

MAHRA LUNCH & LEARN

Can you lead without leading?

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Would you still serve if no one followed?

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Opening visual generated with AI for this presentation.



Kurt Stuke

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Academic credentials

Doctorate in Leadership (DA)

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Experience in quality, process improvement, operational excellence, and corporate leadership training.



What makes you a leader?

Which belief comes closest to the way you were taught to understand leadership?

A · I set direction and ensure people deliver

B · I help people succeed at the direction I set

C · I serve people's growth, and leadership may emerge

D · I balance these depending on the situation

Discussion: 3 minutes. Open the built-in survey. These are starting assumptions, not a scored question. Ask what each definition makes the leader responsible for. Save the tension between achieving a result and serving people for later discussion.

The leader defines the destination.

The familiar starting point: someone knows where we should go.

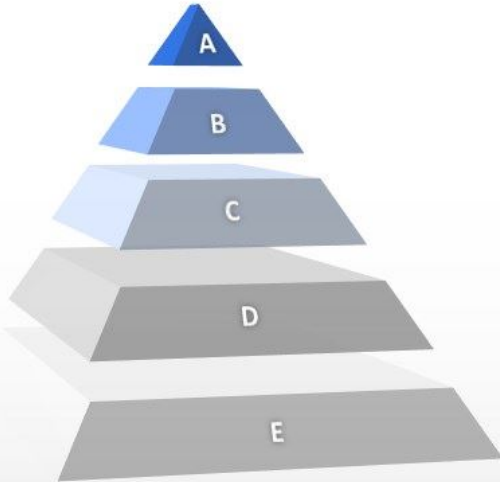
Position authorizes that person to direct others. People become the means through which the plan succeeds.

When we assess a leader, whose success do we measure?

The Old Paradigm

Organizational Structure & Hierarchical Leadership

A	C-Suite The “Generals” – creators of vision & value
B	Upper Management “Majors & Colonels”
C	Middle Management “Captains & Lieutenants”
D	Supervisors “NCOs”
E	Employees “Troops a.k.a. grunts”



Adapted from James C. Hunter’s *The Servant*, p. 58

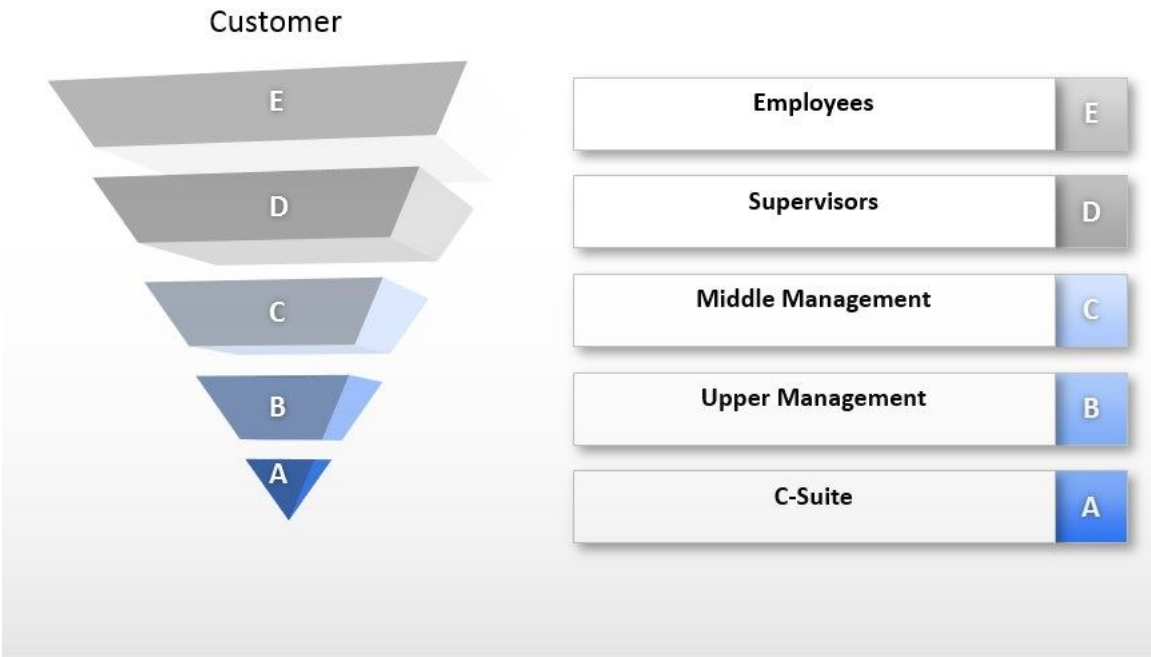
Who serves whom?

Inversion changes the purpose of authority.

The institution and its leaders become responsible for serving people’s growth and their communities.

Inverting the pyramid requires rejecting command-and-control thinking. Redrawing the chart alone does not make that change.

The Servant Paradigm: the Organization



Adapted from James C. Hunter's *The Servant*, p. 62.

Service comes before the role.

“The servant-leader is servant first”

In Greenleaf’s 1970 essay, the desire to serve precedes the choice to lead.

His question reaches beyond how a leader behaves to why that person seeks leadership.

Would service still matter if it brought no title, loyalty, or recognition?



Robert K. Greenleaf

Source: <https://greenleaf.org/product/the-servant-as-leader/>

The servant was the leader.

Leo sustains the journey.

In Hesse's *Journey to the East*, Leo tends the travelers and sustains their spirit. When he disappears, the journey collapses.

The narrator later discovers that Leo is the head of the order behind the journey.

They experienced his leadership as service before they recognized his status.



Source: <https://www.gonzaga.edu/news-events/stories/robert-greenleaf-servant-leadership>

A different test of success.

Those served

Do they become healthier, wiser, freer, and more autonomous? Do they become more inclined to serve others?

Those with least privilege

Does the institution benefit them, or at least avoid further deprivation?

Better compliance and higher output cannot, by themselves, answer these questions.

What evidence would show greater autonomy, wiser judgment, improved well-being, or better outcomes for those with the least power?

Source: <https://greenleaf.org/what-is-servant-leadership/>

Who decides what people need?

A manager offers leadership training to show commitment to employees. Employees say their highest priority is predictable schedules.

HR has funding for only one initiative. What should happen?

A · Keep the training; leaders can see longer-term needs

B · Keep the training but redesign it around employee feedback

C · Reopen the priority with employees, including the scheduling option

D · Test scheduling changes before reallocating the full budget

Discussion: 4 minutes. Open survey and invite disagreement. No option receives points. A preserves expert judgment, B listens within the leader's plan, C makes the ends open to revision, and D tests the competing needs before committing resources. Greenleaf's concern with priority needs challenges a leader's presumption that they already know what service should mean. Employee preferences and priority needs are not automatically identical. Ask whose voice, evidence, and circumstances determine the choice.

The same kindness. Different purposes.

Command and control

I use authority to get people to carry out the plan.

Benevolent control

I listen and support people so they can carry out the plan.

Servant first

I begin with the people and needs to be served. Their growth can change the plan, my role, and how I serve most effectively.

What becomes negotiable when the person with authority begins by serving?

Source: <https://greenleaf.org/product/the-servant-as-leader/>

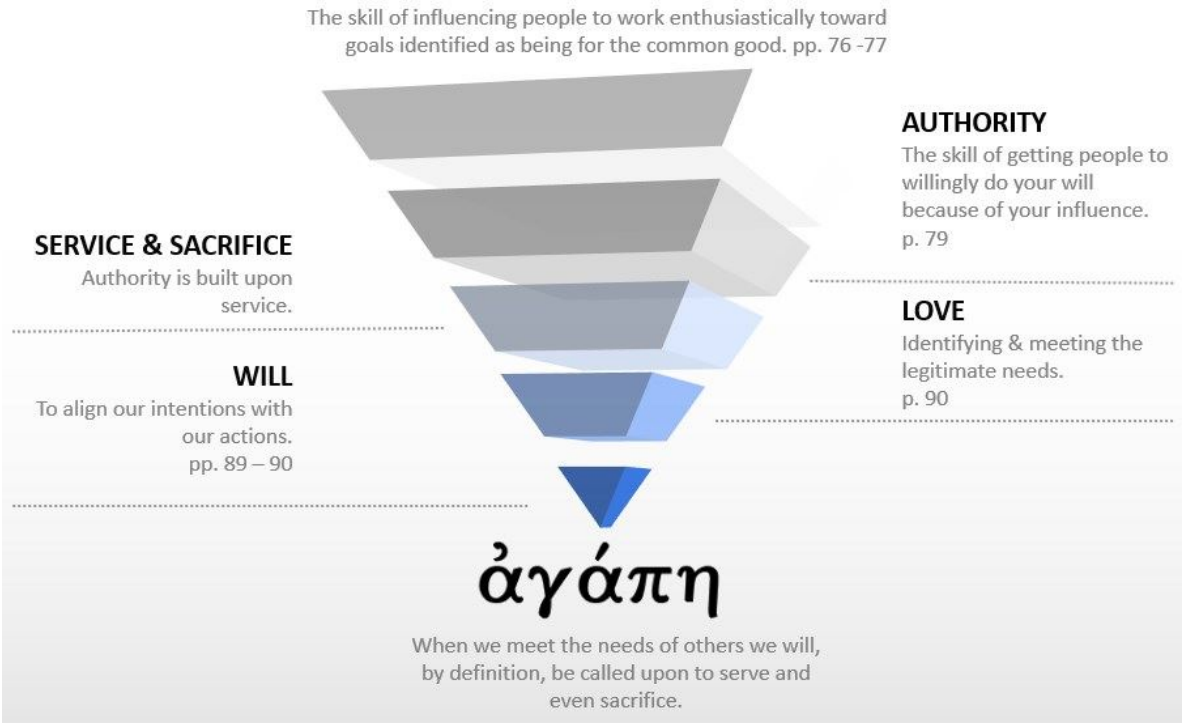
What remains when rank is removed?

Imagine that your title cannot secure agreement.

You can listen, explain, persuade, and serve. Others can disagree with your proposed direction.

Would your service earn trust? Could you accept that trust might not produce the following you wanted?

The Servant Paradigm: Leadership



Adapted from James C. Hunter's *The Servant*, p. 89.

TDIndustries



A 100% employee-owned mechanical construction and facilities services company, founded in 1946. Its teams serve buildings such as hospitals, schools, data centers, and manufacturing facilities.

An explicit servant-leadership commitment.

TDIndustries says its leaders serve employee growth toward autonomy. It also emphasizes safety, excellence, and employee ownership.

Pressure test: Can the company reach its stated goals without the leader steering?

Undated corporate webpage · Accessed October 7, 2026

Source: <https://www.tdindustries.com/who-we-are>

Barry-Wehmiller



A privately held global company based in St. Louis. Its businesses span industrial and packaging automation, professional services, and life sciences technology.

Who was Bob Chapman?

The company's longtime CEO and later chairman, advocate of Truly Human Leadership, and coauthor of Everybody Matters. He died in March 2026. Kyle Chapman is now chairman and CEO.

Bob's November 13, 2025 article describes teaching listening and service through the company's internal university.

Care is visible here. Has leadership become subordinate to service?

A related philosophy. Its compatibility with Greenleaf's test is a question to examine.

Source: <https://www.barrywehmiller.com/post/blog/2025/11/13/want-to-be-a-truly-human-leader--start-here> ; <https://barrywehmiller.com/bobchapman/about> ; <https://barrywehmiller.com/news/company-news/release/kyle-chapman-elected-barry-wehmiller-chairman-of-the-board>

What would convince you?

A statement of care

A company says it values people. What decision could contradict that claim?

A test of power

Who can reopen a priority? What happens to someone who disagrees?

A test of service

Who grows? Who becomes freer? What happens to people with the least influence?

A reputation for kindness does not settle whether an institution serves.

Source: <https://greenleaf.org/what-is-servant-leadership/>

Would you develop people who leave?

An employer funds meaningful development. Employees gain the confidence and qualifications to move into better jobs elsewhere.

Retention falls. The CFO questions the program. How should HR judge its success?

- A · Retention fell, so the program needs a stronger business case
- B · It worked, but support should favor skills useful here
- C · People grew; their departure does not erase that achievement
- D · Preserve the growth goal, but negotiate a financially viable model

Discussion: 4 minutes. This is an invented dilemma, not a claim about either example company. No option is scored. A tests the familiar business justification, B accepts development within organizational limits, C gives human growth independent weight, and D defends growth while confronting economic sustainability. Ask whether the program would still deserve support without a retention benefit. Greenleaf's test creates a genuine tension here, but does not prescribe this exact budget decision or require an insolvent institution.

Can you lead without leading?

Could service itself become the source of leadership?

Could people recognize leadership in someone who sustains their community without continually directing them?

If the right to command disappeared, what would make your leadership worth accepting?

Source: <https://www.gonzaga.edu/news-events/stories/robert-greenleaf-servant-leadership> ; <https://greenleaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/ASQ-Quality-Progress.pdf>

Would you serve without a return?

The comfortable case People grow. Trust deepens. Performance improves.

The harder case People grow. They disagree, leave, or no longer need you.

Does your commitment to service survive the harder case?

Source: <https://greenleaf.org/product/the-servant-as-leader/>

Could the institution itself serve?

A caring supervisor works inside policies that deny some workers voice, development, or security.

The individual

Can a manager's kindness compensate for the institution's effects?

The institution

Would promotion criteria, scheduling, and access to development change if service governed them?

Who has the least power to tell HR that its system is harming them?

Source: <https://greenleaf.org/what-is-servant-leadership/>

Where does this trouble you?

Which part of a servant-first approach is hardest for you to accept?

- A · A leader must retain the final say to remain accountable
- B · Service must produce a business return to be sustainable
- C · Someone still has to decide whose needs matter most
- D · Freely accepted influence seems too fragile for real organizations

Discussion: 3 minutes. Open the closing survey. There is no correct response. Each reservation deserves discussion. Invite a participant to explain the fear beneath the selection: loss of responsibility, financial sustainability, paternalism, or the reality of power. Do not turn the discussion into a demand for public agreement. The goal is reflective tension and a more precise understanding of the model.

What would service ask of you?

Choose one practice you currently defend as good leadership.

Its purpose

Does it serve people's priority needs or make them easier to direct?

Its effects

Who becomes more capable and autonomous? Who bears the cost?

Your willingness

What control, status, or convenience would you relinquish if service required it?

What would have to change for you to call the institution a servant?

Source: <https://greenleaf.org/what-is-servant-leadership/>