

Chapter 26

Lead like the Greatest Leader!

Case Study

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People are often fascinated by successful leaders, influenced by the leadership characteristics that they exhibit, and inspired by the principles that they practice. Great leaders make an impact in multiple ways. Often we admire and respect successful leaders, try to learn from them, emulate them, follow them, and may elevate some of them on a pedestal. On the other hand, some people may be overly critical of them, scrutinize them closely, and may unfairly try to “pull them down.” Yet, successful leaders and their special leadership attributes and principles draw interest from people all over the world. This paper analyzes the case study of the “best of the best,” perhaps the most influential, universally known servant leader in all of history, and presents some successful servant leadership characteristics and principles from this leader’s life which may be worthy of consideration and emulation. These include:

- **Service or serving others:** A great leader must personify service and be truly focused on serving followers (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Blanchard and Miller (2004) contended that he was one of the greatest leaders who exhibited servant leadership attributes and principles. He also showed sacrificial, serving leadership, normally contrary to human nature, which had the most enduring impact on his followers (Selladurai, 2006). An example of his service-oriented leadership was when he washed his disciples’ feet at the Last Supper, and set an example for them to follow (John 13:14, ESV). He came to serve, not to be served (Mark 10:45, ESV). O’Toole (1995), Kouzes and Posner (1993), Blanchard (2003), and Williams (2002) regarded him as the ultimate and best servant leader, a sacrificial leader who genuinely served the people he led. He exhibited the

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perfect example of service and self-sacrifice in his death on the cross. Stone Phillips (2004) the anchorman on *NBC News* in his interview with Larry Spears stated, “Being willing to give his life on the cross....in service of others,” was “the ultimate example of this [service]” in the life of this leader. His strong charismatic leadership observed some 2000 years ago and testified to by the eyewitness and ancient Jewish historian Josephus (1980) remains strong even today, and continues to impact millions of people all over the world.

- **Example for all:** The second attribute of the greatest leader was the example he set for others. He led by perfect, flawless example. His whole life revealed that he practiced what he preached— his words came alive through his actions and life. His followers learned from what they saw in his life, rather than merely from his teaching or words. He modeled servant leadership for others by his own life and example (Bekker, 2006; and Irving & McIntosh, 2009). Great leaders must set an example for their followers to emulate. Some other great leaders, influenced perhaps by this leader’s example of servant leadership and who led/lead by serving include Truett Cathy, Dan Cathy, David Green, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, Jerry Falwell, Sr., Jerry Falwell, Jr., Paul Crouch, Bill Hybels, Tim Keller, Pat Williams, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Jr. and others. These leaders led/lead by example for others through different ways such as personal display of some remarkable servant leadership attribute of sacrifice, greater good of others and company/organization, personal beliefs and convictions, ideals, goals, religious faith, and integrity. Today, Hobby Lobby CEO David Green, a servant leader, is setting an example for all his employees and associates by taking an uncompromising,

bold, public stand for his personal faith and Christian beliefs against some new, controversial changes in government policies, even at the risk of losing his company, the family business, and several millions of dollars. Leading by personal example is a long-time tradition with Hobby Lobby, Chick-Fil-A and other such companies that serve a “higher calling” including practicing “Closed on Sundays” for worship, family time, and other related religious practices, and encouraging their employees to follow their leaders in similar ways.

- **Reform and transform followers:** Great servant leaders know how to reform and transform their followers. This third attribute of the greatest leader may be seen in how he empowered and transformed twelve simple, ordinary men into extraordinary servant leaders themselves, who did their best to follow their leader and defend their beliefs and values, even if it cost them their lives. One of the ways a teacher measures success is through his/her students’ achievements and accomplishments; this great servant leader helped build strong servant leaders amongst his followers, who continued to replicate themselves as servant leaders. They achieved this explosive-growth leadership sometimes through training family members to lead the organization, or training those who show strong leadership potential to continue their leader’s work, mission, and servant leadership legacy. This strategy involves great leaders building other great leaders, and continuing their legacy (Maxwell, 1999). Many world-class, successful organizations and their servant leaders continue to transform their people in similar ways including Chick-Fil-A, Hobby Lobby, Southwest Airlines, Starbucks, TD Industries, Synovus Financial, Liberty University, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association,

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