

**From:**

***The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader***  
**By John C. Maxwell**

S E R V A N T H O O D :

T O G E T A H E A D , P U T O T H E R S F I R S T

The true leader serves. Serves people.  
Serves their best interests, and in so doing  
will not always be popular, may not always impress.  
But because true leaders are motivated by loving  
concern rather than a desire for personal glory,  
they are willing to pay the price.

—*Eugene B. Habecker, Author*

You've got to love your people  
more than your position.

—*John C. Maxwell*

## O N S H A K Y G R O U N D

Not long ago Americans became acquainted with U.S. Army General H. Norman Schwarzkopf. He displayed highly successful leadership abilities in commanding the allied troops in the Persian Gulf War, just as he had done throughout his career, beginning in his days at West Point.

In *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, I wrote how in Vietnam he turned around a battalion that was in shambles. The First Battalion of the Sixth Infantry—known as the “worst of the sixth”—went from laughingstock to effective fighting force and were selected to perform a more difficult mission. That turned out to be an assignment to what Schwarzkopf described as “a horrible, malignant place” called the Batangan Peninsula. The area had been fought over for thirty years, was covered with mines and booby traps, and was the site of numerous weekly casualties from those devices.

Schwarzkopf made the best of a bad situation. He introduced procedures to greatly reduce casualties, and whenever a soldier *was* injured by a mine, he flew out to check on the man, had him evacuated using his chopper, and talked to the other men to boost their morale.

On May 28, 1970, a man was injured by a mine, and Schwarzkopf flew to the man’s location. While the helicopter was evacuating the injured soldier, another soldier stepped on a mine, severely injuring his leg. The man thrashed around on the ground, screaming and wailing. That’s when everyone realized

the first mine hadn't been a lone booby trap. They were all standing in the middle of a minefield.

Schwarzkopf believed the injured man could survive and even keep his leg—but only if he stopped flailing around. There was only one thing he could do. He had to go after the man and immobilize him. Schwarzkopf wrote,

I started through the minefield, one slow step at a time, staring at the ground, looking for telltale bumps or little prongs sticking up from the dirt. My knees were shaking so hard that each time I took a step, I had to grab my leg and steady it with both hands before I could take another . . . It seemed like a thousand years before I reached the kid.

The 240-pound Schwarzkopf, who had been a wrestler at West Point, then pinned the wounded man and calmed him down. It saved his life. And with the help of an engineer team, Schwarzkopf got him and the others out of the minefield.

The quality that Schwarzkopf displayed that day could be described as heroism, courage, or even foolhardiness. But I think the word that best describes it is *servanthood*. On that day in May, the only way he could be effective as a leader was to serve the soldier who was in trouble.

#### F L E S H I N G I T O U T

When you think of servanthood, do you envision it as an activity performed by relatively low-skilled people at the bottom of the

positional totem pole? If you do, you have a wrong impression. Servanthood is not about position or skill. It's about attitude. You have undoubtedly met people in service positions who have poor attitudes toward servanthood: the rude worker at the government agency, the waiter who can't be bothered with taking your order, the store clerk who talks on the phone with a friend instead of helping you.

Just as you can sense when a worker doesn't want to help people, you can just as easily detect whether a leader has a servant's heart. And the truth is that the best leaders desire to serve others, not themselves.

What does it mean to embody the quality of servanthood? A true servant leader:

*1. Puts Others Ahead of His Own Agenda*

The first mark of servanthood is the ability to put others ahead of yourself and your personal desires. It is more than being willing to put your agenda on hold. It means intentionally being aware of your people's needs, available to help them, and able to accept their desires as important.

*2. Possesses the Confidence to Serve*

The real heart of servanthood is security. Show me someone who thinks he is too important to serve, and I'll show you someone who is basically insecure. How we treat others is really a reflection of how we think about ourselves. Philosopher-poet Eric Hoffer captured that thought:

The remarkable thing is that we really love our neighbor as ourselves; we do unto others as we do unto ourselves. We hate others when we hate ourselves. We are tolerant toward others when we tolerate ourselves. We forgive others when we forgive ourselves. It is not love of self but hatred of self which is at the root of the troubles that afflict our world.

The Law of Empowerment says that only secure leaders give power to others. It's also true that only secure leaders exhibit servanthood.

*3. Initiates Service to Others*

Just about anyone will serve if compelled to do so. And some will serve in a crisis. But you can really see the heart of someone who initiates service to others. Great leaders see the need, seize the opportunity, and serve without expecting anything in return.

*4. Is Not Position-Conscious*

Servant leaders don't focus on rank or position. When Colonel Norman Schwarzkopf stepped into that minefield, rank was the last thing on his mind. He was one person trying to help another. If anything, being the leader gave him a greater sense of obligation to serve.

*5. Serves Out of Love*

Servanthood is not motivated by manipulation or self-promotion.

It is fueled by love. In the end, the extent of your influence depends on the depth of your concern for others. That's why it's so important for leaders to be willing to serve.

R E F L E C T I N G O N I T

Where is your heart when it comes to serving others? Do you desire to become a leader for the perks and benefits? Or are you motivated by a desire to help others?

If you really want to become the kind of leader that people want to follow, you will have to settle the issue of servanthood. If your attitude is to be served rather than to serve, you may be headed for trouble. If this is an issue in your life, then heed this advice:

*Stop* lording over people, and *start* listening to them.

*Stop* role-playing for advancement, and *start* risking for others' benefit.

*Stop* seeking your own way, and *start* serving others.

It is true that those who would be great must be like the least and the servant of all.

B R I N G I N G I T H O M E

To improve your servanthood, do the following:

- *Perform small acts.* When was the last time you performed small acts of kindness for others? Start with those

closest to you: your spouse, children, parents. Find ways today to do small things that show others you care.

- *Learn to walk slowly through the crowd.* One of the greatest lessons I learned as a young leader came from my father. I call it walking slowly through the crowd. The next time you attend a function with a number of clients, colleagues, or employees, make it your goal to connect with others by circulating among them and talking to people. Focus on each person you meet. Learn his name if you don't know it already. Make your agenda getting to know each person's needs, wants, and desires. Then later when you go home, make a note to yourself to do something beneficial for half a dozen of those people.
- *Move into action.* If an attitude of servanthood is conspicuously absent from your life, the best way to change it is to start serving. Begin serving with your body, and your heart will eventually catch up. Sign up to serve others for six months at your church, a community agency, or a volunteer organization. If your attitude still isn't good at the end of your term, do it again. Keep at it until your heart changes.

D A I L Y T A K E - A W A Y

Albert Schweitzer wisely stated, "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: The ones among you who will be

really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.” If you want to lead on the highest level, be willing to serve on the lowest.