



Illustration by Jim Elmore

# Serve as You Lead

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**T**he distinctions between managers and leaders always will be with us—managers do things right, and leaders do the right things.

Managers effectively and efficiently apply the functions of management—planning, organizing, staffing, and controlling—as they use allocated resources to get the job done. Leaders, on the other hand, are the point people in any organization, and they lead by example.

For the purposes of this article, *servant leaders* offer themselves, their program, or their enterprise as they develop and serve their people. Simply put, managers primarily plan, organize, staff, and control; and servant leaders primarily motivate, influence, and inspire. Servant leaders motivate through their direction and support. They influence through their example, and they inspire through their passion.

Leaders, like managers, apply resources, but the important distinction up front is that servant leaders have the ability to use the mission, the “cause,” to build their people. Managers use resources/people to fulfill goals. Servant leaders use their projects/programs or organization to develop and build their people. Traditional leadership models describe leaders as those who set the course, provide the vision, and are the examples for others to follow. Both

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traditional and servant leadership models can yield success if correctly applied. The author also would contend that one first must understand and perform successfully as a manager before becoming a trusted, servant leader.

This article focuses on the three leadership attributes—motivation, influence, and inspiration—with the intent that all workforce members may see they have the potential to serve as they lead, wherever they are in the program or enterprise. This article's purpose is not to minimize managers. Yet the higher virtue is that of a servant leader who uses the three leadership attributes to best serve (develop and build) others.

### Serve as You Motivate

Motivation is giving someone a good reason for doing something and causing them to take action. However, leaders must motivate themselves first. They need to first convince themselves that what they are doing, where they are going, and what they are trying to accomplish are the absolute best for the people they serve and will in the end achieve the most success. At the same time, they need to remind themselves up front and often with thoughts such as, "This is not about me," "I am in a cause," "This is really a great idea," and "What can I do to best serve those I'm leading?" These often-needed reminders can fuel their own motivation first before they motivate others.

Leaders motivate through the *direction* they give and *support* they provide. The direction could come in the form of an idea, a strategy, guidance needed to accomplish a task, or reminders of what is right and best to do. The direction a leader provides needs to be clear, sincere, and inspiring. No one likes to read long vision or mission statements that do little to motivate or inspire. Rather, one is motivated to take action when hearing compelling statements by leaders, such as President Kennedy's "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country" or President George H.W. Bush's declaration to Saddam Hussein to be out of Kuwait by Jan. 15, 1991.

Direction also is giving guidance that produces success over time. Leaders continually give guidance so there is a clear understanding of what is required and how to consistently think and act to achieve the standard, thus enabling success. S. Truett Cathy, founder and CEO of Chick-fil-A, posts his famous quotation in each one of his restaurants to set the standard: "Food is Essential to life; therefore, make it good." I think we all would agree that adherence to this motto in service and food may well have been the key to the success of Chick-fil-A.

Steven Covey describes the importance of giving clear guidance to his teenage son that proved successful in maintaining their lawn: "Keep it green and clean."

Servant leaders then motivate themselves and others through their committed *support*. Support from top management is a wonderful thing. Lack of support is misery. A servant leader's

goal is to support people with continual encouragement and guidance, and then watch them bloom. Authentic support comes through one's thoughts, words, and actions. That you care for the improvement and success of those you serve is shown by your encouragement that they stay with it, keep plugging away, and keep making progress. Your genuine, sincere support not only is noticed but contagious.

Then, actions speak the loudest. Leaders' continued acts of support, demonstrated by their competence, caring, and cooperation, motivate others to want to make their own contributions. Genuine support is found in this simple, yet profound, reminder to all leaders at all levels—do not use people to build a project, program, or enterprise but rather use the project, program, or enterprise to build people. Servant leaders remember that enduring, mutually supportive relationships are what life is all about. Building people over building a business, program, etc., is the best and right thing to do. Direction comes from the head. Supportive, servant leadership comes from the heart. Both motivate the leader and those being led. Those under this type of leadership are more secure as they know the leader has their back and genuinely is there to support them.

### Serve as You Influence

Webster defines "influence" as possessing "the power to change or affect someone or something in an important way ... without directly forcing them to make it happen." Both managers and leaders have influence. The influence of managers is seen and felt through the management of resources they set in motion and implement to accomplish goals. The influence of leaders is seen and felt in the lives they affect. Leaders make a difference by their character and example. Character is both learned over time and demonstrated through consistent actions. Leaders influence others by repeatedly setting the example.

As a young officer, I will never forget the 2- to 3-minute character lesson I received from then Brig. Gen. Ronald Yates, the F-16 program director, when he described his work ethic and importance of "putting in the time," even if it meant coming in on weekends for the sake of the program and his people. That brief but vital lesson hit home with me as he routinely demonstrated this quality, thus enabling the success of others over himself. His aspiring to become a four-star general is no surprise; he practiced what he preached, ultimately influencing many under his leadership.

A leader's character also is demonstrated in the hard times. Many a leader weathers the storm of adversity knowing what he or she is doing is right even if it does not feel good; all is not going well, or "the end" is not in sight. Abraham Lincoln, in a famous passage found in one of his original manuscripts, gives us a glimpse of a leader's influence during the Civil War when he wrote "I expect to maintain this contest *until* successful, or till I die, or am conquered, or my term expires, or Congress or the country forsakes me." According to textual

evidence, Lincoln added the words “until successful, or,” drastically altering the meaning of the passage. Yet, through this writing, one gets a glimpse of our 16th president’s grim determination and allowance of optimism. Lincoln used writing to communicate his purpose and resolve during a time of profound conflict.

Leaders also do what they do even though they may not understand fully all the impacts or details of their ideas. They realize, though, that there is a greater opportunity and an ultimate benefit for the people they are serving. Fred Smith, founder and CEO of Federal Express, communicates this uncertainty yet conviction of remaining steadfast and enduring in his vision of a national express delivery system in the following quotes from his book “Learning to Lead—How to Bring Out the Best in People” (1986) on FedEx’s creation:

But once having started it [FedEx] and gone down the road, you’re a bit crazy and you’re driven towards the end goal and that provides a lot of adrenaline. ... Well, I think an entrepreneur has to have the ability to see things other people don’t, that can view what might be rather than what is. ... And then I think secondarily what’s required is enormous conviction and commitment to take the concept or idea and bring it to fulfillment.

Mr. Smith’s vision and unwavering desire to “bring it to fulfillment” have led to FedEx’s success in the global marketplace.

### Serve as You Inspire

Webster defines inspiration as “the action or power of moving the intellect or emotions.” To inspire is to draw in, to heighten, or to intensify. Servant leaders inspire others to want to do or create something. They inspire others through their passion, through having a strong feeling or emotion, rooted in their convictions. Passion starts from within and is caught in one’s words and actions. As leaders communicate, one senses their deep-rooted beliefs and passions. Their thoughts, ideas, or plans become more believable. When servant leaders demonstrate this inspiring intensity of their convictions, they produce a feeling or emotion in the followers to come along, to engage, to buy in. Followers sense the drive and then observe over time the authenticity behind the communication. Their true passion creates a synergy in followers—more things get done and with greater enthusiasm.

These passionate servant leaders also never quit in their efforts to build something, to make something happen. Quitting is not in their vocabularies, and that drive and might move others to make it a part of their lives also. One passionate leader of a university told everyone entering the freshmen class to go to the dorms and cut the word “quit” out of the dictionary. To this day, all dictionaries at that institution have “quit” cut out.

The servant leaders’ direction, support, character, and continued example, combined with a true passion for building and developing others, inspire those they serve to get in step.

A leader’s passion is what inspires followers to go beyond what they think they can do. Genuine passion also produces the response in followers to step up their own passion for the things they too hold dear. When this is accomplished, servant leaders fulfill their true calling—they have used their program or enterprise to build and develop their people.

### A Classic Example in the Workforce

Col. Bruce Mills, former program manager of the E-8 Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) program, uniquely demonstrated these qualities of being a servant leader. In preparation for the program’s low-rate production decision, Col. Mills declared “War on the DAB” (Defense Acquisition Board). To instill the vision, he mobilized his entire program—camouflaging the program office, streaming netting in the halls, stairwells, and offices. And he encouraged military folks and civilians, who purchased them, to wear their Battle Dress Uniforms daily and even to meetings with the contractors. He also displayed JSTARS ground and aircrew mock-ups in the program office; and at “All Hands” and staff meetings communicated creative analogies to war. The genre and urgency of the need created a work environment for success. Team efforts were synergized efficiently, and the entire program office prepared and performed beyond its previous expectations. His creative vision, sacrificial commitment, example, and passion all were vital in helping his people and the program successfully make it to production ... and win the war! The warfighters can be thankful an acquisition leader was as passionate about acquiring the capability they have needed on a daily basis!

### Conclusion

The purpose of this article is *not* to discuss leadership over management. Rather, the article is meant to remind us all as acquisition professionals what separates a leader from a manager. One can be both. One needs to be both. We need efficient and effective managers of cost, schedule, and performance commensurate with program risk. However, as acquisition professionals, we need to keep in mind when it is appropriate to manage and when it is appropriate to lead, no matter where we are in the program or organization. As acquisition leaders, we need always to remember we are helping develop those we can influence, by our example in word and deed. Servant leaders realize it is not about them; it is about serving people through themselves and their program/enterprise. No one is to be minimized. Through their direction, challenging ideas, support, character, attitude, and passion, leaders motivate, influence, and inspire all to give their best and then serve others as well. These leaders make the difference in our lives and in our programs. In the day-to-day management of acquisition programs, the author’s intent was to help readers remember qualities and actions that best serve others, highlighting this as a leader’s greatest calling. Remember, too, at the end of the day, it’s people we are ultimately serving. 

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