

# Chapter 10

## Enspirited Leadership

**Bob Stilger**  
*New Stories, USA*

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter examines the relationships between Servant Leadership and what the author describes as enspirited leadership. The author's research into enspirited leadership identifies it as the set of landmarks and principles that support younger leaders around the world who are called to offer their servant leadership in their local communities. Servant leadership is often thought of as a philosophy of leadership. But how do people find the clarity, the courage, and the compassion to practice philosophy? In his research, the author has identified six core landmarks of enspirited leadership that form an ecology that supports servant leadership. He also has identified a core set of values and beliefs that demonstrate a living systems approach to servant leadership.*

### INTRODUCTION

I had the privilege of meeting and working with Robert Greenleaf just after he left AT&T and as he began to popularize his ideas about Servant Leadership. His presence – the way he walked in the world – as much as his philosophy guided my leadership and my scholarship for more than forty years. First as a co-founder of one of the early nonprofit community developments in the Northwest of the United States and then as a learning partner with people around the world who established local enterprises to create healthy and resilient communities, I turned to the wisdom of Servant Leadership. As our world continued to become more volatile, uncertain and ambiguous, I

wondered: *Where do people find the courage, the clarity, and the compassion to practice servant leadership?*

My own research working with younger leaders around the world has led me to formulate the idea of *enspirited* leadership as one way of responding to this critical question.

### BACKGROUND

This chapter is written as my personal narrative of my life-long exploration of servant leadership.

It has been more than 40 years since I first met Robert Greenleaf. I was a student at Carleton College in Northfield Minnesota. The Dean of

Students had called a group of faculty, administrators, and students together for a week before classes began to discover how we might better work together. The College Chaplin invited a friend of his who was just retiring from AT&T to join us. To this day I do not think I have met a more kind and humble man. Greenleaf's humility, his gentleness, and his deep posture of service stand at the core of servant leadership.

I was a student of the sixties: educational reform, peace movement, civil rights, and the beginnings of both the women's and environmental movements. Several years after graduating I was back on campus chatting with a member of the faculty. He and I had been the only two people at that time who served on both the Educational Policy Committee and the Curriculum Committee. He and I exchanged greetings and he was getting on his bike to leave when he turned and said to me: "You know, if I hadn't been such a wishy-washy liberal and you hadn't been such an arrogant... this college wouldn't have the screwed up governance system it has now." I suspect he was right. He seemed to place more emphasis on the second part of his statement than the first – but both were true.

What is also true is that neither of us were servant leaders. We lacked patience. We lacked humility. We lacked listening. We were filled with our own knowing.

I have always been attracted to the directness and simplicity with which Robert Greenleaf defined servant leadership. In some of his earliest writing he asked "Do those served grow as persons; do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?" (Greenleaf, 2008 p. 15). I remember the mimeographed copy of this essay he had written while leaving AT&T that he handed out at our gathering in 1969. He would publish it the next year and more and more people would begin to think about servant leadership.

What Greenleaf offered was not so much a theory of leadership as it was a philosophy of

life. How do we live together in ways that bring out the best in all of us? How do those of us who serve in positions of leadership behave in ways that encourage all to step forward and offer their gifts? In his early writings he shared his suspicion that his ideas would not be popular. At that time, there was nothing humble about leadership. It was strong, assertive, and demanding. Leaders were people with answers and the power to get something done.

## **SERVANT LEADERSHIP NEVER STANDS ALONE**

It is part of a larger ecology, a vibrant living system. It was more than twenty years after Servant Leadership began to be discussed that Margaret Wheatley wrote *Leadership and the New Science* (Wheatley, 1992). Her work asked us to consider what leadership is when seen as part of a living system. She asked us to think about what life has to teach us about leading. She reminded us that life is messy. Her perspective fits hand-in-glove with Greenleaf's, who said: "My perceptual world is full of contradictions. Some examples: I believe in order, and I want creation out of chaos. My good society will have strong individualism amidst community. It will have elitism along with populism. I listen to the old and to and young and find myself baffled and heartened by both. Reason and intuition, each in its own way, both comfort and dismay me" (Greenleaf, 2008 p. 14). While Greenleaf never, to my knowledge, spoke of "living systems," his approach to leadership is completely consistent with Wheatley's later work as well as that of a number of other scholars who emphasize a leadership as a relationship.

It would be almost another twenty years after Wheatley's landmark book that *The Starfish and the Spider* (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2008) told the story of how the Apache were able to escape defeat by the Spanish when the larger empires to the south had fallen. The Apache knew what Greenleaf and

8 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

[www.igi-global.com/chapter/enspirited-leadership/106112](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/enspirited-leadership/106112)

## Related Content

---

### Does the Concept of Property Rights Hold Relevance for Human Resource Performance?: An Applied Study of Privatized Companies in Tunisia

Fakhri Issaoui, Zaher Meshari Abderrahim, Majed Bin Othayman and Slah Slimani (2024). *International Journal of Human Capital and Information Technology Professionals* (pp. 1-25).

[www.irma-international.org/article/does-the-concept-of-property-rights-hold-relevance-for-human-resource-performance/342088](http://www.irma-international.org/article/does-the-concept-of-property-rights-hold-relevance-for-human-resource-performance/342088)

### Motivations

(2018). *Utilizing Consumer Psychology in Business Strategy* (pp. 159-196).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/motivations/205258](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/motivations/205258)

### Workplace Cyberbullying: A Nuanced Definition, Significant Consequences, and Collective Solutions

Jillian Yarbrough (2021). *Handbook of Research on Cyberbullying and Online Harassment in the Workplace* (pp. 23-44).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/workplace-cyberbullying/263418](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/workplace-cyberbullying/263418)

### Social Media in Bulgarian Higher Education: An Exploratory Survey

Rositsa Doneva and Silvia Gaftandzhieva (2017). *International Journal of Human Capital and Information Technology Professionals* (pp. 67-83).

[www.irma-international.org/article/social-media-in-bulgarian-higher-education-an-exploratory-survey/187011](http://www.irma-international.org/article/social-media-in-bulgarian-higher-education-an-exploratory-survey/187011)

### Ethical Leadership as a Cross-Cultural Leadership Style

Laurie Yates (2011). *Distributed Team Collaboration in Organizations: Emerging Tools and Practices* (pp. 113-125).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/ethical-leadership-cross-cultural-leadership/53405](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/ethical-leadership-cross-cultural-leadership/53405)