

Servant Leadership in Higher Education

The purpose of this presentation is to orient the audience to the tenets of servant leadership and provide examples of how servant leadership can be applied in higher education. Robert Greenleaf (1970) first coined the term “servant leader” as a way of defining a leadership style that puts the emphasis on service. Although many people have developed lists of characteristics of servant-leaders, at their core, individuals with a servant leadership mindset are drawn to serve. This mindset aligns well with the expectation of faculty members and department chairs. We are regularly asked to serve - on committees, as advisors, as mentors - and servant leadership is a natural fit in higher education.

In the traditional leadership paradigm, the leader is seen as the top of the pyramid, with all those under this individual serving the leader. Servant leadership turns the pyramid upside down and the leader becomes the person who provides support, empathy, guidance, and resources to the members of the team.

As Keith (2008) summarizes, there are several key aspects of servant leadership, including self-awareness, listening, changing the pyramid, developing colleagues, coaching instead of controlling, unleashing the energy and intelligence of others, and using foresight. In this presentation, I will explore these aspects and highlight how these can be applied to the role of the department chair. I will also address the challenges of servant leadership in academia and ask individuals in attendance to share their concerns.

Individuals in attendance will be provided a list of self assessments they can complete to learn more about their emotional intelligence, of which self awareness is an essential component. A role playing exercise will allow the audience members to practice balancing the aspect of unleashing the energy and intelligence of others with the resource limitations all department chairs face. Individuals will be asked to provide examples of situations in which they were able to use the aspects of servant leadership effectively.

Greenleaf, R. K. (1970). *The servant as leader*. Westfield, IN: Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership.

Keith, K. M. (2008). *The case for servant leadership*. Westfield, IN: Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership.