

## health systems

# Learn To Serve

Author Eugene B Habecker wrote, “The true leader serves. Serves people. Serves their best interests, and in so doing will not always be popular, may not impress. But because true leaders are motivated by loving concern rather than a desire for personal glory, they are willing to pay the price.”<sup>1</sup> To serve means to provide unconditional love that benefits people. Several years ago, I developed an acrostic for the word SERVE to help me remember the important aspects of servant-hood.

Sacrifice  
Empathy  
Relationships  
Values  
Empowerment

### S for Sacrifice

The word *sacrifice* is used to describe the selfless good deeds we do for others. Self-sacrifice is the only way to truly serve your neighbor. Sacrifice means giving up trying to fulfill your needs and focusing on the needs of other people. Sacrifice does not mean thinking of your self less. Sacrifice means thinking of your self less often. It is easy to be self-centered.

Nothing useful occurs without sacrifice. There are no shortcuts to success. We fail to reach our potential when we fail to pay the price. There is a difference between wanting to “be” a leader and wanting to “do” leadership. All leaders want to be a leader but not everyone has what it takes to “do” leadership. Leadership is hard work and requires sacrifice. In his book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins says “Great leaders are plow horses not show horses.”<sup>2</sup> There is no magic in good companies becoming great companies. Sacrifice and hard work are the key ingredients to success. Good to great companies believe they will prevail despite obstacles. Sacrifice allows us to focus on the task at hand so we may succeed. There is no success without sacrifice. A leader who wants to help his organization must be willing to pay the price to ensure long-lasting success.

**When people  
are serving,  
life is no longer  
meaningless.**

—John W Gardner

### E for Empathy

The root of the word *empathy* is PATHOS—the Greek word for feeling. Leaders that have empathy are kind, loving, and understanding. They are truly compassionate towards other people. Empathy means to be attuned to the emotional signals of other individuals—

to try and put yourself into another’s shoes. Empathy requires good listening skills, an understanding of cultural diversity, and an awareness of what is not obvious. True empathy requires thinking of yourself less and of others more. Because the healing of others may help us heal ourselves, empathy plays an important role in growth and development.

In reality, you will not succeed if your heart is not in the right place. Succeeding in life first requires a change in heart then a change in mind. This is passion. Passion means that you care more than other people do. Passion means you are willing to go the extra mile to get results. In medicine, I often hear patients say, “I do not care how much you know until I know how much you care.” People know that all physicians have the ability to care for patients (they are competent) but they also know that great doctors are the doctors who really care about their patients (they are compassionate). Great leaders care about people.

### R for Relationships

Developing *relationships* is the key to success in an organization. Developing relationships is the key to building trust. There is no dichotomy between self-interest and concern for others. Without relationships, we cannot be truly happy, we cannot be truly successful. One of the benefits of relationships includes moving from “me” mode to “we” mode. Another benefit of good relationships is that they keep you from being discouraged or losing focus.

### V for Values

Our key *values* are accountability, flexibility, and innovation. As a leader, we need to hold ourselves and



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others accountable for their performance and behavior. We often substitute accountability for popularity. However, being popular does not guarantee success. To be successful, we need to be accountable for measurable outcomes. Flexibility means we are open minded. We create environments as leaders that allow other people to express their viewpoints. We listen to what others have to say and take that information into consideration before making a decision. A flexible leader is open-minded. Servant leaders are innovative. They “think outside the box.” They are not afraid to fail so they will try to introduce ideas that perhaps no one has thought of before. Servant leaders are creative and vision (not fear) driven.

### **E for Empowerment**

*Empowerment* means inspiring other people to be more than they think they can be. Empowerment means giving others the power to be successful. The ability to empower another individual is an important leadership skill. It represents the fact that you have acquired skills that help you solve problems and allow you to pass the knowledge on to other people to help them solve problems. It allows your circle of influence to increase and allows you to help more people than you could with

your own limited resources. Great companies have strong leaders. To be successful, great companies learn to empower their leaders to be great leaders.

### **Real Servants**

Real servants do what needs to be done. *They are servants first and leaders second.* They do not complain of how hard a project is or how long it will take. Real servants are willing to sacrifice time and resources to help those in need. They know that to get a job done may mean doing a menial task or some job that others may say “is beneath me.” They work hard to make sure their direct reports succeed. They empower other people to be successful.

Great opportunities in life often disguise themselves as small tasks. Do not be deceived because it is the little things in life that determine the big things. We can all be great because we can all *learn to serve*. ❖

### **References**

1. Habecker EB. The other side of leadership. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987.
2. Collins J. Good to great: Why some companies make the leap ... and others don't. New York: HarperCollins; 2001.

## **Everyone Can**

Everyone can be great because everyone can serve.

— Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr, 1929-1968,  
Nobel Peace Prize winner and civil rights activist