

A Servant Leader's "Deliverables"—Part 1

by Dennis Hooper, published in the Houston Home Journal on Tuesday, June 28, 2005

Four weeks ago, I quoted John Fischer's "The Leader as Shoeshine Man." (Look my article on my website under "The Servant Leaders as Shoeshine Man.") John is senior writer of the "Purpose-Driven Life Daily Devotionals," available by e-mail (go to www.purposedrivenlife.com). In that column, I asked readers to identify "the products and/or services that you and your colleagues desire from your leader."

My desire was to combine your collective thoughts and share them. Leaders will then have a clear description of how to serve their internal customers, their team members

Thanks to all of the many individuals who provided perspectives. I have thanked each of you privately, but you deserve a collective "thank you" publicly. Collaboration with you thoughtful readers and leaders is much appreciated!

John Fischer's analogy offers a potential paradigm shift for leaders who have never deeply considered "servant leadership." Many individuals might quickly identify the lady or gentleman whose shoes are being shined in this description as the more likely leader. Yet, as Fischer wrote, "were Jesus here today, He would point to the shoeshine man as being the one to emulate."

Servant leadership is about creating a welcoming, safe, productive environment that inspires and encourages individuals to excel, using their talents to serve their colleagues and the organization's paying customers. John Fischer used the shoeshine man as an interesting example!

The shoeshine man greets his customers with a smile and an inviting word. The shoeshine stand is attractive and comfortable. Customers are treated with respect. They leave looking and feeling better than when they arrived.

Each new customer is the focus of the shoeshine man's total attention. Whatever else is going on in the vicinity of the shoeshine stand is blotted out of his mind. The shoeshine man responds to the customer's suggestions, feedback, and opinions.

The shoeshine man shares information about what might be of interest to the customer (for example, the movement of the stock market, or the results of today's ball game). He watches closely for a response to know whether and how to proceed.

If the customer wants to talk, the shoeshine man keeps the conversation flowing, seeking understanding and expressing empathy. He makes each customer feel significant.

The shoeshine man may not own his stand, but he realizes it is where he serves, so he takes care of it. He has a special appreciation for his customers, especially the repeaters. When they don't show up at their normal time, he wonders where they are and what might have prevented their presence.

So where does all this shake out? The shoeshine man wants his customers to look good and to feel confident. Servant leaders want the same for those under their authority, and they are deeply committed to creating the environment where that can happen.

Servant leaders have a strong awareness of their stewardship responsibility. They recognize that the positions they hold are their "mission fields," the arenas in which they are privileged to serve. Servant leaders set very high standards for themselves, aware that employees and their families are dependent upon their decisions and direction-setting.

The behaviors of servant leaders flow from the way they view their responsibilities. I encourage you to evaluate your approach to leadership. Do you focus more on meeting your own needs? Or are you serving the needs of those under your authority?

Come back next week, when I'll share some specifics, taken from what readers have identified as the products and services--the deliverables--of servant leaders."