

Leadership in A.A. – Servant Leadership

A huge thank you to the General Service Office and to Area 30 for hosting this regional forum, and allowing us to see service come alive for some of our current and future AA leaders as they see and feel the A.A. general service structure at work among us this weekend.

After consultation with our former regional trustee, I volunteered to speak on the topic “Leadership in A.A. – Servant Leadership.” Several weeks later, as I sat down to compose my presentation, I was filled with fear as I do not possess any formal education or training in Servant Leadership. Oh wait, no, I was actually full of fear because self-reliance had failed me, once again. I asked God at once to remove my fear, not out of any virtue or flawless adherence to the clear-cut directions in “the Big Book” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*), but because my screen was still completely blank and I faced a stack of AA literature in which the answer to “what is servant leadership?” surely must reside. If God can solve the age-old riddle of Alcoholism, why can’t He help here?

Servant Leadership is defined as a non-traditional leadership policy, under which the leader places the primary emphasis on the well-being of those being served. In A.A., there is always another member who is the beneficiary of the service we do – no matter how large or small that service may *seem*. If it is a necessary service, and Bill W. tells us in the Introduction to the Concepts, that we are tasked with asking ourselves “Is this service really needed?”, then it should be for the well-being of those being served. But if we take it one step further, aren’t we really tending to the well-being of those whom we have not yet met?

I have a 1936 Webster’s Dictionary. It’s huge and requires two volumes. Now, 1936 is before service may have even been mentioned in A.A., but nonetheless, 1936 was a good year in AA history. In the second volume, one definition of servant is “an expression of civility used often by equals.” When we use the phrase “trusted servant” in A.A., about ourselves or others, are we thinking of our service as a journey among equals that we experience “shoulder to shoulder” as *Alcoholics Anonymous* tells us? Or are we hoping, consciously or unconsciously, that our servitude will provide us with some level of power or prestige, that we need or maybe even just want? Are we serving to become drunk with power and prestige?

Now backtracking to the first volume of that 1936 dictionary, one finds a definition, albeit five deep, of leader as “in mining, a small vein that leads to a rich lode.” As leaders in A.A., are we exercising our skills in vision, prudence, tolerance and flexibility to allow those we serve, who may be our next leaders, to acquire mining skills to unleash the limitless lode of joy in release from a lifetime of frustration for themselves, and for still others? Are we as leaders, insisting on giving away the entirety of the products of our service for the well-being and benefit of those we serve? Or are we, even in some small way, deriving arrogant ownership over the results of our service? When we can’t claim ownership of the results for ourselves, do we as leaders still “get behind” and support the group conscience? Do we remember that servant leadership in A.A. isn’t just about

us providing for the well-being of others; that we're only agents of the Higher Power, who is the ultimate provider of well-being for those we serve.

"The Sense of the Conference" essay from the Final Report of the Fifth General Service Conference of A.A. (1955) referenced the unanimous adoption of a permanent Charter for the Conference structure, in a way that I believe sums up Servant Leadership in A.A. very powerfully:

...action without awareness can be meaningless. Action for the sake of prestige, or merely as a flexing of intellectual muscles, could be dangerous to men who are bound together by strange catalysts --- humility and the need to serve.

And three paragraphs later...

In 1951 the Delegates had met in the first Conference in an atmosphere of promise and eagerness to serve. The implied promise was that the recovered alcoholics of the world would one day write a social contract with the future, a contract binding them never to forget their obligations to the problem drinkers who might one day turn to them.

Now that we have that social contract, how can our collective service best fulfill its promise and obligation to problem drinkers?

I thank you for your Servant Leadership in A.A. and thank you for your vision, prudence, flexibility, and your tolerance of me as I hammer out some Servant Leadership of my own on the anvils of experience. May we always remember to place our hand in that of our Heavenly Father's and may we allow the well-being of those we serve to be our guiding principle.

My Sources:

The A.A. Service Manual and The Twelve Concepts for World Service (2021-2023 Edition)

Leadership in A.A. Ever a Vital Need (An essay by Bill W.)

Alcoholics Anonymous (4th Edition)

The Final Report of the Fifth General Service Conference of A.A. (1955)

Websters Unabridged Universal Dictionary (1936 – "Profusely Illustrated")

The shoulders of those that came before us.

And yes, the answer to "what is servant leadership?" is indeed in our A.A. literature.