

## The Two Sides of Servant Leadership

Combine visionary and operational thinking to generate results.

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When people hear the phrase servant leadership, they are often confused. They think you can't lead and serve at the same time.

But you can if you understand that servant leadership consists of two parts:

A visionary or strategic role — the leadership aspect of servant leadership.

An implementation or operational role — the servant aspect of servant leadership.

The visionary role involves establishing a compelling vision that tells people who you are (your purpose), where you're going (your picture of the future) and what will guide your journey (your values).

When Walt Disney started his theme parks he had a clear purpose. He didn't say his company was in the theme park business. He said, "We're in the happiness business." Why the distinction? Being in the happiness business helps keep Disney employees aware of the company's primary goal.

Disney's clear purpose for his theme parks also helps his people understand the company's picture of the future: "To keep the same smile on people's faces when they leave the park as when they entered."

The final aspect of establishing a compelling vision for Disney theme parks was to identify values that would guide staff and management on their journey. Disney parks have four rank-ordered values called the Four Keys: safety, courtesy, the show and efficiency.

Why is safety the highest ranked value? Walt Disney knew if a guest was carried out on a stretcher that person would not have the same smile on their face leaving the park that they had when they entered.

The traditional hierarchical pyramid is effective here in the leadership aspect of servant leadership. People look to their organizational leaders for vision and direction. While these leaders may involve others in the process, the ultimate responsibility remains with the leaders to establish a compelling vision and define strategic initiatives for their people to focus on.

After the vision and direction are set, it's time to turn the organizational pyramid upside down and focus on implementation — the servant aspect of servant leadership. Nordstrom excels at this. Leaders at the Seattle-based retailer work for their people — and now the focus and the energy flows toward the customer not toward leadership.

This one change in mindset makes all the difference. Nordstrom's servant leaders help their people live according to the company's vision, solve problems and achieve their goals.

For years, the story was that Nordstrom employees were given a card with 75 words printed on it. It read:

*Welcome to Nordstrom*

*We're glad to have you with our Company. Our number one goal is to provide outstanding customer service. Set both your personal and professional goals high. We have great confidence in your ability to achieve them.*

*Nordstrom Rules: Rule No. 1: Use your good judgment in all situations. There will be no additional rules.*

*Please feel free to ask your department manager, store manager, or division general manager any question at any time.*

I love to tell the story about a friend of mine who went to Nordstrom to get some perfume for his wife. The salesperson said, "I'm sorry we don't sell that brand in our store. But I know where I can get it. How long will you be in the store?"

"About 30 minutes," he said.

"Fine. I'll go get it, bring it back, gift wrap it and have it ready for you when you leave."

That's exactly what she did. And she charged him the same price she had paid at the other store. Nordstrom didn't make any money on the deal but what did they make? A raving customer.

So you see, servant leadership isn't a strange concept at all. Large organizations like Disney and Nordstrom have been practicing it for years and doing pretty well. How about you and your company?

Give servant leadership a try. You'll be surprised at how it will help you achieve great relationships and great results.

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