

# LEADER REPORT: RISE OF THE SERVANT

The logo for 'fit' is located in the top right corner. It consists of the lowercase letters 'fit' in a bold, red, sans-serif font, enclosed within a white speech bubble shape that has a grey gradient background.

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## QUICK FACTS

- + Providing service to others positively affects your brain on a neurobiological level.
- + The concept of *servant leadership* is timeless and was popularized in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Robert Greenleaf's essay, titled *The Servant as Leader*.
- + Employees of servant leaders are more productive, quick to help others, innovative, and satisfied in their work.
- + Albert Einstein said, "The high destiny of the individual is to *serve* rather than to rule."

## SERVE AND BE HAPPY

Let's not fool ourselves, serving others (when done correctly) [feels good](#). When we lose ourselves in the service of others, something magical happens at the [neurobiological level](#)—our brains receive a special chemical cocktail that reinforces our behavior by reducing stress, depression and pain, while increasing our sense of purpose and [life satisfaction](#).

***"The only really happy people are those who have learned how to serve."***

***~ Albert Schweitzer***

It's easy being selfish in a world that promotes quick personal gratification and praises individual achievement. The world's dire need for transformational leaders is nothing new and we are fortunate to live in a time where stories of service can be shared on an unforthinkable scale, impressing and inspiring others to engage in daily acts of kindness. The *Golden Rule* is becoming "old-hat" as the [Platinum Rule](#) ups the ante, to go above and beyond what it is that *you want* and, instead, "treat others the way *they want* to be treated." Dale Carnegie captured this brilliantly when [he wrote](#), "Personally, I am very fond of strawberries and cream, but I have found that for some strange reason, fish prefer worms. So, when I went fishing, I didn't think about what I wanted. I thought about what they wanted. I didn't bait the hook with strawberries and cream. Rather, I dangled a worm or grasshopper in front of the fish and said: 'Wouldn't you like to have that?' Why not use the same common sense when fishing for people?" Ultimately, we serve best when we carefully listen and attend to the unique needs (not emotions) of those around us.

## THE SERVANT AS LEADER

The ancient Chinese philosopher and writer, [Lao-Tzu](#) or Laozi (meaning "Old Master"), wisely shared, "The highest type of ruler is one of whose existence the people are barely aware... The Sage is self-effacing and scanty of words. When his task is accomplished, and things have been completed, all the people say, 'We ourselves have achieved it!'" Behold, the epitome of the servant leader. This age-old concept, of *the servant as leader*, was popularized in [Robert Greenleaf's Essay](#) and provides a depth of purpose not fully captured in earlier [leadership literature](#), such as Lewin's [Leadership Styles framework](#) or Hersey & Blanchard's [Life Cycle Theory](#) of leadership. Greenleaf wrote, "The servant-leader *is* servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead." This *choice*—making the service of others a priority—is critical to developing one's capacity to lead and rise above the common, but antiquated, forms of leadership most commonly found throughout the world today, which are undoubtedly marked by characteristics and organizational structures of increasing power and authority. Larry Spears, former Executive of the [Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership](#), stated in [Insights on Leadership](#) that "we are beginning to see that the traditional, autocratic, and hierarchical modes of leadership are yielding to a newer model - one based on teamwork and community, one that seeks to involve others in decision making, one based on ethical and caring behavior."

In their ever popular book, [Seven Pillars of Servant Leadership: Practicing the Wisdom of Leading by Serving](#), Frick and Sipe provide a comprehensive framework of the most critical competencies found possessed by effective servant leaders (see Figure 1). A servant leader is a *person of character* who maintains integrity, demonstrates humility and serves a higher purpose. A servant leader *puts people first* by serving with love, showing care and concern and mentoring others. A servant leader is a *skilled communicator* who demonstrates empathy, welcomes feedback and is persuasive. A servant leader is a *compassionate collaborator* who expresses appreciation, builds teams and navigates conflict. A servant leader *has foresight*, is visionary, displays creativity of thought and exercises sound judgment. A servant leader is a *systems thinker* who is comfortable with complexity, demonstrates adaptability and considers the “greater good”. Lastly, a servant leader *leads with moral authority* which is granted by others through the consistency and weight of one’s example.



Figure 1 - Seven Pillars of Servant Leadership

Today, servant leadership has been attributed to the success of some of the most [high-performing and profitable companies](#) in the world, like Whole Foods, Home Depot, Starbucks, UPS, Southwest Airlines and Chick-fil-A and has paved the way for [amazing turnarounds](#), like Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen who executed an aggressive growth plan aimed at *servicing* the interests of their franchise owners first, leading to a 25% jump in average restaurant sales and substantial increases in market share, profitability and stock price. Greenleaf realized that when leaders serve their organizations, the organizations themselves begin to act like servant leaders for the greater community, which we see in a variety of ways—from the creation of corporate sponsorships in support of nonprofit organizations to the development and implementation of robust corporate social responsibility initiatives. Servant leadership is a powerful tool and pathway for changing our world.

## IT TAKES PRACTICE

Leadership is no easy undertaking, let alone throwing acts of consistent service into your daily mix, while also ensuring to personally develop the seven core competencies of servant leadership. *Leadership requires others*. For some, overcoming our own selfish desires (and often laziness) may come more naturally, but servant leadership takes consistent and deliberate practice. It’s a daily struggle, where each morning begins with the simple question “*How will I serve others today?*” But how do you know you’re making progress on your path towards servant leadership? Greenleaf has you covered, he said, “*The best test* is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” Only then, has the servant *truly* become the leader.



### About the Firm and the Author

Here in [The fit Practice](#) at [McDermott & Bull](#), we believe in [enriching and inspiring the lives of all we serve](#) and work directly with organizations who are, or aspire to be, culturally rich and values driven. We love attracting and securing top leadership for our clients and have developed a comprehensive approach to executive search that provides optimal outcomes, by [ensuring functional, cultural and personal fit](#). Our firm provides both retained and interim executive search services for public and private companies in a variety of industries and functions, in all segments of human capital, to align talent strategies with business strategies. [Let’s talk!](#)



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