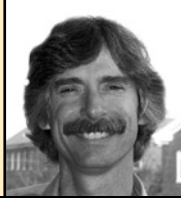


Reconnaissance



By Gary Kent, L.S.

Gary Kent is Director, Integrated Services at The Schneider Corporation in Indianapolis. He is past-president of ACSM and chairs the ALTA/ACSM Committee for NSPS and the Liaison Committee for ALTA. He is on the Indiana Board of Registration and lectures both locally and nationally.

Servant-Leadership in the Workplace

How would you like 93 percent of your employees to say they are proud to work for your company? What would it mean to the success of your company if 93 percent of your employees say that your organization is one in which employees are concerned about the well-being of their colleagues? Or to be a company in which 96 percent of those employees believe that everyone works together for the good of the overall organization?

If that sounds somewhat extraordinary, you're not alone, which is why The Schneider Corporation, a privately-held engineering, surveying and GIS firm based in Indianapolis, caught the eye of an organization in Holland this past year.

The European branch of the Indianapolis-based Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership, in November of 2005, invited owner J. Barry Schneider and myself to be the featured speakers at their annual symposium in The Hague.

The Greenleaf Centers (in addition to the U.S. and The Netherlands, there are nine others around the world from South Korea to South Africa and from the United Kingdom to Brazil) promote the idea of "servant-leadership," a phrase coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in his seminal 1970 essay entitled "The Servant as Leader".

Greenleaf believed that true, effective leaders were 'servants first' – that leadership was, most important, a function of serving those being led. While the term 'servant leader' itself can carry some undertones, those concerns can be easily swept away with a better understanding of the concept.



L-R: Ed Voerman, Alex de Vries, Annelies Voerman, Gerard van Haarlem, Tineke van Haarlem, Rob Bosman, Gary Kent, Monique Laudy and Barry Schneider

In the context of Servant-Leadership, 'service' has as its primary purpose the personal, professional, and, to an extent, even spiritual, growth of those being led. In Greenleaf's ideal, leadership is not simply a matter of consolidating power and manipulating employees, clients or markets. Yet, neither is it a matter of a leader simply putting himself or herself beneath those being led (that wouldn't be leading at all).

It is perhaps more related to the old Buddhist proverb, "*It is better to conquer yourself than to win a thousand battles.*" A servant-leader has the self-awareness and confidence to focus on the well-being and growth of those being led, rather than on controlling and using them.

The Schneider Corporation has been promoting servant leadership in its organizational structure and as part of its culture since 1990. That year, second generation owner John V. Schneider, L.S., P.E. outlined his vision of how he wanted the firm to be organized, the type of employees he wanted in the company and how he expected them to treat each other and to be treated. Third generation owners Barry Schneider, P.E., S.I.T. and his sister Victoria Schneider Temple, J.D. have continued to promote the concept as a pivotal element of the company's culture and of the values that the family holds dear.

While relatively hidden in the small business, for-profit world – which is

exactly why Schneider was invited to Europe in the first place – there are, in fact, a number of highly successful and well-respected companies that have infused the concepts of servant-leadership as integral parts of their organizations.

Firms like Southwest Airlines, Starbucks, The Container Store, U.S. Cellular, Synovus and Men’s Wearhouse often stand head and shoulders above their peer companies in employee satisfaction and in plain, simple success within their chosen markets. It is no accident that all of them are highly focused on hiring the right people, and keeping and growing them by treating them with respect and dignity.



Buildings along the canal in front of Amsterdam’s Rijksmuseum

In an outstanding expression of servant-leadership, Southwest Airlines cofounder Herb Kelliher once said “*Your employees come first. There’s no question about that. If your employees are satisfied and happy and dedicated and inspired by what they are doing, then they make your customers happy and they come back.*” Kelliher is also quoted as saying “*Don’t worry about profit. Think about customer service. Profit is a by-product.*”

Can his words any more clearly explain why Southwest, in the face of the waste laid on the entire airline industry post-September 11, never cancelled any orders for planes, never had to have a lay off, never had to file for bankruptcy, and today carries more domestic passengers than any other airline?

As part of a year-long special focus on servant-leadership, a cross-section of Schneider employees worked for a number of months developing a definition of servant-leadership for the entire Schneider organization, which includes offices in Indiana, Iowa, North Carolina and Tennessee.

Creation of the definition was followed by a 12-month series of dialogue sessions and team activities aimed at helping employees learn more about servant-leadership. Through these efforts, employees have had the opportunity to better understand not only the concepts behind servant leadership, but also what it means to actually put it into practice.

Having an organization-wide understanding of this key part of the Schneider culture is crucial when its own successes are manifested, in part, as they have been over the last few years, by the opening of new offices and the hiring of a substantial workforce beyond its Indianapolis roots.

The definition developed by Schneider is entitled “Servant-Leadership Defined.”

We believe that Servant-Leadership is a journey, not a destination. A Servant Leader’s position as a leader is founded on being a servant first. Servant Leaders are responsible for helping grow every person with whom they interact along their journey.

This is accomplished by:

- Setting the example for others to follow
- Listening first, to understand – then acting decisively
- Accepting the imperfect nature of people and respecting their diversity
- Holding people accountable, starting with one’s self
- Having foresight – planning for the future

Servant-Leadership is the result of the collective deeds and works of solitary individuals who care about others. It is not the work of the company, yet the company values and nurtures it. When the opportunity arises, every individual has the ability, and responsibility, to lead.

Schneider expects its employees – from top management to the employees ‘on the line’ – to put this definition into practice every day in their interactions with their fellow employees, their clients and their communities.

In a survey, the Gallup organization found that only 26% of the working population is engaged, loyal and productive, while 55% is *not* engaged and 19% is *actively disengaged!* Gallup found that engaged workplaces are 50% more likely to have lower turnover, 56% more likely to have higher-than average customer loyalty, 38% more likely to have above-average productivity and 27% more likely to report higher profitability.

According to Gallup, the top three reasons employees leave their jobs are

1. Lack of faith in the leadership or vision of the company
2. Concern with the way management is treating people
3. Lack of management support for areas such as performance reviews and employee development

Servant-leadership clearly and specifically addresses all of these issues. With solid leadership and with intelligent, competent management, success and profits will be by-products of a focus on people. Perhaps if more companies focused on their employees, there would not be the widespread dissatisfaction and cynicism that exists today in the workplace. 