

Employee Perspectives: The Lack of Servant Leadership in Organizations

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Servant leadership is prevalent in various industries; however, organizational leaders in the retail industry continue to operate under situational, autocratic, bureaucratic, and laissez-faire leadership. A group of 11 employees working in retail related the lack of exemplary leadership from employee perspectives, specifically, the lack of servant leadership exhibited by organizational leaders in relation to showing care and consideration for employee well-being and leadership growth. The theoretical support for this research was through the teachings and findings from studies conducted by Greenleaf (1970, 1977), the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership (2008), and van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011). The collection of relevant information on this topic came from personal interviews with retail employees to obtain information to fill the gap regarding the lack of servant leadership in retail organizations.

Of the various types of leadership, servant leadership is the most beneficial style exhibited in organizations (Greenleaf, 1970, 1977; van

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Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). When an employee is having difficulties, a servant leader asks or offers to help. Servant leaders, as defined by Greenleaf (1970, 1977), are interested in being a model of service to employees rather than expecting employees to be of service to them. Servant leadership is not just a method of leadership *for* leaders because anyone can exhibit servant leadership. The reciprocation of servant leadership within an organization creates a level of respectful interaction toward a common goal—satisfaction.

Satisfaction relates to all individuals involved while conducting business. Most people assume that most organizational structures require conducting business and leading employees from the top-down: board of directors, executive leaders, managers, employees, and finally, customers. Through years of research, Greenleaf (1970, 1977), van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011), and others revealed the reverse is actually the way businesses work; thus, *service* should occur from the bottom-up to top-level management. Think about it. Without customers deciding they need something, what is the point of having a business? Businesses, irrespective of the industry, provide a service. Therefore, the word servant relates to service—in the correct context of providing service to someone (Greenleaf, 1970, 1977).

A case-study approach was appropriate for gaining verbal responses to basic feelings from all participants regarding servant leadership. The topic of investigation in this case study was that there is a significant lack of servant leadership in the retail industry. Obtaining verbal responses garnered the necessary information to provide a descriptive report about how employees perceived the display of leadership in the organization. All information gathered provided an overview of leadership from the bottom-up perspective missing in research among retail industry employees.

The results could be of general interest to modern-day organizational leaders in any industry struggling with employee engagement (Silvis, 2016) and a high rate of turnover. When the rate of employee self-termination is high (Powell, 2012), organizational leaders fail to focus concern on the level of employee satisfaction and the exhibition of leadership skills. The expected findings revealed how a lack of training in

servant leadership affects the functionality of the organization as a moral, caring, and empowered community member.

Implications of the findings revealed an emerging need to encourage organizational leaders across all industries to review business operations from the employee perspective, for example, working with organizational leaders lacking in servant leadership skills and implementing ways to empower employees through dual-way organizational training. Recognition and implementation of dual-way servant leader training will help change employee perspectives of leadership styles and values. Continual focus on training and exhibiting servant leadership in retail, and other industries, will benefit the well-being of all employees. Additional benefits of implementing dual-way training in servant leadership include increased employee engagement, relations, and retention to increased value of employee succession into leadership positions.

Background and Knowledge of Servant Leadership

Servant Leadership Perspectives

Servant Leadership Defined

According to Greenleaf (1970, 1977), servant leadership is service oriented, holistic, ethical, spiritual, and altruistic, with leaders using intrinsic moral obligations to fulfill the needs of followers. The ideology is to exhibit a mentorship role, placing the personal well-being of others above the interests of self or the organization (Greenleaf, 1970, 1977; Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2008). Reasons for exhibiting servant leadership qualities in various aspects of life are apparent. An underlying focus defining the increasing emergence of servant leadership is internal perception of moral and ethical business practices (Reed, Vidaver-Cohen, & Colwell, 2011). Successful implementation and practice of servant leadership require a level of intrinsic morality, honesty, and ethics

upon which one can build relationships. Externalization of the values and virtues of moral leadership can transfer to followers, leading to healthy and respectful relationships, enriching the organizational culture, and increasing job retention and satisfaction among followers.

Increase in Servant Leadership in Business

Servant leadership is increasing in popularity and is focusing less on the traditional competencies of leader effectiveness (Taylor, Machado, & Peterson, 2008). A definition of servant leadership is the “practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader” (Hale & Fields, 2007, p. 397), with an emphasis on developing a reciprocation of followers as leaders and leaders as followers. Waite (2011) believed that integrity and humility are crucial for transforming into a servant leader which in turn are necessary for “empowering, and developing of others in carrying out the tasks and processes of visioning, goal setting, leading, modeling, team building, and shared decision-making” (Parolini, 2004, p. 9). Consensus among scholars is that servant leaders exhibit many facets of caring, including listening and empathy, with a demonstrative ability to relate to the feelings and perspectives of others (Boden, 2014). In all aspects of life, servant leadership incorporates a dimensionality of moral and emotional strength, combined with the innate ability to elicit innovation and personal growth among followers (Boden, 2014).

The conscientious servant leader exhibits a quiet healing ability, a genuine reflection of spiritual well-being, and wholeness that radiates among followers (Greenleaf, 1970). Boden (2014) argued that servant leaders demonstrate a high understanding of personal values, feelings, strengths, and weaknesses and easily persuade and influence followers. Servant leaders integrate information from various timelines to discern the most suitable path leading to successful attainment of shared goals. By reviewing the past and relating experiences to the present, servant leaders focus on the future and a holistic approach to all situations (Boden, 2014).

Link Between Servant Leadership and Spiritual Leadership

Spiritual leadership is a call to service based on personal attributes of humility, charity, altruism, love, equality, and genuine concern for others (Davis, 2014). Spirituality is inherent to an individual's inner spirit (Greenleaf, 1970, 1977). Greenleaf (1970, 1977) further explained that spiritual leadership emanates from using positive psychology and exhibiting love, compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, personal responsibility, and a sense of harmony with the environment. Sweeney and Fry (2012) explained that one's leadership philosophy directly relates to the character of one's spirituality.

Positive psychology is a facet of spiritual leadership and the calling for servant leadership encompassing altruism, character, and integrity (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Other attributes of servant leaders are clear vision, values of trust, conscience, humility, the concern for others, and inspiration for followers (Sharma, 2010). The basis of spiritual leadership is similar to servant leadership focusing on ethics, social responsibility, concern for the environment, and value for human rights (Pruzan, 2008). Spiritual leadership also imbues the spiritual perspectives of leaders' perceptions regarding the purpose of life, character as a leader, decision-making, and infusion of spirituality in business activities. Sweeney and Fry (2012) defined *character* as a consistent moral and ethical strength aligning individual and organizational beliefs and interactions with others. Similarly, Beck (2014) explained that while servant leadership incorporates spirituality, various other leadership approaches also help build trustworthy relationships and create an altruistic focus. The aforementioned attributes might be most useful in the retail industry and could increase understanding of the servant leadership perspective of focusing on the successes of followers.

Comparison and Contrast of Servant Leadership and Various Leadership Styles

van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) reported that servant leadership is edging out the contrasting use of traditional leadership styles in

organizations. What sets servant leaders apart from individuals exhibiting other leadership styles are the significance of stewardship, extending a conscious sense of selflessness, and using personal values, beliefs, and aspirations to motivate others. The need for organizations to review leadership styles, with a focus on what is best for all employees—from leaders to entry-level employees—is necessary. Replacing the old-style, traditional leadership styles with servant leadership traits and researching resources will increase trust, build strong cultures, and help redefine leader-follower perspectives.

Overview of Traditional Leadership Theories

The nine most prevalent leadership styles mentioned in recent research include autocratic, bureaucratic, charismatic, laissez-faire, relational, situational, transformational, and transactional (The Executive Connection, 2015). Koontz and O'Donnell (1976) created levels of combined leadership: Theory L, Theory X, Theory Y, and Theory Z. The four leadership theory traits encompass several leadership styles and many of the traits overlap. Theory L includes the relaxed leadership trait of laissez-faire leadership. Theory X includes the controlling leadership traits: autocratic, bureaucratic, and transactional. Theory Y relates to situational leadership, where leaders flex between relaxed and controlled leadership. Theory Z leadership traits include charismatic, relations-oriented, and transformational leadership. Servant leadership most relates to Theory Z leadership as the servant leader is a good manager who inspires high productivity, cooperation, low turnover, and employee commitment (Greenleaf, 1970, 1977; Koontz & O'Donnell, 1976). Recall that van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) defined the various intrinsic virtues of servant leadership—and the most prevalent overall trait—to ensure the well-being of others before self.

Theory L: Laissez-faire. Leaders who exhibit laissez-faire leadership leave the direction of organizational goals up to the whims of employees, and therefore, employee productivity decreases (Koontz & O'Donnell, 1976). Laissez-faire leadership is the absence of leadership, allowing employee self-rule (Yukl, 2013). Unfortunately, employees do not have

decision-making authority but receive the consequences for unmet goals. The lack of strong leadership leaves organizations vulnerable to increased attrition as good employees leave for more challenging employment.

Theory X: Autocratic, bureaucratic, and transactional leadership. Leaders who exhibit autocratic, bureaucratic, and transactional leadership traits are people who direct other people and hold positions of power (Yukl, 2013). Individuals who exhibit Theory X leadership traits offer little encouragement or rewards, increasing stress, while simultaneously decreasing employee satisfaction and productivity (Koontz & O'Donnell, 1976). Employees labeled these leaders as self-driven and controllers (Boden, 2014). Leaders in this group are driven by the need for structure, excessive organization, and adherence to all organizational directives. The requirement is that employees conform to all policies and complete organizational goals as directed by the book (Yukl, 2013). Not following organizational directives may result in negative consequences for employees.

Theory Y: Situational leadership. Similar to laissez-faire leaders, individuals who exhibit situational leadership may allow employees too much or not enough autonomy. With a lackadaisical fluctuation in leadership guidance, decreased teamwork and lower productivity may occur (Koontz & O'Donnell, 1976). Situational leadership is a neutral leadership trait where the leader may try to be more of a friend or peer than to manage followers (Yukl, 2013). The flexibility to guide employees based on factors relating to specific situations of leadership can be detrimental or beneficial. The situational leader sometimes allows employees to make decisions; however, project directions and instructions will vary based on a leader's need to adapt to a different management style to meet organizational goals.

Theory Z: Charismatic, relations-oriented, and transformational leadership. Leaders who exhibit Theory Z traits are devoted communicators, optimists, visionaries, and relationship driven (Crippen, 2012). Koontz and O'Donnell (1976) listed communication with followers as the most important trait for defining direction, cooperation, and autonomy to meet organizational goals. Good managers provide leadership in a way whereby employee productivity and collaboration increases; this helps decrease turnover and increase employee commitment. This group of leadership traits is the most equated with servant leadership—with some

notable exceptions. Charismatic leaders exhibit kindness, vision, and a depth of knowledge and skill needed in times of crisis but generally do not focus on process and structure. Relations-oriented leaders also exude charismatic leadership traits but focus mostly on building relationships. Many leaders whose style falls under Theory Z are best for strengthening productivity, satisfaction, and building relationships within an organization.

Transformational leaders are most similar to servant leaders and lead by example (Washington, Sutton, & Sauser, 2014). Additionally, transformational leaders also use skills from the Theory Z leadership traits to engage followers through rapport, inspiration, or empathy (Bass, 1985). Similar to servant leadership, transformational leaders are confident and willing to make sacrifices for the well-being of the organization. Using motivation and relationships, transformational leaders work to define the need for change, implemented through collaboration.

Servant leadership as part of Theory Z: Comparison and contrast with Theory L, Theory X, and Theory Y leadership traits. In contrast with the Theory L traits, servant leaders exude respectful interactions and work toward common goals. Concerning Theory Y traits, employees would label servant leaders as attentive and caring (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Theory X leadership traits are necessary to build camaraderie and trust; followers require guidance for processes and a defined structure for meeting goals. Theory Z leaders, specifically individuals who exhibit transformational leadership traits, are closer to servant leaders than other leadership styles; however, some individuals may lack the selflessness, spiritual, and holistic focus (stewardship) toward public service.

The most prevalent similarity between Theory Z and servant leaders is the need to succeed for the benefit of employees and the organization (Hale & Fields, 2007). In servant leadership, followers are more important than leaders (Mehta & Pillay, 2011), and van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) believed the requirement is for leaders and employees to collaborate to identify problems and implement solutions as a team. Open communication is essential and expected between leaders and followers (Mehta & Pillay, 2011). From initial project-planning stages to final implementation at every organization, institution, business, agency, department, and group, servant leaders focus only on serving others.

Ethical Leadership

Keselman (2012) stated that creating the right conditions and culture for ethical leadership requires acting and living as models of morality. Only in this way can cultural values become the norm (Keselman, 2012). Ethical leaders exhibit self-respect, respect for others, and have a high premium on shared values. Servant leaders highly value ethical behaviors (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

Institutional Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is becoming increasingly popular in all facets of business. One area still requiring design, training, and implementation is the retail industry. Retail sales are the crux of many economies, involving the one-on-one interaction between employees and customers. Some notable organizations known for servant leadership are Starbucks, Whole Foods, UPS, and Southwest Airlines. Customers only see employees as individuals providing a service, doing what they do in the course of serving the public. However, the people behind the scenes are the very heart of the retail industry: leaders and followers. The terms *leaders* and *followers* continue to relate to an *us* and *them* ideology when, as described by Greenleaf (1977), servant leaders are both because as individuals, people act on personal values, ethics, and morals.

Crippen (2012) and Liden, Wayne, Liao, and Meuser (2013) substantiated the findings of Greenleaf that when leaders model servant leadership qualities, employees emulate these traits, thus creating the follower as the leaders and the leader as a follower. The change to a culture of stewardship (serving others) increases the success of the organization. In a study surveying 1000 employees in a large, multi-regional restaurant chain, results revealed several positive effects of leaders exhibiting servant leadership traits (Liden et al., 2013). Store employees reported increased productivity, satisfaction, and desire to meet organizational goals. Another benefit of store leaders exhibiting servant leadership was the increase in revenue as a direct effect of increased employee productivity, “servant leadership can impact the profitability of an organization” (Liden et al., 2013).

Data Collection and Analysis

Ethical Issues

All ethical protocols designed for this study were met. One participant assisted with providing coworkers with a letter of interest. Volunteers agreeing to participate in the study provided ink-signed and dated consent forms. All documents and data from the study are kept in a locked safe and are unobtainable to anyone. All documents contain pseudonyms, E1 through E11, to protect the identity of all participants. At the end of the data collection process, and unbeknownst to the participants, each individual received a \$5 gift card for a beverage of choice and a personalized thank-you card for participating in the project.

Participant and Recruiting Information

Servant leadership is most prevalent in large organizations, spanning the realm of business in many genres: corporations, religious organizations, and education. The narrow focus for this research concerns the retail business environment in one store of a Fortune 500 retail corporation. The reason for the specific focus is the notable discontentment of employees working in the retail industry related through postings on social media. Recognizing the opportunity to investigate the issues identified through social media was the impetus to discover the leadership and training atmosphere from the perspective of employees working in the specific retail store.

Methods of Data Collection

Data Collection Process

Eleven individuals working in a retail environment provided verbal details to personal questions in a one-on-one discussion about employee leadership opportunities and processes from personal perspectives. The

opportunity to participate was open to all local employees of the organization but only 11 individuals responded and agreed to all aspects of this research. For participants' convenience, interviews occurred via teleconference with participants' agreement for digitally recording the conversations. Erasure of the digital recordings occurred after transcription of all recordings and member checking of the transcripts by the participants.

Findings

The problem identified for examination in this case study was that servant leadership is significantly lacking in the retail industry as related through the perspectives of 11 individuals. From the top of the leadership hierarchy down through employee ranks and from the lower employee ranks up to the executive level, the lack of servant leadership was identified as a significant problem. Three men and eight women working in entry-level, administration, and non-management positions for a retail organization related their experiences by providing responses in one-on-one discussions about their experiences and perspectives of leadership at work.

A list of definitions provided information about the various leadership styles from the article in *The Executive Connection* (2015), and participants selected the leadership style each felt best represented their leaders and the style that best represented themselves. Four styles of leadership were selected representing organizational leaders: autocratic, bureaucratic, situational, and laissez-faire leadership. For the follow-up question, participants indicated they exhibited only three styles of leadership: situational, relations-oriented, and servant leadership.

The participants who selected situational leadership for both leaders and themselves revealed similarities gleaned from working together for five or more years. Throughout the workday, the leaders requested changes in employee routines to meet organizational goals. When ideas were presented from employees, leaders were flexible and changed the routines but only if the suggestions related to meeting organizational objectives and goals. Participants indicated that independent thinking and offering solutions go unnoticed and unrewarded. When asked how this could change for the better in the organization, E10 stated, "I would encourage

feedback from my employees so that our corporation can grow. I would listen to the low man on the totem pole [...] individuals would be heard, and opinions would be taken into account for all situations.”

One participant revealed the strained relationship between leadership and employees. When relating the leadership styles exhibited, one participant was unable to choose only one leadership style. Several participants indicated that leaders exhibited situational, autocratic, and laissez-faire leadership styles when describing the relationship between leaders and subordinates. Leader-employee relations were “forced” (E6) because of the tension and stress from the inconsistency of teamwork, respect, and organizational policies. An analogy of the leader-employee culture was:

I believe that we are running like a car that has too many miles on it. So much of it is broken, and no matter how much is being done to fix it, there’s always something else that is breaking down. (E2)

Interestingly, E2 believed that, given all the other leadership styles modeled in the organization, exhibiting a relations-oriented leadership style was the best way to ensure employees were comfortable, trusting, and open about leadership decisions. Having a good relationship with employees provided motivation toward meeting organizational goals while also building healthy leader-follower relationships among employees.

For the personal interview portion of the study, participants revealed work experiences of leaders exhibiting various leadership qualities but no participant indicated servant leadership as a quality represented among their leaders. Leaders did not provide employee worksite support, empowerment and opportunities for growth, rewards, or recognition. Additionally, leaders exhibited a lack of sensitivity and caring—coming back full circle to the overall lack of leaders practicing or modeling servant leadership.

Employees felt that leadership offered excellent support to employees regarding time off with family or personal breaks; however, the overall perception of leadership when it came to putting employees first on the job was poor. The participants indicated a decreased level of work satisfaction because leaders do not provide an atmosphere of belonging and importance as a member of the organization.

Results

Employee Perspectives of Leadership

Employee Perspectives of Executive Leadership Types

The employees taking part in the one-on-one discussions received an alphabetical list with an overview of nine leadership types: definitions of the eight aforementioned traits and servant leadership (The Executive Connection, 2015). When asked to list the overall leadership style exhibited by executives within the organization, the responses were autocratic, bureaucratic, laissez-faire, and situational. Terms participants used to describe leaders included lazy, bossy, and friendly.

Reports of leadership practices for the executives exhibiting autocratic and bureaucratic leadership styles included militaristic orders to complete work, forced respect, overly structured work environments, and tension. Instead of asking employees to complete a task, or checking to see if employees could finish one task and then take on another, executives “commanded” (E8) employees to do something. If questioned about the request, or if employees did not follow a specifically structured way of completing a task, the executives sometimes caused confrontations with employees. General manners such as saying “please” and “thank you” were either unusual to hear or stated unpleasantly. Interactions in this manner created tension leading to employee reluctance to comply with work requests. Some participants complied with the requests according to the rules and requirements to avoid creating additional tension for themselves or other employees. Consensus was that executives need training about respectful interactions with “underlings” (E8), meaning subordinate employees.

Reports of executives exhibiting a laissez-faire leadership style included not paying attention to business occurring on the sales floor, waving employees away when asking for guidance about work issues, and being unavailable when needed for customer service. Participants noted that some executives appeared to be situational leaders; most of the leadership and guidance depended on which employee asked for assistance and not on the organizational issue at the time of need.

How Leadership Traits Affect the Organization

Given the various descriptions of reported leadership traits, the next question was if the participants believed organizational goals were met. All responses were a resounding “no.” The responses ranged from “not at all” to “only corporate goals are met.” Many responses were that the tight control of wages and hours are a cause of overworked, undercompensated, and unmotivated employees. Several participants’ schedules were taxing, both physically and emotionally. Overall, proper training and implementing a work-life balance among employees was less important to executives than revenues: “[They] get the sales they want, but things could be better if employees enjoyed coming to work [...] if we were treated better” (E3). Participant E5 stated, “It is hard to come together as a company when leadership is managing it so poorly.” With unhappy employees and poor leadership, the consensus was that organizational goals related to revenues were met but employee satisfaction and performance suffered.

Employee Perspectives of Employee Leadership Types

After determining the perspective of executives’ styles of leadership in this retail organization from the lens of employees, participants responded to personal questions about leadership and followership roles. Interestingly, at the beginning of the one-on-one interviews, when the participants reported the type of leadership style each believed they exhibited, all but two individuals selected situational leadership. Only one individual selected relations-oriented leadership, while the other individual chose servant leadership. The individual who selected relations-oriented leadership stated, “I am in the middle of various confrontations ... respect is forced. I see people are put under the microscope, then the chopping block. I need my job, so my respect to my leaders is also forced” (E7). Thus, keeping the relationships open between executives and peers is important but forced. Other individuals who selected situational leadership revealed that the organization is in a position where growth can

occur and situational leadership can be valuable; however, silencing the voice of “the low man on the totem pole” (E1) obstructs growth.

The individual who selected servant leadership described a two-way relationship with some executives and peers. The person to whom this participant reports directly is extremely autocratic, “My department manager is a controller and sometimes treats me ... as if she can control everything I do” (E9). This individual was willing to discuss issues with executives and indicate issues requiring interventions and changes as an equal partner, thus benefitting the organization. This individual also manages other employees and treats everyone with kindness and respect. “I see my subordinates being treated badly by leaders, so I try to step up and show them that I appreciate them—that their efforts *mean* something” (E11).

Role Reversal Perspective: Followers as Leaders

Participants described the expected relationship with executives through role reversal, meaning the participant acted as if the participant was the executive and the executive was now the participant’s subordinate. When asked, *If you had an opportunity to lead others, what would you do different from your leaders so that employee and organizational goals are met?* The theme for meeting both employee and organizational goals shared among all participants was similar but one phrase in particular stood out: the Golden Rule (1997). One participant offered the following summary on behalf of all responses to this question for meeting both employee and organizational goals:

Like the Bible says, ‘Do unto others...’ you know? I do, and would continue to treat others with respect, kindness, and empathy, although that is not how [they] treat me. I think it would be beneficial to have some training—to remind us we are all human, and have to work together and share the consequences and rewards of our efforts—no matter where we fall in the hierarchy. Without adhering to the Golden Rule, we’re just winging it, right? (E4)

After the Golden Rule (1997), creating a work-life balance was the most important significant response mentioned specifically for meeting employee goals. Acknowledging, praising, and rewarding employees for a job well done, and offering open feedback and healthy conversations to help increase employee satisfaction, motivation, and performance, were some ideas offered by employees as ways to meet employee goals. Flexibility was another term participants mentioned for schedules and work performance. Showing some sensitivity and caring for personal and professional needs is lacking at this retail organization, and most participants included that as an important aspect of “being human” (E4).

One of the responses when asked “if given the opportunity to lead how could the followers help meet specific organizational goals” included encouraging feedback from employees to help with leadership, organizational, and cultural growth. The next most stated way to help meet organizational goals was for leaders to listen to the ideas from every team member, “from the CEO to the janitor, everyone has ideas, and some of them could be exactly what we need to grow as a company—as individuals” (E7). Ensuring employees are comfortable with leadership decisions—especially if the employee will be the one acting on the directives—was also important to participants. Building trust was an essential element of organizational success in addition to goal setting as well.

Another theme related by all the participants was the need for everyone in the organization to “uphold and exhibit ethical work standards” (E1). Considering the individuality of the interview process, every participant suggested designing and implementing leadership courses to not only strengthen the skills of individuals already holding executive positions but also to train all employees to work on a similar level of leadership knowledge and skill. The impetus for the training program would be to learn to work together, to benefit everyone, and to work in a respectful, caring, and healthy environment. The ideology for the training program would ultimately lead to training future leaders as servant leaders through succession planning. One participant stated that training and practicing servant leadership could “give meaning to the part of our lives that we give to the company day in and day out—for many years. Not just to get a paycheck” (E2).

Interpretation of the Findings

The responses provided by retail employees at the start of this study revealed that the lack of training in servant leadership negatively affects the functionality of the organization as a moral, caring, and empowered community member. At the conclusion of the interview process, participants had an opportunity to read the transcripts and select which leadership trait would most benefit both executives and employees. Additionally, in the process of conducting this research, participants identified a solution to the problem: dual-way training in servant leadership.

The findings from this study regarding implementing dual-way servant leader training may not be generalizable across the entire retail industry. The employees at this retail organization believed the leadership traits exhibited by executive leaders are not conducive to organizational or employee growth or satisfaction. While the participants were extremely open and honest with responses to the questions, each individual stated worry about risking employment by sharing any of the information revealed in this study with company leaders. The fear of retaliation was of note, and all conversations that appeared uncomfortable to participants ceased.

Limitations

Limitations for the study included skepticism that participation would make a difference, insecurity about confidentiality, and fear of reprisals. Some participants believed that conducting a study about employee perspectives about leadership processes could not provide any positive influence in the retail industry. There were no guarantees made, but individuals were welcome to participate. Several people mentioned that they felt insecure about the confidentiality of their information. Since participation was voluntary, only individuals signing and returning the required informed consent documents participated. Every individual participant received assurance of confidentiality and protection of all identifying information; thus, management at the retail organization will have no reason to retaliate.

Conclusion

The problem investigated through this case study was the lack of servant leadership among executives in the retail industry from the employee perspective. After reviewing the definitions of several leadership traits, employees at a retail organization in Washington State revealed the known lack of excellent leadership, most notably the lack of servant leadership. None of the participants identified executives as servant leaders, and only one participant self-identified as a servant leader, thus supporting the hypothesis that servant leadership is still lacking in the retail industry. Employee consensus was the need to develop and implement a dual-way training program in servant leadership as the best solution to meet employee needs and for the good of the organization.

Of all the leadership traits among organizational executives, servant leadership continues to gain notoriety as the best style for many industries in the twenty-first century. The reintroduction of ethical and moral leadership within all business organizations is necessary. Treating peers as human beings, showing kindness, consideration, empathy, and respect should be at the core of conducting all business activities. Continuing with the basic premise of Greenleaf (1970) and serving through stewardship, exhibiting the ethical and moral traits to employee and customers—as stated in the Golden Rule (1997)—can only increase the growth and success of every aspect of organizations. Liden et al. (2013) proved that training and exhibiting servant leadership in organizations is the right thing to do. By focusing on the needs of people—implementing dual-way servant leadership training, respecting each other, and modeling one's innate ethical, spiritual, and moral values—organizational leaders can realize much more than satisfied and productive employees, and satisfied stakeholders and community members. An interesting topic for further investigation is to reveal how an organization as a whole unit benefits financially because of implementing dual-way servant leadership training and developing organizational succession planning.

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