



The 10 Pillars of Servant Leadership

What to do: Read this tip sheet to help you understand and use the value-based leadership approach known as *servant leadership*. Reflect on ways you might use this philosophy and set of practices to motivate people to take action toward common goals.

Why it matters: Effective leadership sets the cornerstone for an environment where students and staff can flourish. The practices described here can help you recognize and employ a wide range of strengths, skills, and talents to build a quality program. Servant leadership enriches the lives of individuals, builds better organizations, and ultimately creates a more just and caring world, according to [Robert Greenleaf](#), who coined the term.

1. Listening

You believe the best way to understand and help others is to listen. Many times, the purpose of listening is to gather information so you can form a response. As a servant leader, you go a step further and use active listening to make sure you fully understand what's being communicated. This technique, also called reflective listening, supports clear communication and reduces misunderstandings.

Tip: Limit judgements, don't interrupt, wait for a pause to follow up, empathize with the speaker, watch for nonverbal cues, provide feedback, and "practice, practice, practice."

2. Empathy

You understand that everyone has their own perspective, and you try to see the world through their lens. Even if you reach a different conclusion or have a different opinion, putting yourself in someone else's shoes improves insight and understanding, and it helps you communicate effectively. If you worry that "too much empathy" might make you seem like a softie, consider this: In a [survey of over 150 CEOs](#), more than 80 percent said empathy is key to success.

Tip: Think about the differences between pity (I feel sorry for you), sympathy (I feel for you), and empathy (I feel with you). Try to move beyond empathy to compassion to let others know that you not only *hear* them, but you're *here* for them.

3. Healing

You recognize that, as a leader of others, you can change the narrative of their stories. Effective leaders understand that to reach individual and collective goals, healing must sometimes occur. A program environment that provides a sense of safety and belonging is essential to addressing student learning gaps and positive youth development. As a leader, you must seek to create healing on multiple levels: within yourself, via relationships with others, and in service to the program and community.

Tip: Consider ways to use one-on-one conversations, mentoring, and community circles within your program.



4. Self-Awareness

Servant leadership requires psychological maturity and self-regulation. After all, your words, actions, and decisions affect program staff and outcomes. Self-regulation requires self-awareness. Awareness of your words, actions, and decisions — and their effects on others — helps you recognize when your approach isn't getting the desired responses and outcomes. Then you can reflect on your approach and make adjustments. Self-awareness and reflection are key to managing yourself and your relationships with others to keep the team moving toward their goals.

Tip: Be aware of how staff members process information and the time they need to do so. Instead of putting them on the spot, provide an open-ended invitation for sharing.

5. Persuasion

Your role isn't to direct others' every move, but to encourage them to move in a direction that benefits themselves and others. In an out-of-school time program, each staff member's personal and professional growth affects the growth and success of your program. At times, the program goals and objectives you establish will require some level of growth and change among staff. Change can be unsettling for some people, even when it's positive change. To influence others and get them to invest in change, you must understand their starting point. For a servant leader, the purpose of persuasion isn't to bring your staff around to your way of thinking. Its effectiveness is in nudging people to consider new ideas and perspectives, find common ground, and collaborate on goals they agree are worthwhile.

Tip: Personal stories or experiences can be powerful persuasive tools when used appropriately.

6. Conceptualization

As a leader, you're in a position to share the vision of desired outcomes for your program so that your team can help you determine how to get there. Conceptualization puts awareness, listening, healing, and persuasion into action. It synthesizes the best of each to create a vision that addresses the unique characteristics of your staff, students, and program.

Tip: Nurture your ability to dream big dreams. Stretch your thinking beyond the day-to-day to encompass broad-based, long-term ideas.

7. Foresight

You can predict and understand the impact of actions and help navigate a better course. As an out-of-school time program leader, you likely have an acute awareness of the realities of student needs, staffing requirements, budgetary constraints, and more. As a servant leader, you'll reflect openly on past lessons while incorporating present realities to predict your program's likely future situations and circumstances.

Tip: To gather and assess important information about a program or initiative to help you make informed decisions, use a SWOT analysis. S = Strengths, W = Weaknesses, O = Opportunities, and T = Threats.



8. Stewardship

Your accountability and commitment to lead extend beyond the people in your program to include your parent organization and the community. When you're viewed as a credible role model who acts altruistically to serve the greater good (rather than to boost your own ego or personal gain), it can inspire team members to emulate your behavior. Two behaviors that are important to establishing yourself as a good steward are accountability and responsibility.

Tip: Ask for opinions, use feedback to improve your team and yourself, practice effective communication, and fulfill your promises.

9. Growth

Your single greatest accomplishment as a servant leader is to grow and develop your people. Developing strong, positive relationships with your staff can happen only if they view you as a credible, supportive leader. Credibility and trust grow when you're able to demonstrate that your process of learning, planning, and implementation have led to useful outcomes. Before you can serve your staff, you need to familiarize yourself with who they are and what they hope to achieve.

Tip: Involve your staff from the start so they can grow as individuals and as professionals as the program grows and as you grow as a leader.

10. Community

Your workplace culture, ideally, creates a place where all are welcome and all matter. Servant leadership builds a sense of social identity that fulfills the basic human need to belong. Make time for team members to share and celebrate each other's successes. Model leadership that balances the power dynamic between personalities, communication styles, and staff roles. By creating an environment where people recognize one another's value and potential, and support them in their quest for fulfillment, servant leaders foster community.

Tip: Change the organizational attitude toward mistakes and failures. Both are necessary to learn and grow.

*It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life that no man
can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.
Serve and thou shall be served.*

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

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