

Servant Leadership is Unnatural

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Jim Hunter, author of the 1998 book *The Servant: A Simple Story About the True Essence of Leadership*, makes it clear that most people do not want to change. He shared this premise in a half-day session that I was privileged to attend. And, frankly, I was convicted by his observations!

Many leaders want to change the world--well, at least the territory "out there" that they influence--but they do not want to change themselves. They prefer to do what comes naturally to them instead.

Yet good leadership requires many "not natural" behaviors. And doing what is unnatural requires hard work and maybe even some sacrifice. And to do it consistently requires intentional, repetitive effort!

Oh, good leaders make it look easy, but that is because they've been doing the right things for so long, it has become second natur--habitual--for them. But it is clearly SECOND nature. Good leaders have made multiple conscious choices to do things that are NOT natural.

For example, it is not natural to be patient. Our human nature wants satisfaction right now!

It is not natural to be kind. Our human nature wants to blame, judge, and criticize others for their errors and oversights while justifying our limitations and emphasizing our skills and innate abilities.

It is not natural to be humble. Our human nature wants to proclaim our achievements for all to hear!

It is not natural to be respectful of others less powerful. Our human nature showers attention only on those who are in a position to do something that will benefit us.

It is not natural to be selfless. Our human nature looks out primarily for number one. (Jim reminds us that each of us judges the quality of a snapshot by how we look in it, right?)

It is not natural to forgive. Our human nature remembers the hurt and seeks revenge, and we will hold that grudge seeking a time when we can claim retribution and possibly payback.

It is not natural to be honest. Our human nature tends to fudge in whatever way makes us look good.

It is not natural to remain committed to our choices and follow through on our promises. Our human nature seeks whatever is easy and quickly achievable.

It is not natural to serve and sacrifice. Our human nature yearns for comfort, preferring that others acknowledge and attend to our needs.

The information Jim shared was stimulating and challenging, and the morning flew by. As Jim neared the end of his material, however, he revealed some bad news. Based on his previous experience, despite a high desire to capitalize on the new energy and learnings from the session, fewer than 10% of the attendees will follow through and be significantly better leaders a year later. The few who make considerable progress generate a conscious improvement plan right away and execute it daily!

I spoke with Jim privately after the session, exploring how he might improve this transformation percentage. Since few of us go to a four-hour session and change significantly on our own, we thought about options for building frequent follow-up contact with an accountability partner.

Coaches help clarify gaps in performance and hold clients accountable for choosing and executing new behaviors. They nurture the transformation Jim advocates. Studies indicate that as many as 80% of individuals will significantly improve when sound training is supplemented with personal coaching.

Consider inviting someone you trust to serve you with feedback. option generation, and ongoing support as you seek improved, unnatural behaviors in the quest for greater servant leadership.

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