

Abundance and a Serving Mentality

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I was 42 when Procter & Gamble encouraged me to become certified to teach Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. One of the huge insights I gained in my training was an awareness of the distinction between an outlook of abundance and one of scarcity. (See Chapter 4, "Think Win/Win.")

No one had ever identified those terms for me. The concepts were never shared in high school or college. I don't recall the contrasting perspectives being mentioned in over twenty years of leadership training. Perhaps there are readers out there who also have never had a label placed on their underlying perceptions of themselves relative to the rest of the world.

My advocacy for leaders is that they serve those over whom they have authority. That perspective, however, is rare in our society. Instead, many leaders crave dominance. They adopt a command-and-control style, thinking that compliance ("If they would just do what I tell them!") is the objective.

A culture based on fear of retribution ("my way or the highway") is hugely inferior to a culture of genuine commitment. A more collaborative "servant leadership" style--where people have genuinely welcomed their responsibilities, where they are competent in their roles, and where they are honorably motivated to serve both their paying and internal customers--tends to deliver a commitment culture.

Innovation, breakthroughs, and excellence are rarely associated with compliance cultures. To build a culture of commitment, however, the leader must serve as an effective, respected role model. In addition, that rarely occurs if the leader has an outlook of scarcity.

Once I understood what a scarcity mentality represents, I realized my parents taught me that perspective well. Oh, they didn't do it intentionally. They were unaware of their limiting filters. Insufficiency was merely the meaning they made of their circumstances. They anticipated that their environment would be callous and harsh, delivering scarcity. They were experts at identifying lack everywhere.

Maybe that was because they were a product of the Great Depression. Maybe they were just passing along to me what they had unconsciously learned from their parents. Like any other paradigm, the perspective is self-validating. Until you gain some new information, often in a surprising way, you don't even know you are filtering what comes to you through the lens of scarcity.

It's hard to be generous when you have a scarcity mentality. Scarcity fosters fear, anxiety, and often desperation. Your self-protection won't allow you to even celebrate a friend's or family member's good fortune, interpreting it as another sign that the world is overlooking you or worse yet, intentionally beating you down.

An abundance outlook, in contrast, is optimistic. There's an underlying belief that the resources needed to take the next step will make themselves available. Sharing is easy--offering compliments, celebrating achievements, and acknowledging superior effort. The more you give, the more the world seems to give back to you.

Serving from a perspective of scarcity communicates that you are seeking something you don't have. Many leaders seek money, power, approval, status, or prestige. What's stimulating you? What's the silent, hidden driver that propels you? Do you seek a promotion, a raise, a bigger title, greater authority, a corner office?

If you see yourself in the previous paragraph, this article won't generate an immediate change, but it may raise your awareness. What would it take to cause your motivation to be encouraging, helping others "win," creating collaborative relationships, building future leaders, or being an inspiring role model?

It may take years to change your outlook. You may understand the concept intellectually but find yourself behaving in selfish ways. Old habits of wanting to be served--rather than serving--don't disappear easily.

Examine yourself. Recognizing your motives is the first step. Find a mentor who seems unreasonably generous and supportive. Ask challenging questions to penetrate beneath the obvious. What drives this person?

The imprinting from my youth is still present. After twenty years, I continue to work on my outlook. Come join me. Small steps consistently applied over a long time will bring about the changes we desire!

Want more? Go to my website, www.buildingfutureleaders.com/article-archives. In the search box, put in the words "servant leadership." Then read. I welcome your questions at dennis@buildingfutureleaders.com.