

POST WRITTEN BY: Cheryl Williamson

Cheryl Polote Williamson helps female entrepreneurs build business and personal relationships built on honesty, integrity, and trust.

"The servant-leader is a servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first." –Robert K. Greenleaf

If I took five minutes to talk to your team about their thoughts of you as a leader, what would they say? Would they say that you were a servant leader?

For as long as I can remember, I have had an extremely strong and uncommon desire to serve others. As I have grown and developed as a professional and leader, I have realized that my innate desire to serve has catapulted my career to astronomical heights; all because I have always followed my desire to serve first. A leader with a servant's heart is a truly invaluable asset, and everyone in a leadership position should seek to adopt this type of mentality.

Often times, we confuse leadership with dictatorship. A dictator barks out orders and does not take into account the wants and needs of others. A servant leader is the complete opposite. A servant leader works tirelessly to develop his or her people and is focused on what they can do for others.

I have compiled a few examples of what it means to be a servant leader, and most importantly, ways that you can establish a culture of servant leadership within your organization.

1. Let others see you serve and encourage them to join you. It is of the utmost importance that my employees and clients alike witness me in service. For example, this past holiday season I organized a book donation drive to provide books to the residents of one of my favorite charities, Martha's House, which is a local transitional facility for women who are reentering society post-incarceration. I donated copies of my own books and encouraged other authors and people on my team to do the same. Collectively, we donated over 50 books. I simultaneously gave back to the community while showing my team what it means to embody service.

2. Make sure they know that you care. We've all heard the famous quote, "They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." It is crucial that leaders know and understand the message and meaning behind this quote. Being knowledgeable does not make you a good leader, being caring does. A leader who shows his or her team that they care will not have to worry about loyalty or poor customer service. Place the importance of taking care of your people above the importance of your bottom line. When you take care of your people, they will take care of your customers. Get creative with finding ways to show your team that you care. It could be something as small as a \$5 gift card to their favorite store or offering a kind word when they have experienced a personal trauma.

3. Invest in your people. The biggest investment you can make in your people is your time. Your team wants to spend time with you. Giving your time is a surefire way to let them know how

much you care. Spending quality time with your team will impact their job performance directly and will, therefore, have great impacts on your bottom line. Spend time connecting with them as often as you can. Talk to them about non-work related topics and show genuine interest in them as a person. You'd be surprised how much this will mean to your team.

4. Don't place restrictions on your willingness to serve. For a servant leader, no job is beneath their pay grade. A true servant leader is willing to clean toilets if necessary. If you are in leadership, do not make the mistake of feeling or thinking that you are above grunt work. Your team can sense this type of attitude, and it is off-putting. It also puts distance between you and your team. Never be afraid to roll up your sleeves and go to work.

Successful leaders maintain a servant's heart and thus encourage their people to do the same. Imagine what your business's culture would look like if you and all of your team became servant leaders. What impact would this have on your customers' experiences? Only good can come from you showing your people what it means to serve first. I challenge you to explore ways to foster servant leadership in your own leadership style and among your team as well.