

Visionary, Situational, and Transforming



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In our first two lessons we tried to make some sense about leadership as a broad concept and then servant leadership as a more specific. But we really didn't talk about what leaders do. Now we said, if you want to be known as a leader, you have to lead; you've got to do what leaders do. But what does that look like?

Servant leadership is a way of thinking about leadership, but it doesn't really give us a lot of help at 3:30 on a Tuesday afternoon, when we've got a leadership issue in front of us. So how does leadership actually work? More specifically, how does servant leadership work? What does it look like?

In the first session of my Leadership Development Course, I put a PowerPoint slide up that has Psalm 23:1, "The Lord is my shepherd," written in Hebrew. Under that I have the formula for how you calculate the standard deviation from a set of scores. And I ask the students in the class to look at these two things. I say, "How many of you can read that phrase?" Well, once in a while in a seminary I get a student who can read it. Once in a while I get somebody who recognizes the formula, but usually most people are totally clued-out about what those two things are that I've put up in front of them.

Then I ask them, "How many of you would accept a job where reading Hebrew was an essential part of that job?" How many of them would accept a job as a statistician if they couldn't work this basic formula to get the standard deviation? And we pretty well agree that it would be ridiculous for somebody to accept a job as a Hebrew professor, or to accept a job as a statistician, if they couldn't read Hebrew or work the formulas that statisticians have to work.

Well, then I put up the word parent. I say, "How many people assume that they're good parents because they had a child?" I

put up the word spouse and say, “How many of us assume that we know how to be a good spouse because we got married?” And then I put up the word leadership and say, “How many people accept jobs where leading is an essential component of that job, but they really don’t know what leaders do?”

And that introduces the course on why we have to develop ourselves as leaders. It’s not automatic. In fact, leading is a lot more complicated than reading Hebrew. And leading is a lot more complicated than working out statistical formulas, because once you learn how to read Hebrew, and once you learn how to do statistics, it’s pretty stable. But leadership is constantly changing.

Leadership changes form how many times? Within an hour, I can be doing leadership in a conversation with one person and doing things that really do constitute leadership. That person walks away, another person comes up and asks me a different question, and now suddenly leadership takes on a whole different form. That person walks away and the person I was talking to first comes back with a different situation, and I have to do a whole different set of activities if I’m going to lead.

So leading is a complicated thing. It is—it requires the best of our thinking. That’s why coming up with one simple definition doesn’t work. So we said leadership takes us where we “ain’t.” Leadership defines an outcome; it gathers resources; it collects what we need to get that job done. Usually leaders have to collect people who have the skills and the gifts to do those things. Then servant leadership cultivates those gifts and skills so that these people who have those resources now are performing those skills and doing those things at their maximum.

And then leadership focuses or channels those resources on getting the job done. But to do that requires many different kinds of activities on the part of a leader. Well, how do we get our mind around all of those activities? What I’d like to do in this session and the next is look at six models of leadership that come from contemporary literature about different things leaders do.

Now I am in no way suggesting that if you or I master one of these models, we are therefore good, effective, successful leaders. These six models circle around the way of thinking about leadership called servant leadership in the most productive ways. We think of these six models like a golfer thinks about the clubs in her golf bag. It isn’t that I’m always going to use the driver, or I’m always

going to use the putter. If I'm going to be a good golfer, I have to know which club to take out, and then I have to know how to use that club.

So when we talk about these various models, what we're saying is, you have to be able to play these different models like a good golfer plays with all of the clubs in the bag. We could think of these different models as keys on a piano. Just hitting a key does not make beautiful music. We have to know which key to hit when, in combination with which other key, to make music.

We're talking about these models like strings on a violin. A great violinist by stroking the right string at the right time makes music. So as we introduce these different models of leadership, we're just launching ourselves really into a lifetime of cultivating our ability to discern when to use which model and how to use it.

In other words, we become servant leaders by allowing these models to servant lead us. It's a lifetime of growth, a lifetime of learning. So in this session, we look at three of those models, visionary leadership, situational leadership, and transforming leadership.

Visionary leadership essentially says leaders have to know where they're going. If leaders take us where we ain't, the best leaders know where we need to go.

We are in one place; we're doing something well; it's working; but a visionary leader says, "What we're doing today may serve us today, but I see some changes on the horizon. I see that if we continue to do what we've always done, we're going to get what we've always got. But what we've always got isn't going to get us to the future."

So visionary leaders are constantly saying, "Where else do we need to be going? What other markets do we need to be penetrating? What other skills do we need to be cultivating?" Now once again, one leader in an organization isn't enough to do this in a rapidly changing, highly complex world.

Servant leaders are saying, "We need visionaries throughout our organization. We need people who are closest to the action in this department to be freed up and to be capable of looking at that department and saying, 'If this department is going to contribute maximally to the mission of this organization, we need to be

always asking ourselves: How can we do this better? How can we do this faster? How can we do this with greater expertise?’ ”

That’s visionary leadership looking down the road saying, “How are we going to meet the challenges of tomorrow starting today?” A commentator one time asked Wayne Gretzky how come he was always where the puck was. He said to Gretzky, “The reason you score so many goals is you’re always where the puck is.” Gretzky’s response was, “No, I score so many goals because I’m always where the puck is going to be.”

That’s what visionary leadership is all about—are we going to be where our customers need us to be six months down the road, and are we preparing today to get ourselves there? Visionary leadership.

The second model we look at is situational leadership. This comes from Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard’s Situational Leadership. They have now added Dewey Johnson to their team, so I call it the Hersey, Blanchard, Johnson mode of leadership. Situational leadership says, “If I’m going to be an effective servant leader—in other words, if I’m going to do things that help my followers grow—I have to understand what my followers need for me to do.”

Now many leaders are good at a couple things. So what leaders do in the name of leadership is what they are comfortable doing, what they like to do regardless of whether that’s what the follower needs for them to do or not. Hersey and Blanchard and Johnson suggest that we break jobs down into tasks.

Now here’s what I mean by that: As a teacher, my job has various tasks. I have to prepare sessions; I have to teach sessions; I have to exam or give papers to see how well my students are doing on those sessions; and I have to give feedback to my students. So those four tasks, now that’s overly simplified, but those tasks make up the job of a teacher. Some teachers love to do research; they love to prepare; they’re good at preparing; they’re just not so hot in the classroom.

Now if I am the dean of that teacher, and I am a servant-leader dean, I find out which tasks my followers are struggling with. I have a teacher who’s good at preparing but not so good at presenting. Now if I’m going to help that professor improve, I don’t help that professor by spending hours showing that professor how to prepare a lesson.

Now that may be where I'm strong. That may be what I like to talk about. But if I'm going to be a servant leader, a situational leader, to that follower, I have to first of all help that follower discern "where I need help is in the classroom." And then I have to help that professor find some way to improve his or her ability to deliver in the classroom. If that professor and I have two hours to spend together, and I spend two hours with that professor talking about how to prepare a lesson, I have insulted that person; I've wasted that person's time.

Where I help that professor is by spending two hours helping that professor be better at performing in the classroom. So situational leadership says, "Intelligent leadership always begins with the follower. Until I find out what that follower needs, I can't spend my time helping that follower." And then as a good servant leader, I spend my leadership time—situational leadership says, "I conform my leadership style to what that follower needs." That's essentially what situational leadership is about.

Transforming leadership says, "While it is crucial and critical to help our followers develop their skills, it's also essential and crucial to help those followers develop their souls, develop themselves as people. James MacGregor Burns is the father of transforming leadership in the contemporary world, and he says that leaders and followers really enter into a moral commitment, into a moral contract, where leadership at its best doesn't just raise followers' skills, it raises followers as people.

He talks about leaders addressing the followers' concept, their sense of what their wants and their needs and their aspirations and their expectations are. And he's saying that people are wanting and feeling that they need things that really aren't going to help them. A person feels lonely, a person feels inadequate, and they say, "I need a drink; I need a fix," and MacGregor Burns says that what we have to help people understand is that that drink, that fix, isn't really what they need. They have to raise their sight of what's going to satisfy them to a higher level. What do they aspire to? What do they expect out of life?"

And part of servant leadership says, "If you come and you'll follow me, I will raise you to expect and to aspire to and to want and to feel a hunger to need things that are going to raise you to being a higher-level human being—Transforming leadership.

So we began this session by saying that one of the roles of a

servant leader is to be a visionary leader. What that says is that the leader has a clear sense of the mission and the purpose of this organization. A visionary leader is highly intentional about where we're going.

Part of visionary leadership is communicating that vision, that sense of mission and purpose, to everyone in the organization, so that no matter how mundane a particular person's job may be—licking stamps, washing the floor—we use visionary leadership to say to that person, “You're contributing to something magnificent; you're contributing to something you believe in.” Licking stamps, washing floors, is not an end in itself; it's a means to a higher end. So it gives people a sense of looking up higher.

And then situational leadership says, “We're going to teach you how to be the best stamp licker, the best floor washer, anybody has ever seen, because by doing those jobs at their absolute best helps you contribute more fully to something you believe in.”

And transforming leadership says, “We want to help elevate your soul, so that as you engage the mission of this organization, as a visionary follower you are doing something you believe in passionately.”

So visionary leadership raises people's sight and engages them hopefully, passionately, in what the organization is doing. Situational leadership says, “We're going to help you do your job in a way that you contribute to this thing you believe in the best way.” And transforming leadership says, “We want to get your soul engaged in what this organization is doing, so that you feel every day you're a part of this organization; you're contributing to something that you believe in; and you're contributing to it as a genuine participant in the mission, in the vision, in the purpose, of this organization.” That's what servant leaders do.