Experiential Learning for Servant Leadership

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This paper presents experiential learning exercises as a means of introducing and reinforcing servant leadership practices in organizations. When practiced regularly, these exercises are a means of overcoming the problem of people not applying what they have learned through servant leadership and leadership workshops and training.

As a teacher of leadership, I have always been concerned about how much of what I teach actually makes a difference in the lives of my students and their leadership opportunities. In the past 10 years, I have been able to observe and evaluate this in my undergraduate leadership students, who are supposed to practice leadership on campus, and with my graduate students, who are in established leadership positions in the fields of business, health care, education, non-profit international development, Christian ministry, and university student affairs. I have also been the founder and program director for the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities’ Executive Leadership Development Institute, which prepares new university presidents and chief academic officers, and the Leadership Development Institute for developing emerging academic leaders at the departmental and faculty levels. In addition to these long-term roles, I have conducted over 100 leadership workshops of 1 to 5 days duration for such diverse groups as university faculty, school principals, church leaders, police forces, fire departments, hi-tech businesses, and non-profit organizations. All of this came after almost three decades and several careers of leading hundreds of people in multi-million dollar organizations. Each leadership opportunity was a distinct experience as the circumstances, culture, tasks, and people were different, and so it is with my present mantle.

Leadership development is not like a sausage factory where you go in one end and come out the other a leader. Leadership requires adaptation to specific and changing circumstances which makes leadership development a journey rather than a destination. Leadership is also being increasingly built on relationships and, as several recent longitudinal studies have shown, companies with progressive and developmental human resource practices are significantly more profitable and growth-oriented over the long term (Kanter, 1984, p. 19). Leadership cannot be learned only in the classroom. Leadership is more than a position. It is a responsibility that is conferred on a person by someone in authority or by those whom he or she leads. As research from the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina, has demonstrated, leadership development may be informed by study and practice, but it becomes a reality only when it is applied in the actual exercise of leadership. Ultimately, there is no substitute for learning leadership skills through on-the-job training and learning (McCall, 1988, 1998). But most leaders need help in converting those experiences into valuable lessons for their leadership, and that is where leadership guidance, understanding, and development are required beyond the job. When an action-oriented leader gets under pressure, he or she usually reverts to
what has worked for him or her before. It is through the applied study of leadership that new ways of leading are introduced into the leader’s toolbox.

Studies by the National Training Laboratories (NTL) in Bethel, Maine, and other organizations on how we learn, have made it abundantly clear that, for most people, the least amount of learning retention takes place through a straight lecture (Kolb, 1984). According to the work of the NTL, after a 6 week period we will retain only 5% of what we heard. If we add visuals to the words, the retentive learning is enhanced to 20%, but our best learning takes place when we experience it (75%) or have to teach something to others (90%). I have proven this over and over again by asking my graduated leadership students what they remember most, and apply in their daily leadership opportunities, about their leadership lessons. Invariably, the answer is connected to the lessons that were reinforced through an experiential learning exercise and even more so if they have subsequently used this exercise in their own organization. Thus, if we really want to be effective as servant leaders we must practice over and over again the essential components of servant leadership. “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). “All great leaders have a specific leadership point of view that defines how they see their role and their relationship to those they seek to influence” (Blanchard & Hodges, 2003, p. 43). The principles of servant leadership do not come to us naturally, but to be effective, they must become engrained in how we think about working with and relating to others. Servant leadership begins with an attitude of serving others and then adds practices and structures to make this happen. Because biblical servant leadership is inimical to the traditional ways of leading by top-down command and control, it requires much more reinforced learning and practice than what for most people is their natural style of leading.

All forms of leadership involve the use of power to influence followers and accomplish tasks, but the leadership distinction comes in how and for whose benefit that leadership power is exercised. That is what sets Christian servant leadership apart from other forms or styles of leadership. As J. Oswald Sanders (1967) wrote in his classic book on Spiritual Leadership:

Worldly conceptions of greatness and leadership cannot be carried over to His spiritual kingdom. In that kingdom there is a complete reversal of earth’s values . . . Not the number of one’s servant but the number of whom one serves, is the heavenly criterion of greatness and the real preparation for leadership. (p. 13)

There are many criterion that writers on servant leadership have used to set servant leaders apart from other forms of leadership. The Greenleaf Centre for Servant Leadership has sought to identify 10 of these (Spears, 1995, pp. 4-7) and, as a quick reminder, here are a few that I use in my teaching:

- Always being mindful of for whose benefit you serve;
- A vision for serving from the heart;
- Two way communication—listening more than telling;
- Promoting relational interdependence skills;
- Functional decision making that requires participation;
- Development of other leaders through empowerment, delegation, and encouragement;
- Creating meaningful work and workplaces;
- Motivation through meaning and persuasion;
- Serving through teamwork;
- Coaching others to develop their leadership skills;
- Managing Team conflicts;
- Producing win-win results;
- Welcoming feedback as a means to improve one’s serving;
- Continuous learning of how we can serve others better;
• Accepting the personal sacrificial costs of serving others in their leadership development; and
• A close walk with God, who taught us how to be servant leaders through Jesus.

There are many ways to develop these and other traits of servant leaders. Some organizations place appropriate quotes in strategic locations were people can see them. Others send out regular reminders by email and list serves. Some produce office equipment such as pens and screen servers to remind people of the desired theme or outcomes. Both internally and externally generated case studies and stories of other successful, or not so successful efforts, whether they are analyzed or just read, also teach us what good practices should be and why. All of these are good reminders, but experience with leadership training that will have a lasting effect has convinced me that the most effective method is through regular experiential exercises that reinforce the proper serving behaviors and thinking patterns. Those organizations who value good teamwork, for example, do not just talk about it but do exercises to reinforce this thinking. At Westjet, one of Canada’s low cost airlines, at Capita, a subsidiary that manufactures wheel rims for Toyota cars, and at Red Robin Restaurants, each shift or crew begins its work in a team meeting to ensure that everyone has the needed information to do a good job and is functioning together to produce a team effort. Only after this team preparation are its members mentally ready to connect as a team with their responsibilities and each other for the day. We may forget very quickly what we are supposed to do or may not do it with the right attitude. This is where experiential learning exercises can reinforce the desired learning long after the initial idea has been heard or read. Leadership is more learned than taught. Through developmental training that is relevant, consistent, and persistent, people grow as servant leaders when that training is superimposed and integrated with daily learning experiences on the job and becomes part of all employees’ appraisals. Exemplary servant leadership behaviors and practices are regularly noted and celebrated. For example, at Total Systems Inc., headquartered in Columbus, Georgia, there are large bulletin boards extolling examples of caring servant leadership, and Southwest Airlines publishes examples in its monthly LUV magazine for its staff and has an annual Heroes of the Heart celebration to recognize its servant leaders, whose names are then painted on one of its aircraft.

Another method for experiencing what servant leaders do is to construct skits that portray the right and wrong way of doing something. Two companies that are consistently at the top of Fortune Magazine’s “100 Best Companies to Work for in America” are TD Industries and the Container Store. Each produces skits to demonstrate such topics as what a servant leader does to bring safety issues to the fore, how to improve employee retention, and how to reprimand a poor performer. These skits are not only shared during staff meetings, but across businesses to reinforce the right thinking for servant leadership development and practice. This is also a good method for examining and modeling the positive character qualities of servant leadership, such as: accessibility, affability, vulnerability, teachability, impartiality, sensitivity, and stickability, which must be modeled, but are not conducive to learning in a formal setting (Lundy, 2002). In the same way, the negative consequences of destructive ways of handling change can be overcome such as: regarding any new ideas from below with suspicion; deliberately making people or departments compete with each other, requiring multiple levels of approvals, withholding praise while expressing criticism, micro-managing, withholding important information in order to retain control over people’s ideas, and believing that only the supervisor knows what needs to be known about something (Kanter, 1984, p.101).

The most common method of experiential learning is in a group exercise led by a facilitator. There are many books that describe these exercises around the theme of teamwork (Bendaly, 1996; Hart, 1994; Miller, 2004; Page & Page, 2002; Page & Thompson, 2002; Parker, 1998; Parker & Kropp, 1992; Pfeiffer, 1991; Rees, 1993; Stuebe & El-Shamy, 2000; Sugar & Takacs, 2000). I have used a variety of these with different organizations to develop specific servant leadership skills over the years. The longer ones require 1 to 4 hours in a workshop setting, but seldom does the learning experience equal the time invested. Much more effective are those exercises that run from 15-30 minutes, focus on a few key points, and can be easily equated to operations and feelings in the actual work setting. These are effectively incorporated into staff meetings or team meetings at the beginning of a shift or project. They serve as teaching tools and reminders of the essential qualities and expectations of servant leadership.

The primary benefit comes not from doing the exercise as much as from the debriefing thereafter. During the debrief, the participants can get in touch with their thinking and feelings and be encouraged to apply the right
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lessons to changing their working environment. All of these exercises use regular household materials that are easily available and do not cost much. In schools, for example, the classroom budget may allow for only $10 for all equipment. In most cases, these exercises are well within that budget, and in some cases cost nothing at all, as materials may be gathered from what otherwise would be discarded or materials that can be reused in the school or office. Thus, they can be used during a staff meeting or at the beginning of a professional workshop or job-related training session to set the right tone and practices for what will follow. They can also be done at any level of an organization or cross-functionally. While some adults initially regard the doing of exercises as child’s play, they quickly put these notions aside when they learn that they are used regularly in such organizations as Southwest Airlines, Harley-Davidson, Synovus Financial Corporation, Boeing Corporation, and Disney World. Schools and universities use them to change student attitudes and to promote a sense of community. The University of Indiana has an entire department that develops such exercises as teaching tools for all disciplines taught in the university (Thiagarajan & Thiagarajan, 2000).

What makes the learning process work in a group activity? To begin with, the participants have to be open to active participation in order to have the desired learning occur. Disequilibria must also be present for learning to occur. Disequilibria refers to an individual’s awareness that a mismatch exists between the old ways of thinking and new information, attitudes, and behaviors. For the essence of servant leadership to prevail, there must be a spirit of cooperation rather than competition, a spirit for serving the well-being of others rather than being served or selfishness. This helps foster opportunities to develop team cohesiveness. Team bonding is cultivated through a structure that focuses on shared goals and the provision of time for interpersonal communication around problem solving. Participants are encouraged to reflect and in some manner express the thoughts and feelings that they experienced during the exercise. They are then asked to provide their own linkages, bridges, and connections to what they are learning so that they can integrate their personal insights and desired servant leadership behaviors when they return to their work station.

Debriefing should not be looked upon as a separate activity but as something that is connected to the exercise itself. For the long term benefit of the participants, the debriefing will be as, or more important, than the activity itself. It is common for facilitators to come away from an activity feeling that it all worked perfectly because everyone participated in it and appeared to have fun. Missing is the perspective of the team member who didn’t feel supported or another who felt marginalized. Facilitators must pay attention to both the verbal expressions of the participants and their body language, especially facial expressions. The debriefing time allows the team to come forth with their perceptions and conflicts that relate to what happens in their workplace. Experiential learning exercises are also a good way to begin addressing an issue that would be regarded as a mine-field if it were openly discussed. For example, if you have a group of employees who are consistently late for meetings, by doing an exercise without all members present it becomes apparent what the impact of the delinquent members have on the rest of the group and how they feel about their tardiness which is having a negative impact on their work. Such awareness is the first step leading to a remedy. Talking things out as a team gives the participants the opportunity to gain strength and become a more integral part of the change process. The shape, form, and outcome of a debrief time will vary and is dependent on the participation of all team members and the ability of the facilitator to enhance team participation and team spirit.

A well-orchestrated experience involves plenty of group interactions with feedback, encouragement, and confrontation going on all the time. In general, a good sequencing for a debrief is:

1. The “What?” What happened? Why was it successful or not successful?
2. The “So What?” What does it mean?
3. How can we learn from it? What would we do better if we were doing it again?
4. The “Now What?” How do we apply it? How do we incorporate it into our workplace and relate it to the mission or goals of the team or organization.

There is so much that goes on that, no matter how much we talk about it, some things will take a long time to sink in. Just because it is not always fed back to them does not mean it did not happen.
While there are plenty of exercises that reinforce specific servant leadership qualities such as good listening, teamwork, and empowerment, I have chosen in this paper to focus on a few that deal with the fundamental attitude required for servant leadership, namely a heart or attitude for serving others above self.

Getting people to serve others and the group’s well-being rather than selfish ambition is crucial in a servant-led organization. I have used an exercise called “Broken Squares” to uncover destructive bossy attitudes in a police detachment, conflicts over the treatment of certain executives of a hi-tech company, and weariness from over extended responsibilities among the elders in a church. In each case, those who had trouble serving others rather than telling them what to do came to the fore as they sought ways to get around the rules and direct their colleagues to do certain things. It also became evident who was content with doing their own thing while refusing to assist others to accomplish their collective team goals. In each case, the perpetrators did not realize what their actions were doing to demean and destroy the self-esteem of their colleagues. The offending behavior could be more easily spoken about as it surfaced out of this exercise and then extrapolated for application to the workplace. Here is the exercise.

**Broken Squares**

*Objective:* To see if the attitude of serving others is firmly established in the minds of participants or whether they are still working as individuals. This exercise was originally adapted from a similar one used by Disney World to screen applicants on their serving attitude (Capodagli & Jackson, 2001, pp. 135-41). In order to make it more usable, I have modified the number of pieces used from five to four. When new employees arrive for their introduction to the Synovus Financial Corporation they use a similar exercise with one inch wooden blocks in a shallow box with parts of a picture on each block that need to be assembled so that the complete picture appears in the box of each group.

*Number of participants:* Any multiple of 4.

*Equipment:* Each group of four people is to receive four ziplock bags containing four pieces of a square that have been cut out in the pattern shown in the template diagram (Capodagli & Jackson, 2001, p. 141). 8 ½” X 11” card stock works well for this as you can cut four 4” X 4” squares from each piece. Each bag should contain a part taken from each square but never a complete square in any one bag. It is best to number the bags so that they do not get mixed up as in puzzle 1-1, 1-2, 1-3, and 1-4. This ensures that all number 1 bags can be kept separate from the second or third group of four bags. This will be very important in keeping the puzzle pieces from getting mixed up, thereby rendering the squares impossible to complete. It is easiest to have a group of four work around a clear space on a table or it can be done on the floor. It works best when the participants are facing each other in a square.

*Procedure:* Distribute the bags to each group but do not let them open the bags. Explain that there are four pieces in each bag that do not make a complete square. They are to exchange pieces with their colleagues so that each person has a completed square of equal size in front of them. Each will be a perfect square of four pieces with no gaps, pieces sticking out, or overlapping. They cannot fold or mutilate any of the pieces to make them fit. These are the rules that they have to work with:

1. No talking during the exercise.
2. No signaling or motioning to others.
3. No grabbing or throwing pieces.
4. Pieces of the puzzle are exchanged when they are offered and accepted from participant to participant.
5. Each person may work only on his or her own square.
6. Strive to be the winning team.

It is best to put these rules on an overhead or on the blackboard for all to see and be reminded of. Ask if there are any questions. Let them start.

The facilitator will have to continually watch the participants for violations of the rules. The most common ones are:

- Taking a piece that you need from someone else in order to complete your square.
- Pointing out to someone else what they need to do to get a piece of their square in place.
- Talking, signaling, or poking.

Debrief: After you have one or more groups complete the four squares show them the answer in a template on an overhead. You will need to allow a few moments while the groups that were not successful prove to themselves that it could be done. Have them place one piece from each completed puzzle in each ziplock bag so that there is no complete puzzle in any one bag. Clip the four bags together that form the complete puzzle.

Debrief Questions:
1. Which rules did you find hardest to keep and why? Those who break the rules are most likely to be domineering controlling types of people who want to tell others what to do rather than letting them serve and be served by others. They take away the self-esteem of others by doing things for them. They may also demonstrate dreaded micro-managing tendencies. This is not a serving atmosphere.
2. Did anyone assemble their square with four pieces and then not pay attention to the others or sit back having done their part—a sure sign that they are not willing to serve the group effort.
3. Who contributed most to the group’s success? There should not be any one individual or the group did not function well as a group?
4. Did anyone pass all of their pieces to someone else to work on? This meant that only the person receiving the pieces was engaged in solving the puzzle which means that the other person or persons were not contributing to the group effort—they prefer someone else to do their work for them when they are not able to solve the problem themselves. They were not serving each other effectively.
5. How did you feel when you gave someone a piece to complete their square but they could not see what to do with it? What would be a creative way, within the rules of the exercise, to handle this situation?
6. How did you feel when you saw a piece that you needed in order to complete your square but the person holding that piece made no effort to give it to you? What did you do or could you do about that situation without violating the rules of the exercise?
7. What does it take to get people to think of serving others?

The ideal participant is one who is continually watching what everyone is doing and trying to offer what they have for the benefit of the other players completing their squares as well as working on their own square. He or she remains focused throughout the exercise.

Another way to emphasize the value of serving over selfishness is to play the Loonie Treasure game.

**A Loonie Treasure: Serving The Bigger Picture**

*Objective:* To learn that the greatest value comes from what we can do to serve others.

*Number of Participants:* Any number of groups of 3 to 5 people.

*Equipment:* Pen and paper for each group.

*Procedure:* Ask each group, “What is the best thing that you can get for a loonie (one dollar)?” Write down your best value. If you think of a better one, write it down and cross out the others.

*Debrief:* At first, the group will think of something they can buy for a dollar at a dollar or discount store, such as a candle for light and warmth or some food product that has been discounted to one dollar. After a while they will start to think of leveraging their investment. For example, you could buy something for a dollar and then sell it for more. Hopefully, they will eventually start to think about what they could do for others that would be of even greater value. For example, you could buy a stamp and send a letter to a friend or someone who is lonely. You could send a letter to someone and ask them to duplicate or email it to others so that you could
raise money for building a Habitat for Humanity house or providing a meal at the local homeless shelter. What would happen if we combined our resources?

**Debrief Questions:**
1. How did it feel when you saw that you could use it to benefit or serve others?
2. Why is meaning in our lives connected to serving others?
3. How can we be more creative in serving others without breaking the bank?

Our society has conditioned us to continually be thinking competitively with a result that for many people, even if there is no competition, becomes one. By competing we fail to think win-win, which is the way of servant leadership. Here is an exercise for pointing this out.

**Magic Carpets**

**Objective:** To enable participants to get the idea of serving the whole through a win-win solution for all rather than competing with each other.

**Number of Participants:** Any multiple of 8 adults. For younger people a multiple of 9 or 10 will work.

**Equipment:** One 4’ X 6’ tarp for each group of eight. An old sheet cut to the same size will also work but the tarp is better because it will not tear and can be reused.

**Procedure:** Space the tarps out on the floor or ground so that they are approximately 1 ½’ apart. The configuration does not matter as long as they are spaced properly. The tarps must be far enough away from any other object in the room, like a table or wall, so that the participants cannot touch these objects. Have each group of 8 stand on each tarp. No part of their feet should be touching the floor or ground. Explain to them that they have to turn the tarps over without anyone touching the floor or ground. Explain to them that they have to turn the tarps over without anyone touching the floor or ground with any part of their body. That is the only rule. There is an easy and hard way to do this exercise, it all depends on thinking in terms of servant leadership.

**Debrief:** Almost every group will try various gyrations to turn the tarp over as an individual group. In time, this may work for them but the easy servant leadership way is to ask another group to cooperate with them and then have everyone move onto the one tarp while one or two people reach over to the other tarp and flip it. Then everyone moves onto the flipped tarp and the other tarp is flipped. The group then moves back to its original tarp. This may be repeated with other groups until all tarps are flipped. Some groups may never get the idea of sharing with another group and will require some hints in order to get it done on time.

**Debrief Questions:**
1. Why did it take so long for the group to come up with a win-win idea?
2. How and why is that individual group thinking replicated in our working environment (silos)?
3. What would be required to change our mindset to think first of serving others?
4. What is an example of a win-win result in the workplace and what did it take to produce it?

It is important that in servant leadership the whole is more important than the parts. Here is an exercise that brings this out:

**Puzzlegram**

**Objective:** To enable participants to learn how serving each other together can more effectively foster the creation of the whole.

**Number of participants:** Any multiple of 4.

**Equipment:** Twenty pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that all fit together are needed for each group of four participants. This set of 20 pieces can be placed in a ziplock bag for easy storage and distribution and to prevent the pieces from being mixed with other sets. To construct the set, assemble a child’s jigsaw puzzle. A child’s puzzle is recommended because it is easier to assemble and the pieces are larger, approximately 1” X 1” as opposed to...
many adult puzzles in which the pieces are smaller and more intricately connected. Once the puzzle has been assembled, turn it over so that the blank underside of the assembled puzzle is facing up. Choose any 20 pieces that are joined together in a batch. A batch of 20 pieces does not necessarily have to include straight edged side pieces. Using a felt tip marker write or print on this blank side some short saying that will cover as many of the pieces of the assembled 20 pieces as possible (i.e., “Leaders must have followers,” or “To serve is to lead”). Next, take these 20 pieces apart and place them in a ziplock bag. Repeat for as many batches of 20 pieces that you need for the participants.

Procedure: Distribute a ziplock bag containing 20 pieces of the puzzle to each group of four participants. Each participant is to take five pieces from the ziplock bag. This exercise works best if the participants are sitting around a table opposite each other in a square or around something to construct the puzzle on if they are on the ground. The first person will place one of their pieces of the puzzle in the centre of the group. The next person on the right will try to add a piece that they have to this piece. Once they have done this or if they are unable to do this in 10 seconds then it is the next person’s turn on the right. Another participant may give the person who is trying to add a piece one that they have that they think will fit the puzzle. If the person receiving the piece is unable to fit it onto the puzzle then they retain the piece they have just received. No person can add more than one piece to the puzzle during their turn. When a person has run out of pieces to add, then someone else must share a piece with them. This goes on until all 20 pieces are assembled together and the writing can be read. In doing this exercise, no one can speak or motion or point to another player or a piece of the puzzle indicating where a piece should go to complete the puzzle or which piece to add next. The group that assembles all their 20 pieces together and can read what the writing says has won the match.

Debrief Questions:
1. Which rules did you find hardest to keep and why? Those who break the rules are most likely to be domineering and controlling types of people who want to tell others what to do rather than letting them serve and be served by others. They take away the self-esteem of others by doing things for them. This is not a serving atmosphere.
2. How did you feel when you gave someone a piece to add to the puzzle but that person could not see what to do with it? What would be a creative way, within the rules of the exercise, to handle this situation?
3. How did you feel when you saw a piece that you could add to the puzzle but the person holding that piece made no effort to give it to you? What did or could you do about that situation without violating the rules of the exercise?
4. What does it take to get people to think of serving others for accomplishing the group’s task?
5. What would an ideal team player do in this exercise?

As the group gets into the serving mode, participants will anticipate in advance what piece they can offer to the person whose turn it is to add a piece to the puzzle and how to hand that piece in such a way that the player can see how it will fit into the puzzle.

Variation: Shorten the time to 5 seconds and score a point for every time someone shares a piece with another participant and that piece is added to the puzzle. Alternatively, give each person more time.

Servant leadership is based on becoming interdependent with each other rather than independent or dependent. Here is an exercise that points out the differences among them.

We all begin life as a baby that is totally dependent upon others for our well-being. With each year we gradually develop and are encouraged by our parents to develop more and more independence. Then we enter the workforce or get married and have to shift to an interdependent mindset as we use relationships to get thinks done. It is the interdependent mindset that is critical for making servant leadership a reality in an organization, but not everyone makes that adjustment on their own. Lets look at these three mindsets in the workplace.
Dependent. When we enter a new job or environment we are usually needing considerable input from others to find our way around and to learn how to succeed. It is natural to rely on others at that stage. When that mindset continues however, it can become debilitating and lead to autocratic leadership from a supervisor. The dependent person prefers to rely on others, especially their supervisor, to make decisions for them and if they go wrong, to blame others for the problem. They are hesitant or reluctant to do something without someone telling them what to do or how to do. Their performance level is controlled by those who evaluate them. Most everything they do must be checked or approved by someone else. Autocratic leaders and benevolent dictators like these kind of subservient, dependant employees. Being served is a high ideal.

Independent. This is the opposite of dependent. An independent mindset prefers to rely on self rather than anybody else. They are good at working on their own and will get the job done on their own initiative and in their own way. They resist input from others because they think that they know best or their ego or experience does not make it easy for them to take into account someone else’s views or ideas. Most of all, they want to be right and see that it is done right by themselves. This attitude may have been fostered by having to live by oneself or through the educational system that encourages and rewards individual accomplishments through competition. While acknowledgment of their accomplishments is generally appreciated and welcomed, they do not like others reviewing their work for mistakes. Serving self is a high ideal.

Interdependent. An interdependent mindset is at the heart of good teamwork that flows from and is integral to servant leadership. With this mindset, we are all in it together and seek to work cooperatively and as a community. Each contributes to the welfare of the other and together we can accomplish more than if we acted as dependent or independent individuals. Synergy comes from the interactive effort of the group where the talents and skills of each person are utilized for the maximum benefit to the group or the organization. Performance reviews are a two-way interactive exercise of learning and improving for the sake of the whole and their contribution to that whole. Serving others is a high ideal. This is the unselfish mindset of the servant-leader.

To see the differences between dependent, independent, and interdependent mindsets, try this exercise. Take this outline and enlarge it so that the spaces can be filled in by groups of 3 to 4 participants. Other categories of decision making can be added as the exercise is used at different times.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Dependent</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Interdependent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Decisions:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who is included?</td>
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<td>Who is given the information?</td>
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<td>Who is responsible for seeing that the decision is carried out?</td>
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<td>Meetings:</td>
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<td>Who is responsible for calling them?</td>
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<td>Who determines the agenda?</td>
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<td>Who controls the list of invitees?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who determines the seating arrangement?</td>
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<td>Who chairs the meeting?</td>
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<td>Who determines if the meeting is a success?</td>
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<td>Who is responsible for follow-up?</td>
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<td>Inter-office Communications:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who determines what kind of information is to be sent out?</td>
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<td>Who controls the content?</td>
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<td>Who controls and on what basis is the distribution list determined?</td>
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<td>Handling of Mistakes or Conflict:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who causes the conflict or is to blame for the mistake?</td>
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<td>How are disagreements resolved?</td>
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<td>Who takes responsibility for dealing with problems?</td>
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<td>Budgets:</td>
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<td>Who creates budgets?</td>
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<td>Who determines what input is required?</td>
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<td>Who makes the final decisions?</td>
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<td>On what basis are those decisions made?</td>
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<td>Performance Reviews:</td>
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<td>Who initiates the process?</td>
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<td>Who determines what is to be evaluated?</td>
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<td>Who gets evaluated?</td>
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<td>Who determines rewards for good performance?</td>
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<td>Who and what determines how poor performance is to be handled</td>
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<td>Who handles the follow-up?</td>
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<td>Public Recognition Ceremonies:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who determines who is to be recognized or commended?</td>
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<td>Who plans or orchestrates the program?</td>
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<td>Who decides what the award should be?</td>
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<td>Who shares in the award?</td>
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<td>Office Décor:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who determines the size and configuration of offices?</td>
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<td>Who determines what an employee may have in his or her office?</td>
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<td>Who determines the furnishings?</td>
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<td>Business Travel:</td>
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<td>Who determines if a trip is necessary?</td>
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<td>Who determines who should be included?</td>
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<td>How is the expense account determined or allotted?</td>
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<td>Who receives a report on the trip?</td>
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Strategic Planning:
Who determines who is involved?
Who controls the contents of the strategic plan?
Who is responsible for follow-up?

(This exercise was adapted from one that I saw Ann McGee Cooper conduct in one of her leadership workshops in October 2003.)

The Servant Walk
This exercise is best introduced by watching the 12 minute Survivor Run video (available for non-paying educational audiences only from Pyramid Media, www.pyramidmedia.com). The video features Harry Cordellos, a blind runner in the Dipsea race, who is assisted by Mike in running the marathon. Many people who lose their sight experience a heightened awareness of the world around them through the use of their other senses. They may also rely more on others to serve them by being the replacement for their lost sight. This requires a lot of risk-taking as well as trust as listening skills are enhanced.

Debrief After the Video:
1. Who is the servant leader here?
2. How did Harry serve Mike?
3. What did it take for Harry and Mike to complete the race?

Exercise: The Servant Walk, also known as the Blind Walk (Capodagli & Jackson, 2001, pp. 178-81).

Procedure: Participants pair off with a partner. The facilitator explains that one person will act as the blind person (close eyes or blindfold) and the other as the guide as they negotiate around various objects inside a room or outside. Safety must be of the utmost importance in this exercise. The guide may take the blind person by the forearm or the blind person may place their hand on the guide’s shoulder. To enhance the experience even more, do not touch each other but use only verbal instructions. A predetermined course may be followed or the pair may move through various spaces. Appropriate obstacles would be chairs, tables, steps, and something to go under or over.

Debrief:
1. After 5 minutes, the pair talk to each other about what they learned and experienced about trusting in someone else and serving the other person. Allow 3 minutes.
2. Switch roles with the blind person now becoming the guide and repeat the exercise.
3. Allow a further debriefing time of 3 minutes between the pairs.
4. General debrief—Did you trust one another? Why or why not? What does it take to trust someone else? What does it take to serve someone else? What lessons did you learn about your communication skills in serving others? How do we employ these skills in our serving at work?

Variation: The blind partner must remain silent.

More than one person team up as a blind group for the guide to lead through the course.

Experiential learning can be an effective means for establishing and reinforcing the basic tenets of servant leadership. While the exercises may be fun to do, and learning can be a fun exercise, the main purpose is to learn through them by seeing ourselves in a position different from our work, but analogous to the feelings and attitudes we experience while working. Servant-led organizations will never be effective until the members see serving each other and their clients or customers as coming from an unselfish heart, as Jesus taught us to serve others rather than to be served (Berry, 1999). Organizations that practice serving through experiential learning exercises are the most adept at perpetuating the culture of servant leadership. “Those who lead in the Kingdom of God,” Gene Wilkes reminds us, “must check where they sit and what they wear. If you are not kneeling at the feet of others, wearing a servant’s towel, you are in the wrong place” (Wilkes, 1998, p. 175).
References
Miller, B. C. (2004). Quick team-building activities for busy managers: 50 exercises that get results in just 15 minutes. New York: AMACOM.