

The Heart of a Servant – The GREAT DIFFERENTIATOR!!

Our Military at Their Best

I have led thousands of individuals over the years in management consulting and I still remember when I was moving into leadership when my boss, John Ford told me: *“Be careful of what you hope for... leadership is different than management”*. I was all of 23 at the time and I thought “Bring it on”. Little did I know what he was sharing and what today I am still understanding is a “Leadership Work-In-Progress”.

Roll forward almost 35 years and the great Damon Shook – Senior Pastor at Champion Forest Baptist at the time, my friend and one of the original mega-church pastors – comes to visit with me for some coaching on leadership. He sits down and says the funniest thing I’ve ever heard on leadership. Damon says:

“Brent, I know God called me to lead; and I do love leading.... It’s just dealing w/ people that drives me nuts!”

Goodness, I would like to have died... no truer words have ever been said.

Today, I watch parents all wanting to tell colleges their kids are great leaders; I see college graduates say the same as they interview. Further, I watch companies share the same and I even have 25–35-year-olds tells me they are the “best leaders in the U.S.”. Goodness... I’ve been leading for 40+ years and I still feel like I know only 5%! What most are missing though is the true heart of a true leader— being the servant-leader.

Most people don’t know that the term **“servant leadership”** was actually coined in 1970 by Robert Greenleaf in his essay **“The Servant as Leader”**. In his essay, he states:

“The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.”

When I think of that, it is easy to think of our military... wanting to serve and to serve first! For that, we should all be grateful; for that, they should all know that they are being prepared for great things since serving is the true foundation of ever wanting to impact others and lead. Michael Jordan summed it up perfectly when he said: *“Ask any of my teammates, the one thing Michael Jordan was ‘He never*

asked me to do something that he didn't do'. For our military and for them putting their lives on the line for our freedom—could there truly be any greater gesture; could there be any greater path to leadership.... than serving in our military!? I don't think so.

Too many people have not developed the desire, or want, to serve into their DNA... almost everyone though wants to lead. It's similar to when I used to coach basketball at a high school (also similar to the great movie *Hoosiers*), and everyone on the team wanted to lead in scoring... but who wanted to put in the time and effort to defend; to rebound; to hustle and do all those little things that NOT only made the team better... but it also set the example I needed for others to follow IF we were ever to be competitive. If those "little things" are not done, it is a guarantee you will lose. That's what our Armed Forces do each and every day. They put in the time and effort on those little things that add up to victory; they put in the time to make a difference and protect their flanks from being overrun. They sign up knowing that they will be SERVING in the most important sense - SERVING to PROTECT OUR FREEDOMS!

To be a TRUE LEADER, both head and heart must be in tune. As a leader adapts to the mindset of serving first, conscious choice and neuroplasticity kick in... the brain is re-wired!!! It then becomes intentional and actionable to lead. Serving in our military rewires their brains such that they will forever be positioned to be amazing on so many fronts.

Look at what just happened with Urban Meyer - the coach of the Jaguars - who was just fired. He was "leader" in name only... but leadership did not resonate inside his DNA... at all! True leadership begins with LEADERSHIP BY CHARACTER!! Compare and contrast him to Tom Brady - someone considered to be the G.O.A.T in football and his role as a leader posted this inspirational message on his Instagram:

"I have always believed the sport of football is an 'all-in' proposition -- if a 100% competitive commitment isn't there, you won't succeed, and success is what I love so much about our game. There is a physical, mental, and emotional challenge EVERY single day that has allowed me to maximize my highest potential. And I have tried my very best these past 22 years. There are no shortcuts to success on the field or in life."

Goodness, was Tom talking about football or was that our Armed Forces he was talking about? One could argue for both, BUT I can guarantee you this, without our

military protecting us, I doubt there is ever a Tom Brady, a Michael Jordan or any of the great stars we enjoy watch in the *“land of the free and home of the brave.”*

Unfortunately, not every person is equipped to meet the standards involved. When you serve first, it is for others’ benefit... or in the case of our military... for our Country’s benefit. It is not a resume filler or something to impress your peers. Servant-Leadership requires – no it DEMANDS – the best leaders to focus their attention away from themselves and put the spotlight on others while growing, empowering, encouraging, and teaching them first and with the foremost being; making them the best THEY can be!! Better said... the best you can be!!! That is what our Armed Forces do... they try to develop and bring to light, the VERY BEST every soldier they have.

Personally, I have never served, and I still have so much to learn, but my mom inspired this trait in me when I was 7 with the power of her love she had working with special needs kids. This trait would continue to be developed as I went to Jesuit where they required service hours to be completed every year, and when I got to college, I continued doing what I could for others with special needs. These actions were never for accolades, it was just who my mom and others had shown and developed me to be. Goodness, what a TREASURE and LEGACY from her, and when I think of the legacies our military puts out regarding serving... there is nothing that compares. NOTHING!

I think the hardest part though is what some see as a servant-leader being a “doormat”. In my experience being around the best great corporate leaders like Herb Kelleher; Michael Dell; Coach John Wooden and Bill Gates... they have a Spirit of Excellence that is to die for, but they all are/were tough. They demand excellence from others while they too demonstrate it day-in and day-out. They lead by example, and they lead with authority, **BUT** from the bottom up and they in turn reap their reward through seeing results!!! So too does our military and all associated with them in the protection of this great country of ours!!!

The reason this topic is so key to me as my time here on earth gets shorter — regarding servant leadership in the most conventional sense — is the TOTAL commitment in creating the conditions needed for superior performance to maximize our abilities. This is what it’s all about. This is what tomorrow’s generation needs to be taught and developed in. It may be the BEST GIFT we can give of ourselves... an eternal fire that burns inside those willing. Our Military is a “front-line” example of this... a role model for all.

“The extreme self-sacrifice characteristic of group-selected species such as ants and bees can often be found among soldiers.” – Jonathan Haidt

The challenge is there... set aside self to focus on others to help them reach remarkable results!!! Imagine if the youth of our generation were able to simply go through a simulation for 6 months of being in the military and doing what is necessary to serve and put others first... imagine the difference...imagine how the United States would look 30 years from now; IMAGINE!

Hmmm... set aside self ... to focus on others... in today’s environment of immediate gratification; social media; entitlement and laziness... and I could even say “meanness” ... teaching our kids to be servant leaders (like my mom did me and the military does for thousands of young recruits) is and will be... **THE GREAT DIFFERENTIATOR** — especially when role-modeled out to those that we care about; to those that are willing to put in the effort; to those willing to put their lives on the line for others; to those that see the power of selflessness, encouragement and care that will transform those in this generation willing to “renew” their minds and hearts!! If we don’t, we are perfectly and utterly useless as a country if all we do is conform to the world around us and have no concept of truly serving! If you can’t serve, I guarantee you can’t protect!!

Bottom-line, I don’t think our legacies are interested in the title, the size, or the scope of our leadership. Legacies are interested in the quality and care in which we lead and teach others and the lasting legacies we leave behind - our REPUTATIONS!! With leadership... no matter how you look at it, begins with knowing how to serve, and serve well.

QUALITY, EXCELLENCE AND CARE!!!! That’s what our military strives for each and every day they are out there protecting us.

Now that’s a true LEGACY!!

Now that’s a GIFT WORTH GIVING!!

Thank you from all of us you so selflessly serve!!