

# Chapter 53

## The Impact of Faith on Servant Leadership and Leadership Behavior

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### ABSTRACT

*The objective of this chapter is to describe a couple of the deepest, compelling antecedents or schemata that shape personal faith and spiritual beliefs as well as two behaviors that exude outwardly toward followers of servant leaders. The first three core leadership points are strongly based on the theoretical model of Phipps (2012). The first core subject is a leader's personal spiritual beliefs, schema, or worldview. The existential worldview, as categorized by Koltko-Rivera (2004), shares the Christian worldview as a prototypical basis for servant leadership. The second core subject is a leader's constructive development or life experience, which shapes a leader's thinking (Phipps, 2012). This entails how a leader learns, processes, and makes meaning by reflecting on the school of personal experience, including trials and crucibles. The third core subject is more of a leader outcome, called meta-belief. A servant leader utilizes meta-belief or self-awareness in order to make choices in particular places and contexts. Finally, the fourth core essential subject that is evident to followers of servant leaders is vision and hope. A hopeful leader is always optimistically looking ahead with foresight, knowing what has taken place in both the past and present.*

### INTRODUCTION

Robert Greenleaf once wrote in his book, *Servant as leader*, that servant leadership begins deep within the heart and mind of an individual.

*One wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to lead...The best test, and difficult to administer is this: Do those served grow?*

*Do they while being served become healthier, wiser, freer, and more likely themselves to become servants? (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 7)*

One reason some leaders may be at a loss, or grasping for some spiritual or value laden direction in the modern world, may be due to some personal confusion or lack of understanding within of their own personal beliefs, worldview

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and values. “The global financial crisis revealed that spiritual/religious values are as important to profitable organizations in the business world as they are to religious institutes.” (Chen, C. Y., Chen, C. H., & Li, 2013, p. 418). If a leader does not conscientiously consider the source or stem of his or her beliefs, and the meaning behind their values it may lead to inconsistent leadership. “The servant leadership theory is an approach to leadership development which holds that the leaders are first a servant to serve others before they are guided... Values and beliefs are the core motivators of leadership...” (Chen et al., 2013, p. 420).

What beliefs or values motivate a person from deep within to serve? At what point does cognitive knowledge begin to shape within a leader’s conscious mind to act in such a considerate way as to serve the needs of others first? Probert and James (2011) stress that schemas or schemata are often the collective knowledge structures or paradigms which leaders use to receive and filter all new external knowledge (both tacit and explicit) and decrease or reduce its complexity in order to execute wise, strategic decisions. Schemas enable the leader “to attend to some information while ignoring other information” (Phipps, 2012, p. 182).

The objective of this chapter is to outline some of the mediating variables (Phipp’s, 2012) and/or antecedents (Van Dierendonck, 2011) which shape a leader’s spiritual beliefs, and in turn, his or her leadership behavior and outcomes. The first three sections strongly overlap with Phipp’s (2012) model. Section one is personal spiritual beliefs. The mediating variables for it are constructive development and meta-belief, section two and section three of this chapter. The last two sections, meta-belief or self-awareness (section three), and hope and vision (section four) describe more servant leadership behavior and outcomes which are evident to their followers.

The first core area is a leader’s personal spiritual beliefs (or worldview). Within this section Christianity will be reviewed as a reasonable example of

a classic servant leadership worldview. A second core area is a leader’s constructive development (including life experience and crucibles) which is “the experience of reality...constructed at the individual level...whereby individuals construct their reality” over a lifetime (Phipps, 2012, p. 183). A leader’s constructive development evolves throughout a leader’s lifetime of experience and personal crucibles. The third core area is a person’s meta-belief, a self-awareness based on an individual’s beliefs which is conscientiously held and then employed in the way one leads. Self-awareness is a critical mediating variable enabling a servant leader to exercise servant leadership which is authentic to followers. “...Each spiritual belief is placed in a particular context and used in a particular way by an individual” (Phipps, 2012, p. 183). The fourth and final core area which describes the consequential behavior of a servant leader is that they inspire vision and hope for others. Servant leaders, according to Van Dierendonck (2011), generally cast a positive perspective on whatever they engage in and authentically care for people and their general well-being.

## **PERSONAL SPIRITUAL BELIEFS AND A SCHEMA**

### **Worldview as a Foundation**

A number of leadership scholars concur that a solid spiritual foundation and worldview is the most valuable place to begin a discussion on faith and leadership. Terry (1993) strongly gravitates to the importance of a spiritual grounding when he defines the basis and crux of leadership this way.

*Leadership is spiritually grounded. To lose this hope and this faith is to despair and to fall into cynicism. Leadership is indeed a noble calling worthy of our most profound commitment. For what we do, in the final analysis, rests solely on*

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