

Leadership as a Service: A New Model for Higher Education in a New Century – A Book Review

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Introduction

Leadership as service is a scholarly text written with the same scientific rigor, deductions and inferences as required for a scientific publication. The book is more than sets of theoretical abstractions, constructions and idealistic perspectives as there were a plethora of practical perspectives drawn from the author's experience as an educator and president of a university along with those of practitioners in the private and public sectors. It is a master piece of poetry (using metaphors), insights into the issue of leadership at higher educational institutions and a balanced account of the science and art of leadership. Although the text is primarily around educational leadership, Farnsworth broadens the perspective to make it a discourse of issues in leadership, challenges in leadership to include higher educational institutions, effective leadership, historical features on leadership, and a justification for a new paradigm in educational leadership, particularly higher education. The book is a succinct analysis of educational leadership at higher educational institutions in the USA, while contextualizing the matter beyond that space to the world, including providing a rationale for servant-centered leadership in both private as well as public sector organizations. In leadership by service, the author squarely confronts the traditional paradigm of leadership in higher education and warns against the embedded pitfalls, guides against making them and channels a transformational thinking that is critical to contemporary society. The book addresses certain themes such as:

- The need for new leadership;
- Leadership as a quest to serve;
- Lessons from the wisdom traditions;
- Shaping a syncretic leadership;
- Shaping the vision;
- Hearing every voice;
- Renewing the social contract;
- Empowering toward service;
- Redesigning higher education;
- Trust and consensus during change;
- Organizing for service;
- Leading as learning;
- Barriers to leadership as service; and
- Leadership for a new century.

The purpose of the book is to provide a guide (road map) for new prospective leaders in higher education as a result of the personal challenges experienced by the writer as a principal for a tertiary level educational institution.

Farnsworth contends that the traditional approach to leadership—autocratic, Laissez-Faire, participatory leadership styles, et cetera—is

mostly about a power-over people paradigm and this has fundamentally changed over the last decade. The new organization is a collective unit of many players with the leader being only one in a complex social system. Within the context of the collective human relations that exists in an organization, Farnsworth opines that empirical studies, his experiences, and other educators and CEOs have shown that entities in which the leader employs power-with, performance is higher and the leader oftentimes is catapulted to the point of stardom. While he argues that leaders are faced with a plethora of challenges in trying to balance the personal interests of academic staffers and that of the public, he contends that a fall in admissions at higher educational institutions is an indication that entities are not meeting the needs of the consumer. Farnsworth postulates that people are demanding an educational product that fits within their budget, time – work schedule -, and that what is traditionally offered by higher educational organizations is not meeting the outside demands of the social or business world. This explains Farnsworth's statement that "It is time for a new approach to leadership in higher education in America" [1], indicating that low admissions at higher educational organizations is a clear message to those entities that they are not meeting prospective students' expectations in this new global world.

Farnsworth notes that he has become a student of servant leadership from having read the works of Stephen Covey, Robert Greenleaf, and others [2-4]. Although Robert Greenleaf is lauded for his concept of servant leadership, Farnsworth believes that his approach was highly theoretical and lacked practical applications [1]. To support his observed position that servant-centered leadership (servant Leadership) is the way forward, Farnsworth aptly describes his position this way "new direction in educational leadership will come through a complete commitment to service" [1]. While Farnsworth ideally accepted servant leadership "...my personal sense that leadership is first and foremost an act of service finds support in the writings of some newly emerging 'prophets' of leadership. I (Farnsworth) find similar themes in (Peter) Drucker, (Jim) Collins, (Stephen) Covey, (Warren) Bennis, (Peter) Senge, John Gardner, [5,6] and others as I read their works" [1] having set the personal perspective on service leadership, he continues by examining CEO and managers – at Robert Greenleaf, manager at AT&T, Robert W. Lear, former CEO at F&M Schaefer, Ronald Campton, Chairman at Aetna Lifewho provided their accounts of organizational successes following the implementation of service-centered leadership. He highlights that Robert Greenleaf was a Quaker and this accounted for his usage of servant leadership as his religious underpinnings emphasizes service and that the leader must be a follower in order to be an effective leader [4].

Farnsworth dedicated some chapters to the issue of servant leadership and brought the discourse away from the religious dogma to spirituality. He contends that the qualities of servant leadership have been practiced by Jesus, spoken of by Confucius; but that the matter is a deeper level of human consciousness than religion. Using Jay Conger's definition of spirituality, Farnsworth quoted that "A selfless sense of love and compassion for others, respect and concern for well-being and life, a reverence for the universe and its creation [1]. As such Farnsworth writes that-

I would go even further to say that true vision depends on those spiritual resources, on a sense of what should and can be. It depends on a communal understanding of what the institution and those within it can do to contribute to the universal well-being Conger mentions. It transcends the commonplace and routine and forces the question, 'What do we exist for if we don't contribute in some significant way to the well-being of other? [1].

It is this spirituality that Farnsworth argues accounts for people like Martin Luther Jr., Gandhi, and other great leaders propelling to the depth of greatness not because of power-over; but power-with and having a vision that is shared with a collective group of people, who in return act on the vision by way of shared-consensus. He outlines that while service-centered leadership does not mitigate against the leader having a vision, the leader must believe in the people who will act on his/her vision and transform this into a reality. It is for this very reason that Farnsworth explains that leaders must listen as it is the most important skill in leadership. He documents many cases in which organizations did not progress to the level desired by its leadership because people believed that the leader did not listen and as a result did not see them as integral to the process of the organization. However, he notes that when the leader is an active listener, the people consider themselves to be of value, worth, and that the leader gets the best of the follower. Hence, he argues that low admissions at higher educational organizations undergraduate entrants can be interpreted as the lack of leadership listening to the students, people and prospective market place.

Repeatedly Farnsworth, therefore, called for a new paradigm of service-centered leadership in which the leader actively listens to the students, legislators, general public, employers and other stakeholders. The author shows how many leaders have resisted change and how they have been left behind, organizations have failed and why leaders in higher educational organizations must change by way of listening to the needs of the students and the wider publics. The difficulty of change was outlined by Farnsworth and he brings Thomas Kuhn's concept to explain how the keepers of the old paradigm effortlessly try to maintain its continuation because of personal interests instead of accepting the need to change. He went on to say that the University of Phoenix, Harvard and many other higher educational organizations have transformed themselves in attempting to meet the needs of their customers, while upholding the quality of the academic product. Distance Education is one method that is in keeping with customers' demand for education on their time, at a low cost, and outside of the structured classroom on campus approach of old.

Farnsworth notes that while with Greenleaf, a Quaker, religious beliefs employ equality in roles, the importance of each person in the decision-making process, servitude and spirituality in approaching issues, such a system is time consuming; but he shows that it is more effective and long lasting as the collective consciousness is reached when a decision is taken. As a result for decades, Farnsworth opines that higher educational organizations have sought to make decisions

solely based on the personal interest of faculty and this has resulted in low admissions today. The publics, including some organizations, have lamented the quality of the graduands of higher educational institutions, which has resulted in many calls to transform this system. "...many who graduate from our institutions of higher learning do not have the basic skills we would expect of college educated persons [1], instead of listening to the public' outcry, many faculty members including presidents of higher educational learning institutions have changed a few things instead of listening and responding to the call for a new paradigm in service execution. As a result, Farnsworth repeatedly questions whether the leaders of higher educational organizations understand the demands of their customers and the publics or are they marching to their own drum. He warns against complacency, tardiness, personal interest over the greater perspective and suggests that "For universities, primary attention must return to the undergraduate curriculum, while still maintaining the productive part of the university research agenda" [1]. Such a perspective resonated throughout all the chapters of the book and clearly displayed the disconnect of higher educational organizations in the USA compared to those in Asia that are meeting the needs of the society [1].

The author notes that many higher educational organizations are more concerned with named professors, edifices and state of the art laboratories and the research agenda, while little emphasis is placed on quality teaching in the undergraduate programs. So, he writes that "I also now see overwhelming evidence that leadership approaches of the past, based upon the bureaucratic, top-down use of power and hierarchical models, are ineffective and occasionally destructive. But so too are laissez-faire, shared governance approaches with no single, responsible chief decision makers" [1]. With this forwarded, the author argues that leadership, especially at the presidential level needs to employ a service-centered leadership approach that meets the various stakeholders' demands, while attaining a quality research agenda. In order to understand his call for servant-leadership, using a quotation from Jim Collins, Farnsworth writes that "He (Jim Collins) found that those organizations that transcended being 'good' and moved on to greatness were most often led by relatively unassuming credit-sharing, lower profile leaders. They were individuals with a passionate vision of what could be and little concern for who received credit for moving the organization forward" [1,6], which encapsulates servant leadership.

It is a succinctly written book with a plethora of illustrations, critical argumentation for and against the traditional approaches to leadership, the call for a new paradigm and how the organization will experience difficulty if it does not chart a service-centered leadership model. Farnsworth is an essayist who uses his pen to inspire, teach, forewarn and provide knowledge for him who desires wisdom [7]. I recommend this book to all leaders, especially those in higher education, as it sets a platform for awareness, knowledge, understanding and solutions to the crises in education. While the book is written in reference to the USA, the issues are similar across other jurisdictions and provides a toolkit for leaders in all higher learning educational organizations in the world that have not yet sought to employ servant leadership in their institutions.

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