

# SERVANT LEADERSHIP



By Pastor Jerry Truex

There are two models of church leadership that can be contrasted: *top-down management* and *servant leadership*.

The *first model* depends on hierarchical structures, where institutional goals are served by people who are expendable. In this model, the people within the organization can be replaced.

The *second model* functions more like an organism, which is made up of people who are interdependent. Like organs in a body, people are not expendable or replaceable. Christians are called to function like an organism, the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12) and imitate the servant leadership of Christ, who is the Head of the Body (Mk. 10:35-45; Phil. 2:5-8; Eph. 5:23).

## Top-Down Management

Many Christian organizations are run the same way secular businesses and governments operate, using a top-down organizational structure. It has a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) at the top. Managers report to the CEO. Supervisors report to the Managers. Workers report to the Supervisors.



In many cases today, the church is no different. If we substitute Senior Pastor for the CEO, Associate Pastors for Managers, Shepherds for Supervisors, and the congregation for Workers, then the same organizational model emerges.

In *strict* top-down models, people wait for orders coming from the top. Policy, programs, and decisions come from the CEO with little input from the lower strata of the hierarchy. In such businesses, authority and responsibility come with the position. A new boss has instant authority and if people do not respect his authority, they're fired.

Top-down organizations have their merit. They are efficient and effective organizations, especially if the aim is productivity and profit, but they can be impersonal. Of course, individuals within these types of organizations are not heartless. Many are compassionate and caring. However, the organization itself does not promote compassion for compassion sake, but only if, as in the case of hospitals, compassion increases profit or productivity. Even then, compassion is a means to an end and not the end itself.

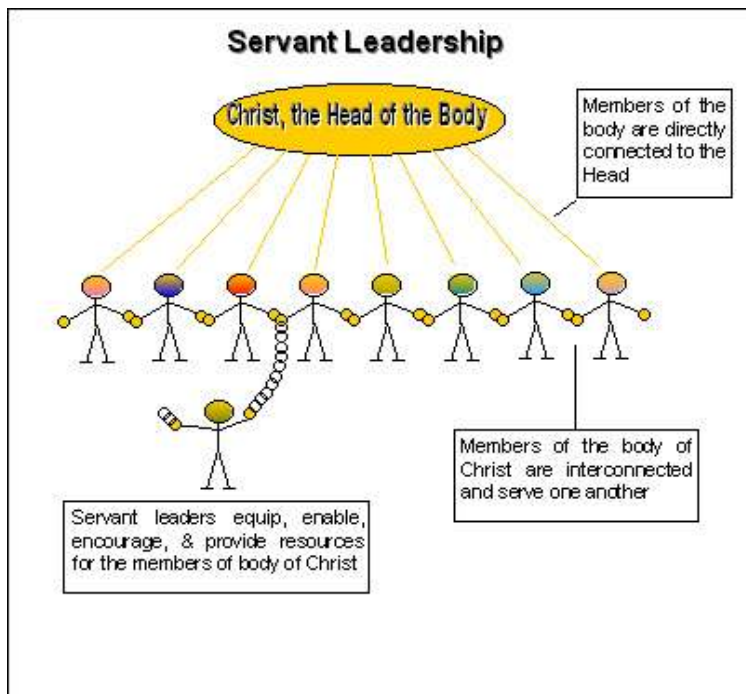
In these types of organizations, *people are expendable and replaceable*. If someone is not performing efficiently or someone becomes a burden on the system, that person is replaced or made redundant. People come and go, but the institution remains. In this way, the institution takes on a life of its own irrespective of who is working within the system. In these organizations, people serve the institution, not vice versa.

## Servant Leadership

The Body of Christ stands in stark contrast. The aim of the Body of Christ is not productivity, but personal maturity in Christ (Col. 1:28). The highest value is not profit, but God and the people who bear God's image. People are the focus of pastoral attention and not the means to some other goal.

### ***People are not expendable or replaceable***

Each person is a valuable and integral member of the whole. In the church, the criteria of evaluation is not efficiency or quotas, but faithful obedience (Rom. 1:5) and becoming Christlike (Rom 8:29) including character development or bearing the "fruit of the Spirit," such as love, joy, peace, patience, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23) none of which can be measured quantitatively as in profit and production focused organizations.



For these reasons, we can see that the values, goals, and modes of a church are very different from businesses and other organizations. Since the aims and values of the church are radically different from other organizations, it is not surprising that leadership in the church is also very different from that found in government, business, and the military.

***Servant leadership***

The radical leadership envisioned by Jesus was *servant leadership*. A central text is Mark 10:35-45. Here, the disciples are depicted as competing for Jesus' attention. They want him to appoint them to certain positions of authority (Mk. 10:37), but this is not the way the Kingdom of God works (Mk. 10:42-43). Greatness or leadership is not by appointment, but comes with serving others (Mk. 10:43-45). Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is not only presented as the greatest *servant leader*, but also the pattern or model that all disciples are to follow (Jn. 13:12-17). This is leading by example, by imitating Jesus. All believers are to imitate Jesus' self-sacrificial, *servant leadership* (Phil. 2:6-8).

In Matthew, Jesus tells his disciples not to seek the type of power, authority, or public recognition that typified the Pharisees (Matt. 23:8-13). Rather, Jesus said, "You are all brothers and sisters" (Matt 23:8). They are called into a new family, where discipleship is among equals, where family loyalty is defined as humble service (Matt. 23:9-11) and "doing the word of God" (Lk. 8:21 ). In this way, Jesus reverses the world's expectations. His kingdom is an *upside down* kingdom (Matt. 23:12). The world's system of authority—by appointment, position, manipulation, force or coercion—will not work in the *upside down* kingdom. Rather, kingdom leadership is self-sacrifice, humility, and servanthood.

***The danger of codependency***

As with all types of leadership and styles of human relations, there are dangers to avoid. One danger to avoid is developing addictive attachments to other people or codependency. Codependency is an addiction to a person, rather than to something like alcohol, drugs, food, or gambling. Instead of helping the person in a nonattached, self-responsible, adult-like relationship, the "helping person," consciously or unconsciously, uses another person to meet their false-self or ego needs for power (control), pleasure (sensation), or security (possession).

A key characteristic of codependency is "enablement" or doing for others what they can and should do for themselves. To help others develop self-responsibility, servant leaders must develop "nonattached love." Nonattached love seeks what is best for the other person without the addictive demands, manipulative strategies, and compulsive behaviors that might arise from the false-self or ego of the helper.

***Non-hierarchical, egalitarian relationships***

The model of *servant leadership* articulated by Jesus not only emphasizes non-attached love, but also non-hierarchical relations. Hierarchical relations often create attachment and codependency because of power imbalances. In contrast, Christians are brothers and sisters, having equal status before God and each other (Matt. 23:8). Because there is no upward mobility, competition is eliminated. Because each member of the Body gets his or her gifts and abilities from the Head (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4), each member is directly responsible to the Head to use his or her gifts.

***The role of pastors and shepherds***

Shepherds are viewed as master-servants in that they excel in serving. As master-servants, shepherds are *under* the members of the Body. This completely inverts the hierarchical model. Shepherds are not *over* others, as if mediating the authority of the Head. Rather, shepherds serve, encourage, teach, and equip from *underneath*. The servant leader has influence and power, but not on the basis of position. Rather, influence comes with showing interest in others, serving them, being examples of Christlikeness, and earning trust and recognition.

Shepherds, as skilled servant leaders, serve the members of the Body so that members, in turn, can carry out their service or ministry where the Lord has placed them. We should think of every person as strategically placed by the Lord in a specific place (work, home, neighborhood, etc.) with spiritual gifts designed for that specific context.

Just as there are different types of tools for different occasions, so there are different types of spiritually gifted persons for different contexts. Through their gifts, people serve (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:12, 26); through service, people lead (Mk. 10:42-45). For example, during Sunday morning worship, servant leaders with the gifts of preaching, teaching, and music are prominent. In other circumstances, gifts of administration, exhortation, or mercy may have higher profile.

Throughout the week, wherever God mobilizes His servants, they use their gifts at work, in the home, or their neighborhoods. In this model, a one hundred member congregation constitutes one hundred ministers, each being taught and trained in the art of *servant leadership* by shepherds gifted in teaching (Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Tim. 3:1-2). Shepherds provide ideas and resources, the 'know-how' of knowledge and experience, and their own lives as examples (1 Tim. 3:1-13).