

# Servant Leadership...

# Staying the COURSE

Duane Trammell, M.Ed.

Do you remember the first time you bought a brand new car? When you took it home from the dealership it had that new car smell, everything was shiny and super clean. You made promises to yourself that you wouldn't eat fast food in it and that you would take it by the car wash each week to keep that shiny new look. But, somewhere down the road, perhaps a few months later, the "newness" began to wear off. You were in a hurry and decided to drive through McDonald's. A french fry dropped between the console and the driver's seat so that you couldn't easily retrieve it, and you thought... "I'll dig it out later." And instead of waiting in the car wash line on Saturdays, you thought, "it's going to rain, anyway, and it's silly to pay all this money just to have it shiny for a few days" and you decided to live with the rain splotches most of the time. For some, after a few months... a new car just didn't seem as special as it did when you drove it home from the showroom.

If we are not careful, servant leadership can be like the new car syndrome. We go to our first conference



or workshop and are introduced to this great way of teaming and leading. We are excited. It fits. It sounds so good and it is the way that we all want to be treated and led. We might even tell others about it. But after a few months, the new wears off and the discipline of cleaning, caring, and maintaining it becomes effort. At this point, some may revert back to old ways of being...putting me first instead of other's welfare; blaming others when things go wrong; griping and complaining when things get tough; assuming the worst in others, and taking relationships for granted.

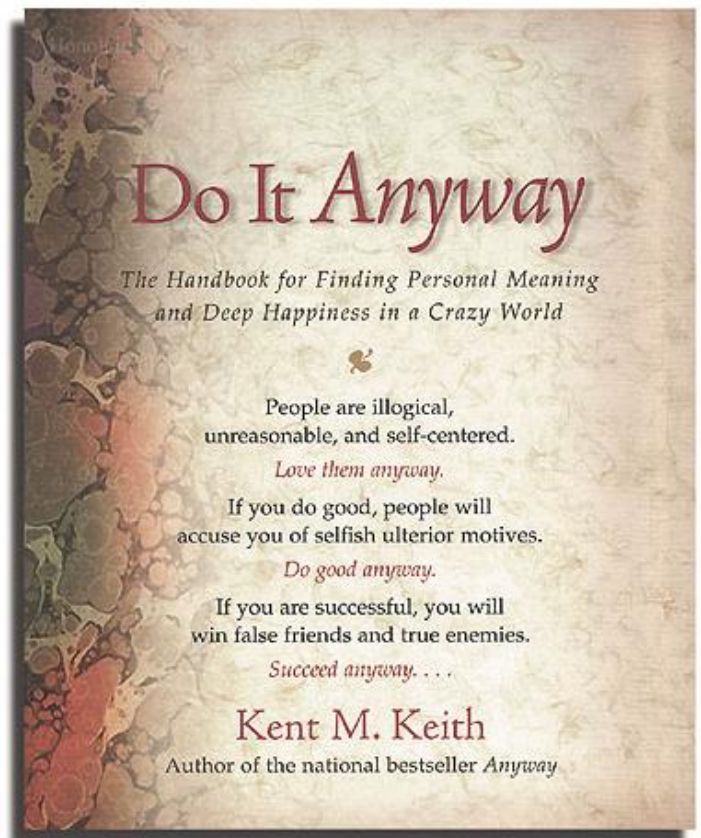


In the first year of servant leadership development, we began by thinking of those people who have been influences in our lives, who helped us to grow. We looked at those specific things we can do in our own behavior to “change ourselves first.” The next step on the servant leadership journey is to begin to explore what it means to be a servant-leader in our organizations:

- Where do I need to continue to grow?
- The people I serve, what do they need?
- How can I help myself and others be more effective?
- What does my organization need me to do?
- How can I help my organization accomplish it?
- What skills do I have that would be helpful and how can I use them?

We begin to look at our moods and attitudes or the climate we create when we are around others. What is our tone of voice? Do we smile? Are we encouraging or friendly? Are we approachable and hospitable when people need to talk with us? Do we share information freely and point others to resources we know about? Do we share airtime and listen just as intently to other’s ideas as our own? Do we show appreciation, say *thank you* frequently, and point out the good deeds of others?

And what do we do when our good intentions are not met with favorable responses? Do we throw up our hands and give up, saying, “This stuff doesn’t work in the real world.” Or, do we take the more difficult journey that servant-leader Kent Keith shares in *The Paradoxical Commandments*. “If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Do good anyway. The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway. People really need help but may attack you if you do help them. Help people anyway.” Kent has other paradoxical commandments, but his point is this: Servant-leaders find personal meaning and positivity even in the face of adversity. My favorite quote of his is, “We can face the worst in the world with the best in ourselves.” We can’t control the external world, other’s bad moods, or people who are unappreciative, but we can control our inner lives. We can decide how we are going to respond and how we are going to live.



## Staying the Course

While much has changed technologically since Robert Greenleaf's first exploration into servant leadership since 1970, human nature has not changed that much. He wrote, "to the worldly, servant-leaders may seem naïve...servant-leaders may stand alone, largely without the support of their culture, as a saving remnant of those who care for both persons and institutions, and who are determined to make their caring count—*wherever they are involved.*"

**Staying the  
course  
becomes a  
rallying  
cry**



Servant Leadership is about "staying the course." Historians cite different origins of this phrase. Some attribute it to a nautical metaphor on maintaining a constant, unfaltering course while navigating. Others show the phrase describing horses having the stamina to remain on the course of a racetrack. Both of these references are spot on for our work as servant-leaders. Servant Leadership is about keeping focused on what we need to do to improve and the perseverance to keep doing it.

Duane Trammell is Cofounding Partner, President, and COO of Ann McGee-Cooper and Associates.