

## **Servant Leadership + Personal Meaning = Happiness**

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Good evening! [opening remarks][USC, room-mate]

I want to congratulate you on your attendance here at this conference. This is a wonderful opportunity to learn, and share, and network, build friendships, and improve your skills.

I know you are here because you care about your students. You want to help your students become all that they can be. You want them to be happy, and successful, and live meaningful, productive lives. You want them to be good people and good citizens as well as good leaders and managers.

Your students are studying and doing academic research, but they are also learning about themselves, their strengths and weaknesses, their values, their talents, their friends, and the world of work. They are learning more about who they are and what they can do and how they fit in. And they need you to listen, and advise, and commiserate, and prod, and help them to become the best they can be.

That's why your work is so important. Nothing is more noble or sacred than helping people to learn and grow and reach their full potential. I repeat: *Nothing is more noble or sacred than helping people to learn and grow and reach their full potential.* And that's what you are doing—every day.

There is no question that you are changing lives. A lot of students are depending on you to be your best and do your best, so that you can help them to be and do their best. So the question is—how do you continue, day after day, to be and do your best? I think the best way to do that is to be a servant leader who finds a lot of meaning in your work. Servant leadership and personal meaning can give you deep happiness.

## **Being Deeply Happy**

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 God’s 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.

It’s like the safety instructions we receive when we board airplanes. We are told to put on our own oxygen masks, then help our children. I see deep happiness as the oxygen mask. When we put on that oxygen mask—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.

## **From Power Model to Service Model**

I have learned that deep happiness can come from a life of servant leadership. But the service model of leadership is not the dominant model in our culture.

Looking back, it is clear to me that when I was going to school, ideas about leadership were ideas about power. Leadership was about how to accumulate and wield power; how to make people do things; how to attack and win. It was about clever strategies, and how to apply pressure. It was a power model.

There are some severe problems with the power model. First, it focuses on *having* power, not on using it wisely. Power is an end in itself.

Second, the power model of leadership promotes conflict between power groups or factions. People are taught that leadership is about power, so they establish themselves in power groups that compete with other power

groups. These power groups become so focused on their rivalries with each other, that they can't focus on our society's problems or opportunities. There is also a bias against cooperation, because if you cooperate and succeed, you have to share the credit with another power group.

Third, the power model defines victory in terms of who gains more power, not in terms of who accomplishes the most for his or her organization or community. These are serious drawbacks.

Unfortunately, there are two more problems with power, and that is the impact that it has on those who seek it. First, people who seek power, often become irrelevant as leaders. They focus on what they want, instead of what other people want, and they lose touch with the people they are supposed to be serving. Second, people who seek power can never get enough of it. It becomes a kind of disease. They always want more, and more, and more. This easily results in spiritual corruption and an unhappy life of self-torment.

### **The Servant Leader**

Fortunately, there is another model of leadership, and it has been around for thousands of years. It is the service model. Leaders who live the service model are often called servant leaders. So who is a servant leader? I think a servant leader is simply a leader who is focused on serving others. A servant leader loves people, and wants to help them. Loving and helping others gives a servant leader meaning and satisfaction in life.

The servant leader lives the service model of leadership. 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 is the key concept: Identify and meet the needs of others. That is the mission of the servant leader.

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 doesn't matter. 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 explain the difference is this: The power model is about *grabbing*. The service model is about *giving*.

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.

Servant leaders can be many different types of leader, depending on their personalities and the specific circumstances. What they have in common is this. They go into a group or organization and ask, is there a gap or missing link or blockage of some kind that is making it hard for this group to achieve what it wants to achieve? If so, can I identify what that gap or missing link or blockage is? If I can identify it, can I do something about it? If I can't do anything about it, can I find someone who can? Since the missing link or gap or blockage will not always be the same, the servant leader does not always perform the same role or service in each case.

### **The Modern Servant Leadership Movement in America**

It is my privilege to serve as the CEO of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, based in Indianapolis. We were founded by Robert Greenleaf, who launched the modern servant leadership movement in America in 1970 with his essay on "The Servant as Leader." Greenleaf distinguished between leaders who are "leader first," and those who are a "servant first." Those who are a servant first, are servant leaders. You have a handout with Greenleaf's definition of a servant leader:

The servant-leader *is* servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is *leader* first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions... The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is 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?

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

Servant leaders can be kings or queens, commanders, political leaders, businessmen and businesswomen, non-profit leaders, coaches, friends, or neighbors. Servant leaders do most of the things that other leaders do—they provide a vision, they manage, they communicate, and so forth. What sets servant leaders apart from other leaders is that they have a different focus, and a different motivation, than most other leaders. They are focused on others, not just themselves. And they are motivated to make life better for others, not just for themselves. This difference in focus and motivation is what really defines and distinguishes servant leaders, regardless of their title, role, or position in their organization or society.

The difference in focus and motivation has real tangible impact. It shows itself in the questions that people ask themselves when they make decisions in their daily life and work. For example, a power-oriented individual may make decisions after asking: What decision will make me look good? What decision will enhance my power? What decision will give me the visibility I want? What decision will be an incredibly effective 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 next promotion?

A service-oriented individual will make decisions after asking a different set of questions. For example, a servant leader may ask: Whose needs are we trying to meet? Are there greater needs that should be addressed before this one? In meeting this need, who will suffer negative impacts? How can we mitigate those negative impacts? What decision would be most consistent with the values and goals of my organization?

The questions that are asked by people in the power model are different from the questions that people ask when they are in the service model. Different questions lead to different answers, different decisions, and different results. Over time, the power leader and the servant leader move their organizations in different directions. The power-oriented leader makes decisions that meet his or her needs, while the servant leader makes decisions that meet the needs of others.

### **Examples of Servant Leaders**

There are no doubt thousands of examples of servant leadership in literature, the movies, history, and daily life today. One thinks of people like Washington and Lincoln, Harriet Tubman, Susan B. Anthony, Albert Schweitzer, Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, and Mother Theresa. However, my guess is that most servant leaders have *not* been known outside the group or community they have served. They did not seek fame, they sought to make a difference—and they did.

While there have been many famous servant leaders, most servant leaders have *not* been known outside the group or community they have served. They did not seek fame, they sought to make a difference—and they did.

For example, Will Hartzell is a friend of mine who learned that each year contaminated drinking water causes the deaths of millions of people around the world. He made a deep personal commitment to change that. He developed solar water pasteurizers that are a simple, low-cost, long-term solution to the problem. In spite of all the “naysayers” who told him it couldn’t be done, he launched his company, Solar Water Systems, in 1997. Will recalled:

One safe-drinking-water project that left an indelible impact on me was in Africa. Our Solar Water Pasteurizers were

installed in five locations near Arusha, Tanzania. One site was the Selian Hospital. The hospital was not able to afford a water disinfection system and ran the risk of patients actually contracting diseases while at the hospital.

After our equipment was installed, I was watching the patients as they came to get clean water to drink. One woman was in the hospital because her child was gravely ill. After she filled her water bottle and was headed back to her child, she stopped and looked at me. Our eyes met in one of those time-stopping moments. We didn't speak the same language, but the nurse translated for me. She said, "Thank you. Thank you for giving my child the chance to live."

At that moment I knew that I would do whatever it took to provide safe drinking water for as many people as I could all over the world.

Since then, Will and his colleagues have installed 2,500 solar water pasteurizers in 56 countries. The result is that 200,000 people in those countries no longer risk illness or death because of contaminated water. Will Hartzell is a servant leader who saves lives every day.

When you start noticing servant leaders, you find them in fiction as well as real life. Some of my favorite servant leaders are fictitious. For example, there is Atticus Finch, the attorney in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In fantasy novels, there are wizards who are servant leaders, such as Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings* by Tolkien, and Belgarath in *The Belgariad* by David Eddings, and Ged in the *Earthsea Trilogy* by Ursula Le Guin.

Another great example of a servant leader is Hazel-rah, the Chief Rabbit in the novel *Watership Down* by Richard Adams. This is a wonderful fable about a group of rabbits who set out to find a new home. Hazel-rah becomes the Chief Rabbit, not because he is the biggest rabbit in the group, or the cleverest, or the most clairvoyant. He becomes the leader because he is willing to listen, and he often asks for advice from others. He knows the different strengths of the other rabbits, and draws out those strengths for the good of the group. He is able to identify the needs of the group, and make decisions and take action in a way that unites the rabbits in seeking to achieve their common goals. And he is willing to pitch in and take personal

risks on behalf of the group. The rabbits face hard times, and are severely tested, but with Hazel-rah's guidance, they work together as a team, and they succeed in finding a new home.

The politician is supposed to be a public servant—a servant leader by definition. One of the simplest and best definitions of servant leadership in politics is found in the movie, *Dave*. It's a wonderful, charming, funny movie with some gentle truths. Dave is an everyday citizen who happens to look a lot like the President of the United States, and is used as a double. When something happens to the President, Dave becomes the de facto president. Toward the end of the movie, Dave said three things in a speech to Congress. He said: (1) I should have thought more about you than about me; (2) I should have cared more about what is right than what is popular; and (3) I should have been willing to give up the whole thing for something I really believed in. That's a good definition of servant leadership in politics.

### **Servant leaders you have known**

Okay. We've been defining the servant leader. Now I would like to stop, and ask each of you to think about a servant leader you have known. It could be someone you have known from reading history or literature, or from a movie or book, or someone from your own life and work.

Okay—do you have that person in mind? Good. Please stand up, and tell somebody in the row behind you about the servant leader you are thinking about. If there is nobody behind you, tell the person beside you or in front of you...

Okay—good. Thank you...

### **Key Practices of Servant Leadership**

Servant leadership really works. But why? Here are some specific practices that help explain its effectiveness: self-awareness, listening, inverting the pyramid, developing colleagues, coaching instead of controlling, unleashing the energy and intelligence of others, and the use of foresight.

Let's talk about a few of these specific practices. Let's start with listening. I said that servant leaders identify and meet the needs of others. The first step toward identifying needs is to listen.

Servant leaders gather feedback in as many ways as possible from their colleagues and those they serve. They observe what people are doing. They ask questions. They conduct informal interviews, formal interviews, surveys, discussion groups, and focus groups. They use suggestions boxes. They do marketing studies and needs assessments. They are always asking, listening, watching, and thinking about what they learn. This is the foundation of their relevance and effectiveness.

The main point is this: Servant leaders don't begin with the answer, the program, the product, 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 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 a servant leader is good at identifying needs, he or she will be in a great position to meet those needs. If the servant leader does in fact meet those needs, the servant leader will be effective because he or she will be providing relevant products, programs, and services. That means that the servant leader's organization will succeed in having customers, clients, patients, members, and students. The organization will thrive, because the servant leader listened, and made sure that what the organization offers is what people really *need*.

Richard Pieper is the Chairman of PPC Partners, Inc., headquartered in Milwaukee. PPC Partners owns a series of electrical service and construction firms. Dick joined Pieper Electric as President in 1960, when the family-owned business had eight employees doing \$250,000 of business per year. Today, PPC Partners, Inc. employs 900 to 1,100 people, has sales in the low nine figures, and is one of the top electrical contracting firms in the United States.

One reason for the company's dramatic growth is that Dick is relentless about getting feedback from colleagues and customers. He is

always asking and listening. After every company semi-annual briefing, those who attended are asked to fill out an evaluation form that asks about the attendees' overall reaction to the meeting, pre-meeting communications, transportation, hotel, meeting room, food service (each meal), the program, and the chairman. They are asked what they enjoyed the most, and the least; what they learned and intend to implement; and what they recommend for future meetings. For regular meetings, there is a two-page "Post Meeting Reaction" form that asks similar questions. Dick even has a Chairman's Office Survey in which he asks each employee to rate him and his executive assistant on their quality of service, reliability, knowledge, and timeliness. Then of course there are regular surveys of customers. The comments are studied, and follow-up is comprehensive. At PieperPower, listening is a high priority. It is a broad-based, systematic process with a focus on constant follow-up and improvement.

Part of the listening process is testing products or services in their early stages of development, to make sure they are aligned with customer needs. Years ago, when developing a new four-wheel, all-terrain vehicle (ATV), Suzuki Motor Company engineers took prototypes of the ATV to the apple orchards of Washington and asked the owners and workers to try them out. The engineers watched and listened to the feedback they got from these early users. For example, the workers said they needed a basket for tools and insecticides, so the engineers added a basket.

One day, a manager took off into his orchard with an ATV, and was away a long time. The engineers began to worry. Did he have an accident? Did the prototype break down? Finally the manager returned with a big smile on his face. "That was fun!" he said. "I want to order 20 of these." It was only after listening and testing that the engineers knew that their product was ready to market.

### *Inverting the Pyramid*

The traditional organizational hierarchy is a pyramid. There are a few people at the top—the people who have power. Then there are more people in the middle, often known as middle managers. Most of the people are at the base of the pyramid. These are the people who create and deliver the products, programs, and services that the organization provides.

Robert Greenleaf worked for AT&T when it was one of the largest corporations in the world. His final role there was Director of Management Research. He continually sought ways to improve the leadership and management of the company. One of his conclusions was that the pyramidal structure doesn't work.

One of the problems with the traditional pyramidal structure is that workers focus on pleasing their "bosses." When the pyramid is inverted, everyone in the organization can focus on pleasing customers, clients, members, or participants—the people whom the organization is designed to serve.

Ken Blanchard, in his book *Leading at a Higher Level*, pointed out that servant leaders stand at the top of the pyramid only when articulating the mission and vision of the organization, so everyone will know what direction the organization is going. After servant leaders have listened and set the direction, their role changes. Their role is to help everybody else implement the vision, and reach the goals. "They constantly try to find out what their people need to perform well and live according to the vision."

Steven B. Sample, President of the University of Southern California, told a story in his book, *The Contrarian's Guide to Leadership*. At the tender age of thirty, he was named deputy director for academic affairs of the Illinois Board of Higher Education. The board's chairman, George Clements, was a successful business man.

Sample recalled that when he started work, Mr. Clements advised him to spend only 10 percent of his time hiring, evaluating, exhorting, praising, and motivating the people who reported directly to him. Clements said: "For the remaining 90 percent of your time you should be doing *everything you can* to help your direct reports succeed. You should be the first assistant to the people who work for you." Clements told Sample to "work for those who work for you!" Sample said:

If you're not in the process of getting rid of a lieutenant, bend over backwards to help him get his job done. That means returning his phone calls promptly, listening carefully to his plans and problems, calling on others at his request, and helping him formulate his goals and develop strategies for achieving those goals. It's not simply that

you should be your lieutenant's staff person, you should be his *best* staff person.

In *The Servant Leader*, James Autry puts it this way: "One of the primary functions of the manager/leader is to assure that people get the resources they need to do the job. To be a leader who serves, you must think of yourself as—and indeed must be—their principal resource."

### *Developing your colleagues*

Robert Greenleaf thought that the development of workers was as important as the work. In his essay on "Servant Leadership in Business," he proposed a new business ethic:

Looking at the two major elements, the work and the person, the new ethic, simply but quite completely stated, will be: *the work exists for the person as much as the person exists for the work*. To put it another way, the business exists as much to provide meaningful work to the person as it exists to provide a product or service to the customer.

TDIndustries is a highly successful air conditioning and electrical contracting company based in Dallas. It has repeatedly been on Fortune magazine's list of the 100 Best Companies to Work for in America. Its "Mission Statement" is built on this ethic articulated by Greenleaf—that the work exists for the person as much as the person exists for the work. The TDIndustries Mission Statement 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." The worker is as important as the work.

### *Coaching, not controlling*

In the power model, and most management textbooks, the assumption is that a leader or manager exercises power 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."

James Showkeir is an organizational development expert who assists organizations in implementing servant leadership. He points out that focusing on control and compliance has a high cost. Showkeir said:

Compliance is not commitment. Compliance does not create passion. Compliance does not make individuals wiser. Compliance does not encourage choosing accountability. Compliance does not lead to creativity, flexibility, differentiation, and speed. Compliance does not create meaning and purpose. Compliance does not breed freedom. Meaning, purpose, and freedom ensue from struggle, risk, and engagement; compliance cuts us away from these.

Servant leaders are not focused on controlling their “subordinates.” They do not measure their status in terms of their “span of control.” They are not focused on compliance. Instead, they are focused on coaching and mentoring. They teach, they encourage, and they provide timely feedback.

One reason that servant leaders don’t focus on controlling others is that *nobody really controls anybody else*. Each of us controls our own time and attention, but nobody else’s. Yes, a leader can threaten, or persuade, or plead, but individuals have to decide if they are going to cooperate and respond to the leader. A leader may have “authority,” but those she or he leads have to accept and respond to that authority, or nothing will happen.

For the leader, then, giving orders is not enough. You have to make sure that people understand, see the purpose, are in personal alignment, and are willing and able to do what is requested. You can’t *make* them do that. It would be like ordering someone to be charming. It doesn’t work.

Servant leaders know that people are not only capable of resisting an order—they are free to leave the organization and find a job somewhere else. Jack Lowe, Jr. of TDIndustries points out that “Your best employees have the talent and ability to leave your company and find work elsewhere if they want to. So you should lead them the way you lead volunteers.”

### **The Three Options**

Let me ask this question: Why would anyone want to be a servant leader? Some become servant leaders as a result of devout faith—they are following the scriptures in their religion. But I think most servant leaders

back into it, over time, as part of their life experience. I can think of two reasons that happens. First, servant leaders make a moral decision, and second, they discover where to find the most meaning in life.

Let's start with the moral decision. When you understand that people have many needs, I think you have only three basic options:

(1) do nothing, and ignore the needs of others--which is an option I consider a moral failure; or

(2) take advantage of people's weaknesses, cynically exploit their needs, and seek personal gain at their expense-- which is an option I consider an even worse moral failure; or

(3) do the right thing, and try to meet people's needs.

The third option is the servant leader option, and it is the only moral one. That is still the right option, even if you fail to achieve what you hope to achieve.

If you try to do what is right and good and true, and feel that you have failed, you may be tempted to shift to the cynical option of exploiting others or the indifferent option of doing nothing. But there is no justification for falling into the two *immoral* options, just because things are not going the way you had hoped, or people don't appreciate what you have done, or people even criticize you for the good you are trying to do. Servant leaders stay with the third option, no matter how difficult it may be.

The issue of appreciation is a big one. Many of us feel that we are being taken for granted. Many of us are right. The people we serve don't appreciate us, so why should we give them our best? The answer is that we have our own integrity and standards, and we derive a sense of meaning and satisfaction from doing a great job. It doesn't matter whether anybody else knows or appreciates what we do— *we* know. We know what we're doing, and we still have to do what's right. We still have to be the best we can be. This is about *us*, not *them*. This is about how much *we* care, not about how much *they* care.

Each of us likes to be appreciated. That's normal. But it is hard to be a servant leader if you crave applause. Focusing on applause means that you

are focused on yourself, not others. You should focus instead on the meaning and satisfaction that you receive when you help others. That is something that nobody can take away from you. The meaning and satisfaction are yours, whether anybody else applauds or not.

I was fortunate to learn this early in life. One of the real “aha!” experiences of my life occurred as I walked to the stadium for the student awards ceremony at Roosevelt High School my senior year. It occurred to me that I was so happy about what I had done that year, and felt so good about what I had learned, and who I had helped, that I didn’t need any awards. *I had already been rewarded.* I already had the sense of meaning and satisfaction that came from doing a good job. That realization was a major breakthrough for me. I felt liberated. I felt an immense inner peace.

### **The Paradoxical Commandments**

I went to college during the sixties. It was a time of conflict and confrontation on many college campuses, but also a time of hope and idealism. I was working with student leaders, back then. I saw a lot of idealistic young people go out into the world to do what they thought was right, and good, and true, only to come back a short time later, discouraged, or embittered, because nobody seemed to appreciate them, or they didn’t get the results they wanted to get.

I wanted change, too, but in my writing and speaking during the sixties, I encouraged students to work with each other, and work through the system, to achieve change. I had two messages for these students. First, I told them that they really had to love people. Change usually takes time, and love is one of the only motivations that can keep you going, keep you with the people and with the process until change is achieved. Second, I told them that if they went out and did what they thought was right and good and true, they would find meaning and satisfaction, and that meaning and satisfaction would be enough. If they had the meaning, they didn’t need the glory.

In 1968, at the height of the student unrest on American college campuses, I wrote a booklet for student leaders. I was 19, a sophomore in college at the time. In the booklet I urged high school student leaders to learn how to work through the system to get things done. I challenged them with what I called “The Paradoxical Commandments of Leadership.” You have the handout:

[Hand out]

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

The Paradoxical Commandments are about finding personal meaning in the face of adversity. That's why the first phrase in each commandment is about adversity, or difficulty, or disappointment. People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. People really need help, but may attack you if you do help them.

But each statement about adversity is followed by a positive commandment: Love people anyway. Do good anyway. Help people anyway.

The paradox is this. The world may be difficult—the world may be crazy—but 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.

The fact is that you and I, as individuals, can't control the external world. We can't control the world economy, and the rate of population growth. We can't control the weather, or natural disasters like fires and floods. We can't control when terrorists may strike or wars may break out. We can't control which companies will acquire which companies, and which jobs will be downsized and which jobs will open up. We can work hard, and prepare, and seize opportunities—and we should. We can join with others to influence those external events—we should do that, too. But there are lots of things in our external world we just can't control.

What we can control is our inner lives. You and I get to decide who we are going to be and how we are going to live. And we can live our most cherished values, and we can be close to our families and friends, and we can do what we know is right and good and true—no matter what. *No matter what*. The good news is that these are the things that give people a lot of personal meaning for many, many years. The even better news is that personal meaning is a key to being 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 joy, or self-fulfillment, or self-actualization, or being centered. Others call it living their passion, or following their bliss. For people of faith, it may be finding God's will for their lives, and then living that will. But however we describe it, personal meaning is a key.

Some people see the Paradoxical Commandments as a personal declaration of independence—a declaration of independence from all the external factors we don't control. No matter what happens out there, I can still find meaning and happiness. My meaning and happiness are independent of the events in the external world.

Other people call the Paradoxical Commandments a “no excuses” policy. Sure, 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. 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 your character, that’s your spirit, and that’s where you’re going to find the most meaning.

Some people have told me that when they first read the Paradoxical Commandments, they thought I must have been having a very, very bad year when I wrote them. That’s not true. Well... I was 19, and I couldn’t get a date. Actually it was worse than that. I could get a date, but then I would spend the evening talking about the meaning of life, and I couldn’t get the next date... But I have always been very optimistic. I think that if you do what is right, and good, and true, things will usually work out for you, and you will often receive recognition and praise.

But what if you don’t? What if you put your heart and mind and soul into a project, and it fails? What if you do a brilliant job, and nobody notices? 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 personal meaning. That’s where you’re going to find the deepest happiness. And you don’t want to give that up. Don’t ever, ever give that up—certainly not when times are tough. Certainly not then.

### **The Origin of the Paradoxical Commandments**

I wrote the Paradoxical Commandments in 1968, when I was 19, a college sophomore. I wrote them as part of a booklet for student leaders, entitled *The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council*. It was published by Harvard Student Agencies and later by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. About 25,000-30,000 copies were sold or distributed between 1968 and 1972.

I went on with my life, and for 25 years, I didn’t know that the Paradoxical Commandments were spreading around the world. What I know now is that people were taking the Paradoxical Commandments and putting them up on their walls, and their refrigerator doors, and putting them into

speeches and articles. They spread around the world, until today it is estimated that they have been used by millions of people.

From doing some searches on the internet, I know that they were used by business leaders, politicians, military commanders, religious leaders, teachers, social workers, coaches, and students. They were used by Boy Scouts in Canada and the United States. They were used by Rotary Clubs in Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Alabama—I like that combination! They were used by student leaders in South Africa, and the Cambodian Free Speech Movement, and a university in Belgium. They are on an Iranian website for news and culture. They were used by a homeless shelter in Philadelphia, a welfare agency in Texas, a Family Council in Ohio, a Methodist church in Kansas. They were used by Karl Menninger in a speech at the United Nations in 1981. They were used by Abel Muzorewa, a Methodist Bishop, who was the President of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. They have been translated into Japanese and used in homilies by a Japanese Catholic priest in Tokyo. They are being used with an Eskimo group in Canada. They were published in John C. Maxwell's book, *Becoming a Person of Influence*, and Rev. Robert Schuller's book, *Turning Hurts into Halos*, and Wayne Dyer's book, *There's a Spiritual Solution to Every Problem*. They are in Stephen Covey's newest book, *The 8<sup>th</sup> Habit*.

If you go to the internet and use a search engine, and type in the first phrase of the first commandment, "People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered, love them anyway," you will get as many as 100,000 hits. Not all of those are the Paradoxical Commandments, of course. Friends tell me the commandments are on at least 6,000 websites. My favorite website... well, I don't know if I should share this.... Well, my favorite website is the website of the English Cocker Spaniel Club of America!

### **The Mother Teresa connection**

The discovery that changed my life happened at my Rotary Club meeting, which took place at the Royal Hawaiian hotel in Honolulu in September 1997. My fellow Rotarian got up to do the inspiration. He noted that Mother Teresa had died, and said that in her memory, he wanted to read a poem she had written. I bowed my head in contemplation, and what I heard was eight of the original ten Paradoxical Commandments, exactly as I had written them thirty years before.

I was astonished, but I was cool—I didn't jump up and go "Hey!" I just went up after the meeting and asked him where he got the poem. He said, "Isn't it wonderful?" And I said, "Well, actually, I wrote it." He didn't say a word, but he gave me a look. I don't know what the look meant to him, but to me, it meant "you poor, delusional megalomaniac." I said, but where did you get it? He said it was in a book about Mother Teresa, but he couldn't remember the title.

The next night I went to a bookstore and started looking through the shelf of books about the life and works of Mother Teresa. I found it, on the last page before the appendices in a book entitled, *Mother Teresa: A Simple Path*, compiled by Lucinda Vardey. The Paradoxical Commandments had been reformatted to look like a poem, and they had been re-titled "Anyway." There was no author listed, but at the bottom, it said: "From a sign on the wall of Shishu Bhavan, the children's home in Calcutta."

That really hit me. I wanted to laugh, and cry, and shout—and I was getting chills up and down my spine. The idea that Mother Teresa had put the Paradoxical Commandments up on the wall to look at from time to time as she and her colleagues ministered to their children—that touched me deeply. That was when I decided to write and speak about the Paradoxical Commandments again after 30 years.

*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 now published three books about the Paradoxical Commandments. As a result of the books and the publicity, every month about 10,000 people from 70 or 80 countries visit my website, and many of them send me messages. They tell me what the Paradoxical Commandments mean to them—how they have used them to raise their children, or get through a tough time at work, or establish their goals.

I set out to inspire people, and now they are inspiring me. I have become part of a growing network of kindred spirits, and I am deeply grateful.

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.

### **Meaning Maximizers**

Remember I said that I think people become servant leaders because, first, they make a moral decision, and second, they discover where to find the most meaning in life.

Let's talk about meaning. There is no more dramatic example of the importance of finding meaning than the story of Viktor Frankl, a Jewish psychiatrist who survived the Nazi concentration camps in World War II. In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl described his experiences as a prisoner. It is a painful story of immense suffering and sorrow. Prisoners had to work each day with little food, clothing, or sleep, in an environment of constant fear and death. Frankl observed that prisoners who had faith in the future, who still had a reason to live, were the ones who were most likely to survive. From this, he developed his theory of *logotherapy*, or meaning therapy, in which a patient is "confronted with and reoriented toward the meaning of his life." Frankl broke with Freud and disagreed with Jung. He didn't believe that sex or power were the primary drives. Frankl believed that "striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man."

Finding meaning is an intrinsic motivator. People who are intrinsically motivated are happier, more productive, more innovative, more committed, and less likely to burn out than people who are not intrinsically motivated. People who are intrinsically motivated are also mentally healthier than those who are extrinsically motivated. So finding meaning has many benefits.

Servant leaders know that the search for success and the search for meaning are not the same thing. They may overlap, but they are not the same. The things that our commercial, secular society considers to be attributes of success may have little to do with personal meaning.

For example, power is a symbol of success. But people learn that there is more meaning in helping people than in ordering them around. Wealth is a

big symbol of success. But even the wealthy discover that there is more meaning in appreciating the richness of daily life—family, friends, hobbies, sunsets—than in possessing money. Fame is a symbol of success, but the famous know that there is more meaning in being intimately known to a few people, than being superficially known to millions of people. Winning is a symbol of success, but people learn that there is more meaning in always doing their personal best, win or lose.

The symbols of success are not necessarily bad. They're just *not enough*. It is not enough to get ahead. We also need to get meaning.

### **My Hobby**

One of my hobbies is conducting research on sources of personal meaning. Over the past few years I have surveyed about 3,000 people on the sources of meaning in their lives. Many of them have been college students. I have used a survey instrument that asks people to rate 27 different sources of personal meaning on a scale of 1 to 10, in which 1 is low and 10 is high. I have used samples of convenience, not random samples, so I can't extrapolate from them to larger populations. But the results are interesting.

All the groups I have surveyed have given the highest average rating to "my family." The rating is always a 9.0 or higher. Most have given the next-highest rating to "giving and receiving love." Other sources of personal meaning that have received high ratings are "intimate relationships," "doing my personal best," "a sense of accomplishment," and "living my values." I find these results encouraging.

Even more interesting, I think, is that all the groups I have surveyed so far have given low average ratings to power or influence; winning; and fame—all typical symbols of success. These symbols of success usually get a 3, 4, or 5. The average ratings for money or wealth are always pretty low, as well—a 5 or a 6. People know that these are not important sources of personal meaning.

### **The Four Universal Sources of Personal Meaning**

People ask me—what are some really basic, universal sources of personal meaning? I would pick four. 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. They won't surprise you. Here they are: Love people, help people, live ethically, and don't be too attached to material things.

I think there is a causal link between these four principles. If you love people, you will want to help them, and if you are loving and helping people, you will want to treat them right—you will want to treat them ethically. And if you are busy loving and helping others and treating them right, you are probably more focused on people than on things, so you probably aren't too attached to material things.

These fundamental sources of meaning are available to you every day. Think about it. You are among the lucky ones. You are having an impact, and you can see that impact. That's not something to take for granted.

It is true that every job can be done with dignity, and every job can have its own meaning. But not all jobs are created equal. If you manufactured soft drinks, or developed shopping malls, or did scientific research, you might never meet any of the people who are impacted by your work. And if you did meet them, you might discover that you're not making much of a difference in their lives. That's not necessarily bad, but it's not very satisfying. We need to make a living, but it's a lot more satisfying to also make a difference.

And that's what you get to do. You get to make a difference in the lives of your students. And you can see that difference, as they learn and grow during the years they are with you. You help them grow and develop their potential so that they can fulfill their purpose on this planet. You make a difference in their lives, and that difference multiplies, by having an impact on their families, and friends, and their children, and their organizations and communities, and society at large. All of that should give you an immense amount of personal meaning.

Servant leaders understand where to find the most meaning. That is why a life of servant leadership is not about self-sacrifice or self-denial. I repeat: Servant leadership is not about self-sacrifice or self-denial. It is about *self-fulfillment*. It is about living closely to your most important sources of meaning. Servant leaders find satisfaction and meaning that are simply not available in any other way. They know that serving others is not just something you do. It is what life is about.

The simple truth is this: If you want to be deeply happy, 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 not: Am I a success or a failure? The most fundamental question is: Is my life meaningful? *Is my life meaningful*. If you love and help your students, then your lives will always be meaningful. Always! I promise.

### **Concluding remarks**

Let me conclude this way. Some of you may have seen the movie, *Man of La Mancha*, when it came out many years ago, 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. They were not wondering why they were dying, they were wondering why they had ever lived. What a terrible question to be asking as you breathe your last breath! They wondered why they had ever lived. When they looked back, they saw no meaning in their lives.

There are many benefits to being servant leaders, living the paradoxical life and loving and helping your students. One of the benefits is this. When you look back at the end of your life, you will not have many regrets. You may not have any. You'll look back on a life filled with meaning. Even more important, you will not wonder why you lived. You'll know. You'll *know*. And that may be the greatest blessing of all.

Thank you!