

ORGL 690 Paper

A Calling to Serve:

Promoting Servant Leadership in Law Enforcement

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This paper serves to explore incorporating Robert Greenleaf's Servant-Leadership philosophies into law enforcement organizations. This will be achieved through discussion of the dimensions of servant leadership, examination of the ten traits of servant leadership to define law enforcement service, and applying the ten traits and dimensions of servant-leadership to expand the law enforcement officer's calling to serve.

Introduction

Law enforcement has a culture all of its own. Law enforcement is full of symbolism and officers exhibit a general ethos which is either immediately present due to a calling to serve, or is cultivated following the initial calling to drive fast and catch the bad guy! In most cases, men and women do come into the law enforcement profession by what they describe as a 'calling to serve' – "to make a difference, serve the public, and strengthen communities" (Covey, 2015, p. 3). Dr. Stephen R. Covey called policing "one of the most noble professions" (Covey, 2009). It is noble because this 'calling to serve' is one which causes law enforcement professionals to serve their communities; communities who must trust in their police and have confidence that their police agencies will protect and serve them with dignity, respect, and compassion.

Today's world is turbulent, to say the least. Robert K. Greenleaf asked, "How can we ordinary mortals lead governments...to become more serving in this turbulent world" (as cited by Spears, 1998, p. 21)? The answer may be in his servant-leadership philosophy. Greenleaf defined servant-leadership in this way;

The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more

autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants (as cited by Spears, 1998, p. 1).

And what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further derided (Spears, 2004, p. 12)?

Serving others, whether as individuals, in organizations, our communities, or in a more global setting, must be the number one priority of a servant-leader (Spears, 2004, p. 12).

In a conversation, Shann Ferch said, “servant leaders are called to do things about the difficulties in society – to heal others” (personal communication, March 27, 2015). Who, more so than law enforcement, are called upon to deal with the difficult situations in society and to bring healing to victims? Larry Spears stated that “Servant-leadership...challenges people to be brave and courageous” (Phillips, 2004). Law enforcement members are courageous and demonstrate bravery at every turn. These descriptions of servant-leaders seem synonymous to behaviors seen in law enforcement; however, the actions of law enforcement officers, although conducted with courage and in difficult situations, are not carried out to meet the definition of servant-leadership. They are carried out to meet the global police mission to protect and serve. But, why do they serve and for what purpose? How can law enforcement officers become servant-leaders?

Understanding the purpose of service and what is in an individual’s heart as they serve will help to unlock the secret of creating a servant-leadership mindset in law enforcement. This understanding comes from knowledge of one’s self and an understanding of one’s own motives and intentions; means and methods; and ends and outcomes (SanFacon & Spears, 2008, p. 9). Greenleaf believed achieving servant-leadership in an organization was possible through improving the performance of the leaders and the institutions themselves (p. 1).

The Dimensions of Servant-Leadership

The dimensions of servant-leadership intend to provide us with insight into ourselves through discovery of understanding the “Why? How? What?” of servant-leadership (SanFacon & Spears, 2008, p. 9). The ‘Why’ defines our motives and intentions regarding why we serve. The basic premise for why those in law enforcement serve is to answer an initial calling to serve. As officers become more involved in law enforcement they are met with challenges which can compete with this calling and cause them to seek other “Whys” to serve. These can be in the form of assignments to special teams, recognition, material gain, or promotion (p. 9). To return to the call to serve which brought them to law enforcement to begin with, officers need to examine themselves and begin to care less about themselves and more about others; they need to become citizens of a community greater than their own and care for everyone who would be affected by their service - now and in the future (pp. 4-5).

The dimension of ‘How’ examines the means and methods of how we are – our ways of being. How we conduct ourselves in our various roles determines how we can affect others and whether we are helping those we serve to grow as persons (SanFacon & Spears, 2008, pp. 5-6). Law enforcement officers can develop their capacities in various areas which will enhance their abilities as servant-leaders. Some of those areas include awareness, presence, availability, empathy, listening, intuition, and foresight (p. 6). At the most basic level, these capacities are necessary for officers to develop to be successful in the course of their career. As servant-leaders, an officer’s ability to increase their capacity in these areas increases their ability to be stewards to their communities; role models for children; healers to crime victims; change agents in incidents requiring their leadership; and builders of community policing structures that are driven by care and compassion (p. 9).

Means and methods can also be expanded to incorporate the organization. In a law enforcement setting, this would require a dramatic change in the current culture and hierarchical structure of a police organization; it requires a change in the system (SanFacon & Spears, 2008, p. 6). Moving from a control and command power structure to one which allows for teams and partnerships to operate equally in command settings is one way to advance servant-leadership on an organizational level (p. 6). The calling to serve has greater depth at this level; encouraging change not only within the servant-leader, but also in the system (p. 7).

Examining ‘The What’ in servant-leadership rounds out the last dimension with an understanding of the overall goal as it explains the ends and the outcomes of servant-leadership in practice; it is measurable by reviewing Greenleaf’s ‘best test.’ For law enforcement, the perfect end result would be no crime, no oppression, no victims – “the world works for all” (SanFacon & Spears, 2008, p. 9). In reality, the closest law enforcement may come to this is to promote a safer, more meaningful community for those they serve, encourage social equity among the members of their community, and consistently behave in a manner which exhibits balance and fairness.

The Ten Traits of Servant-Leadership

These characteristics were developed through Larry Spears’ intimate review of Greenleaf’s writings on servant-leadership. Spears identified many characteristics demonstrated by servant-leaders, but he recognized ten which were reoccurring. These traits should be the focus of development for servant leaders and are the building blocks upon which servant-leadership can flourish (Spears, 2004, pp. 13-16).

So, how can law enforcement use these traits to be servant leaders? Truly, each of these are traits which law enforcement members should develop in order to carry out the police

mission to protect and serve; however, to transition from a place where the traits are practiced out of duty to a place where they are practiced to forward the goal that those served grow as people takes metanoia – a change of heart. These characteristics represent choices that law enforcement members can make in their daily lives to live up to the noble calling of law enforcement – to serve with a passion and to be inspired to be servants to others (Leider & Spears, 2009, pp. 5-7; Spears, 2015, pp. 9-12; Spears, 2004, pp. 13-16). All of the traits can be developed with focus and a willingness to grow.

Following, are the ten characteristics as described by Larry Spears; however, the definitions are adjusted to provide direction to law enforcement professionals in order to describe how these characteristics can be used to strengthen their abilities as servant-leaders.

Listening

Listening to all that is being said – and not being said – will help law enforcement servant-leaders at all levels. Listening intently and developing the ability to understand what is being said can help officers bring resolution to situations, to gain positive favor and trust in the community, and is the first step to demonstrating care for the individual who is speaking (Spears, 2004, p. 13).

Empathy

Accepting others for who they are and making every effort to understand where they come from is important. It is important to understand that although officers do not have to condone the behavior or action of people they deal with; to understand them and accept their distinct differences opens the door to caring at a different level (Spears, 2004, p. 13).

Healing

Law enforcement officers are in contact with many people who are broken, whether they are victims or suspects; they deal directly in the face of circumstances where they have the opportunity to heal others through their actions. As servant-leaders, officers can perform in a manner that will allow their actions to indirectly be examples to every level of person involved in a situation and for every person they contact to be affected in a positive way by their actions. They can also directly make efforts to help heal those who they can identify as needing particular services or needs which the officer has resources and contacts to offer (Spears, 2004, p. 13).

Just as important as healing others is to the servant-leader, being able to heal one's self is just as significant. Officers deal with a great number of stressful, negative, and damaging situations; many end up with physical and psychological trauma due to their experiences (Fiedler, nd, p. 9). Recognizing officer wellness as part of healing for officers will help them to be stronger servants to others (Spears, 2004, p. 13).

Awareness

Self-awareness can help officers become accountable to themselves for their actions through a more thorough understanding of themselves, their values, and ethics. General awareness helps officers to not only remain safe and alert on duty, but also to see the world around them and how they fit into it (Spears, 2004, p. 14).

Persuasion

Through building relationships and trust within a community, an officer can rely, for the most part, on persuasion rather than positional authority of coercion to gain compliance. Due to the nature of the job, this is not possible in all cases; however, to only depend on presence or

authority does not allow for the servant-leader to build consensus, therefore helping others to grow and to trust the intentions of the officer (Spears, 2004, p. 14).

Conceptualization

Being able to see the bigger picture in both operational and organizational situations will help law enforcement officers make choices which affect a broader range of goals. If officers conceptualize an end goal which seeks to fulfil Greenleaf's best test, officers will be able to develop momentum toward that goal through strengthening this trait (Spears, 2004, p. 14).

Foresight

Officers generally use their past experiences to enhance decisions in the present. Foresight adds to this ability suggesting that lessons for how the future may be affected by past decisions and experiences are also considered. Foresight empowers officers to envision how they might affect the future of others through their actions (Spears, 2004, p. 15).

Stewardship

Stewardship requires that officers hold their organizations and their communities in trust not only for the greater good in society now, but for the future of both their organization and the community they work in. It calls upon officers to build the people in the community through their commitment to serve them – by being stewards of the people (Spears, 2004, p. 15).

Commitment to the Growth of People

Officers can demonstrate servant-leadership through their commitment to the people in their community, in their organizations, and in their profession. When their decisions and actions put the growth of people first, based on a true desire to enrich each individual, an officer can make a big impact (Spears, 2004, pp. 15-16).

Building Community

Greenleaf felt community could be built if each servant-leader demonstrated their “own unlimited liability” for the specific community they serve (Spears, 2004, p. 16). Truly, if officers recognized the overall impact – the liability – each of their actions and choices had on their communities and organizations, they could easily see the greater impact those choices have on building a community of servant-leaders (p. 16).

Conclusion

Creating a servant-leadership mindset in law enforcement depends on expanding the calling to serve to include serving from the heart, truly caring about those being served, and serving with a greater purpose. By being aware of the multiple dimensions of servant-leadership and the core traits of servant-leaders, law enforcement officers can become more fully developed in servant-leadership themselves. Developing these areas will enhance the ‘calling to serve’ which brought so many law enforcement members to this profession, and it will challenge officers to be brave and courageous in ways they had not previously prepared for. It will cause them to look beyond their duty to serve and prepare them to answer a higher calling to become servant-leaders.

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