

3 Elusive Insights OF More Effective Servant Leadership

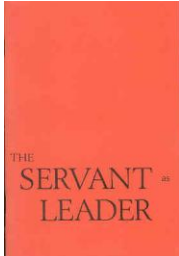
Learned from
Robert K. Greenleaf

Keynote for 2010 Greenleaf Conference given by Ann McGee-Cooper, Ed.D
Atlanta, June 2010

History of Connection with Greenleaf

Robert K. Greenleaf transformed my life through his writings, his mentoring and role model and I'm please to have this opportunity to share the profound impact of this amazing thought-leader.

My story begins in Dallas in 1976. I was a keynote speaker at a national conference for lay religious educators, teaching ways to communicate learning through all the senses and primarily by making learning fun and relevant to what



kids cared about. Jack Lowe Sr. heard that presentation and invited me to come meet with him. In that meeting he gave me a copy of Robert Greenleaf's essay, *The Servant as Leader*, and asked if I

would have interest in reading it and then meeting again.

In the second meeting, after learning that I found Greenleaf's work of great interest and very aligned with the educational theories I had found so successful with

students of every background, he invited me to come help design a new way to teach servant leadership to every Employee at TDIindustries. The challenge was that servant leadership is a



philosophy rich with abstract, intangible concepts, yet Employees ranged from craft workers, plumbers, electricians, accountants, engineers, project managers...very practical construction workers, who respond best



to tangible, concrete learning styles. This began a 34 year partnership with TDIndustries and a wonderful opportunity to be mentored by both Jack Lowe, Sr. and Robert K. Greenleaf. Jack Lowe Sr. was a natural servant leader who practiced the gift of deep listening and being fully present. He earned a high level of trust with all those who knew him. Jack Lowe, Jr, who became CEO in 1980 at the death of his father, was also deeply committed to servant leadership and became a close friend and mentor as did so many of the Partners who are TDIndustries.



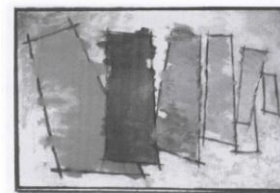
Not long after beginning this collaborative teaching design project, AT&T contacted our consulting team, Ann McGee-Cooper & Associates, and invited us to design a leadership development process for one of their business units. As part of this work I was invited to interview Bob Greenleaf to get some of his leading ideas on tape and in video. Thus began several trips with Diane Cory and Fred Myers, (both with AT&T at the time) to Crosslands, a Quaker retirement village where Greenleaf was living, to learn as much as possible from this visionary thinker. In addition to broad philosophical conversations, I was specifically seeking his help designing and improving both the leadership development at TDIndustries and at AT&T. Without question Bob inspired, challenged and transformed our ways of seeing and being. Just being in his presence brought a very different sense of self and the endless possibilities of what could be.

Personal Greenleaf Story—Genius

My first opportunity to meet with Bob was over breakfast. Bob brought his wife, Esther, to the table in a wheelchair. They were both mentally very sharp and the conversation included much of what each had read the right before. Both were avid



readers, fascinated by world events, history, biographies, novels, politics, philosophy, poetry and so much more. Esther was a very gifted visual artist and had a showing of some of her most recent work in the exhibit hall. I was stunned to discover the depth of her talent. What also struck me was the intensity of their love and connection. Even though I was there



with Diane Cory and Fred Myers (known inside AT&T as the monk and the mystic), and we were graciously welcomed to the conversation, there was clearly an exciting flow of dialogue as they

shared from their reading the evening before. These were not elderly people living in the past. Both of them were fascinated by what was evolving globally and nationally, how our leaders were responding and other creative perspectives perhaps not being considered.

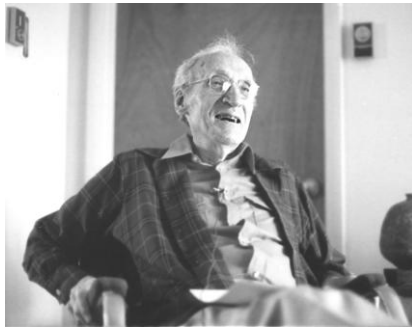
Looking back, I now realize that Bob planted many fertile seeds in the foundation of my thinking. The word, “EXTRAordinary” has flooded my consciousness for many years and

only in doing this research did I recognize the origin.

“It is important that the quality of your life be extraordinary and that you carry this quality into the work of the world.”

—RKG

Bob gave me the gift of learning to discover many paradoxes and expanded my way of seeing and being into a deeper way of understanding myself and life. He helped me discover the creative tension of “both/and” rather than the tyranny of “either/or”.



And he planted a seed about thinking of my life work as the opportunity to make meaningful contributions and to leave a legacy rather than a necessary but regrettable drudgery. He viewed one’s work as an opportunity to invest one’s unique gifts in the service of a cause that mattered. He didn’t see work as purely a means to an end, a way to earn a livelihood. He talked about how we define ourselves by what we choose to do and how we do our work. He saw service and making a meaningful contribution as an important dimension of what makes life purposeful and joyful. He did not divide life into segments, such as work and play, good and bad, practical and sacred. Rather, he saw the interconnectedness of all things and ways of being. He helped me discover the connection between my own genius and my shadow self. Too much of one elicits the other. Perhaps this is why we need the richness, strength and possibility of belonging to a diverse community, one that can fill in one’s personal gaps and hold up a mirror which both affirms one’s gifts and also helps identify gaps and blind spots. We

need those most unlike us to compliment and balance our perspective and bias.

Over the next 30 years, I considered the many gems of wisdom that Bob taught me and incorporated them into three areas of our own research in servant leadership:

1. Knowing who you are and owning your gifts as a responsibility to serve others—**Awakening Genius within Self and Others.**
2. **Time** – Greenleaf taught me about the other dimension of time - polychronic, and how learning to enrich monochronic

“The Work exists for the person as much as the person exists for the work.”

—RKG

time with the relativity that Einstein defined, opens a spirit of FLOW and extraordinary creativity.

3. **Energy** – taking ownership for maintaining a contagious, encouraging energy for life and work. You can’t and won’t be a servant leader when in burnout. Instead, in spite of all good intentions you will be a poor listener, judgmental, impatient and controlling, all the antithesis of what it means to grow those around you through authentic generative listening and inspirational modeling of self actualization.

We have found these to be three profound paradigm shifts that expand the depth of our own servant leadership.

Before each of these visits I remember preparing pages of questions to make sure I used this precious learning opportunity fruitfully. Fred

was taping our interviews. On one visit, after peppering Bob with questions and making hurried notes, Bob shifted gears, stood up, took my hand and walked me out to a garden adjoining his apartment area. There was a



wooden bench where he motioned me to join him. We sat there in silence, soaking in the warmth of the sun for what seemed like a very long time. I was antsy to learn as much as

I could yet I sensed that he had had enough of my intense questioning. In a very peaceful cadence Bob began. “Ann, I am a Quaker and have learned a good deal that I value from this journey of faith. Quakers value silence and use it fruitfully to deepen reflection and discovery. May I share two wisdoms I have learned from Quaker meetings. The first is,

Don’t speak unless you can improve upon the silence.

(This stunned me. I had never thought of silence as anything except a time to jump in and talk.) The second, he noted was something like this.

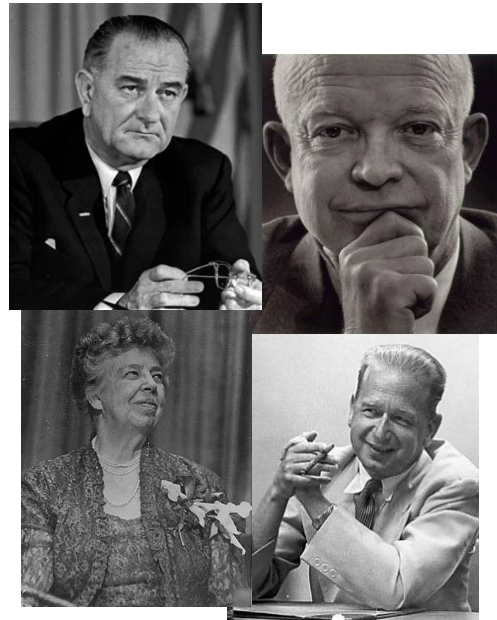
“When Spirit moves within you, you have a responsibility to give it voice.”

These were not his exact words but this was the meaning I took from that dialogue with Bob. I think of them as “bookends” to deepen dialogue. By practicing this shift in conversation, the dialogue can move from safe, inconsequential topics to the heart of the matter and then bear fruit in amazing ways.

Don Frick, who spent a decade researching his brilliantly written biography, Robert K. Greenleaf: A Life of Servant Leadership, told me he felt certain that Esther had a huge

influence on Bob’s thinking. Don learned that Esther read extensively and served as a key learning partner with Bob. We can’t know just how much of his work was due to her influence but we can know, from his attribution that Esther was a brilliant and primary source of insight and a safe yet provocative sounding board for Bob.

Bob invested in meaningful correspondence with U.S. presidents, world political leaders and thought leaders in many fields including politics,



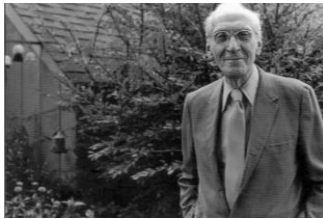
theology, research, philosophy, philanthropy, governance, literature and others. Cleo Craig, when president of AT&T, once introduced Bob as AT&T’s “kept revolutionary”. Indeed Bob preferred to work behind the scenes to influence and grow the thinking of those in top leadership positions. He did indeed lead through persuasion, deep listening and active dialogue.

I remember him as asking fascinating, open-ended questions. I wanted answers yet he was a master at challenging me to focus back within my own experience and insights. I wanted him to tell me how to design a curriculum to bring the essence of servant leadership to every Employee I touched, whether they were a C-level executive or an apprentice plumber. He



would ask about the work I had done awakening deep enthusiasm to learn within youngsters

other had given up on as unsuccessful learners. Then he said, “Trust your intuition. Helping others discover the essence of servant leadership is an intrinsic journey. You will know what to do.” He was a master at helping me ask questions I had not considered and keeping ownership for the work with me. He gave me confidence in my ability to “create dangerously.” [NOTE: This term came from the last public lecture given by Albert Camus and is a paradox that energized Greenleaf.]



Awakening Genius in Self and Others

I have been fascinated by the concept of genius since I was 15. What makes some people manifest extraordinary genius and others live more ordinary lives? Greenleaf seemed to personify all the themes and patterns of genius I had identified in the five decades I’ve tracked and searched out these trends. He seemed very comfortable in his own skin, a very humble person yet eager to challenge assumptions and search for unintended consequences. He was well ahead of his time in many areas, such as systems thinking (made famous by Peter Senge’s book, *The Fifth Discipline* in 1990) and tuning into sustainability and the challenge of our present life style and business assumptions



overshooting the carrying capacity of the planet. Greenleaf was a neighbor and friend of Peter Drucker and also knew Peter Senge. He reached out with letters frequently to interact with



thought leaders in many fields of inquiry. And he easily found connections and intersections of discovery. For example, he realized that a business is like an ecosystem where you can’t cheat another without violating your own ethics, your peers and Employees, your Customers and family. He noted that the failure of foresight (seeing things whole) and looking well out ahead, was an ethical failure. He realized that we are all connected for better and for worse. In the second portion of the Test for Servant Leadership, he asks, “And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will s/he benefit, or , at least, will s/he not be further deprived?” Greenleaf knew intuitively that there is no away. We can’t throw waste and toxic garbage away.



Neither can we throw people away. When we ignore the least among us and choose not to care about their state of being, our neglect invites violence, wars and ugly outcomes such as famine, disease and rebellion. These events are not “out there”. As Greenleaf reminds us,

“the true servant views any problem in the world as in here, inside oneself, not out there. And if a flaw in the world is to be remedied, to the servant the process of change starts in here, in the servant, not out there.”



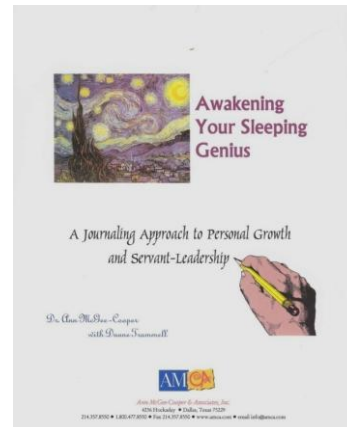
SEEKING MUTUAL GOALS & WHAT BRINGS US TOGETHER RATHER THAN WHAT DIVIDES US

One memory so typical of Bob Greenleaf was the twinkle in his eye and insightful way of leading me to challenge long held assumptions. One summer close to the Fourth of July, I arrived with conversations of red, white and blue patriotism, as a greeting and way of connecting. Bob thought for a while and then said, “Ann, I’ve never been a very patriotic person.” I was stunned! What could he mean? Then he noted that when the astronauts first went out in space and brought back photographs of our planet, which they named, the blue pearl, it struck him that there were no lines between countries. He said when he was a lad his father had made this point even before that



famous photograph. Patriotism, well meaning as it might be, works to divide people into “us” versus “them” when in truth we are one species in a very diverse ecosystem. Our very survival is dependent on our honoring strength through difference. Bob said he had seen many good people get misdirected by the paradigm of “we are Americans” fighting the Germans, Japanese, Russians, whoever. His belief was that an even greater challenge was for us to find our mutual goals and work to achieve those rather than celebrating events that tend to divide our understanding of our mutual interdependence. He had a knack of surprising me with fresh ways of seeing the world and my opportunities within it.

Greenleaf would mirror my special gifts when I would feel overwhelmed and like I was sitting at the feet of the master awaiting “the answer”. He



would begin to reflect back what he saw in me and had learned from listening to me and helped me see the foundation of my thoughts, teaching strategies and lessons learned.

He gave me the courage to trust my intuition and surrender to a sense of possibility. He noted that rational thought, though highly valued in our business world, lags significantly behind intuition. So have the courage to stay tuned into your intuition, he would tell me. We captured this trait in the Journal we created on Awakening Your Sleeping Genius, A journaling Approach to Servant Leadership, by tracking many of the characteristics of Bob Greenleaf’s life and those he identified as also living into their genius. People such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Jawaharlal Nehru, Dag Hammarskjold, Edward Kennedy and John D. Rockefeller.



LEARNING TO SEE THINGS WHOLE was a theme for Bob that he first learned from his father who was a gifted mechanic, perhaps an intuitive engineer at heart. Bob told me about going with his father many times when he was called in to solve major problems such as a new, expensive steam engine which no one could get to work. Bob said his father stepped back and studied the big picture. Then said, “Unless somebody has invented an engine the likes of which I have never seen, this is the first steam engine I ever saw that had a bigger intake than it had exhaust.” The engine had been installed in reverse to its design!

Learning to see things whole is the foundation of what it means to be a servant-leader. One of the most difficult challenges is to track problems back to your own role in them. What am I doing or not doing to contribute to what I don’t want? Bringing positive transformation by first changing within is key to being a servant-leader. Blame is replaced by curiosity and personal accountability.

NEW DIMENSIONS OF TIME

“The ability to withdraw and reorient oneself, if only for a moment, presumes that one has learned the art of systematic neglect, to sort out the more important from the less important-and the important from the urgent-and attend to the more important, even though there may be penalties and censure for the neglect of something else.”

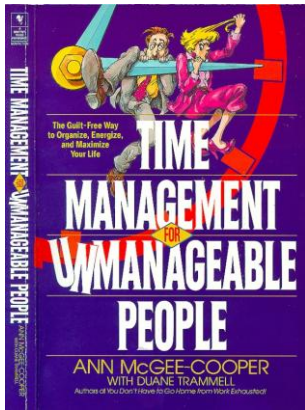
—Robert K. Greenleaf

Bob is known to have not chosen air travel. It wasn’t that he was afraid to fly. Rather he valued quiet time to ponder, reflect and meditate. So taking the train was his choice of travel and he did a great deal of travel. He also followed his own wisdom by “knowing his gifts and focusing his work in the areas he believed he could bring the greatest impact.” When invited to work extensively in India, Bob chose to leave that to those native to India. He believed he had work yet to be done in America.



Slowing down to go faster was a defining trait of Bob Greenleaf. He would slow down conversations and encourage deeper dialogue. I was primarily monochronic when I first met Bob. Monochronic means to measure the quality of time by one measure, the clock. Am I on time? Am I prompt, efficient, brief, quick to act? Time is money. Do I make the best use of time in terms of efficiency? Yet Bob marched to a different drummer. When I studied the work of sociologists Edward T. & Mildred Reed Hall, (both Ph.D’s) I learned the term polychronic, which best describes how Bob related to time. This means that the use of time is decided by many relative factors simultaneously. When you think of growing trust, this process is polychronic. When you think of how long it takes to boil an egg or make a widget on an assembly line, this process is monochronic. When Bob lead a paradigm shift in thinking about the role of a leader, he differentiated between management of things and leading people. He acknowledged that both sets of skills were important. But learning to

listen deeply, inspire, persuade and grow those around you to aspire to higher collective goals is a polychronic process which requires primarily the integration of both right and left hemispheres of the brain. After working with Bob, we created a fun book with gifted kids and then transformed it into a business resource called, *Time Management for Unmanageable People*.



We realized that traditional time management was created by the left brain for the left brain. If your brain dominance was more to the left then getting organized was easy. However, half the population got left behind,

feeling guilty and discouraged because they couldn't make these monochronic systems work for them, so we expanded ways to organize and manage time to include polychronic, right brained approaches. (See www.amca.com) Bob realized that the singular focus on speed and efficiency was leading to very reactive leadership. Meanwhile he worked to awaken an appreciation for slowing down to communicate the big picture to each Employee involved in the value chain so each person could participate in generating creative solutions and enjoy the satisfaction of being part of successful initiatives.



Servant Leaders Bring Contagious Energy to Their Work and Relationships

Bob loved his work and his life. He had wide interests and participated in research, the arts, science and the transformation of business paradigms at a time of major change in our world. Esther's art caught Bob's fancy and he began to enjoy painting and working in creative media. He read widely and served as a ghost writer for several top leaders in AT&T. As an introvert he used the art of withdrawal and meditation as a major source of renewal. He also had a great wit and knew how to keep work fun. I love a photo of Bob roller skating in Central Park in what seems to be a moment of enjoying the KidSpirit of early childhood.

Importance of Nurturing a Positive Sense of Humor:

Bob had a playful spirit and took time out for fun. He knew the importance of nurturing a positive sense of humor reflected in this quote by Bob,

"How can we grow to respond to the opportunities to remake the world unless we can have that quiet inward smile called humor when we regard the silly little half-made creatures that we are?"

He wrote his own epitaph which demonstrates both his deep respect for craft persons and also his playful spirit. It reads, "Potentially a good plumber ruined by a sophisticated education." As a researcher he knew that a person would be of no help if they were tired, overwhelmed and reactive. He had many personal practices to keep himself grounded including surrounding himself with a very special group of colleagues



and friends who were on the cutting edge in many fields of study.

Government, science, systems thinking, the arts, poetry, literature, history, philosophy all held great interest for him. I loved his “hole in the hedge” theory which



meant if a great opportunity popped up, dare to take it and run. You never know what might be around the next corner. He seemed to be a very intuitive guy who learned to trust his divergent sense of synchronicity. And his life was filled with lucky coincidences that we might now call learning to get in FLOW.



Energy Renewal: How Do You Nurture Your Spirit?

Realizing how important peak energy is for optimum creativity and servant leadership, I thought back to an important breakthrough in my own life. I had worked three years to complete my doctorate at Columbia University, Teacher’s College, while teaching full time at SMU. In June I flew to Columbia to defend my dissertation and completed that work with a standing ovation from my committee and other

faculty and graduate students who had come to listen. I was reporting on a Teacher Survival System designed by youngsters, college students and teachers in Dallas. The favorite part of the report was a very clever spoof on statistics created by a very bright 12 year old. It stole the show so to speak.

Well, here I was celebrating the completion of an impossible dream. I had earned my Ed.D. from a highly prestigious university and done it by commuting from Dallas to New York. I was enjoying a few hours window shopping as I



waiting for an evening flight home. And I came upon a small shop with children’s toys. There was a stuffed mouse in a pink flowered frock and pink bonnet who caught my eye. “How frivolous! Forget it!” I thought. Then, walking in just to check the price, it occurred to me that I had achieved an impossible dream. Why couldn’t I celebrate with a small fanciful stuffed mouse? \$7.95 later, purchasing “Missy Mouse” was a milestone in my life. This bold act (for me) opened a door to the unlimited energy we can unleash by giving ourselves permission to step back into childhood wishes and dreams. Now I often enjoy adding another whimsical doll or fascinating toy to my collection. As Margaret Mead told me when I asked how she

managed to enjoy such abundance of energy, “I suppose I never grew up while fooling most people into believing that I have.” Noticing and finding a way to claim childhood dream can generate amazing zest for life.



A Wish for a Teddy Bear....

On one visit, I had taken Bob and Esther two Amish, hand-made dolls. One was a little boy whom I gave to Esther. The other was a little girl I gave to Bob. Bob quietly explained that they lived a simple life by choice and didn't



collect things. But his grandchildren, who would be visiting, would enjoy the two dolls. Later that afternoon, Bob mused that there was one memory that triggered a longing. Since Esther now slept in the

full-care center and not at his side, he timidly wished for a teddy bear to cuddle as he once did as a boy. I was pleased to find one and send to him. This seemed connected to the sense of KidSpirit that I had found so prevalent within the lives of those I had studied as examples of genius and what I was finding in my own life.

So, How You Can Apply This to Be a Better Servant Leader?

- Your energy, like your attitude is contagious to others in the work environment.
- Burnout is very destruction and sabotages servant leadership.
- Questions to continually ask oneself: Are you fully present? Is your spirit glad?
- Are you passionate, vibrant, full of healthy energy?

Conclusion: Who is the Enemy of Goodness?

One of his most profound lessons for me comes from the concept he called, "Who is the enemy of goodness?" To my surprise he noted that it wasn't the evil, ignorant, biased or bigoted people so much as the "good" people who chose to sit quietly and say nothing, not wanting to get involved or risk sanction. When enough of us turn away, we make it easy for bad things to happen unchallenged. This has been the biggest challenge for me going forward. Every day I find I have opportunities to speak for those being taken advantage of, disrespected or ignored. By finding the courage to own my responsibility to see my own part in the huge, complex issues which confront us, I can indeed change the world. Daring to change myself begins a momentum that can bring unlimited possibilities.

A fitting end to this collection of memories and tribute to a profound mentor would be one of his best-known quotes. "Not much happens without a dream. And for something great to happen, there must be a great dream!" Robert's spirit is here with us at this 20th Greenleaf Conference, returning for the first time to Atlanta. Now it is our turn to be the change we want to see in the world. To look inside ourselves and not out to others. To grow and inspire those we serve to become servant leaders in their lives and work.

"The best test is do those served grow as persons...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?" Robert K. Greenleaf

Seminars and additional resources are available from Ann McGee-Cooper and Associates, Inc. 214 357-8550 or visit us at AMCA.com