

# Applying the HBDI® (Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument) to Servant Leadership

Ann McGee-Cooper and Duane Trammell

In the 25 years we have had our consulting practice, there are four areas of interest that have withstood the test of time with our Clients:

- (1) whole-brained thinking—discovering our preferred way of viewing the world, how that impacts our decision-making and ways to synergize with people of opposite strengths to significantly improve the collective intelligence and productivity of all;
- (2) life/work balance—developing strategies to renew personal energy to combat daily stressors;
- (3) whole-brained time management—understanding the opposite approaches to planning, prioritizing, scheduling, and executing our work and leisure hours; and
- (4) servant leadership—growing leaderful organizations and leading to make sure people’s highest priority needs are being served which includes personal growth and well-being.



Throughout the years, we have applied whole-brained thinking

technologies to personal energy management and time management to develop greater understanding and practical strategies for improvement. And now, we are beginning to see a profound relationship between whole-brained thinking and servant leadership.

## What is servant leadership?

Although the concept of servant leadership has been around for centuries and can be found in most ancient religious writings, we first encountered a business application of servant leadership in the writings of Robert K. Greenleaf. His original essay, *The Servant as Leader* outlines qualities of this type of leader as opposed to the non-servant. For a more complete understanding, there

## Applying the HBDI® to Servant Leadership

are multiple resources on the practice and principles of servant leadership noted in the bibliography that follows this article.

The easiest way to understand servant leadership is to look at the image that inspired Greenleaf to coin the term servant leadership, a character from Hermann Hesse's book, *The Journey to the East*.

Leo was a servant in a band of travelers on a pilgrimage. Leo did menial chores for the group...he carried the luggage, sang songs to keep spirits high, and enthusiastically embraced the goals of the journey. He also shared his thoughts with the masters...“The law of service. He who wishes to live long must serve.” At a point in the story, Leo disappears and the group of travelers disbands. Without Leo, the group can't seem to make it together. When a few finally arrive at the destination, to their surprise, they learn that Leo is actually the head of the League and held in the highest regard. All along, he was a leader who had the humility to serve and make sure other's needs were being met.

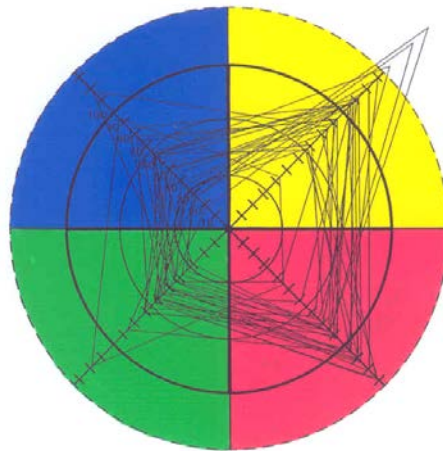
Greenleaf used this character to arrive at a simple definition of a servant-leader:

“The servant-leader *is* servant first—as Leo was portrayed. It begins with a natural feeling that

one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. <This person> is sharply different from the person who is *leader* first, perhaps because of the need to assuage unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. For such it will be a later choice to serve—after leadership is established. The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.”

Greenleaf goes on to offer the real test of whether one is a servant-leader or a non-servant:

“The best test, and difficult to administer is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous,



more likely themselves to become servants?” And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will <they> benefit, or, at least,

will <they> not be further deprived?”

In the later years of his life, I, Ann, had the opportunity to interview and be mentored by Robert Greenleaf, and servant leadership has had a profound effect upon our consulting work.

## How does the HBDI® and breakdown of the different quadrants relate to servant leadership?

Servant leadership does not fall into one specific quadrant, but instead is how you choose to use the abilities you are given in each quadrant.

It might be tempting to assume that since the C quadrant is the “people” quadrant, that C dominant people are natural servant leaders. And if you continued with that line of thinking, you would be hard-pressed to find an “A” quadrant dominant servant-leader because “all they care about is money,” profitability and productivity of the organization. But such is not the case. Servant-leaders can be found within any dominance, it just depends on the way we use the talents we possess in each quadrant. The over-arching question from Greenleaf's test is “do those served grow as persons” and how are we

## Applying the HBDI® to Servant Leadership

affecting those with the least power in our constituencies?

So what does servant leadership look like with individuals within each dominance?

### A servant-leader with an A-dominance

An A-quadrant servant-leader is concerned about the financial well-being of those served—whether it is stockholders, Employees, or the Customer base. They use their capacity for numbers in a way that serves the greater good, and not for greed or personal gain. They constantly ask how their financial decisions are affecting the stakeholders with the least power, authority, and station in life...are these decisions hurting or helping them?



A-quadrant servant-leaders use their gift of objectivity, critical thinking skills, and command of facts to communicate clear goals, explain the big picture, and offer reasons for how decisions are made. They invite all questions and want to keep answering questions until challenges are

understood and concerns appropriately addressed to the satisfaction of all.

A quadrant servant-leaders know that a proliferation of data can be confusing, and because this is their strength, they also have the ability to cull, narrow, prioritize, and simplify for greater understanding. They do not use data to confuse, but rather to teach and enlighten.

Finally, A Quadrant servant-leaders are skilled at questioning, but they are not interrogators. They ask questions in a way that is not focused on entrapment or seeking a specific answer they want. Instead, the A quadrant servant-leader asks questions with humility, with care for those being led not to embarrass them or “catch them” in inaccuracies, but with the goal of serving them by helping them discover for themselves areas where data or facts might have been overlooked.

Rigor is balanced with humility exhibited by the A who might have more memorized facts at her or his command.

### A servant-leader with a B Dominance:

B Quadrant servant-leaders use their “Leo” organizational abilities to serve all those around them. They work quietly behind the scenes to help those who lack “B quadrant” skills

employ them, and understand them. If something is an organizational mess or in chaos, they help clean it up and make sense of it.



B's put order to it... not in a “pushy” or “bossy” way, but in a spirit of helpfulness.

They don't blame others who might not have these skills, but rather teach, lift-up, and inspire others along the way with their planning and gift of detail. It sounds like “This is the way we can do this together so that it will make sense to others and we can all have one consistent plan of action to get it done.”

B Quadrant servant-leaders use policy and procedures to help and not hinder those being served. If an institutional rule is harming others, they don't hide behind the rule or throw up their hands and say “this is just the way it is.” Instead, they might seek out a “D” quadrant and ask for help in seeing how a rule could be changed or interpreted differently, (but within the law) to produce a better outcome for those being served.

B Quadrant servant-leaders use their knowledge of bureaucracy not to keep access away from others, but to help others gain access and learn how the systems work. They become “guides” to help others through complex systems and paperwork. Those being “led” go away from these situations feeling grateful and helped, rather than “stupid” or that they were imposing.

### A Servant-Leader with a C Dominance

C Quadrant servant-leaders use their interpersonal skills and charisma to connect with people and help them feel valued. The tricky part of being a C Quadrant servant-leader vs. a non-servant is in the belief: “It’s not about me, it’s about those I am serving.” A natural trait of C quadrant people is that they like to think out loud with others. To be a servant-leader, you must balance your own voice with those being led. A non-servant is unaware of how much they are talking and doesn’t allow space for others to enter into the conversation. Non-servant C’s skillfully use connector phrases like **and, or, because, therefore, in order to**, etc. to string sentences together which doesn’t allow others to contribute. In contrast, C quadrant servant-leaders use their listening ability to notice those who have not spoken and invite their ideas to be heard, thus building trust with others. When they turn their attention to others, they are the best at empathetic listening. They use their emotions to

connect. When they do talk, they speak with inspiration and draw upon personal experience and become vulnerable by openly sharing their own mistakes and misfortunes. These C-quadrant servant-leaders are those with whom you laugh, cry, and call when you need a friend.

A C quadrant servant-leader is different from the ego-driven C who must be on stage, in the limelight and is not happy unless they are the center of attention.

A C-quadrant servant-leader also has high emotional intelligence. Back to Greenleaf’s definition of a servant leader—do those who are being led grow as persons? A C-Quadrant who just spews raw emotion, without regard to those being led...whether it be anger, frustration, or despair--does not serve those being led. On the other hand, a C quadrant servant-leader is thoughtful about how, when, and who to vent to. They use their emotional energy to build up, rather than to tear down.

### A servant leader with a D Dominance

D Quadrant servant-leaders care about people by caring about the future. They are what Greenleaf calls the ones who “know the unknowable” the “intuitive ones”...those who possess “foresight...a better than average

guess about *what* is going to happen *when* in the future.” This is a primary trait of the servant-leader. Greenleaf believed this so strongly that he even said “The failure (or refusal) of a leader to foresee may be viewed as an ethical failure; because a serious ethical compromise today is sometimes the result of a failure to take the right actions when there was freedom for initiative to act.”



So what is the difference between a visionary servant-leader and a visionary non-servant? Once again, we go back to the test...“do those grow” There are many talented, creative, risk-takers with commensurate D quadrant skills, but wouldn’t be classed as servant-leaders because they lose sight of the people around them. Their ideas become fused with who they are, their egos, and they deliver their ideas at all costs...even trampling those around them. They become closed to feedback, and “my way is the best way, therefore the only way.” How does this differ from the D-Quadrant visionary servant-leader?



The Visionary servant-leader knows they need the support of all those around them for new ideas and change to succeed.

They build networks and coalitions. They gather feedback. They include all in their idea development. They purposefully seek out their opposites to mitigate risk, even if they have little skills in this area. They care so much about how the future is going to impact people that they make sure they use everything in their visionary toolbox to insure the success of change that needs to happen for the greater good.



The visionary servant-leader integrates information from many sources to make educated guesses about the future. Greenleaf coaches, "One follows the steps of the creative process which require that one stay with conscious analysis as far as it will carry them, and then withdraw, release the analytical pressure, if only for a moment, in full confidence that a resolving insight will come."

D Quadrant servant leaders have a sense of urgency and make leaps in their thought process. Yet they are also mindful that their creative intuition needs the balancing wisdom of the other three quadrants to make sure there are not unintended consequences.

### Conclusion

Growing as a servant-leader is a journey, not a destination. As the HBDI® reveals, there are many parts to us and many different gifts we each bring to the journey. Yet there is a significant shift as one consciously chooses to put the best interest of the whole ahead of person gain or ego. One of the most difficult challenges is to stop trying to change or fix others. We must learn to speak the different languages of the four quadrants and believe in the value each offers. For the servant-leader the process of change starts within. As Gandhi said, "We must be the change we want to see in the world."

One realizes that people support what they help to create and believes that every person has many gifts to share. Enthusiasm comes naturally when people are involved, challenged and appreciated. Servant leaders know the importance of creating a shared vision so that everyone feels included and passionate about their opportunity to contribute.

Servant leaders believe that solutions created by a group of diverse

individuals will consistently be far more robust long-term than the best ideas of any one individual

...the wisdom of slowing down to go faster. Part of this process is making sure that all angles have been considered. Using the HBDI to learn about these differences is a structured way to invite diverse input.



One of the key elements of servant leadership is the difference between being led by exercising power over people versus empowering by authentically engaging the full potential and commitment of each person toward a compelling vision. When we are committing our lives to achieve or create something we can be proud of and deeply believe in, we aren't just showing up for a job. Instead we step into living personal Calling, of investing our lives in making a difference. It is important to understand that different personalities will exercise servant leadership in different ways—some will serve others through consistency and fairness of policies and procedures; some will serve through correcting inaccuracies of financial plans; some will serve by empathetic

listening while others will serve by showing foresight and imagining things that don't exist. By recognizing and appreciating all of these personalities, we will grow leaderful organizations where each person grows taller, wiser and more likely themselves to become servant leaders. Leaderful organizations are those where each person thinks and acts like an owner of the vision. Ordinary people consistently achieve extraordinary results through enthusiastic team spirit! The HBDI® is a powerful tool that can help us create these extraordinary results.



### Bibliography on Servant Leadership

Abrashoff, Captain D. Michael. *It's Your Ship*. New York: Warner Books, Inc, 2002

Autry, James. *The Servant Leader*. California: Prima Publishing, 2001.

Collins, Jim. *Good to Great*. New York: Harpers Business, 2001.

Freiberg, Kevin and Freiberg, Jackie. *NUTS!* Austin: Bard Press, 1996.

Frick, Don. *Robert K. Greenleaf: A Life of Servant Leadership*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2004.

Gladewell, Malcolm. *The Tipping Point*. New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2000.

Greenleaf, Robert K. *The Servant as Leader*. Newton Center MA: Robert K. Greenleaf Center, 1970.

Jackson, Phil. *Sacred Hoops*. New York: Hyperion, 1995.

Keith, Kent M. *The Case for Servant Leadership*. The Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2008.

McGee-Cooper, Ann and Gary Looper. *The Essentials of Servant Leadership: Principles in Practice*. Boston: Pegasus Communications, 2001.

McGee-Cooper, Ann and Trammell, Duane. *Awaken Your Sleeping Genius: A Journaling Approach to Personal Growth and Servant Leadership*. Dallas: Ann McGee-Cooper and Associates, Inc, 1998

Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, Switzler. *Crucial Conversations*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002.

Spears, Larry. Editor. *Practicing Servant Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004.

Wheatley, Margaret. *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 2001.

Zohar, Danah. *Rewiring the Corporate Brain*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. 1997.

---

Seminars and additional resources are available from Ann McGee-Cooper and Associates, Inc. 214 357-8550 or visit us at [AMCA.com](http://AMCA.com)