

How to Spot a Servant Leader

It's no surprise—leaders come in all shapes and sizes. Each carries a distinct look.

The narcissistic leader is dressed for the spotlight, always searching for a platform or a press conference.

The command-and-control leader is barking out orders about which hill to take—right now.

The micro-managing leader hovers close, ready to correct or redirect at a moment's notice.

You get the picture.

But what about a servant leader? What does that person look like?

When I think about the people who have modeled servant leadership in my own life, I've noticed four defining traits that consistently rise to the surface:

1. Servant leaders don't chase personal success.

They think differently. Act differently. Lead differently.

This rare breed finds energy not in applause, but in the advancement of others.

They come alive when someone else succeeds—and they're first in line with a high-five or fist pump to celebrate a job well done.

2. Servant leaders don't need the credit.

They're relentless in pointing praise toward others.

You'll hear them call out teammates by name, highlighting contributions that most leaders overlook. For them, the win isn't about being noticed—it's about knowing the mission moved forward.

Knowing that the mission is being advanced is the only credit a servant leader is after.

3. Servant leaders don't seek the stage.

If leadership requires them to call plays from the field, they'll do it. But they're just as comfortable in the press box—quietly observing, offering insights, and letting others carry the ball.

For them, victory isn't about visibility. It's about seeing the team thrive.

As long as the team is winning, servant leaders are at home (and at peace) behind the scenes, off camera.

4. Servant leaders don't use people.

They see people as treasures, not tools.

Each person is an image-bearer—crafted by God, carrying unique gifts, strengths, and passions. Servant leaders create space for those gifts to shine. They believe deeply in the wisdom of many counselors and the beauty of shared ownership.

So what do servant leaders really look like?

At the end of the day, they look a whole lot like the portrait the Apostle Paul painted 2000 years ago:

Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. —Philippians 2:3-4 MSG

Our world is desperate for this kind of leader—humble, grounded, others-first.

You in?

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