

WHAT FOLLOWERS EXPECT OF THEIR LEADERS

By Robert J. Tamasy

Most leaders have specific expectations. They often communicate, whether orally, in writing, or both, what they expect of those that report to them. They provide job descriptions, set goals and objectives, and determine the parameters that define when, where and how they are to perform their job responsibilities. But how often do we consider that followers might rightfully have expectations of their leaders?

Max DePree, the late entrepreneur, business executive and writer, offered this perspective:

"Any follower has a right to ask things of a leader. Here are several questions that leaders should expect to hear: What may I expect from you? Can I achieve my own goals by following you? Will I reach my potential by working with you? Have you bothered to prepare yourself for leadership? What do you believe?"

A common perspective is that followers – employees, staff, and team members – are there primarily for the benefit of the leader. However, authorities on the business and professional world like DePree have long contended that equally so, the leader is there for the benefit of the followers. Many renowned leaders say one of their foremost desires is to assist those that work for them in maximizing their potential and fulfillment.

My first job was as a grocery clerk, working on a local supermarket's night crew. I was assigned a specific aisle and the responsibility for keeping the shelves stocked, sweeping and mopping the floor, and making certain the aisle looked presentable for shoppers the next morning. The night crew manager, a fellow named Joe, could have spent the night in his office, but every evening would work alongside one of us in our respective aisles.

One night I asked Joe why he worked with us, helping us to do our jobs, rather than just giving us our instructions and making sure we did our work properly. His answer was profound: "I will never ask anyone to do anything that I am not willing to do." That, long before the term became popular, was my first exposure to servant leadership.

I did not ask the manager any of the questions DePree suggested, but from that simple response, I knew Joe had my best interests at heart, as well as those of my fellow workers.

The concept of a leader that serves his or her followers was not originated by DePree, or Robert K. Greenleaf, the author of *Servant Leadership*. It was stated explicitly by Jesus Christ. He said, *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45). Jesus also made the curious statement, *"and whoever wants to be first must be your slave"* (Matthew 20:27).

These declarations were made by the One of whom the Bible says, *"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."* (1 John 2:2). That, without question, is the epitome of servant leadership. That is not all the Bible says about how are we as leaders to serve others.

The leader who puts the needs and interests of others first will inspire followers to give their best, including their loyalty. *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others"* (Philippians 2:3-4).

As Jesus said, it is *"more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35). One reason is because when we give – putting others first – we also receive. In the workplace, this often means serving others, who in turn are willing to give their best to those for whom they are working.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. If you report directly to someone, what expectations does he or she have for you?

2. Do you think that employees – followers – are entitled to have expectations of their leaders? If you serve in a leadership role, would you be willing to ask those who work for you what expectations they have for you? Why or why not?

3. Should a leader rightfully be obligated to help followers in being able to achieve their goals or reach their potential? Or should a leader focus only on corporate goals and objectives, seeing staff as the means for achieving them? Explain your answer.

4. What risk, if any, would leaders be taking by setting aside or deemphasizing personal ambitions and instead, considering others as better, or more important, than themselves?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about principles it presents, consider the following passages:

Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:30-31; Luke 22:24-27; Galatians 5:13-14; James 2:8