CHAPTER 8

AN EVEN CLOSER LOOK AT THE TWO PRINCIPALS
& THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

At the end of the four weeks' observation, we wondered whether or not the two principals differed in their exercise of servant-leadership apart from their difference in gender. Both principals espoused 'open-door' policies that meant that people were always welcome to their offices for discussions without necessarily booking formal appointments. Angela and Denis indicated that the open-door policy was useful for dealing with situations, and left no room for procrastination. As well, it was a reliable approach that ensured the free flow of information that engendered healthy communication between principal and constituents.

Both principals exhibited similarities in their manner of showing respect towards students, staff, and parents. For example, they both chose their words carefully when communicating with parents on the phone, and almost always ended up by thanking them for calling to express their concerns. Angela and Denis always had either a word of encouragement, or asked students how they were doing. Angela's words of encouragement to a student who had won a prestigious scholarship were noted and Denis' show of concern for a student he considered a loner, and another student who looked sick attest to their respect for their students pulled our attention. Furthermore, both principals showed their respect for students by allowing the grade 12 students to speak to their grade nine peers at their full-day and half-day retreats because the older students had valuable ideas to share with their younger colleagues as their contribution to the growth of their school communities. The relationships and mentorship both principals and their assistant principals was observed. The constant consultations that took place between principals and their assistant principals, and the leadership roles they were allowed to play were signs of mentorship and collaboration. Angela was always full of praise for her assistant principals and she believed they would be excellent principals in the future.

Both principals displayed similarity as good listeners and empathizers. As good listeners, they exhibited patience by allowing staff members, students, and parents to express themselves and asking for their opinions. The question, "*so what do you think?*" was common. Angela, the more exuberant of the two, sometimes interrupted the speaker with humour or a helpful comment while Denis, in his calm and gentle manner, waited until the speaker had finished his/her story before saying what he thought was helpful.

Both respondents exercised leadership in ways that showed that they were committed to collaboration and community building. Their involvement of staff in various discussions that centered on students' achievement, innovative teaching practices,

and their interactions with both staff and students indicated their dedication to collaboration and community building. Ways of promoting community building and collaboration included their presence in the staff room, participation in chats with staff members, asking staff members about students' progress, and requesting reports from committees for general staff discussion. The ease with which students approached both principals to greet them and vice versa as they toured their schools was an additional sign of community building where members showed mutual concern for one another. Prayer life punctuated the life of both schools. The spontaneity with which both principals promised to pray for people whose situations they thought needed prayers attest to their belief in Jesus Christ as the substance of their leadership. Both exhibited a sense of stewardship by the several tours they made of their schools each day. Through these tours, they made themselves visible to staff and students while creating the opportunity to talk one-on-one with them on the corridors and outside their offices.

However, Denis and Angela were different in their personalities. Angela was enthusiastic, exuberant, and full of energy and would occasionally be heard laughing joyfully in her office. Denis was rather gentle and calm. Both were excellent communicators and neither lacked humour as they interacted with staff and students. They differed in the way they welcomed people to their offices. Angela often left her chair and desk to meet visitors while Denis welcomed them with a broad smile while standing at his desk. Angela seemed to 'infect' students, and staff members with joy and liveliness. In his gentle demeanour, Denis on the other hand, seemed to welcome people in ways that assured them that he was there to care for everybody in the school community. When a staff member asked him "Have you got time for me?" Denis readily answered, "I have got time for you." Denis never seemed to stop talking about the need for mutual support as a useful engine for success for *ALL* students at St. Mark. He was happy to point out that Aboriginal students had a 95% success rate. Denis believed healthy relationships are the beginning of the achievement of success for all students.

As observations were mainly dictated by the activities taking place in each school during the observation period, Angela was especially committed to the growth of people. She exhibited this through her encouragement of staff members to take on various leadership roles such as chairperson of committees, encouragement of teachers to share best teaching practices, her sharing of a talk on the re-culturation of St. Jerome with her staff members, and allowing staff members to take turns in leading morning prayers in the staff room. Regarding her encouragement of staff to take initiatives and share best teaching practices with each other, she said in one of her talks to the staff, "I love listening to, I have tried this and it worked."

Denis, on the other hand, was a relationship-oriented servant-leader. He showed this through his interactions with the school chaplain. He demonstrated his high regard for relationships by respecting the chaplain's reservations about the suggestion put forth by a teacher that once in a month, students line the hallways holding hands in prayer in a symbolic community circle. According to Denis, he had the right to dictate what should be done, but as a servant-leader, he needed to respect the

chaplain's opinions to increase trust and good relationships between them. He felt that he had to persuade the chaplain to give the suggestion a trial. His frequent visits to the classrooms, and the response of both teachers and students to his words of encouragement were indications of the good relationships that existed between principal and the members of his school. We recall a parent's comment to Denis that she believed it was because of his good relationship with her son that had served as the genesis of great improvement in his academic work. Denis' own words and actions signify his love and belief in relationships. Denis occasionally bought lunch for his staff so that they could be together thereby, solidifying their relationships with one another.

Reflecting on experiences through the observation period, we conclude that despite differences in personality, the greatest demand of servant-leadership on school principals is service, care, and humility. Without these qualities, servant-leadership remains only a theory with no practical utility. These qualities help bring out the best in the servant-leader and his/her community, and legitimize the reason for leadership.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

After two weeks of observing Angela, we showed her a copy of a conceptual framework, depicting the ten servant-leadership characteristics and dimensions. Angela took a careful look at the conceptual framework, as if trying to memorize the servant-leadership characteristics. She asked for an explanation of the framework. After the explanation, we observed to her that she had exhibited many of these same characteristics and dimensions over period of our "shadowing" her. Angela looked with surprise, and exclaimed, *So you mean I exhibited all these characteristics? If I exhibit all these characteristics and dimensions in St. Jerome, then that is encouraging! I must be doing something good in this school.* Angela seemed to live out, on a day-to-day basis, the Biblical story of the last judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 where the people that showed kindness to their neighbours were not even aware of their good acts. This experience with Angela concurs with Spears' (2004) belief that the ten qualities of servant-leadership occur naturally within servant-leaders but can still be further developed and improved through learning and practice. We would now like to review and expound these characteristics of servant leadership to frame our understanding of the notion. Spears considered each of these to be essential in day-to-day practice.

Listening

Greenleaf's (1991) essay described the necessity of listening for understanding (Spears, 1998). The traditional heroic picture of leaders is that they possess the most important information and knowledge without need for listening to others (Murphy, 2000). Whatever a leader's level of scholarship, to discover, clarify, or refine his/her calling, he/she needs to start by listening (Spears, 1998). Spears defined listening as the ability "… to listen receptively to what is being said (and not said) … coupled

with regular periods of reflection" (p. 4). Good listening involves an active effort to comprehend the world from another's perspective (Covey, 1989). A true natural servant automatically responds to any problem by listening first (Greenleaf, 1977). Greenleaf reminded leaders that listening is not simply hearing with the ability to repeat, but to seek for meaning through verbal and nonverbal communication and observation skills. Listening is a critical way by which leaders demonstrate respect and appreciation for followers (Nix, 1997).

True listening builds strength in other people, and is about *doing* (learning listening skills) and *being* – bringing one's full presence to the encounter (Frick, 2004). According to Spears (2004), "leaders have traditionally been valued for their communication and decision-making skills" (p. 13) which are indispensable for the servant-leader, and need to be reinforced by a deep commitment to listening intently to others. Roethlisberger (1941/2005) confirmed the power inherent in listening. He said that often, "… people did not really want anything done about the things of which they were complaining. What they want was an opportunity to talk about their troubles to a sympathetic listener" (p. 163).

Sympathetic listening is an attitude "… rooted in a genuine interest in the viewpoints and perspectives of those served" (Spears, 2002, p. 229). According to Greenleaf (1977), it can be cultivated if the servant-leader is guided by St. Francis' serenity prayer (as cited in Dollen, 1990): "O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek … to be understood as to understand" (p. 60). In fact, Baggett (1997) pointed out that, "Great communicators are great listeners" (p. 111). A strong commitment to nonjudgmental listening is as crucial as the ability to speak persuasively and effectively. Greenleaf wrote that, "Long ago, I discovered that the depth to which someone will share what is going on in their lives, personal or professional, indicated the degree of trust they have in the listener" (p. 96). For Greenleaf, listening receptively to employees builds a high level of trust and autonomy within an organization.

According to Cashman (1999), for servant-leaders to be effective listeners to others, they need to practice listening to themselves in order to properly and authentically listen to others. Authentic listening requires listening only not to the words but also to the emotions, fears, and underlying concerns of oneself and of others. A servant-leader will authentically listen to others through a variety of communication skills that may include dialogue, coaching, reflective thinking, and/or enquiry (Greenleaf, 1991). To solve problems, and diagnose issues, a true servant-leader will first listen. According to Sofield and Kuhn (1995), "listening gives the leader access to people and their needs, hopes, weaknesses, and strengths. It reveals the state of the community" (p. 37). Listening benefits followers and when combined with regular periods of reflection also leads to the growth of the servant-leader (Spears, 2004).

Empathy

Spears (2004) pointed out that empathy is "… the capacity for participation in another's feelings or ideas" (p. 137), and to accept and recognize people for their special and unique spirits. Empathy does not imply agreement, but the ability to understand

the other person (Fryar, 2001). Like listening, the ability to empathize builds trust among followers (Greenleaf, 1991) and requires receptive listening. An empathetic leader attracts people to him/her because people do not care about how much the leader knows until they know how much he/she cares (Maxwell, 1993). Studies have confirmed that when people believe that their leaders understand their concerns, they do their best to execute decisions, even those they disagree with, as "… grumbling and resistance tend to fade away" (Fryar, p. 57). Individuals naturally have personal problems and appreciate the leader who empathizes with their situation. For Sullivan (2004), "the servant-leader … accepts people as they are and empathizes with them" (p. 72), however, he/she rejects substandard efforts, while being tolerant of mistakes and less-than-perfect performance.

Sullivan's (2004) explanation of the notion of servant-leadership does not imply a *laisser-faire* leadership style that over-empathizes with followers. According to Blanchard (1998), servant-leaders hold followers responsible for their actions while viewing mistakes as opportunities for growth and a departure from the status quo that unravels the talents individuals have for the good of the community. A good test of servant-leadership is the ability to tolerate the imperfections of followers, since anyone can lead perfect people (Greenleaf, 1995). Fryar (2001) agreed and argued further that the servant-leader with an empathetic spirit has a heightened awareness of the need for constituents to grow and mature gradually, and this leads to providing them with better service. In the Gospel of John 8:1-11, the adulterous woman was not condemned but was given the opportunity to do better. Schools are organizations of people with emotions that cannot be overlooked (Sharpe, 1995), so that staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders need to be related to as people, and empathized with.

Healing

Spears (2004) considered healing as one of the strengths of the servant-leader, because "many people have broken spirits and have suffered from a variety of emotional hurts. Although this is a part of being human, servant-leaders recognize that they have an opportunity to 'help make whole' those with whom they come in contact" (p. 13). Greenleaf (1991) explained that in life, people are constantly searching to make their lives more complete, more "whole." Although wholeness cannot be achieved completely, a servant-leader strives to achieve wholeness with those he/she serves. Leaders with healing qualities can tolerate and help followers in the journey of growth towards perfection. St. Benedict advising abbots about judgment of their followers, counseled that when they "… must pass judgment on a situation … , the healing balm of compassion should be applied with hope that mercy will bring about its medicinal and salutary effect" (as cited in Polan, 2004, p. 93).

Sturnick (1998) observed that "… healing insight helps us to confront issues – exacerbated by personal and institutional transitions – of obsessive perfectionism and abhorrence of failure" (p. 191). Where students are still young and in their formative years, a principal's healing qualities are crucial in helping them through imperfections and failures.

Healing entails allowing followers to vent their frustrations and disappointments, especially, during resolution processes (Covey, 2002). According to Spears (1995), such processes employed in times of problem solving require the servant-leader's use of "grief work," that means working through the resentment and fear process with people. Parents, students, and staff occasionally face disappointing moments and conflicts that need careful resolution so as to keep their morale high. The way a leader resolves conflicts and minimizes stress enhances a community's ability to trust and build teamwork (Harvey & Drolet, 1994). Seeking to understand followers without prejudgment is an important means of conflict resolution.

Bolman and Deal (2001) maintained that healing the soul is important if we are to arrive at the inner peace we aspire for. They argued that:

> What's really missing is souls and spirit. Some people experience this gap as a haunting sense that somewhere along the line they got off track. They're working harder than ever, but they're not sure why, and they've lost touch with what's really important in life. For others, life feels like a forced march. They can never get off the treadmill, even though they don't know where they're going. … All these experiences are clues, symptoms of spiritual malaise – a hollow, existential vacuum that can be filled only by a greater attention to souls, spirit, and faith. (pp. 5–6)

In order to cure the spiritual malaise of followers, the servant-leader who has developed an admirable appreciation for the emotional spirit of others has a role when something traumatic happens in the life of constituents (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2007). Such a leader helps the healing process, and is approached in the event of emotional crisis.

Awareness

Greenleaf (1991) defined awareness as "… opening wide the doors of perception to enable one get more of what is available of sensory experience and other signals from the environment than people usually take in" (p. 18). Awareness allows a leader to obtain an intuitive insight into the future of constituents. Freud's (1965) image of consciousness as an iceberg where nine-tenths of what we know lies below the waterline in the realm of the subconscious had a special appeal for Greenleaf (1977) who claimed that, we need to bring our hidden valuable resources above the waterline into conscious awareness so they can be useful. According to Frick (2004), "heightened awareness is not the same as intuition but is important for the intuitive leap" (p. 145) that directs the servant-leader to gain the confidence of his/her followers. General awareness and especially self awareness strengthen the servant-leader, and serve as assets in understanding of issues that involve ethics and values, and provide a more integrated, holistic approach to most situations (Spears, 2004). Awareness is not devoid of difficult challenges. Greenleaf (1995) observed:

> Awareness is not a giver of solace – it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed. They are not seekers after solace. They have their own inner serenity. (p. 20)

According to Greenleaf, awareness helps the leader to acknowledge challenges and problems and to seek possible solutions through a sympathetic disposition that makes followers feel valued.

Within the school context, the most important role of a servant-leader is to serve the values and ideals that will shape a school community, because of a deep awareness of the students' and community needs. Leaders may observe their surroundings but miss opportunities by not looking deeply or widely enough to perceive the situation as a whole. They may troubleshoot problems, but fail in their complete resolution because of inadequate investigation. However, those with too broad a perception may have difficulty managing a situation, especially when they need to view themselves as part of it (Greenleaf, 1991). Awareness builds and clarifies value because it equips the leader to face the hassle of life with calmness when faced with stress and uncertainty (Greenleaf, 1995). In short, awareness creates a spirit of persuasion in the servant-leader, without use of coercion in administration.

Persuasion

Spears and Lawrence (2004) pointed out that by persuasion, "… the servant-leader seeks to convince others rather than to coerce compliance" (p. 14). Greenleaf (1991) used the term *persuasion* to differentiate leadership that relies on positional authority and coercion from leadership that operates through influence, example, and moral power. He believed that, "leadership by persuasion has the virtue of change by convincement rather than coercion" (p. 22). Greenleaf (1980) identified three modes of wielding power: coercion, manipulation, and persuasion. The first two of these are means to lead people to a predetermined direction. In contrast, the third is:

> The critical skill of servant-leadership. Such a leader is one who ventures and takes the risks of going out ahead to show the way and whom others follow, voluntarily, because they are persuaded that the leader's path is the right one – for them, probably better than they could devise for themselves. (p. 44)

Persuasion unites people, creates opportunities for followers (Spears, 1995), and fosters development of mature consciences (*Congregation*, 1988). Servant-leaders lead by example and not by controlling others. They share their wisdom and seek to encourage understanding because persuasion is ethical use of power (Lopez, 1995). Servant-leaders use consensus building within groups and eschew coercion which is only effective as long as the power behind it lasts (Crom, 1998).

Steers and Black (1994) noted, "transformational or charismatic leaders inspire their followers to pursue the leader's clear vision for the company" (p. 420). Persuasion is a wise use of power as it can build autonomy and influence others by promoting credibility and building trust. Murrow (as cited in Kouzes & Posner, 1987) said, "to be persuasive we must be believable: to be believable we must be credible; to be credible, we must be truthful" (p. 15).

Conceptualization

Spears (1998) explained conceptualization as the capacity to dream great dreams, and to look at a problem (or organization) by conceptualizing it. This requires thinking further than day-to-day realities. This implies that the servant-leader, while living in the present must be able to distill and learn from past mistakes and also be capable of leading his/her followers on the right path (Greenleaf, 1995).

Greenleaf (1980) cited teachers as excellent examples of servant-leaders since they are great believers in the ability to conceptualize, and believe that what they teach affects their students' future success. He saw teachers as constantly serving the needs of students and giving hope to those without hope, so that they might work to make the world a better place.

Foresight

Foresight is the ability to look into the future, and is closely related to conceptualization (Greenleaf, 1991). Bolman and Deal's (1995) dramatic description of foresight is: "Without roots, plants perish. Without history, the present makes no sense, without a historical base a vision is rootless and doomed" (p. 145). Foresight permits the servant-leader to comprehend the lessons of the past, the realities of the present and the probable consequences of a decision (Spears & Lawrence, 2004). For Greenleaf (2002), "foresight is the 'lead' that the leader has. Once leaders lose this lead and events start to force their hand, they are leaders in name only" (p. 54). When leaders fail to foresee the future for the people and the organization, they 'seal our fate' as a society. In fact, change is only possible through foresight.

When misunderstanding exists regarding change, the leader with foresight must remember that painless change is an oxymoron (Reeves, 2002). Reeves pointed out that, "effective leaders know that their task is not to render a difficult task simple, but rather to render successful accomplishment of a difficult task more rewarding than avoidance." Foresight deserves careful consideration in the life of the leader as leaders need vision in order to keep their organizations on course.

Stewardship

Block (1993) defined stewardship as "… the willingness to be accountable for the well-being of the larger organization by operating in service, rather than in control of those around us. Stated simply, it is accountability without control or compliance" (p. 6). This implies choosing service to our customers, our work colleagues, our community, and the world at large, as well as broad vision of the world and of our responsibility to make it a better place for all.

As the reader will recall, Greenleaf (1977) posed the following questions: "Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants" (p. 13)? For Spears (1998), stewardship "… assumed first and foremost a commitment to serving the

needs of others. [Stewardship] also emphasizes the use of openness and persuasion rather than control" (p. 5). Block (1993) advocated for a paradigm shift in leadership toward stewardship based on service. Stewardship of this kind involves honesty and accountability; it is not an entitlement (DePree, 1997). Degraaf, Tilley, and Neal (2004) argued that in today's world, stewardship is often associated with environmental or financial responsibility, but it can be much more if we are willing to be accountable for something larger than just ourselves.

Leaders and followers are generally stewards or agents of the organizations they lead and are thus required to use their unique talents, skills, abilities, and gifts for the general good (Gaston, 1987). Greenleaf (1977) suggested that for servant-leaders to be effective, they need to look within themselves and effect changes that make them more effective. Stewardship means the growth and development of followers and also of the leader (Blanchard, 2002) as an asset to community building.

Building Community

Mcmanus' (2006) observations on community building are excellent for Catholic high school principals who derive their values of leadership largely from religious beliefs. Mcmanus observed, "when we belong to God, we belong to each other. … without genuine belonging, without the power of authentic community, no one should believe that we have come to know God" (p. 16). According to Autry (2001), human beings have an innate desire to make their workplaces habitable for the human spirit, thereby making work itself meaningful in people's lives. For Bolman and Deal (1995), "effective leadership is a relationship rooted in community. Successful servant-leaders embody their group's most precious values and beliefs. Their ability to lead emerges from the strength and sustenance of those around them" (p. 56).

In building community, a servant-leader accepts and recognizes the uniqueness of the spirit, assumes good intentions, but does not condone inappropriate behaviours and/or mediocre performance (Spears, 2002). Bolman and Deal (2001) pointed out that leadership is a relationship rooted in community due to the leader's embodiment of the group's most precious values and beliefs. Hence, the servant-leader creates opportunities and alternatives from which constituents may choose and thus build up their autonomy for success (Greenleaf, 1977).

Success in leadership is similar to success in life and may be measured by how well people work and play together (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Working and playing together fills in for much that has been lost in recent human history because of the shift from local communities to large institutions as primary shaper of human lives (Spears, 2004). According to Spears, "this awareness causes the servant-leader to seek to identify some means for building community among those who work within a given institution" (p.16). In this way, a sense of community and team spirit is created which builds and maintains the social support we need to flourish as communities (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). To this end, a servant-leader believes that a community is greater than the sum of its individual parts (Covey, 2004). Greenleaf advised,

"… to build a community, genuine care must be exercised because human service that requires love cannot be satisfactorily dispensed by specialized institutions that exist apart from community" (p. 38). With regard to schools, Sergiovanni (1994) stated, "community building must become the heart of any school improvement effort" (p. xi). The building of community in Catholic schools as an essential role of their participation in the community life of the Church was stressed by the Vatican II document *Gravissimum educationis* (1965) in which Catholic schools are viewed not merely as institutions but as essentially communities of people.

Any conflict during building a community must be considered to be healthy and be welcomed. When conflict arises, leaders have to learn to thrive on the tensions between their own calling and the voice of the people, because conflict situations are critical moments where leaders can learn to practice empathy (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Even during conflict, the servant-leader is to foster mutual respect and build a team where strength is made productive and weakness made irrelevant (Covey, 1991). Greenleaf (1977) taught that what is needed to build community is for enough servant-leaders to show the way.

Commitment to the Growth of People

Spears (2004) argued, "servant-leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As a result, the servant-leader is deeply committed to the growth of each and every individual within the institution" (p. 15). However, according to Autry (2001), "regardless of structure, of environment, or of leadership style, our organizations remain fundamentally human organizations, which means they will reflect both the strengths and the frailties of the human condition" (p. 100). Similarly, for Covey (1991), "to affirm a person's worth or potential, you have to look at him with an eye of faith and treat him in terms of his potential, not his behaviour" (p. 59). For Covey, believing in the unseen potential creates a climate for growth and opportunity, which depends on the servant-leader's ability, emotional, psychological, and spiritual stamina to face the perplexing challenges of the human condition.

Spears (1998) counseled that, despite the weaknesses of followers, servant-leaders "… hold the vision of other people's goodness for them until they discover it. This should sound familiar. We always knew that great teachers were those who saw more in us than we saw in our young selves" (p. 357). The secret to building people, Greenleaf (1995) maintained, is "… to be able to weld a team of such people by lifting them up to grow taller than they would otherwise be" (p. 21). Bethel (1995) believed followers are encouraged by:

> The pleasure of an honest compliment, the excitement of taking a risk, the feelings of self-fulfillment, self esteem, and true team spirit, the electrifying sense of being part of something greater than themselves. Most of all, they want someone to be aware of what they are accomplishing, to really notice and really care. (p. 145)

The soul needs affiliation and connection with others that cannot be met by monetary benefits, but can be met by acknowledgement (Levin & Regime, 2000). While they may need encouragement, people appreciate positive affirmation, appreciation, acknowledgment, and praise that recognizes them for who they are and what they do (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

An important task for a dedicated educator is to bring hope and a future to children. Greenleaf (1977) challenged others to "... raise the spirit of young people, help them build their confidence that they can successfully contend with the condition, work with them to find the direction they need to go and the competencies they need to acquire, and send them on their way" (p. 172). He added that everyone working with youth, people in the community, or employees, "... add something that is voluntary, something that raises the human spirit. Try it and see if you are not rewarded. See if the urge to venture further does not overtake you" (p. 172).

Our next section, and its two chapters, provides several conceptual frameworks to make some synthetic sense of the many descriptive dimensions, qualities and insights that mark the Catholic high school principal who ministers as a servant leader.