

# Event Management: Using a Servant Leadership Model

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## Introduction

In his book, *Managing Employees Attitudes and Behaviors in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry*, Kusluvan (2003) states that researchers have theorized that the concept of leadership is continuing to evolve. Therefore, the definitions of leadership must also evolve. The context of leadership is constantly changing because it is contingent on situations and the people involved (Kusluvan, 2003). While a leadership action is successful in one situation, the same concept or model of leadership may be ineffective if used in a different context with different people. Variances in results are illustrated in a definition of leadership: the "interaction among members of a group that initiates and maintains improved expectations and the competence of the group to solve problems or to attain goals" (Bass & Stogdill, 1990:20). This definition eliminates situational differences and focuses on interaction between people.

## Leadership Defined

As previously noted, the concept of leadership in the hospitality industry is continuing to evolve, as the industry's needs change. From Mahatma Gandhi and Winston Churchill, to Martin Luther King and Steve Jobs, there can be as many ways to lead people as there are leaders (Mind Tools, 2015). Effective leadership style is also necessary to reduce the attrition rate (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2014). Some note that leadership is a social influence process in which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of subordinates in an effort to reach organization goals.

One hundred years ago, the popular leadership model had a monarchial framework with one leader at the top (Brownell, 2010). This leadership model adopts an autocratic approach to decision making. Instead of encouraging or even allowing others to contribute their opinions or ideas, the autocratic leader insists on having total authority and making all decisions alone (Johnson, 2015). Others, in order to avoid becoming an autocratic leader, have chosen the Laissez-Faire style of leadership that gives little to no direction to the subordinates. These leaders expect the team to figure out how to accomplish their tasks with minimal supervision and feedback. Some suggest that high tech industries that focus on creative behavior embrace the laissez-faire model.

However, other leaders have chosen models, which focus on supervision and strict adherence to the rules and regulations. These leaders believe that their employees will be successful at their jobs only if the company procedures are followed precisely (Mind Tools, 2015). Another leadership model, called transactional leadership, focuses on reward for performance. These leaders evaluate their employees based on their performances and reward them based on predetermined goals. In this model, the leader views the tasks to be performed as transactions between leader and employee. Rewards, such as wages and benefits, are a fair price for completing the tasks. Transactional leadership is considered as the subordinates' rewards through their efforts and performance.

Not all leaders choose to implement these models. Some leaders chose to lead by motivating and inspiring their followers to enact positive change. This model is defined as transformational leadership because leaders who use this model cast a vision for the future thereby motivating the employees to aspire to reach their goals (Mind Tools, 2015). Transformational leadership theory is deemed to improve the subordinate's performance by changing the motives and values of employees. Transformational leadership has the characteristics of individual influence, spiritual encouragement and intellectual stimulation. By communicating the goals and expectations, the leader holds himself and the employees accountable to each do their best to accomplish the company's goals. (MindTools, 2015 and Enotes, 2016).

Kurt Lewin developed a framework for leadership styles in the 1930's. These leadership styles included authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire. These classical leadership styles, as noted above vary in the degree of control that they give their followers (Enotes, 2016).

- Authoritarian leadership is characterized as domineering without any input from their employees or staff and expect employees to comply with their decisions (Enotes, 2016).
- Democratic leadership focuses more on collective decision-making, i.e. involvement offering employees choices and support (Enotes, 2016).
- Laissez-faire leadership is characterized as uninvolved and in some cases is described as an absence of leadership style. This style of leadership denotes providing support and presumes that workers are capable and reliable and will do their jobs (Enotes, 2016).

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Part of the discussion of leadership styles is the ability of the leader to know what style of leadership to use in different situations. For example, research on this premise was conducted in 1964 and developed the Blake-Mouton Managerial Grid, which highlights concern for people and concern for tasks and production (Blake and Mouton, 1964). In addition to the leadership styles noted above, Goleman et al (2002) noted six emotional leadership styles. These styles include visionary, coaching, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter, and commanding (MindTools, 2016). Additionally, others refer to charismatic leadership, human oriented leadership, and task oriented leadership. Charismatic leadership and human oriented leadership are related to communication style (deVries et al, 2009).

Spinelli (2006) noted, for the healthcare field, that a new type of leadership will be needed. The argument here is that hospitality and tourism requires new styles of leadership to face the new issues and challenges of the service industries. In addition, there are multiple studies across industries that look at the use of leadership styles and even destructive or what may be referred to as tyrannical or abusive leadership (Skogstad et al, 2014). There is a need for training in emotional competencies for emotional leadership and success for manager roles. Muller and Turner (2005) have reviewed the literature on leadership and have identified six schools of thought. The six schools are Trait, Behavior, Contingency, Visionary, Emotional intelligence, and Competency (Rodney et al, 2009).

Effective leaders are differentiated from other leaders through the exercise of a relatively small range of skill or competencies areas. In addition, effective leadership requires being yourself with skill. Dulewicz and Higgs (2004, 2005) identified three different leader styles, which they called goal oriented, involving and engaging.

- Goal oriented leadership is a style that is focused on delivering results within a relatively stable context.
- Involving leadership is a style that is based on a transitional organization, which faces significant changes in its business model, and
- Emerging leadership is based on a high level of empowerment and involvement in a highly transformational context. The focus here is to produce radical change (Rodney et al, 2009).

One model, the leader match concept is based on a contingency model. This postulates that the effectiveness of a leader depends upon the correct match between the leader's motivational structure (task or interrelationships) and situation control (Fielder and Mahar, 1979). The theory focuses heavily upon the personality of leaders in different situations. The premise is that your effectiveness as a manager will depend on how well your individual personality and leadership style fit the requirements of your leadership situation (Fiedler & Chemers, 1976). The contingency model suggests that it is considerably easier for a leader to modify the leadership situation than to change his/her

personality and motivational structure (Fiedler & Mahar, 1979).

While each of these leadership models may be the right fit for a specific situation, today's hospitality industry requires something more from its leaders. The Management Research Group (1987) identified leadership functions as management focus, production concern, people concern, excitement, and restraint (Management Research Group, 1987). Instead of dictating orders or even inspiring people to change, hospitality leaders need to set an example of service for their employees (Brownell, 2010). LaBier (2015) references a study by S. J. Wayne on servant leadership when he quotes "the best business leadership style is far from, 'Do this. Don't do that.' A servant leader looks and sounds a lot more like, 'Is there anything I can do to help you?' Or 'Let me help you'...this approach helps employees reach their full potential".

Additionally, it is important to understand that people need to be treated with mutual respect and care for others, as they would like to have others care for them. Sometimes referring to the "golden rule", do unto others, as you would have them do unto you, a leader must treat his or her employees and customers with the same respect and consideration as they would want to receive. This leadership model may be as simple as talking directly with employees and actively listening to their concerns. Small actions by a leader can go a long way to showing respect and consideration for others. The success of this style of leadership focuses on the culture of an organization and the tone being set at the top.

## Leadership and Communication

Bass & Stogdill, (1990) defined leadership, as not commanding or dictating, but as mutual communication between the people in the group. An article shared in a college publication, from the Broad College of Business at Michigan State University, states that communication is the most important quality a leader must have to be successful. While other qualities are significant, communication is vital to the company because the leadership team must be able to communicate to their employees, customers and each other in order to be successful (Broad, 2015). Without a well-defined communication process, a leader cannot listen to the needs and desires of employees and customers and the business could suffer. Event managers for example, must be able to actively listen and communicate to be effective.

In an article on effective listening for leaders, Glenn Llopis states that actively listening "goes well beyond being quiet and giving someone your full attention. It requires [the leader] to be aware of body language, facial expressions, mood, and natural behavioral tendencies" (Llopis, 2013). It is also a good idea to take notes while listening to upset attendees or employees. It is essential to establish an atmosphere of trust and openness in order to clear up miscommunication and find a successful resolution to the problem. As an event manager, communication happens months before the day of the event and afterwards. Clear communication will help ensure the contractors set up the equip-

ment in the right place, the tickets sold to the attendees at the right rate, and the vendors and speakers show up to the event at the right time.

A practical example of servant leadership took place at a ServiceMaster board meeting where the CEO, William Pollard, spilled a cup of coffee just before the board meeting started. Instead of calling for someone to clean up the spill, he asked for a cleaning solution and a cloth. Getting down on his hands and knees, he cleaned up the spill himself without hesitating. He could have easily justified calling someone to clean up the spill by saying that he was too busy because he needed to be starting the board meeting, or that he needed to be discussing changes with his upper level leadership. Instead, his leadership style humbled himself and cleaned up the spill without ceremony or reluctance (Heskett, 2013). The CEO set the example of servant leadership by openly showing that no menial task was beneath anyone, even the CEO of the company. Servant leadership means that a leader genuinely cares for his/her employees and that they are willing to do any task to benefit the company. This operating framework will result in admiration and respect that manifests itself through commitment, loyalty and excellence exhibited by the employees.

A leader's humility and servant leadership qualities will become a role model of how the employees should act and together they will create a culture of servant leadership in the business (LaBier, 2015). Humility is a huge part of servant leadership. If a leader makes an effort to serve his/ her employees, they will begin to develop a similar attitude of service and humility when serving customers. Humility does not imply meekness or that the person is a pushover. In fact, it is quite the opposite. It takes great strength of character and will to choose to be humble and put the needs of a company above fighting for self-recognition or acclaim. In his book, *Good to Great* (2001), Jim Collins talks about a type of leader that is humble and puts the needs of the company and its employees above him or herself. He states, "these leaders channel their ego away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company.... it's not that [these] leaders have no ego or self-interest. Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious – but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves" (Collins, 2001:21). This attitude shift to humility and servant leadership puts the needs of the employees and the company as a whole before the leader's own ambitions. Leaders who embody servant leadership serve their employees and customers by setting the example of service and humility.

The idea of servant leadership has been around for centuries. However, the hospitality industry is just starting to embrace this style of leadership. Servant leadership can be a valuable leadership style in any situation, but in the hospitality industry, it is the optimum leadership model. The hospitality industry is focused on service and therefore, a manager who exemplifies service through their leadership will be more effective in creating a service-centered restaurant or hotel (Brownell, 2010). A servant leader does not seek to control the employees under

them; instead, they empower their employees to seek out ways they can serve their customers. If a manager is exemplifying servant leadership through doing simple but important things like opening doors, carrying luggage or mixing a cocktail, they will inspire their employees to work hard and stay committed to a shared vision of their business. For example, a number of lodging organizations have started programs where executives have participated with employees at their hourly positions. A leader, by showing that they are not above carrying luggage or checking in a guest, communicates to employees that all employees, management and staff compose a team that works together.

Leaders can also serve their employees by striving to place each employee in a position where they can use their gifts and talents to their fullest capability. When employees feel valued and understood for who they are and the value they bring to a company, they are motivated to work with excellence (Trompenaars & Voerman, 2009). Therefore, serving the employees actually means serving the customers of a company, which in turn creates profit and makes a company successful. This case study focuses on Servant Leadership as a choice for leaders as compared and/ or combined with various other styles of leadership.

## Servant Leadership

An example of a leader who displayed servant leadership traits is David Maxwell, former CEO of Fannie Mae. When Maxwell retired from Fannie Mae, his retirement package became a topic of dispute in the United States Congress because Fannie Mae is a government-chartered company and yet Maxwell's retirement package was valued at \$20 million dollars. Maxwell thought that the publicity and controversy over this issue could have a negative effect on the company as a whole and could possibly hurt their company image resulting in a loss of revenue in the future. Based on his thinking, instead of demanding the remaining 5.5 million dollars owed to him, he asked the new CEO to turn the money over to a charity run by the company. Arguably, David Maxwell chose what was best for the company, and subsequently the employees that worked there, over his own needs and ambitions (Collins, 2001:21). This type of leader wants the company to be healthy and successful whether they benefit from the company's success or not.

The mindset of service and putting the company before one's personal needs will permeate throughout the culture of a company and change the way a company operates. A business that truly serves each other and its customers will be attractive to customers, especially in the hospitality industry. The service culture among leadership and employees will set a hotel or restaurant apart from its competitors as a true example of customer service. People are constantly seeking out hospitality businesses that are committed to a high level of customer service and it is argued that the return on investment of servant leadership is much higher than any other form of leadership because it will produce a higher level of service.

True leadership in the hospitality industry is servant leadership. An industry that is focused on providing customer service must have an example of true service to emulate. Hospitality managers must emulate servant leadership in order to inspire their employees to become servant leaders so that together they can provide excellent customer service.

## Events Sector and Servant Leadership: Be Prepared

While it is easy to understand how servant leadership can benefit a company and its leadership in theory, it is not always easy to put into action. In the event management industry, leaders have to juggle details of the event, the various stakeholders involved and their own event staff all under the pressure of the event schedule. It can be difficult to know how to set the example of servant leadership as the event manager while producing an event. Several ways that event managers can implement the servant leadership model are through their planning, communication, and response to problems. In the event management industry, the planning stage is arguably the most important part of an event. It is the time to create the design and layout of the event, calculate the staffing needs, assign tasks and create the event schedule. Without the planning stage, there would be miscommunication and confusion because no one would know what to do and when to do it. There are numerous sources for event planning checklists. These can be a starting point for a well-planned event. For example, the University of Washington has posted several checklists for event management: <http://www.washington.edu/marketing/events/planning-checklists/> (2015). Additionally, WildApricot.com (2015) is another source for event planning timeline structure (<http://www.wildapricot.com/articles/eg-event-checklist>).

It is imperative to plan, but it is even more important to have a contingency plan. No one plans to have a crisis at their hotel or event, but a good leader knows that accidents, technical failures, and more crises e.g. terrorist attacks, and natural disasters happen and so they plan for them. Crisis management is "an organization's pre-established activities and guidelines for preparing and responding to significant catastrophic events or incidents in a safe and effective manner" (Lockwood, 2005:2). In business, several criteria generally define a crisis. The first characteristic is potential for injury to guests or staff and the second is damage to company assets. The third is how fast events are occurring and the fourth, how fast decisions have to be made (Brewton, 1987). Leaders must be prepared for crisis ahead of time because in the chaos of a crisis, people will look to the leader for direction. Preparing a crisis management plan includes planning procedures and delegating who will be in charge of each area of the event. A precise hierarchy is established ahead of time in order to avoid confusion and delay.

A crisis plan needs to be specific and identify who is involved, what they should do and how they will get the job done. This also includes

establishing a hierarchy of leadership during a crisis such as who will call 911, who will manage guest problems, and who ultimately will make decisions. Above all, it is crucial to communicate the contingency plan to all staff so that everyone knows their exact duties during a crisis. No matter how well planned an event may be, there is always the chance of something going wrong. Good event managers prepare a contingency plan. However, it will not matter how prepared the event manager is for the event itself and for the contingency plan if there has been clear communication to the event staff and attendees. Communication, planning and crisis preparation are key skills for a leader.

It may also be tempting, as the leader of the event staff, to redirect blame to the staff of the area that failed. For instance, an employee forgets to reserve special seating for VIP guests or fails to place guides along the hall to the breakdown session so hundreds of people are wandering around the hallway outside of the arena. Redirecting the blame to the employees would cause the stakeholders to see who actually caused the problem as the failures instead of the event leadership. If blame fell on the leader, it could jeopardize their personal reputation and make them look like an ineffective event manager.

Servant leaders take a different approach to mistakes and failures. Instead of deflecting blame onto employees, servant leaders take the full force of the blame on themselves. They know that they were not personally at fault, but as the team leader, they accept the responsibility to come alongside the staff to correct the error and compensate the guests for the inconvenience. They also take the responsibility because if the mistake occurred due to lack of training, the leader knows it is their responsibility to train and equip their staff. Servant leaders do not stop to wonder if taking responsibility for their staff will hurt their personal reputation, they care more about serving their employees and protecting the company's reputation. They also use the mistake as a way to teach their employees and encourage their staff to reflect on how they could have handled the situation differently. In a model event staff, no one is demoted or reprimanded for their mistakes; employees have the opportunity to learn, which allows them to grow to be better leaders in their areas of the event. The servant leadership method focuses on developing others to become leaders while setting the example of service for the employees and the attendees of the event.

## Leadership Dilemma

As an example of example of servant leadership in an event company, Scott Williams, the Event Manager for a leadership conference for students, recently hired a new Arena Manager named Tonya. The Student Leadership conference is a two-day event starting on Friday night at 6pm and ending the next day at 9pm. More than 2,000 people attend the general sessions with 300-500 people attending the six breakout sessions that occur during the event. Tonya, the new event manager, had the responsibility for overseeing arena volunteers, seating issues

and distribution of materials to attendees during the event. Prior to flying out for the North East Regional Student Leadership conference in Amherst, MA, Tonya went through extensive training. Her training included customer service simulations practice runs of the event during pre-production, and in-class training on managing volunteers, and on-the-job training shadowing an upper level manager. A good source for training material for event volunteers is *How to Produce Fabulous Fund-raising Events* (1999). This book focuses on the importance of volunteers and how to effectively communicate and inspire volunteers to create a successful event (Stallings & McMillion, 2004).

Mr. Williams personally signed off on her management training and approved Tonya for the Student Leadership conference in Amherst, MA, at the Mullins Center Coliseum. This is Tonya's first event as a manager, and she was feeling the pressure. Some logistical factors compounded this pressure such as the ticket office over selling the forecasted number of seats. The revised attendance estimate was over 3,000 attendees, more than 500 than originally forecasted. Prior to the event, Mr. Williams instructed Tonya to distribute survey cards in buckets already placed in each section of the arena. The cards were to be distributed by volunteers at a specific point in the program when the guest speaker requested they be distributed to attendees. The guest speaker requested the cards withheld until needed so that no one filled out the survey before listening to the session. After placing sufficient cards for each seating section, she then positioned the buckets for easy access for the volunteer in each section. When the local volunteers for the event arrived for training, she carefully went over exactly when to pass out the survey cards and how to pass out and collect the cards in an efficient manner as instructed during training. The volunteers appeared to grasp the task and Tonya quickly assigned the volunteers to sections before the doors opened for the attendees. Tonya's first event seemed to be going smoothly.

The first two hours of the event went as planned. Then in the second session, the guest speaker called for the volunteers in each section to pass the survey cards out to each attendee. As she looked around the arena, Tonya could see her volunteers passing out cards just as she had instructed them to do. However, to her dismay, when she looked on the floor level of the arena, she did not see any volunteers at all. While the volunteers on the second and third levels were busy passing out cards, the sections right in front of the guest speaker were not receiving any cards. The attendees in the front sections began to look around for survey cards and the guest speaker is even starting to notice that whole sections of attendees were not receiving survey cards.

Mr. Williams was standing in the back of the arena to oversee the session to make sure that everything went according to plan. Additionally, he is also watching how his new manager had communicated to the volunteers and how she handled the distribution of materials. From his vantage point in the back of the Arena, he noticed several

things as the guest speaker was calling for the survey cards: 1) the cards were placed in buckets, 2) there were no volunteers located in the front sections and 3) Williams saw that the attendees in the front three sections were getting upset. Knowing how important the survey was for the speaker's message, he pondered what he needed to do to correct the situation.

He looked for Tonya and found her standing in the middle of the arena, unable to determine what she should do next. You are working with Mr. Williams and he asks you to quickly provide input on this situation and then create recommendations for correction and prevention of this issue.

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