

Deep in the Forest: BIPOC Servant Leaders' Journeys Through the Effects of an “Invisible Tax”

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) servant leaders seek to improve equity within their organizations to improve the lives of marginalized students, clients, and community members, these leaders must often weed through a forest of microaggressions, and, over time, they will endure events and responsibilities that will add an additional tax that is often invisible, and which disrupts the work they seek to do as servant leaders. Within this chapter, the authors explore first-hand narratives of servant leaders struggling to ensure equity exists despite being affected by the same barriers that the marginalized people they serve are facing.

INTRODUCTION

Mission of the Chapter

The mission of this chapter is to further identify how the “invisible tax” disrupts the ability of BIPOC servant leaders ability to fully reach potential and determine what support and resources are needed for BIPOC servant leaders to thrive in their organizations and institutions.

The chapter will also investigate the historical origins of servant leadership and how it relates to the current realities of BIPOC servant leaders.

This chapter is hoping to address the following questions:

- What are the historical origins of servant leadership and how does this need to be modified to support the current realities of BIPOC faculty?
- What does the “invisible tax” look like for BIPOC servant leaders?
 - ; African-American Teachers (focus)
 - ; Development of Imposter phenomenon
 - ; Decrease in overall health outcomes

A large part of U.S. history can be characterized as racist, classist, homophobic, sexist, and ethnocentric by one group or another (Blake, 2021). Institutional racism and the invisible tax can make being a leader difficult, especially for people of color. Historically, BIPOC leaders face challenges not commonly seen by their White counterparts. As there are various types of leadership, we will explore servant leadership and the challenges BIPOC leaders face in this chapter.

BIPOC is a term used to describe individuals who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. When compared to White counterparts, BIPOC leaders face many more challenges. Western culture has typically associated leadership with middle-class, White men and, more recently, White women. [People of color] in positions of power and authority distort this fixed image (Blake, 2021). What does it mean to be a servant leader and a person of color? Leadership must commit to changing leadership demographics in order to create a new corporate culture that makes diversity as important as the bottom line, customer service, quality, and organizational growth (Blake, 2021).

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The best leaders inspire, nudge, or improve others so that they think, believe, or act differently than they would otherwise. A person with these skills is not born with them; instead, they possess a combination of abilities that can be recognized, analyzed, studied, and then applied.

Robert Greenleaf is credited with creating servant leadership. Greenleaf gained a strong perspective on leadership during his time at AT&T. When he retired, he began researching how institutions might better serve society. As he explored these topics, he was captivated by the concept of power and how organizations can assist each other. It resulted in the development of servant leadership (Frick, 2020).

Larry Spears, President, and CEO of The GreenLeaf Center for Servant Leadership, identified 10 characteristics of servant leadership to help practitioners better understand it (Blake, 2021):

1. **Listening:** Leadership and followers communicating with each other.
2. **Empathy:** Understanding another person’s perspective.
3. **Healing:** Making things whole.
4. **Awareness:** Being aware of one’s surroundings.
5. **Persuasion:** Influencing others to make a change.
6. **Conceptualization:** Considering the future.
7. **Foresight:** The capability of predicting the future.
8. **Stewardship:** Assuming responsibility for the leadership role and serving others.
9. **Commitment to the Growth of People:** Nurturing people’s professional, personal, and spiritual needs.
10. **Building Community:** Fostering the growth of the collective.

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