can be found everywhere, especially in nature.

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP IS NATURAL

'It is the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed.'

— *Charles Darwin*

A pack constantly pursues goals together: they search for a territory together and go hunting. They often catch animals many times larger than themselves. They depend on each other to achieve their goals and work together very effectively. Not for nothing do Indians and Inuit regard wolves as their teachers. Underlying this is the basic attitude of the pack, namely that bonding and working together for a common goal leads to better results than competition.

For a long time, biologists mistakenly assumed that a wolf pack organised itself in a rigid, hierarchical manner. At the top of the pack would be the alpha male and alpha female, below were the beta animals, below them the gamma animals and so on. Leadership would be imposed by strength, age and physical confrontation. This hypothesis is analogous to the outdated proposition that effective organisations are best served by a pyramidal structure and authoritarian leadership models to achieve good results.

In our times, however, leading biologists have shown that a wolf pack organises itself much more horizontally than is commonly assumed, rather like a family (Packard in Mech and Boitani, 2003). Wolves have strong social bonds among themselves. Thus, they decide together who will be the leader. The wolf with the greatest mental strength is chosen, not necessarily the strongest wolf, but the one who can best adapt to changing circumstances. So there is no such thing as a born 'alpha wolf'. From the leadership practices of a pack

we can learn a lot about how to manage our own organisations more effectively. The leadership of the ‘alpha wolf’ is not based on conflict, fear or control, but rather on targeted interventions to reduce tensions in the group (Packard, in Mech and Boitani, 2007). The leader never has dictatorial control. The social structure of the pack can be compared to a democracy that relies on constant interaction. The alpha male will not ‘lead for the sake of leading’, but make the pack members themselves responsible for the best solutions for the whole group, without compromising the pack’s social structure. During hunting, for example, wolves take over the leadership role from each other for a while from time to time. All animals in the pack have a responsibility in this. Thus, everyone contributes to the smooth functioning of the group.

Furthermore, there have been several observations of wolf behaviour that show empathy. For example, an older wolf with arthritis was not left to fend for itself, but fed by wolves that were still able to hunt. Young pups are not only fed by the parents, but by the whole pack.

The operation of a wolf pack is evidence from nature that the most effective result hardly comes from a rigid, hierarchical structure where there is no say from the members involved and where the leader dictates on a basis of threats and displays of power.

These are all things that bear a strong analogy to human social systems. But how then can a servant leader act in a ‘human pack’? What basic attitude underpins natural leadership?

A MANAGER GETS THE EMPLOYEES HE (DE)SERVES

‘Group members only accept the influence and guidance of a leader they believe has the means to fulfil their needs. People follow (and have their actions guided by) a leader who, they believe, will ensure they get what they want or need.’

— Thomas Gordon, *communication and leadership expert*

Sociological research has shown that there are no innate personality differences between leaders and non-leaders (Gordon, 2010). So be reassured that leadership potential is not something you have or do not have by nature. Yet I have noticed during various training courses that similarities regularly emerge between leaders in different sectors. People who advance to leadership are often experts who seem to be born leaders with just the right set of traits, but some pitfalls are present there too.

These types are regularly characterised by the ‘three Ps’: they want to perform, to perfect their skills and to please their people. Such traits do encourage these managers to take a facilitating or coaching approach. The biggest problem with these three Ps is that they do not fully empower the employee in the long run. From his desire to ‘perform’ or ‘perfect’, the manager may be less comfortable with handing over responsibilities. As a result, he may feel the urge to take over various operational tasks himself, hindering his employees’ growth. When, at the same time, he clings to the hope of pleasing people, he may find it difficult - besides letting go of operational tasks - to hold people accountable, and thereby compromises results.

This book starts from the premise that leadership is most effective when the manager places as much ultimate responsibility with his

employees as possible, rather than on himself. Therefore, from his awareness of the effects of the three Ps, the manager should shift his focus. The importance of this was recently highlighted in a study (Rath & Conchie, 2008) in which more than 1 million people were surveyed. Here, it was found that the main reason for job resignations was not pay, travel time or job tasks. The main reason was the way leadership was provided.

From that science, then, it seems fair to say that leadership stands or falls on group members accepting or rejecting the influence of the leader, rather than on someone being 'assigned a role' from on high. Just because someone declares you a leader does not mean you effectively are one. The real judgement on that can only be made by the people you lead. It is therefore especially important for a leader to get a mandate from his or her employees (Gordon, 2010).

So how do you acquire that mandate? Why do employees or team members accept the influence of one manager and not another? What happens during such interactions? According to the servant-leadership philosophy, you earn this mandate by finding the right balance between serving and directing. Servant-leadership, for instance, is a very common philosophy in several armies. For instance, the word 'sergeant' comes from 'servant'. On the one hand, soldiers get to know the sergeant as someone who shouts hoarsely when there is a need to drill, who gets angry when latecomers show up and asks the utmost of his men during exhausting physical trials. But at the same time, they know him as the one who is most concerned when someone suffers an injury, who waits until everyone has eaten before serving himself and who takes the lead in battle. In battle, he chooses the path he deems safest for his men and himself.

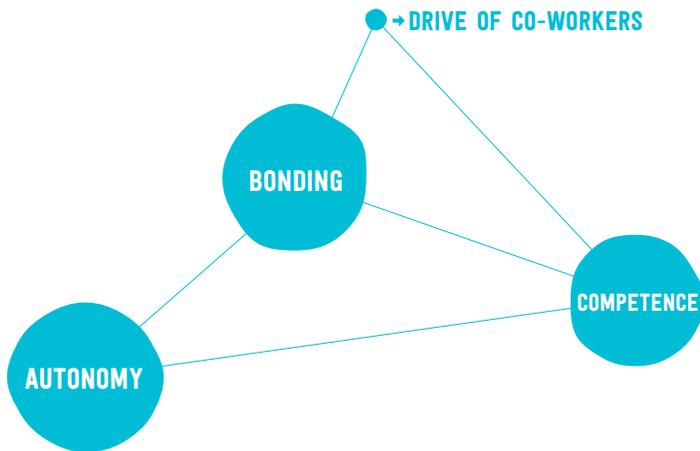
Because leadership is about what you ultimately do or do not do, you can look at leadership development as striving to be the most authentic and effective leader hidden within you. As a servant-leader, you act out of a willingness to put the needs of your team members at the centre - while

always keeping an eye on the organisation's vision and goals (Gordon, 2010). Whenever you succeed in doing this, you 'deposit' resources into your colleagues' relational bank account, as it were, and build up credit. So in servant-leadership, you find out what your employees' needs are and then try to create a context in which those needs can be met. There is a constant interaction: as a leader, you only get loyal employees by being loyal to your team. A good touchstone is to lead the way you yourself want to be led. To put this into daily practice, try working according to the 'ABC' of employee needs (Pink, 2013). Your employee has a number of requirements you must consider:

- **Autonomy:** as much as possible, the employee wants to be able to decide what he does and how he does something.
- **Bonding** with a cause and the team: the employee wants to contribute to a cause – a cause that is also meaningful to him. He wants to feel connected to the team and the organisation.
- **Competence:** the employee wants to be good at something.

EXERCISE

- Consider an executive who has been an inspiration to you. Who managed to bring out the best professional version of yourself? What did that person do? What did he not do? How did this affect you? Can you make the link to the ABC?
- Think about an executive you felt a lot of loyalty towards. What did he do differently from the others? What was the effect of this? Can you link it to the ABC?



AN ORGANISATION GETS THE LEADERS IT REWARDS

‘Our top-down pyramid style of management is a very old concept borrowed from centuries of war and monarchies.’

— James C. Hunter

From research on leadership among traditional populations, where a leader is unable to control the group hierarchically, we see that the leader’s position is often determined by the value assigned to him by group members. Among the Kung, a hunter-gatherer people in Namibia, we read in old accounts: ‘None of them is arrogant, dominant, cold or boastful.’ Among the Kung, such traits make you ineligible even to become a leader. We also find that a lust for opulent lifestyles and possessions is rather less common than among the average households in the tribe.

