

Volume 31**The Question**

How can I lead if I'm always worrying about what my people need?

A Perspective

Since Robert Greenleaf coined the term "servant leader" in 1970 (in his essay, "The Servant as Leader"), the concept of servant leadership has grown into a widely discussed phenomenon. Google "servant leadership" today and you'll find almost 1.8 million results. The challenge is that servant leadership as a general concept carries many assumptions, often erroneous, ranging from "this is a faith-based model" to "I must choose whether to serve OR to make a profit."

In the last [trU Tips \(Vol. 30\)](#), I introduced trUMoments™, the key moments I believe a leader must master to be effective both in building relationships (team-building) and achieving business results:

1. Someone does something right (or wrong — including you).
2. Someone needs something from you.
3. Someone disagrees with you.
4. A change is needed.
5. You feel worn out or overly stressed.

Serving the people on your team means recognizing when trUMoment™ #2 occurs AND moving into action to help meet that need.

Your Action Plan

Appreciate that everyone has needs every day. Beyond helping to meet your people's basic Maslovian needs of food/water/shelter and safety, however, recognize that servant leadership focuses especially on providing those specific things that your people need from you as their leader.

I speak passionately about creating space where honest conversations can occur that lead to thoughtful action and improved performance. I believe that great conversations start with a question. Here are critical questions that need to be asked every time such a conversation occurs. If you ask these questions consistently — and follow through on what you hear — you will be serving:

During an interview: "Based on what I've told you about this role, what would you need from me in the first three months to ensure that you were successful?"

During a one-on-one: "What energizes you right now? What frustrates you?"

Prior to an evaluation: "What three questions do you want to have answered as part of your upcoming review?"

In an employee survey: "What one question do you have for the leadership team?"

During a team meeting: "Rate our meeting on a scale of 1 to 10. Why did you assign that rating? What would make it a 10?"

In a development/career-plan conversation: "What support do you need in order to achieve your learning and growth goals?"

At lunch: "What plans do you have for _____ (the summer, your next vacation, the holiday, etc.)?" **Follow-up question after it happens:** "How was your _____?"

Leadership based on serving others *is* that simple, but recognize that it's not that easy.

Servant leadership need not necessitate a choice to serve OR to profit. James Sipe and Don Frick conducted a study examining the returns of companies that had a servant philosophy. Their results showed that servant-lead companies achieved an average pretax portfolio return of 24.2%, better than James C. Collins' *Good to Great* companies' 17.5% and S&P 500 companies' 10.8%. The data demonstrates the inherent profitability of servant leadership.



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Reminders for the Busy
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Do you need help building these moments into your habits as a leader? Do you have leadership-development needs for your team or yourself? Contact me. Scott@thetrugroup.com

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