



## The Servant Leader... Selfless, Empathetic and Aware

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Are you a Servant Leader? Is your top priority to look after the needs of your followers so as to ensure that they reach their full potential, hence perform at their best?

The term servant leadership was first coined by Robert K. Greenleaf (1904-1990) in a 1970 essay entitled *The Servant as Leader*. Since that time, more than half a million copies of his books and essays have been sold worldwide. Greenleaf's servant-leadership writings have made a deep, long lasting impression on many individuals and corporations who share a concern for the issues of leadership, management, service and personal growth. His influence is also evidenced through the work of numerous award winning authors including, but not limited to, Stephen Covey, Ken Blanchard and John Maxwell to name a few.

While there are many servant leaders who come to mind, I suggest that Pat Tillman belongs at the top of the list. In May, 2002, eight months after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and after completing the 15 remaining games of the 2001 NFL season, Tillman turned down a contract offer of \$3.6 million over three years from the Arizona Cardinals to enlist in the U.S. Army. He

was killed in Afghanistan in 2004. The official story is that he was shot by enemy forces during an ambush, but it was later revealed that he may have been killed by friendly fire.

### What is Servant Leadership?

Servant leaders serve the people they lead. Their style represents a selfless approach to leadership, one that places serving others – including employees, customers, community and country – as priority number one. Servant leadership emphasizes increased service to others, promoting a sense of community and sharing of power and decision making. Servant leaders understand that personal recognition is not the path toward team success. Their ego and individual goals do not get in the way of the larger picture of team goals.

The words servant and leader are usually thought of as opposites. However, when these two opposites are brought together, the selfless leader emerges. At its core, servant-leadership represents a transformational approach to life and work – a way of being that creates positive change in life, business and society.

Born on November 6, 1976 in San Jose, California, Pat Tillman was the oldest of three sons. He excelled at football in high school and helped lead Leland High School to the Central Coast Division I football championship. Tillman's considerable talent landed him a scholarship to Arizona State University (ASU) which he attended after graduating from high school. At ASU, Tillman thrived on the field and in the classroom. As a linebacker he helped his team achieve an undefeated season and make it to the 1997 Rose Bowl game. He won Pac-10 Defensive Player of the Year and was selected as the ASU Most Valuable Player. Tillman also earned awards for his performance as a student, winning the Clyde B. Smith Academic Award in 1996 and 1997; the Sporting News Honda Scholar-Athlete of the Year in 1997; and the 1998 Sun Angel Student Athlete of the Year.

Pat Tillman was selected by the Arizona Cardinals as the 226<sup>th</sup> pick in the 1998 National Football League Draft. Tillman moved over to play the safety position in the NFL and started 10 of 16 games in his rookie season. Of interest, he turned down a 5-year, \$9 million contract offer from the St. Louis Rams out of loyalty to the Cardinals. *Sports Illustrated* football writer Paul Zimmerman named Tillman to his 2000 NFL All Pro Team after Tillman finished with 155 tackles (120 solo), 1.5 sacks, 2 forced fumbles, 2 fumble recoveries, 9 pass deflections and 1 interception for 30 yards. He excelled in the NFL despite being relatively small for his position at 5' 11" tall.

### What do Servant Leaders do Differently?

A servant leader serves first. He or she is the one who is the first to volunteer to help. Never too proud to do the work, even the difficult or unpopular jobs in order for the team to succeed. Often, the jobs are done without anyone knowing because there is no complaining or comparing.

Robert Greenleaf wrote that "servant leadership begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscience choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is to ask oneself two

questions: (1) Do those served grow as persons? (2) Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, autonomous, more likely themselves to be servants?" The following represents a sampling of what the servant leader does:

- Devotes himself or herself to serving the needs of the team.
- Focuses on fulfilling the needs of those whom they lead
- Develops and nurtures team members to bring out the best in them
- Coaches others and encourages their self expression
- Facilitates personal growth in all whom they serve
- Listens with the goal of building a sense of community

Pat Tillman and his brother Kevin enlisted on May 31, 2002. Kevin gave up a career in professional baseball as he already had signed to play for the Cleveland Indians. In September, 2002, one year after the World Trade Center attacks, they completed their basic training together. The two brothers completed the Ranger Indoctrination Program in late 2002 and were assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ranger Battalion in Fort Lewis, Washington. After participating in the initial invasion of Operation Iraqi Freedom in September 2003, Pat Tillman entered Ranger School in Fort Benning, Georgia and graduated on November 28, 2003. Tillman was subsequently redeployed to Afghanistan.

Pat Tillman was very close to his family and high school friends. He repeatedly mentioned in his journals during wartime service that he drew strength from, and deeply valued, his closest friendships, parents, wife and family. He was very committed to his high school sweetheart whom he married just prior to enlistment in the Army Rangers, Marie Ugenti Tillman.

### **Who are These Servant Leaders?**

Servant leaders are all around us. They are just hard to spot because they are so focused on their mission – selflessly serving others. It is the teacher who is always accessible after class. The nurse who goes beyond the call of duty to care for her patients. The gifted actor who accepts a supporting role in the play. The volunteer whose passion is serving the community. The star athlete who cares less about his or her statistics as compared to the team's success. And, Pat Tillman – the gifted athlete and scholar whose priority was serving his country. When asked why he decided to put his professional football career on hold and join the U.S. Military, Tillman stated "Sports embodied many of the qualities I deem meaningful, however, these last few years, and especially after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack, I have come to appreciate just how shallow and insignificant my role is...It is no longer important."

Great teams, organizations and communities have servant leaders who make their own unique contributions. A servant leader is willing to risk his or her fate in order to do what is right. It is the politician who champions an unpopular policy because he or she feels it is in the best interest of the country. It is the coach who benches the star player because the team chemistry is at risk. It is the co-worker who accepts full responsibility for a failed project even though many team members were involved.

### What are the Characteristics of the Servant Leader?

Larry Spears, President and CEO of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership extracted the following characteristics of servant leaders after years of studying Greenleaf's original writings:

**Listening** – Servant leaders possess a trait of listening intently to others. Listening, coupled with regular periods of reflection, is essential to the growth of the servant leader.

**Empathy** – The servant leader strives to understand and empathize with those whom they serve. They accept and recognize one's talents and unique abilities.

**Healing** – Many people have broken spirits and suffer from a variety of emotional hurts. Servant leaders recognize that they have an opportunity to "help make people whole".

**Persuasion** – Servant leaders use persuasion rather than positional authority in making decisions within an organization. They seek to convince others rather than coerce compliance.

**Conceptualization** – A servant leader has the ability to help others "dream great dreams". They have the ability to look at a problem from a conceptualizing perspective allowing them to think beyond day-to-day realities.

**Stewardship** – Stewardship is best defined as "managing for others, one who directs affairs. Guardian. Manager." Servant leadership, like stewardship, assumes first and foremost a commitment to serving the needs of others.

**Commitment to the Growth of People** – Servant leaders believe that people have intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As a result, the servant leader is deeply committed to the growth of each and every individual whom they serve.

**Building Community** – A servant leader is ever mindful of the importance of building community amongst those they serve. Servant leadership suggests that true community can be created when people are respected and valued.

Pat Tillman was killed by friendly fire on April 22, 2004. The Army initially claimed that Tillman and his unit were attacked in an apparent ambush on a road outside the village of Sperah, about 25 miles southwest of Khost, near the Pakistan border. An investigation by the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command concluded that Tillman and the Afghan militia soldier were killed by friendly fire when one ally group fired upon another in confusion after nearby gunfire was mistakenly believed to be from enemy combats.

On Sunday, September 19, 2004, all teams of the NFL wore a memorial decal on their helmets in honor of Pat Tillman. The Arizona Cardinals continued to wear this decal throughout the 2004 season. Pat Tillman...athlete, professional football player, son, husband, brother, soldier. A servant leader...selfless, empathetic and aware!

#### About the Author

Scott Addis, CPCU, CRA, CBWA is the CEO of Beyond Insurance and is recognized as an industry leader having been named a Philadelphia finalist for *Inc. Magazine's* "Entrepreneur of the Year" award as well as one of the "25 Most Innovative Agents in America." Beyond Insurance is a consulting firm that offers leadership training, cultural transformation, and talent and tactical development for enlightened professionals who are looking to take their practice to the next level. Since 2007, the proven and repeatable processes of Beyond Insurance have transformed individuals and organizations as measured by enhanced organic growth, productivity, profitability, and value in the marketplace.