

# **THE MEANINGFUL LIVES OF SERVANT-LEADERS**

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Good afternoon! Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon.

I believe that our organizations could be far more effective than they are today. Our colleagues could be more productive and more fulfilled, and our customers could be better served and more satisfied. What is holding us back is our attitude toward the purpose of organizations, and our ideas about leadership.

I like to start with a fundamental question: Why do organizations exist? My answer is that every organization exists to serve people, inside and outside the organization—employees or colleagues within the organization, and customers, clients, patients, students, members, or citizens outside the organization. Whether the organization is public, or private, or non-profit, or academic, the purpose of the organization is to meet the needs of others. Organizations receive income in different ways—from sales or fees or donations or tax revenues. But each organization serves its employees so they in turn can serve the organization's customers, clients, patients, students, members, or citizens.

Of course, most of us go to work to earn money to support ourselves and our families. But there is more to it than that. When we go to work each day, we help people get what they need. We help people get food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, and recreation. That is a noble thing. When we help people get what they need, we make a difference in their lives. We improve their quality of life, and sometimes we save their lives. That gives our work meaning and purpose. While serving others, we gain meaning and purpose for ourselves. So *we get what we need by helping other people to get what they need*. Organizations are all about people helping people.

I think this is what makes leading and managing so challenging. It is all about people, inside and outside the organization, and people are not easy. People are different, and people have needs, and people have problems, and people have potential, and people have good days and bad days, and people can cooperate and not cooperate. People are not easy. In the United States, business consultants often refer to the “hard” side of the business” as the part that is about resources—money, equipment, machinery, natural resources. They refer to the “soft” side of the business as the people side. I think that the people side of the business is much harder than the resources side, so I would say that the two sides of a business are not “hard” and “soft,” but “hard” and “harder.”

So it is not easy. But when we are good at identifying and meeting the needs of others, our organizations work very well. We will fulfill our purpose as an organization, and we will be successful as an organization. Customers will want our programs, products, and services, because we know what they need, and we are providing it. We are able meet their needs because our colleagues are performing at a high level. They are performing at a high level because we know what they need, and we are providing it.

So if the purpose of every organization is to meet people’s needs, both inside and outside the organization, the most fundamental leadership question is: How should you lead, and how should you organize, if you really want to identify and meet the needs of others?

### **The Service Model**

The answer is servant leadership. As many of you know, the modern servant leadership movement was launched by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970, when he published his essay, “The Servant as Leader.” It was in that essay that he coined the terms “servant-leader” and “servant leadership.” Greenleaf was a successful business executive, who worked for AT&T for 38 years. Toward the end of his career, he was Director of Management Research. It was his job to help AT&T leaders and managers be as effective as possible. After retiring in 1964, he established what is now the Greenleaf Center, and did some teaching and consulting. He concluded that the most effective leaders were those who were focused on others, not themselves. They identified and met the needs of others, rather than just trying to acquire power, wealth, and fame for themselves.

You have a handout with Greenleaf’s famous definition of a servant-leader. Greenleaf said that the servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural

feeling that one wants to serve. And as one emerges into leadership positions, one remembers that one's purpose is to serve. Leading is a way of serving. The test that Greenleaf proposed for servant leaders was this:

Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?

### **Defining Servant Leadership**

So who, exactly, is a servant leader? I like to say that a servant leader is simply a leader who is focused on serving others. A servant leader loves people, and wants to help them.

The power model of leadership says that leadership is about acquiring and wielding power. The service model says that leadership is about making a difference. So the servant leader does not ask, "How can I get power? How can I make people do things?" The servant leader asks, "What do people need? How can I help them to get it? What does my organization need to do? How can I help my organization to do it?" Thus, rather than embarking on a quest for personal power, the servant leader embarks on a quest to identify and meet the needs of others. That's the mission of a servant leader: To identify and meet the needs of others.

One way to contrast a power-oriented leader and a service-oriented leader is this: Power-oriented leaders want to *make* people do things. Servant leaders want to *help* people do things. That's why servant leaders are usually facilitators, coordinators, healers, partners, and coalition-builders.

There is another big difference between the power model and the service model of leadership. The power model assumes a hierarchy. Only a few people have power—those at the top of the hierarchy. In the service model, the hierarchy isn't really relevant. That's because *anybody* in a family, organization, or community can be of service. *Anybody* can identify and meet the needs of others. *Anybody* can respond to the call to be a servant leader.

Perhaps the simplest way to compare the power model and the service model is this. The power model is about *grabbing*. The service model is about *giving*. And when you give, you get something in return—you get a lot of meaning and satisfaction.

Now, we live in a real world. We know that power abhors a vacuum. Somebody is going to exercise power, and it makes a difference who that somebody is. Certainly, a servant leader can accumulate and exercise power. A servant leader can even become angry and enter the fray to do battle. What is important is that the servant leader accumulates power or becomes angry *on behalf of others*. A servant leader acts in response to the way *others* are treated, not in response to the way he or she is treated. For the servant leader, power is only a tool. It is a means, not an end. There are other tools, other means, that are more important.

### **Different Focus, Different Motivation**

Servant leaders can be political leaders, business leaders, non-profit leaders, coaches, friends, or neighbors. And they do the things that leaders do— they provide a vision, they motivate, they communicate, and manage. They do all the things that leaders do. What I think distinguishes them is two things. First, they are focused on others, not just themselves, and secondly, they are working hard to make life better for others, not just for themselves. That's what motivates them. This difference in focus and motivation is what really distinguishes servant leaders, regardless of their titles, roles, or positions in their organizations or society.

That difference in focus and motivation is easiest to see, I think, in the decisions that people make every day. A power-oriented leader who sits down to make a decision asks a different set of questions than a servant leader. A power-oriented leader will ask questions like this: What decision will enhance my power? What decision will make me look good? What decision will be a great way to get ahead of my chief rival? What decision will improve my relationship with my boss? What decision will position me better for my promotion? All power-oriented questions about the leader who is making the decision.

A servant leader asks a different set of questions. What needs should we be addressing? If we address this need, is there another one that is really more important that we should be addressing first? If we address this need, are we going to harm someone, or leave someone out? Is there going to be some harm that we can mitigate or reduce? What decision would be most consistent with the mission and values and goals of my organization? Those are different kinds of questions.

Now you ask these different sets of questions, you get different answers, and over time, the power-oriented leader and servant leader move in different

directions. Basically, the power oriented leader moves toward the things that she or he wants, whereas the servant leader moves toward things that other people need. That's a big difference.

## **Key Practices of Servant Leaders**

The practical benefits of servant leadership are what gains high praise from leadership and management experts like Ken Blanchard, Stephen Covey, Peter Senge, Margaret Wheatley, and many others who have spoken at Greenleaf conferences. The simple fact is that servant leadership works. Let me share a few of the key practices of servant leaders.

### *Self-Awareness*

Our first key practice is self-awareness. Each of us is the instrument through which we lead. If we want to be effective, and have positive impacts on others, we need to be aware of who we are—our personalities, our strengths and weaknesses, our biases, our skills and experiences, the way we talk and move and act. Because other people are always watching.

Servant leaders know that their moods are contagious, and people are always watching to see what their mood happens to be. A servant leader who projects a positive mood helps produce enthusiasm and cooperation among team members, which in turn produce success for the team.

Self-awareness includes knowledge of the impact that one's words and deeds have on others. Servant leaders are aware that saying one thing and doing another can destroy trust. Conversely, being true to your word, even when it is awkward or difficult, can build trust.

One of the hardest things to learn as a leader is that a grimace, an offhand remark, or a joke in poor taste can have a lasting negative impact on others. Conversely, a smile, a thoughtful remark, and an encouraging word can have a lasting positive impact.

Self-awareness arises from reflection. It is hard to see ourselves as others see us. What we learn about ourselves often depends on reflection—taking the time to think about how we behave, and why, and when, and consider whether there are other, better, more appropriate, more effective, more thoughtful ways to behave. We can do this while taking a walk, or listening to music, or sitting quietly before

or after work. Servant-leaders take time to reflect.

### *Listening*

First, servant leaders do a huge amount of listening. They don't begin with the answer, the program, the procedure, the facility. They don't begin with their own knowledge or expertise. They begin with questions that will help identify the needs of others. What do people say when asked about their needs, their wants, their hopes, their dreams? Servant leaders use personal observation, discussions, suggestion boxes, informal interviews, formal interviews, surveys, focus groups, and other forms of research to identify the needs of others. They watch and listen before they take action. They try hard to identify needs, before they try to meet them.

Taking time to identify needs is moral and respectful. It is also very practical. If we are good at identifying needs, we will be in a great position to meet those needs. If we meet those needs, we will be effective leaders and we will provide relevant products, programs, and services. That means we will succeed in having customers, clients, patients, members, and students. We will thrive, because we listened, and made sure that what we offer is what people need.

One problem is that most organizations are run by experienced professionals who know a lot about what their customers want. They know a lot, so they aren't driven to learn more, which means that *they don't know enough*. Times change, demographics change, the market changes, and they get out of touch, out of synch with their customers. When sales begin to slip, they increase their marketing and sales efforts instead of increasing their listening efforts. This is unfortunate, because nothing is harder than trying to sell a program or product or service to people who don't want it. If you are good at listening and responding to what you hear, people will be *asking* for your product or service, instead of resisting it.

### *Changing the Pyramid*

To do a good job of listening, you need to be sure that everyone in your organization, from top to bottom, is paying attention to your customers or students or patients every day.

That is hard to do if you operate with a traditional hierarchy, shaped like a pyramid, with only a few people at the top—the President or CEO, CFO, CIO—and then more middle managers, and then the largest number of people at the

bottom, the people who deliver the programs, products, or services. You have to invert this pyramid, or at least lay the pyramid on its side, if you want everybody to stay focused on customers.

The reason is that in the traditional pyramid, people pay more attention to their bosses than to their customers. People are looking “up” to their bosses, rather than “out” to the customer. The problem is that pleasing your boss may have nothing to do with pleasing your customers. You can please your boss, and she can please her boss, and he can please the Board of Directors, without anybody really paying attention to the wants and needs of the customer. So you have to invert the pyramid, or tip it over, so that everyone can focus on the customer.

Of course, if you are the leader, it makes sense to stand at the top of the pyramid long enough to articulate the mission and the vision and establish the goals, so that everyone knows where they are headed. But then you need to focus on implementation, or the mission and vision and goals will come to nothing. Focusing on implementation means helping your direct reports, who help their direct reports, who help the customers. You make sure that everyone has the training, and the resources, and the time to implement the vision and serve the customer. You run interference for your direct reports when they need it. You give them the help they need to be effective.

Another problem with the traditional pyramid is that the person at the top of the pyramid—let’s call that person the President—has difficulty getting accurate information or testing his or her ideas. The President is usually not part of the grapevine, and people tend to tell the president only what they *want* the president to know, not what the President *needs* to know. Information gets filtered. And not too many people are comfortable telling the president that his newest idea is a lousy one. Unless they have already announced their retirement or have another job lined up, they just aren’t going to tell him what they really think. So the President can lose touch, and may come to think of himself as exceedingly brilliant and nearly infallible. His ideas must be great. After all, nobody is challenging them.

This problem is actually easy to solve. What you need leading your organization is not an individual chief, but a team. You need a council of senior leaders and managers who trust each other, share information, and test each other’s ideas. You need a team of senior leaders whose members are comfortable talking to each other as equals. The President or CEO should be *first* among equals, with the authority to make the final decisions, but she needs to be accessible, open to challenge, and receptive to the real news, not the filtered news. This will help

connect the President with the rest of the organization and the customers it serves.

### *Developing your people*

Obviously, your organization's ability to listen to and serve your customers will only be as good as your people—your colleagues, associates, or employees. Most of us work in service industries or knowledge industries, in which our people are by far our biggest asset. You will want to train and develop your people, so that they are good at listening and serving your customers, in addition to having whatever technical skills are required by their jobs. If you take care of your people, they will take care of your customers.

TDIndustries is a highly successful air conditioning and specialty construction company based in Dallas. It has been on *Fortune* magazine's list of the 100 Best Companies to Work for in America. In fact, it has been on the list every year since the list was started, so *Fortune* magazine has put TDIndustries in its Hall of Fame. The company's "Mission Statement" is not about profit, or market share, or leadership in technology. The Mission Statement is about developing people. It says: "We are committed to providing outstanding career opportunities by exceeding our customers' expectations through continuous aggressive improvement."

The Mission Statement is elaborated by saying, "We believe in continuous, intense 'people-development' efforts, including substantial training budgets." In a world in which employee turnover is very expensive, TDIndustries has the competitive advantage of attracting and keeping excellent employees. They do it by constantly developing their people.

### *Coaching, not Controlling*

One of the best ways to develop your people is to constantly coach and mentor them. If you want your employees to know how to serve your customers, you need to coach your employees, not control them.

In a lot of old management textbooks, the assumption was that a manager is there to "control" his or her unit or organization. The people who report to the manager constitute his or her "span of control." The manager's job is to "keep things under control." But micro-managing, or focusing only on compliance, doesn't bring out the best in others. Bring out the best in others involves engaging, inspiring, coaching, and mentoring.

Giving orders is not enough. You have to make sure that people understand the order, see the purpose of the order, have the resources to follow the order, and are willing and able to do what needs to be done. That is best accomplished through coaching and mentoring.

### *Unleashing the energy and intelligence of others*

If you are training and developing your colleagues, and you spend time coaching and mentoring them, then you will be comfortable allowing them to make decisions. You can unleash the energy and intelligence of your employees.

Not unleashing the energy and intelligence of others is extraordinarily sad and wasteful. Knowledge and skill are needed at all levels, and everyone counts. It doesn't make any sense to have lots of people in an organization, but let only a few people—those at the top—use their full potential. The people at the top of the pyramid can't *know* everything or *do* everything. They are only human; they have limits. Meanwhile, the organization is paying for *all* its people. Why not engage them fully in the work at hand? When everybody is fully engaged, the organization will be better able to understand and respond to the needs of colleagues and customers.

These are some of the key practices of servant leadership that are extremely practical, and get very positive bottom-line results.

### **The Meaningful Life of Servant Leadership**

I believe that servant leadership is ethical, because it is about serving people, not using people. It is about treating other people with respect, and seeking to identify and meet their needs. I also believe that servant leadership is practical. The key practices of servant leaders get good results for their organizations. Finally, I believe that servant leadership is meaningful. It is a meaningful way to live, and a meaningful way to lead.

There are at least three benefits to finding meaning in life and at work: (1) intrinsic motivation, (2) good mental health, and (3) deep happiness. I'd like to talk about each of these three benefits.

### *Meaning as an intrinsic motivator*

First, meaning is an intrinsic motivator. People who are intrinsically motivated are more productive, more innovative, more committed, and less likely to feel stress or burn out, than those who are extrinsically motivated.

As you know, extrinsic motivation applies when people are motivated by something other than the work or activity, while intrinsic motivation applies when people are motivated by the work or activity itself. For example, in school, a student who studies to get a good grade in order to get money from Dad or Mom, is *extrinsically* motivated. A student who studies because he or she is interested in learning, and enjoys learning, is *intrinsically* motivated. We are intrinsically motivated when we do things because we want to, not because we have to. We are intrinsically motivated when we do something because it is fun or good or the right thing to do, or it is meaningful and fulfilling.

Going back at least as far as the industrial revolution, extrinsic rewards have been heavily emphasized in the work place. Extrinsic rewards are wages, benefits, bonuses, and working conditions, as well as negative threats such as punishment or dismissal. Extrinsic rewards will always be important. We need to earn money to take care of ourselves and our families. But people want more than that, and need more than that, if they are to be happy, productive, energized, committed, and innovative. They need to be intrinsically motivated by meaning and purpose.

### *Meaning and mental health*

A second benefit of finding meaning at work is that meaning is an intrinsic motivator, and those who are intrinsically motivated have better mental health. Edward L. Deci wrote a book titled, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Self Motivation*. The book reports on a study done on six types of life aspirations. Three were extrinsic—the aspiration to be wealthy, famous, and physically attractive. The other three were intrinsic—the aspiration to have meaningful personal relationships, to make contributions to the community, and to grow as individuals.

Notice that the extrinsic goals are about what one *has*. The intrinsic goals are about who one *is*. The research showed that people who were heavily focused on extrinsic rewards had poor mental health, while those who were focused on intrinsic rewards had more vitality, higher-self esteem, and a greater sense of well being.

## *Meaning and Deep Happiness*

Finally, let's look at deep happiness. I believe that each of us can be and should be deeply happy. What do I mean by "deep happiness"? I mean the kind of happiness that touches your spirit and connects with your soul. It is hard to describe. Some people call it self-fulfillment, or self-actualization, or being centered. Others call it living their passion, or following their bliss. For people of faith, it is about finding the divine will for their lives, and then living that will.

Seeking deep happiness is not selfish. I am not suggesting that you try to be happy *instead* of others or *at the expense* of others. I am suggesting that you should be deeply happy so that you will be at your best, and will be able to help others to be deeply happy and at their best, as well. When we experience deep happiness—we are ready to really help others. We become more loving, more giving, more patient, more enthusiastic. We become a gift to others. So we should be deeply happy for their sake as well as ours.

There is no question that meaning and purpose are keys to being deeply happy. There is lots of research, and we learn this through our own experience. So—if you want to be deeply happy, the most fundamental question is not: Am I a success or a failure? The most fundamental question is not: Is my life hard or easy? The most fundamental question is not: Do people appreciate me? The most fundamental question is: Is my life meaningful? *Is my life meaningful?* If you can answer yes to that question, you can be deeply happy.

### **My Hobby**

If meaning is so important, where do we find it? I'd like you to answer that question for yourself. One of your handouts is a self-survey of sources of meaning at work. What I would like you to do now is to fill out the survey. Please follow the instructions, and rate each source of meaning. A "1" is low, and a "10" is high. Rate each source of meaning separately. Then, go back and look at the ones that received your highest rating, and write them down.

There are no right or wrong answers. But over the past seven or eight years, I have been surveying people, and asking them about the sources of personal meaning in their lives and in their work. I do not have any random samples, so I cannot extrapolate to larger populations. However, I think the results are interesting.

First, meaning at work. I have surveyed a number of leaders in a variety of organizations in the United States—leaders and managers of an insurance company in New York, a bank in California, public school leaders in Hawaii, and so forth. Each group is different, but their highly rated sources of meaning tend to be the same, as are their lowest-rated sources. At the top of the ratings, the top one third, are usually:

- Always doing my personal best
- Making a difference
- Living my values
- Setting a good example
- Supporting my family
- A sense of accomplishment
- Always doing what's right
- Being appreciated by customers
- Being a good leader
- A sense of progress
- Solving problems

These are wonderful sources of meaning at work. “Supporting my family” and “being appreciated by customers” are extrinsic, but all the others are sources of meaning intrinsic to the work itself.

The lowest rated sources of meaning at work are usually:

- Winning
- My salary/wage
- Recognition by superiors
- Having power/influence
- Accumulating wealth
- Fame

These are mostly extrinsic—salary and wealth, recognition, power, and fame. Nobody is against these things, but they are not nearly as important as the other, intrinsic sources of personal meaning.

I have also collected about 3,500 survey forms on the meaning of life. Again, I do not have any random samples, so I cannot extrapolate to larger populations, and my samples are all in the United States—except for a group of 12 people in Albania.

Here is what I've learned from these 3,500 people. All but one of the groups that I surveyed rated the same source of meaning highest. That source was "family." And the one group that didn't put "family" highest put "giving and receiving love" the highest, and family was right behind.

You know what always comes out high? On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is low and 10 is high, the high 8's and 9's are always "my family," "giving and receiving love," "intimate relationships," "doing my personal best," "living my values," and "a sense of accomplishment." Those are wonderful sources of personal meaning.

I think it's also interesting to see what gets a low rating. Power, wealth, fame, and winning—they're always down low, a 3, 4, 5, or 6. People are not against these symbols of success, they just know that they don't provide a lot of meaning.

### **Four Universal Sources of Meaning**

If I had to boil it down to just four things, I'd pick these. These are four principles or ideas that I think can be found in most of the world's great religions and the teachings of many spiritual leaders, and are things that we learn as we grow and experience life. You won't be surprised. Here they are: One, love people. Two, help people. Three, live ethically. Four, don't be too attached to material things. Love people, help people, live ethically, and don't be too attached to material things.

I think there is probably a causal relationship here, because I think that when you love people, you want to help them. And if you are loving people and helping people, you want to treat them right—you want to be ethical in the way you behave. And if you are focused on people, you're probably not too worried about material things.

### **Two core sources of meaning**

There is another way to narrow it down, to only two core sources of meaning: (1) focus on others, and (2) become part of something larger than yourself. Focusing on others includes loving people, and helping people, and treating them right. Becoming part of something larger than yourself is about joining with others in a team, an organization, a movement, a cause that makes a

difference.

### **One simple source of meaning**

Finally, if you are every feeling down, or discouraged, or empty, and you know you are disconnected from your sources of meaning, there is a simple solution: Go help somebody. Just go help somebody. That will get you focused on someone else, and help you to make a meaningful difference in the world.

All of these fundamental sources of meaning are available to servant leaders. Servant leaders love and help others. It is spiritually renewing. I like to say that servant leaders get material results for their organizations and spiritual returns for themselves. The spiritual returns are in the form of the meaning that gives them strong intrinsic motivation, good mental health, and the opportunity to be deeply happy. That's why I don't think that servant leadership is about self-denial or self-sacrifice. I think it is entirely about self-fulfillment. That kind of self-fulfillment is a huge advantage that servant leaders have over other kinds of leaders.

### **The Paradoxical Commandments**

One of the best things about personal meaning is that you can always find it, no matter what. That is the message of the Paradoxical Commandments that I wrote for student leaders when I was in college back in the 1960s.

The sixties were a provocative time of conflict and confrontation—also, a lot of hope and idealism. What disturbed me the most was seeing so many idealistic young people go out into the world to bring about change, and then come back, much too soon, disappointed or even embittered because the change they sought did not occur, or people didn't seem to appreciate what they were trying to do.

I had two messages for them. First of all, you really have to love people, because love is one of the only motivations that is strong enough to keep you with the people, and with the process, until change is finally achieved. Second, I told them that if they went out and did what they thought was right and good and true, they would get a lot of meaning and satisfaction. If people appreciated them, that was fine, but if they didn't, they were still okay. If they had the meaning, they didn't have to have the glory.

Well, I wrote a booklet for them, a kind of leadership manual, titled *The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council*. In that booklet, I

wrote 149 words that I called “The Paradoxical Commandments.” There are copies for you on the bookmarks that I brought for you. This is what I wrote:

1. People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. Love them anyway.
2. If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Do good anyway.
3. If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.
4. The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.
5. Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway.
6. The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men and women with the smallest minds. Think big anyway.
7. People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs. Fight for a few underdogs anyway.
8. What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.
9. People really need help but may attack you if you do help them. Help people anyway.

And finally:

10. Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth. Give the world the best you have anyway.

Ten Paradoxical Commandments. The Paradoxical Commandments are guidelines for finding personal meaning in the face of adversity. So each one begins with a statement that’s difficult, that’s about adversity. People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered; or the good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow; or people really need help, but may attack you if you do help them.

But each statement of adversity is followed by the positive commandment:

Love people anyway. Do good anyway. Help people anyway.

The paradox is this: Even when the world out there is difficult—even when the world out there is crazy—you and I can still find personal meaning and deep happiness. We do that by facing the worst in the world with the best in ourselves. Facing the worst in the world with the best in ourselves.

You and I know that as individuals, we can't control all kinds of things that go on in the world. I mean, as individuals we can control the world economy or population growth, or natural disasters like fires and floods, or when a hurricane might hit or when a terrorist might strike or when a war might break out, or which company will buy which company, which jobs will be created and which jobs will be eliminated. There are so many things we can't control. We can work hard, and prepare, and seize opportunities—we got to do that. We can join with others, and try to influence those external events—we ought to do that. But there are so many things that, as individuals, we just can't control.

What we can control is our inner lives. You and I get to decide who we're going to be and how we're going to live. And we can live our most cherished values, and we can be close to our family and friends, and we can do what we know is right and good and true—no matter what. *No matter what*. And the good news is, that's where people have been finding a lot of meaning, for a long, long time.

Some people look at the Paradoxical Commandments a personal declaration of independence. I can be independent of all that stuff that's happening out there, when it comes to finding meaning and happiness. I can find it anyway.

Other people look at the commandments as a “no excuses” policy. Okay, some people are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. So what? That's no excuse. You have to love them anyway. You don't want to limit your life by limiting your love. You have to love them anyway. And maybe the good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. So what? That's no excuse. You don't run out and do bad. You have to do good anyway. That's who you are, that's your character, that's where the meaning comes from. You have to do good anyway.

I was optimistic then, and I am optimistic now. I believe that if you go out and do what is right, and good, and true, you will often be successful, you will often be recognized, you will often be rewarded. So the question is: What if you aren't? What if you put your heart and mind and soul into it, and your project fails?

What if you do a brilliant job, and nobody notices? And the answer is: So what? So what? You still have to be who you have to be. You still have to do what you have to do. You still have to live your most cherished values, and be close to your family and friends, and do what you know is right and good and true—because that’s where you’re going to find the most meaning. That’s where you’re going to find the deep happiness. And you don’t want to give that up—don’t ever give that up, certainly not when times are tough; certainly not then.

### **Where the Paradoxical Commandments traveled**

Well, I wrote the Paradoxical Commandments in a little booklet for student leaders. The booklet was published in 1968, and we sold about 25,000 or 30,000 copies around the United States, and that was great.

I went on with my life, extended my adolescence as long as possible, went to five different universities. I finally settled down, got married, started a job, started a family. And 25 years went by, and I didn’t know what was happening to the Paradoxical Commandments. I know now that what was happening is that people were lifting the Paradoxical Commandments out of that little student council booklet and putting them up on their walls, and their refrigerator doors, and passing them to friends. And they traveled—they traveled all over the world. It is estimated that, as of today, millions of people have used the Paradoxical Commandments.

The discovery that changed my life occurred at my Rotary Club meeting in Honolulu in September 1997. That’s when I learned that Mother Teresa had put the Paradoxical Commandments up on the wall of her children’s home in Calcutta. That had a big impact on me. I began writing and speaking about the Paradoxical Commandments again, 30 years after I first published them.

*The New York Times* called me the Rip Van Winkle of inspirational gurus. I wrote something when I was 19, thirty years went by, and then I woke up and discovered where it had traveled all those years. I have published four books now that relate to the Paradoxical Commandments, and as a result of my books and the national publicity, I get 10,000 to 15,000 people visiting my website every month, from 70 or 80 countries. Some of them send me messages. They tell me how the Paradoxical Commandments helped them raise their children, or get through a tough time at work, or clarify their personal goals. Others say they have carried the Paradoxical Commandments around in their wallets for twenty years, and they look at them each morning, to help them remember what is most important in their

lives. I set out to inspire people, and now they are inspiring me. I feel very blessed. I feel part of a growing network of kindred spirits.

Servant leaders understand the Paradoxical Commandments. The Paradoxical Commandments focus on personal meaning, and so do servant leaders. That is what makes it possible for them to keep working, whether they get applause, indifference, or even a negative response. They like to be treated well, but they are not especially concerned when they are treated badly. Servant leaders are not worried about the attention others pay to them, but the attention they pay to others. That's where the meaning is to be found.

### **Conclusion**

I think it is very important the servant leadership is ethical, practical, and meaningful. It is the "meaningful" aspect that I think is most often ignored, or under-rated. At the end of our lives, however, we may conclude that it was the most important part of our lives.

Many years ago, there was a movie, *Man of La Mancha*, starring Peter O'Toole and Sophia Loren. The story line in the movie is that Cervantes, the author of Don Quixote, is arrested by the Inquisition and taken to prison, where he tells the story of Don Quixote and the other prisoners help him act it out. Cervantes said something in that movie that really struck me. He said that he had seen people dying with a question on their lips. The question was not: Why am I dying? The question was: Why did I live? What a terrible question to be asking yourself as you breathe your last breath!

There are a lot of benefits to being a servant leader, but one benefit is this. If you love and help others, and focus on meaning, and live a paradoxical life, then at the end of your life, when you look back, you're not going to have a lot of regrets. You may not have any. You're going to look back on a life filled with meaning. Even more important, you will not wonder why you have lived. You'll know. *You'll know*. And that may be the greatest blessing of all.

Thank you!