

COVER STORY

Has all the recent talk about visions, values and purpose struck a deeper chord in corporate America? A growing chorus says yes.



THE SEARCH FOR SPIRIT IN THE WORKPLACE

It may be summer by the calendar, but cold, soul-numbing winds hold a wintry grip on the corporate landscape. The litany should be familiar by now. The *Fortune 500*, the largest manufacturers in the country, have eliminated some 4 million jobs since 1982. Former icons of corporate stability—General Motors, Digital Equipment Co., International Business Machines—are scrambling to survive by closing plants and slashing jobs. In the new global marketplace, there's no guarantee you'll have a job, a company or a career next week.

The current symbol of success? General Electric and its CEO, Jack Welch. Welch, one of America's 10 toughest bosses (according to *Fortune*), has turned his company into "the world's most powerful corporation" (according to *Forbes*) by selling \$11 billion worth of existing GE businesses, buying \$26 billion of new businesses, cutting head count by 300,000 people, and doubling managerial span of control. As the ex-CEOs of General Motors, IBM, American Express and Sunbeam-Oster found out, there are no executive exceptions to the order of the day: Get tough, get results or get out.

Welcome to the 1990s. The wonderful world of work has become a place where effort can count for little

BY CHRIS LEE AND RON ZEMKE

Corbert Gauthier



The guiding spirit of this school of thought? A devout Quaker management researcher.

and longevity for nothing. The only rock-solid thing to hang on to is the assurance that whatever you thought was true last week will have changed by Monday morning.

In an environment racked with stress, insecurity, tough decisions and 60-hour weeks, you might expect a resurgence of a management model based on Machiavelli's Prince, Leona Helmsley or some other Theory-X icon. Instead, there's a stirring in the opposite direction: A flood of management books, articles and musings try to make sense of the current chaos by proposing a management model filled with

heart—and soul.

Consider some of the best-selling business books of recent years: *Zapp! The Lightning of Empowerment*, *Leadership Is an Art*, *Managing from the Heart*, and *The Republic of Tea*. All of them envision a workplace where managers and workers alike share a deep sense of purpose and meaning. The spring catalog from Barrett-Koehler, a San Francisco-based business-book publisher, featured Peter Block's new book, *Stewardship*:

Choosing Service Over Self-Interest, and listed several new titles that share a distinctive flavor: *Reawakening the Spirit in Work: The Power of Dharmic Management*; *The Healing Manager: How to Build Quality Relationships and Productive Cultures at Work*; *The Fourth Wave: Business in the 21st Century*; *Leadership and the New Science: Learning About Organization From an Orderly Universe*.

All of these books can be said to spring from a particular school of thought. Its guiding spirit was a devout Quaker management researcher named Robert K. Greenleaf, whose gentle precepts and 20-year-old essay, "The Servant as Leader," give us a label for this loosely woven movement: servant leadership (see box).

According to Greenleaf's philosophy, leaders exist only to serve their followers. Indeed, they earn followers only by virtue of their selfless, Gandhiesque natures. Servant leadership emphasizes service to others, a wholistic approach to work, personal development and shared decision making—characteristics that place it squarely in the mainstream of conventional talk about empowerment, total quality and participative management.

But it goes beyond that. Greenleaf's philosophy is unabashedly spiritual, yet it's finding a home in the secular world of the corporation. It seems to have tapped into a growing need to find comfort and meaning in the stressed-out, insecure workplace of the '90s.

THE SERVANT LEADER

The unifying strand that meanders through much of the recent writing and thinking about spirit in the workplace is the concept of "servant leadership." Most credit Robert K. Greenleaf, one-time management researcher at AT&T and lifelong philosopher, with introducing the idea in a 1970 essay called "The Servant as Leader."

No, the concept of servant leader is not meant to be an oxymoron, but it's certainly a paradox in a Zen sort of way. Yes, it does stand the traditional view of the leader—the CEO at the peak of the pyramid, the captain at the helm of the ship—on its head. That's intentional. Greenleaf built his philosophy on the idea that the leader exists only to serve his followers; they grant him their allegiance in response to his servant nature.

Greenleaf credits Herman Hesse's *Journey to the East* with providing his inspiration (although an earlier source, the gospel of Luke, also defines a leader as one who serves). In the novel, a group of men on a mythical journey are accompanied by the servant Leo. He performs menial chores for the travelers, but also sustains them with his spirit and song. When Leo disappears, the travelers find they cannot continue without him, and the group falls

apart. Writes Greenleaf: "The narrator, one of the party, after some years of wandering finds Leo and is taken into the Order that had sponsored the journey. There he discovers that Leo, whom he had known first as a *servant*, was in fact the titular head of the Order, its guiding spirit, a great and noble *leader*."

On this foundation, Greenleaf builds his philosophy. According to his essay, servant leaders embody these characteristics:

- *They are servants first.* Like Leo, servant leaders are motivated by a natural desire to serve, not to lead. They must make a conscious choice to *aspire* to lead. People who are leaders first are responding to an innate drive to acquire power or material possessions.
- *They articulate goals.* A servant leader gives certainty and purpose to others by clearly articulating a goal or, in today's leadership parlance, a vision.
- *They inspire trust.* Followers are confident of the leader's values, competence and judgment. He has a sustaining spirit (*entheos*) that supports the tenacious pursuit of a goal.
- *They know how to listen.* The true, natural ser-

WHY THIS?

Though the servant-leader philosophy complements the movement toward more openness and participation and a less-directing management style, why has this particular approach earned such a warm reception? After all, we're basically talking about the ideal of the participative manager who respects the skills and abilities of employees and sees himself as coach, mentor and facilitator rather than as a taskmaster. That's not exactly new.

As early as 1943, Abraham Maslow advanced a theory of human motivation that held that work—along with play and myriad other activities—could allow people to fulfill fundamental needs. In the '50s, motivational theorist Douglas McGregor proposed what he called the "Theory Y" view of employees, in which he encouraged managers to view their people as responsible, ambitious, energetic, ingenious and creative. This set of assumptions led to a management style that emphasized trust and respect. McGregor contrasted Theory Y with "Theory X" assumptions, or the "commonly held" set of beliefs that say workers by nature dislike hard work and are lazy, untrustworthy and resistant to change.

A few years later, researcher Frederick Herzberg demonstrated that McGregor's theories were correct. Employees who were given positive feedback, increased responsibility, greater opportunity, challenging work, and recognition for their performance worked harder and accomplished more. They also were more satisfied with their jobs than employees managed under Theory-X assumptions.

From the 1950s to the present, the literature of work has been dominated by social scientists—Kurt Lewin, Robert Blake, Jane Mouton, Rensis Likert, William Ouchi, Tom Peters and Robert Waterman, to name a few—who view employees as responsible and trustworthy. The human-potential movement of the '70s was nothing if not a manifesto of individuality in the workplace, with different strokes for different folks as its acoustical theme song. Peter Drucker, today's premier management thinker, summed up this recurrent view when he suggested, only half in jest: "Management's job is to find out what it is doing that keeps people from doing a good job, and stop doing it."

But members of this new school of thought step beyond the assumption that employees are responsible and worthy of trust. In *The Art of Leadership*, for example, Max DePree, chairman of Herman Miller, the office-furniture manufacturer in Zeeland, MI, begins with the premise that participative management is the most effective contemporary practice. But he ends up in a place where leaders create covenantal relationships (bonds that fulfill deep needs and give work meaning) with employees and the purpose of the corporation is redemption, not profit. "We need to weigh the pragmatic in the clarifying light of the moral," writes DePree. "We must understand that reaching our potential is more important than reaching our goals."

In *New Traditions in Business*, a collection of essays, contributor Michael L. Ray writes: "The gateway from the old paradigm to the new is the individ-

vant leader responds to any problem by listening first. You can discipline yourself to learn to listen first, and thus become a natural servant. Here, Greenleaf draws on the prayer of St. Francis, "Lord, grant that I may not seek so much to be understood as to understand."

- *They are masters of positive feedback.* The servant leader always offers unqualified acceptance of the person, although she doesn't necessarily accept the person's effort or performance.

- *They rely on foresight.* No leader ever has all the information necessary to make major decisions. But servant leaders have an intuitive sense that they use to bridge information gaps. Their ability to detach from day-to-day events allows their conscious and unconscious to work together to "better foresee the unforeseeable."

- *They emphasize personal development.* A servant leader views every problem as originating inside, rather than outside, himself. To remedy any "flaw in the world," the process of change starts in the servant, not "out there." Notes Greenleaf: "This is a difficult concept for that busybody, modern man."

Greenleaf apparently sowed a potent—if slow-

growing—seed with this original work. He expanded on the concept in a series of essays and two books, *Servant Leadership* and *Teacher as Servant* (Paulist Press). After retiring from AT&T in 1964, he founded the Center for Applied Ethics, a nonprofit educational organization in Indianapolis, which became the Robert K. Greenleaf Center in 1985.

Why has the servant-leadership model gathered steam in recent years? Certainly our unrelenting fascination with leaders makes the idea at least as pertinent today as it was 23 years ago. Larry Spears, executive director of the Greenleaf Center, offers another explanation. Close to 500,000 copies of Greenleaf's essays and books have been sold since 1970, he says, so perhaps the idea has reached a certain critical mass of people.

The center itself has changed as well. After Greenleaf's death in 1990, it became a membership organization committed to spreading the servant-leadership philosophy. Today, it sponsors an annual conference, conducts workshops, and sells essays, books and videotapes that carry the servant-leadership message.—C.L.



ual, and changes in the individual come from the inside, from inner consciousness or spirit. People involved in business transformation have come to it out of their own personal transformation." Another contributor, Charles F. Kiefer, unequivocally states, "the essence of leadership stems from the leader's soul rather than from his or her behavior."

Why the sudden interest in an implicitly *spiritual* idea of the manager as steward, the leader as servant? There are two separate streams of explanation: business reasons and social reasons.

Heading the list of business reasons is an up-

'Something very, very profound is going on. It is a true metamorphosis inside our society. I haven't any question about it at all.'

heaval in organizational structure. The traditional middle-manager roles have changed, as have the people who fill those slots in organizations. Historically, middle managers performed two functions: They acted as information conduits and straw bosses. Over the past decade, the rise of information technology, employee participation and self-direction have eroded those roles. Senior management has at its fingertips the same data as does middle management—and at about the same time. Nor does the production of quality goods and services any longer depend much on direct, line-of-sight supervision by a manager.

The people who hold middle-management positions—those who remain after the rampant downsizing and flattening of the past few years—have changed as well. Who are they? *Fortune* calls them "nonmanager managers" and identifies them as—you guessed it—baby boomers who bring a new set of values to the workplace: "The 78 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964 tend to be an irreverent bunch. Many don't see the CEO as much of a hero. In fact, they often think the big guy gets in the way. They like to call themselves leaders, facilitators, sponsors—anything but managers." To this new breed, "boss" is a four-letter word.

More important, these nonmanagers don't want to be stuck in the "between" role of simply passing paper up and down the pyramid. They want bigger goals: creating new business, solving major problems, setting challenging visions, and helping the people who do the work.

The boomer manager's desire to be first among teammates—instead of "the boss"—fits pretty well with the wants and needs of the formerly governed, equally independent doers. Geoffrey M. Bellman, author of *The Quest for Staff Leadership and Getting Things Done When You're Not in Charge*, sees the servant-leader/manager-steward concept as both a philosophy and a response to an implicit demand.

"People don't want managers anymore," he says. "They want leaders. And the leaders they want

aren't out of the old kind of paternalistic or autocratic molds." Many of today's workers want manager/leaders who add their own unique perspectives and skills to a self-directed, participative environment but don't dominate it, says Bellman. In other words, they want a manager who helps, not one who controls.

He sees people searching for their own leadership qualities as well as for leaders who can help them find that sense of independence in themselves. "They want leaders who can help them work better and lead their lives better. Servant leadership and stewardship have to do with how I identify myself in that part of my life, that community called work."

In *Stewardship: Choosing Service Over Self-Interest*, Block defines 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." To him, the leader-as-servant movement is an exercise in "what-if": What if we really didn't need managers or leaders? What would that kind of workplace look like?

"Stewardship is an argument against leadership," he tells TRAINING. "Stewardship is less prescriptive. It has more to do with being accountable and being responsible for what's been created than it does with defining, prescribing and telling others what to do."

The real issues, he says, are power, control and choice. Stewardship is not a single guiding principle but part of a triumvirate that includes empowerment and partnership. "The principles of stewardship bring accountability while partnership balances responsibility."

Leadership is just a word for a manager playing the role of parent, Block contends, if it is exercised as a caretaking function—that is, if the leader takes responsibility for the well-being of others. In an organization of adults, that is demeaning. "The question, 'How would partners handle this?' and 'What policy or structure would we create if this were a partnership?' are the most useful questions I know in the search for the alternative to patriarchy."

WHY NOW?

The appeal of the spiritual side of the servant-leader concept becomes clear if you stand it against the backdrop of larger social trends. For one thing, talk of spirituality or religion is no longer taboo or automatically suspect.

When the buttoned-down editorial page of *The Wall Street Journal* applauds mystic actress Shirley MacLaine for giving a speech castigating the members of the American Society of Newspaper Editors for their condescending attitude toward religion, *something* is going on. Paraphrasing MacLaine, the editorial said, "Contrary to received wisdom . . . spiritual and religious values and those of a free democratic society go hand-in-hand . . . A pity Ms. MacLaine's remarks aren't posted in newsrooms around the country."

Time magazine, for one, seems to have taken MacLaine's suggestions to heart. A recent cover story, "The Church Search," examined the baby-boom

generation's quest for a spiritual home. It seems that midlife crises combined with economic insecurity are persuading some boomers to return to their childhood religions, some to turn to unconventional churches and some to the various 12-step programs of the "recovery" movement.

With the 40-something generation searching for soul, self and meaning wherever it can find them, the workplace is not out of bounds. Connecticut psychiatrist M. Scott Peck, author of *The Road Less Traveled* and *A World Waiting to be Born* sees no reason why a spiritual rebirth couldn't or shouldn't happen in the workplace as easily as in a church. It is, after all, where most people spend most of their time.

This yearning for a spiritual connection in the workplace doesn't surprise Stephen R. Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, a book with an implicit spiritual base that has been among *Publisher's Weekly's* top 10 best-selling nonfiction books for over 120 weeks. "Something very, very profound is going on," Covey says. "It is a true metamorphosis inside our society. I haven't any question about it at all. People have had it with giving their whole lives to a business. I'm sensing a lot of imbalance, an awareness of a hollowness in people's lives."

Out of this, Covey sees a trend: People are determinedly seeking spiritual and moral anchors in their lives and in their work. He attributes it to a trio of factors, using the metaphor of a stream with three primary currents: "One is just the sheer pain of the global marketplace and the deterioration of our society. That has been a chronic thing, but it has become so acutely painful that [people] are really paying attention now. The second current is the awareness that there are no quick fixes; there is no instant way to deal with the pain. Finally, people are feeling a need for values and principles that don't change."

"Top managers today make more decisions in one month than their grandparents made in a lifetime," adds Kenneth Blanchard, co-author of the one-minute manager book series and co-author with Norman Vincent Peale of *The Power of Ethical Management*. "People can't know what's going on in a traditional sense," he says. "And when people become unsure, the spiritual becomes important again."

The servant-leadership model allows managers to share their "not knowingness," says Blanchard. It allows them to turn to the collective wisdom of the group—employees, customers, suppliers, all the stakeholders—to glean knowledge. But managers won't be able to do that without a spiritual awareness that allows them to "open up to their own vulnerabilities and become willing to listen."

Blanchard suggests that all managers would profit from taking to heart the first three steps of 12-step programs: Admit their vulnerability, acknowledge there is a higher power, and get their lives in line with it. "It will change their lives," he says. "I'm talking about this all the time now. No one's getting upset. People don't say, 'You're crazy.'"

FUZZY LINES

Should any of this come as a surprise? For years a multitude of experts has been urging managers to turn themselves into leaders: people who create inspiring visions for their organizations, who embody values that provide a higher purpose for the enterprise, and who operate according to ethical verities. We've hailed spirit as the foundation for business success; the next step to the spiritual isn't a giant one.

"There is a sacred aspect to good leadership training," muses Randall White, director of specialized client applications at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) in Greensboro, NC. "We talk about the idea of becoming committed to being a better person, and treating others as you'd want to be treated. For years, we've been talking about flipping over the organizational pyramid and serving all the people." In leadership training, and in the most progressive organizations, he says, the emphasis has shifted from looking at knowledge, skills and behaviors to examining values, attitudes and beliefs.

Values-driven organizations create credos and lay down rules about how employees will interact in the interest of the community, White says. That spurs personal mission statements and a search for answers to questions like "Who am I?" "Who are we?" "Where are we going?"

At the same time, most American workers have lost the sense of security and identification with the company that gave meaning to their work lives. Now, they are searching for a connection—a commitment to something larger to replace that lost dependence on the corporation. White theorizes that building a bridge between the secular and sacred worlds may be a natural outgrowth of this search for meaning and identity. Given the flurry of downsizings during the past few years, he says, "it's little wonder people are turning to a higher order to find meaning."

Hylar Bracey, president of the Atlanta Consulting Group, is co-author of *Managing from the Heart*, a book that suggests managers need more than competence and confidence; they also need to be caring. He, too, sees the spiritual component of servant leadership as a natural progression in management thought and literature.

In Bracey's view, Greenleaf was ahead of his time. Over the last 50 years, he says, "we've evolved from treating workers as machines to realizing that they have feelings, and we could get them to be more responsive if we acknowledged that."

The profound change Bracey sees occurring in the '90s is twofold: One factor is a growing preoccupation among individuals with the spiritual side of life. "They've begun to think, 'There must be a bigger purpose here than my BMW and my job.'" The second is the acceptance of the whole person in the workplace. "We used to pretend that people didn't show up at work with their sexuality—now it's OK to talk about sexual harassment. We used to check our feelings, health, sexuality, spirituality and family problems at the door of the workplace. We've matured enough to get beyond that. The unspeakable



is now acceptable.”

Bracey predicts we'll soon see Bible study groups and other groups grappling with spiritual questions in the workplace. In fact, an informal group of people who work at CCL is already doing just that. “We're a collection of individuals fascinated by [spiritual questions],” says one of the members. “We do our own reading, writing, talking and thinking about it.”

The recent surge in interest in the servant-leader concept seems to be tapping a deeply felt need of both leaders and people in organizations, he says. People are looking to work to provide spiritual

‘Baby boomers and contemporary literature say it’s not nice to be boss. But power is power no matter what you call it.’

growth—if it doesn't, they feel it's not worth their time. “For leaders, when you start talking about values and mission—and from whence those things come—you quickly get beyond the rational and logical to what lies deepest inside the individual. Their highest and best ideas come from the spirit.”

Tom Peters, longtime champion of corporate vision, values and spirit, is alarmed to see the enthusiasm for workplace spirit turn into workplace spirituality. In a recent syndicated column, titled “Spiritual Talk Has No Place in Secular Corporation,” he wholeheartedly endorsed Greenleaf's premise: “The leader, from shop supervisor to President Clinton to Boris Yeltsin, should serve his or her constituents.” But he gets uneasy, he continued, when people start assigning Deeper Meanings to that service: “In tapping . . . the imagination and curiosity [we need from workers in the viciously competitive '90s], let's leave the Bible, the Koran and facile talk of spiritual leaders at home.”

Peters was less reticent in an interview with TRAINING. “There's nothing I believe in more than the Bill of Rights,” he says. “When you cross the line between the secular and the spiritual you're edging up on something that bugs me.

“At the highest level of abstraction, we've obviously reached a point where non-intuitive, linear, rational management has made a mess of American companies,” says Peters. “Moving away from that is positive.” But he senses danger in overdoing it in the opposite direction. “By getting overtly into the spiritual stuff, the pendulum is swinging too far,” he says. He fears that a leap into spirituality could backfire and squash the empowerment movement before it reaches full flower.

Corporations have successfully and rightfully stepped into the role of certain social institutions in this country, he continues. But while he applauds the corporation taking on the role of the public schools by teaching literacy skills to employees, the idea of the corporation taking on the role of a religious institution “makes me want to puke.”

There are places in the human psyche, Peters contends, where you simply don't want a business organization screwing around. And that, of course, brings us to . . .

THE DARK SIDE

Though Peters doesn't mention it, there's also the law.

Organizations these days are finding themselves under attack for things like Christmas crèches and celebrations that offend non-Christians, as well as for Halloween and Easter-Bunny paraphernalia that offend fundamentalist Christians. When employees put religious greetings on their voice mail, their companies can find themselves in hot water with customers.

Spirituality has proved an explosive issue for trainers in recent years. While so-called New Age trainers have insisted that training must involve the whole person—body, mind and spirit—organizations that have tried to follow that advice have sometimes ended up in legal trouble.

In the late 1980s Pacific Bell was called to task by the California Public Utilities Commission when consumer groups protested PacBell's spending several million dollars on training designed by consultant Charles Krone and based in part on the teachings of an Armenian mystic named Georges Gurdjieff.

During the same period, a few other cases grabbed national headlines. A car salesman in Tacoma, WA, was fired for refusing to attend a spirituality-based training program; he then sued his company. In Albany, GA, William Gleaton, a human-resources manager for Firestone Tire, was fired after refusing to conduct a training program because he felt it was tainted by secular humanism. As more and more companies pledge to “value diversity,” such sensitivities will surely grow.

Harry Levinson, head of the Levinson Institute, a Cambridge, MA, consulting organization, sees other, equally pragmatic problems in the servant-leadership model. “Bob Greenleaf was a very thoughtful man and a Quaker who tried to put Quaker ‘theology’ into managerial practice,” he says. On the positive side, Levinson sees a philosophy that can enhance people's dignity and ability to work together. On the negative side, he thinks it ignores accountability and the underlying fundamental aggression of people in the workplace.

Compatibility with the company's culture and systems is another consideration, says Levinson. At Herman Miller, chairman DePree successfully practiced the art of leadership by following Greenleaf's precepts. However, Levinson cautions, if this philosophy doesn't fit the culture, it may run into trouble.

Much of the emphasis placed on empowerment and participation doesn't take into account people's different conceptual abilities, he says. For example, the average worker on the plant floor is unlikely to have a lot to contribute to, say, a discussion of how a major corporation ought to cope with the global marketplace. “I'm in favor of making the most of people's talents, but I'm not in favor of naively giving power,” he says. “A lot of this talk ignores levels of

competence and conceptual capabilities. There's a sort of glibness to it that masks underlying psychological realities."

Managers have to take charge and be appropriately aggressive, he contends. "If managers make believe they aren't taking charge, they'll do it in clandestine fashion and contribute to a lack of trust among employees. Baby boomers and contemporary literature say it's not nice to be boss. But power is power no matter what you call it. There's no escape from accountability, but you don't read about accountability."

The servant-leader orientation is helpful for managers concerned with respecting the feelings of the people who work for them, Levinson says, but as a philosophy, he suspects it concerns book writers and publishers more than practicing managers. "Whenever you make a conscious effort to implement values that fundamentally respect human beings, it resounds with everybody. But when you get into spirituality, you run the risk of intruding into somebody else's spiritual orientation."

Despite these hazards, the enthusiasm remains. Peters' column on keeping spiritual talk out of the corporate world prompted a thoughtful response from William W. George, president and CEO of Medtronic Inc., the biomedical company based in Fridley, MN. In an open letter published in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, George takes Peters to task for confusing spirituality with religion. He begins with the dictionary definition of spiritual: "1) the animating or life-giving principle within a human being, 2) the part of a human being associated with the mind or feelings as distinguished from the physical body, and 3) the real sense of significance of something."

He continues: "This 'significance' is precisely what DePree and Greenleaf are appealing to. After all, we spend more time at work than in any other part of our lives. Shouldn't we find significance in our work and the opportunity to use our mind and feeling while appealing to 'the animating or life-giving principles' within us? This isn't practicing religion per se but rather devoting our whole being toward a higher purpose in our work."

Medtronic, George insists, continues to live the mission penned more than 30 years ago by founder Earl Bakken: to restore people to the fullness of life and health. To do this, the company stresses "leading by values," rather than management by objectives, especially in its self-directed work teams.

"At Medtronic," he concludes, "we don't mix religion and business, but we certainly do not shy away from the spiritual side of our work and the deeper meaning of our mission to save lives. If all this makes you want to run, so be it. For all of us, it is the real reason to go to work every day."

THE MANAGER AS... MESSIAH?

Beyond all the talk about meaning and values, a substantial question looms: What do spiritually minded managers *do* that distinguishes them from the old model boss?

According to *Managing from the Heart*, a servant leader/steward manager honors "five unspoken"

employee requests:

- Hear and understand me.
- Even if you disagree with me, please don't make me wrong.
- Acknowledge the greatness within me.
- Remember to look for my loving intentions.
- Tell me the truth with compassion.

According to Bracey, "Honoring these five unspoken requests is a style of management that brings high levels of both compassion and accountability to the workplace." They form "a sort of behavioral approach to spiritual principles," he says.

In his new book, *Leadership Jazz*, Max DePree concludes: "Above all, leadership is a position of servanthood. Leadership is a forfeiture of rights." He proposes 12 characteristics as the keys to becoming a successful servant leader:

- Integrity.
- Vulnerability.
- Discernment.
- Awareness of the human spirit.
- Courage in relationships.
- Sense of humor.
- Intellectual energy and curiosity.
- Respect for the future, regard for the present, understanding of the past.
- Predictability.
- Breadth.
- Comfort with ambiguity.
- Presence.

Blanchard suggests managers learn to think of themselves as partners with employees, rather than judges and critics. Instead of management by objectives (a goal-setting system that doesn't work, he says, because goals are simply dictated by the manager to employees), he sees the servant-leader model as one that makes possible a true partnership between managers and employees. And in a true partnership, both parties are equally responsible for goals.

Servant leadership is not soft leadership, he emphasizes. It's the leader's job to create a vision, set up tough goals in partnership with employees and then help people become winners in the performance game.

Blanchard compares it to the way he taught college. "I gave out the final exam on the first day and taught the answers all quarter. All the students got A's. That's what life is about—getting A's, not grading on a curve. I'm talking about getting away from the cat-and-mouse game where it's the manager's job to be judge and jury. It's a powerful package that's based on a lot of spiritual principles."

Block, on the other hand, sees lists of traits, attributes and behaviors as a trap, and compiling such lists as a counterproductive activity. "Our profession is caught up in prescribing," he says. "[Warren] Bennis writes a book on the four essences of great leaders, and we attempt to recreate them [in others] in some fashion. Stewardship is less a prescription than about being accountable and owning—about making democracy work at work."

While these descriptions fall short of expecting the servant leader to walk on water, the image of the



manager as messiah inevitably intrudes. While acknowledging that the language they use can unintentionally evoke the impression that the manager they're describing is an other-worldly being, proponents insist that the servant leader is expected to be neither Lama-like nor priestly.

What distinguishes the servant leader from the messianic manager out to save corporate souls?

Bellman sees corporate purpose as one safety valve. "The primary reason that we're gathered [in the workplace] is to get something done," he says. And as long as everyone recognizes an organization-

Proponents insist that the servant leader is expected to be neither Lama-like nor priestly.

al purpose that requires productivity and accomplishment, no one is going to confuse the servant leader with a semi-saint.

Covey generally agrees with that perspective. "As I see it, [the difference between the leader as servant and the manager as saint] is in the consensus process that surrounds the development of the mission statement," he says. Developing a meaningful mission statement is a long, difficult, inclusive pro-

cess that positions the manager as neither saint nor sinner, but simply as the person who keeps the process moving.

On a day-to-day level, adds Covey, sharing raw data—not information that's been digested and repackaged by the corporate marketing department—about everything from employees' own performance to financial results works against relying on a single leader. "I say keep involving people in the raw data. People are basically proactive; they have the capacity to respond. When you share raw, unfiltered data, trust goes up and people move fast. There is no dependence. [These types of] stakeholder information systems keep people focused on the mission and the vision—not on the leader."

So what do we have here? A movement? A mood? A desperate quest for stability in an unstable world? An idealistic screed that will never gain acceptance in the hard-bitten workplace of the '90s? Or could this be the new way of working we've been looking for? "We're searching for a new organizational model," says Edward E. Lawler, professor at the Business School of the University of Southern California and director of the school's Center for Effective Organizations. "The traditional business model has failed and we're looking for a replacement. Here's one new—old—paradigm." □

Chris Lee is managing editor and **Ron Zemke** is senior editor of *TRAINING* Magazine.

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