

# True leaders serve with love

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Typically the Western world uses the top-down pyramid style of management, one where the CEO is at the top, followed by the executives, then middle management, the supervisors and then the employees. The employees typically face the customers.

In my experience, the people in many organisations today are looking up the food chain (up the triangle as it were) and are mostly concerned about keeping the boss happy.

My question is that while everyone is focusing on keeping the boss happy, who's focusing on keeping the customer happy? After all, isn't that our most important goal in business?

What would happen if we turned the typical management pyramid upside down?

Let's imagine for a moment an organisation in which the main focus is on serving the customer at the top of the pyramid.

Imagine, as the upside-down pyramid depicts, an organisation where the front line employees are facing and truly serving the customer, and ensuring that their legitimate needs are being met; and suppose the front line supervisors begin seeing their employees as their customers and ensure their legitimate needs are being met; and so on down the pyramid.

As you can imagine, this would require each manager to take on a new mindset, a new paradigm, and recognise that the role of the leader is not to rule and lord it over the next layer of management, but rather the role of the leader is to serve.

I often tell my senior team that our role as leaders is to remove all the obstacles, all the roadblocks in the way of ensuring the customer's needs are met.

Essentially a leader is someone who identifies and meets the legitimate needs of their people, removes all the obstacles and barriers, so they can serve the customer better. To lead you must be willing to serve.

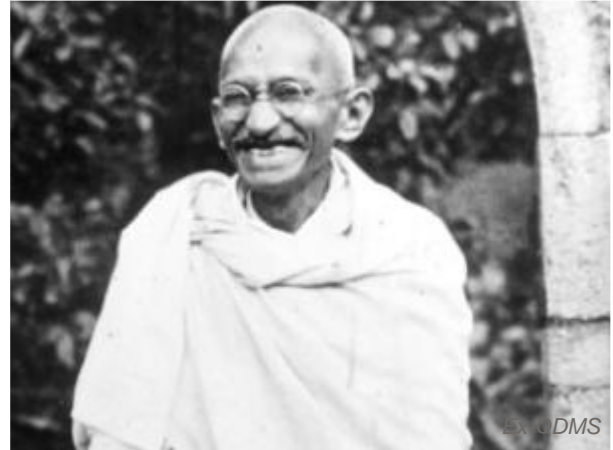
Notice my careful choice of the word "needs". Slaves do what others want, but servants do what others need. There is a big difference between meeting wants and meeting needs.

Jesus said that to lead, you must be willing to serve, a style of leadership often referred to as servant leadership. Jesus never used a power style because he had no power. King Herod, Pontius Pilot, the Romans, they had all the power.

But Jesus had a great deal of influence and he has been able to influence people even to this day. Interestingly, Jesus never used power, never forced or coerced people into following him.

So the big question is, how do we build influence with people? How do we get people to willingly do our will; how do we get people involved and committed from the neck up?

Jesus modelled a leadership style where influence was built on service. Gandhi is another great example of a man getting things done with influence and no power at all.



Great leader: Mahatma Gandhi showed that leadership through influence and example can be extremely powerful.

He found himself living in an oppressed country of about a third of a billion people, a virtual slave nation to the British Empire.

Gandhi flatly stated that he would succeed in obtaining independence from England without resorting to violence. And he did.

So how did Gandhi achieve this incredible feat? Well, he knew that he had to draw the world's attention to India so that others could begin to see the injustice of what was happening. He told his followers they would have to sacrifice as they served the course of freedom, but through their sacrifice they would begin building influence with the world.

Gandhi personally served and sacrificed a great deal for the cause. He was imprisoned and beaten for his acts of civil disobedience.

He went on severe fasts to draw further attention to India's plight. He served and sacrificed for the cause of his country's freedom until the world took notice.

Finally, in 1947, not only did the British Empire give India its independence, they also welcomed Gandhi in the centre of London with a hero's parade. He did it without resorting to guns, violence or power. He did it through influence.

We see from these two examples that for leadership to go the distance and stand the test of time, it must be built on influence, where influence is the skill of getting people to willingly do your will because of your own influence.

We build influence any time we serve and sacrifice for others. The role of leadership is to serve, that is, to identify and meet legitimate needs. In the process of meeting needs, we will often be called upon to make sacrifices for those we serve.

So, what do you suppose service and sacrifice is built on? Effort and lots of it would be a good answer, but I prefer the word love.

I define this love in the article that I wrote for this column in 2010, Have the guts to lead with love, where I talk about love as a verb describing behaviour.

When we choose to love, to extend ourselves for others, we will be required to be patient, kind, humble, respectful, selfless, forgiving, honest and committed. These behaviours will require us to serve and sacrifice for others.

We may have to sacrifice our egos or even our bad moods on a particular day. We may even have to sacrifice by loving and extending ourselves for people we may not even like!

And lastly, love is built on "will". Ken Blanchard, in the One Minute Manager, talks about intentions minus actions equals squat. All the good intentions in the world don't mean a thing if they don't live up with our actions.

Intentions plus actions equals will. It is only when our actions are aligned with our intentions that we become authentic leaders.

True leadership is difficult and it takes a lot of effort. Our intentions are not very meaningful if they don't line up with our actions. And that's why the foundation of leadership starts with will.

In summary, the leadership model I describe starts with the "will", which is our ability as human beings to align our intentions with our actions and choose our behaviour.

With the proper will, we then choose to love, which is about identifying the legitimate needs, not wants, of those we lead.

When we meet the needs of others we will be called on to serve and even sacrifice. When we serve and sacrifice for others, we build our authority or influence, and only when we have built our authority with people, have we earned the right to be called leader.

While leaders indeed possess great skills and gifts, these take second place to serving others out of love.

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