

**SERVE, LEAD, SUCCEED!** is a how-to book for successful sales management, showing how servant leaders across the nation have transformed their sales teams from mediocre to exemplary.

# **Serve, Lead, Succeed!**

## **How Servant Leaders Are Reaching Breakthrough Sales**

by Max Cates

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**SERVE,  
LEAD,  
SUCCEED!**

**HOW SERVANT LEADERS**

**ARE REACHING**

**BREAKTHROUGH SALES**

**MAX CATES**

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## Chapter 2

### **Servant leaders meeting the challenges of today's sales environment**

One of the oldest known quotes on leadership still applies to today's sales manager: "A leader is best when people barely know he exists, not so good when people obey and acclaim him, worst when they despise him. Fail to honor people; they fail to honor you. But of a good leader, when his work is done, they will all say, 'We did it ourselves.'" The speaker was philosopher Lao Tze speaking on servant leadership. The year was 500 BC. More than a passing fad, servant leadership continues to energize leaders around the world – from Southwest Airlines to Starbucks – delivering proven, bottom line results. It is a discipline, a tough-love approach requiring character strength and self-confidence from the sales leader as well as accountability from the sales team.

Servant leaders take an employee-first rather than a customer-first approach. They make sure their reps are well trained, coached, encouraged and supported. They include their reps in decision making, problem solving and goal setting. They listen to their reps and meet their needs to achieve objectives. They collaborate with sales people, creating a vision and setting challenging objectives together. They hold themselves and their reps accountable to high benchmarks.

Following are three ways servant leaders are developing high-performing sales teams:

**1. Improved retention rates** – Servant leadership improves rep retention, helping keep experienced sales people on the payroll.



According to a Baylor University study of 501 full time sales people, “Adopting an employee-oriented approach will improve turn-over intention, a common problem in sales.” By placing sales people’s needs as most important, “leaders serve as role models to their employees and reap the benefit of improved employee attitude and job satisfaction. While it may on the surface appear counter intuitive to place employee needs as a top priority, even above company objectives, this study, as well as supporting research, demonstrates that servant leadership has myriad benefits to the organization and is an effective tool to retain employees.” Servant leaders, according to the study, enhance “person-organization fit,” helping align reps with company values, beliefs and goals by including them in decision-making and collaboratively shaping the company’s value structure. Essentially, servant leaders help sales reps feel that they truly fit the organization and belong there. In addition, servant leadership increases the level of “organizational commitment” the attachment and identification the rep feels for the employer – this sense of employee dedication leads to “a deeper desire to stay with the organization.”

**2. Increasing sales productivity** – One of the few studies of the impact of servant leadership on sales performance was conducted by William Auxier in 2011. Studying a cross section of sales people in the healthcare industry, Auxier found that top sales people – those in the top 20% of those studied – were likely to be managed by servant leaders who exhibited these three characteristics:

- Developing and empowering others – Focusing on training, supporting and nurturing sales people to reach their full potential; and providing them with the freedom and authority to work independently and creatively without coercion or micromanagement.
- Authentic leadership – Projecting in an honest way a leader’s values, identity, emotions, motives and goals which develops trust in followers. To be consistent about what one thinks, what one says and what one does.

- Visionary leadership – Developing a clear vision that inspires, motivates and energizes followers with a sense of purpose.

Southwest Airlines, one of the premier servant leader companies, has led the airline industry in profitability and productivity indices for many years. Herb Kelleher helped found the airline on the following premise: “Your employees come first. And if you treat your employees right, guess what? Your customers come back, and that makes your shareholders happy. Start with employees, and the rest follows from that.”

A study by authors James Sipe and Don Frick showed 11 companies with servant leadership as a component of management strategy delivered a 17.5% return on stocks compared to 10.8% average return of the 500 largest publicly-held companies. A subsequent study showed companies with servant leadership as the **predominant** leadership strategy produced a 24.2% return. In addition, this and other studies have shown that servant leadership also improves relations with customers, ostensibly having the effect of improved sales and repeat sales. According to the researchers, “Essentially, employees learn to treat their customers by observing how their managers treat them.” This gives the servant leader a performance advantage that’s particularly important in sales where customer satisfaction is everything.

A study sponsored by the University of Illinois at Chicago further supported the bottom line benefits of servant leadership. A total of 961 employees from 71 Jason’s Deli Restaurants were studied in 10 metropolitan areas. The restaurants led by servant leaders showed positive results:

1. Six percent higher job performance.
2. Eight percent higher customer service behaviors.
3. Employees who were 50% less likely to leave the company.

The study states: “The best business leadership style is far from ‘Do this. Don’t do that.’ A servant leader looks and sounds a lot more like, ‘Is there anything I can do to help you?’ Or, ‘Let me help you.’ Or, ‘What do you need?’ This approach helps employees reach their full potential,” said Sandy Wayne, one of the researchers. She noted that servant leaders pass along their virtues to their subordinates, “It’s contagious. The employees see their leaders as role models and often mimic those qualities, creating a culture of servant leadership. This serving culture drives the effectiveness of the business as a whole.”

**3. Reciprocity** – The Law of Reciprocity, a basic sales practice, says people repay in kind what another person has provided. Just like we feel obligated to repay favors and gifts, subordinates are likely to reciprocate the kind of positive treatment received from a sales manager. The manager who respects sales people will likely receive respect from them – likewise for the following important factors (the more leaders give, the more they receive):

- Responsiveness
- Loyalty
- Encouragement
- Trust
- Honesty

It’s just human nature to want to return the favor of being treated well. The key thing is that it starts with the servant leader as the giver, the one who gives respect, trust and kindness without expecting anything in return. In effect, reciprocity creates a powerful synergy that drives teamwork, enthusiasm, buy-in and commitment to company goals. However, this law is never a one-to-one ratio, so don’t expect immediate and equal reciprocity from your people. When the payback comes, you’ll probably see more of a two-to-one ratio: You give two times what you receive.

On the other side of the coin, we've all experienced the opposite of positive reciprocity which is negative reciprocity – which means your reps are likely to repay discourtesy with discourtesy, and reciprocate in kind as they receive distrust, condescension or ridicule.

### **Five-minute bursts build enthusiasm**

Servant leadership isn't for everyone – it takes sales managers who are bold, self-assured and confident in their abilities – but when applied with sincerity and selflessness, it has the potential to transform a sales group into a high-performance sales team. However, the process takes time. Valuable time that could be spent doing other things. How does the leader find the time? Part of the answer comes in the form of what Adam Grant, leadership author and researcher, calls “five-minute bursts” which he describes as “very short bursts of energy and attention that leave a lasting impact on people. In my first real job, when I was about a month in, the president stopped by, shook my hand, introduced himself, and said, ‘I just want to get together for coffee.’ We probably had a 15-minute interaction. And the fact that he knew who I was and cared about me and took a personal interest stuck with me for months. I decided that I didn't want to let this guy down. Leaders' status and stature make it possible to quickly recognize and notice people. Then you're a lot less likely to have hours and hours of the day when all those people are seeking you out.”

### **Intrinsic motivation is the servant leader's currency**

Servant leaders realize that “My way or the highway” sales management simply doesn't work. They know when sales people feel pushed they push back with resistance, even a subtle kind of sales sabotage. The result is mediocre sales performance. An over-controlling manager is limited to control of visible activities. For example, you can ask for reports on each customer presentation explaining why or why not a sale was made. You can ask your sales team for daily activity reports. You can require 15 appointments per week. At the end of the day, what you have are reports and activities.

What you don't necessarily have are the invisible factors that comprise high performance selling – enthusiasm, commitment, and accountability.

The control issue revolves around extrinsic and intrinsic motivators. Extrinsic motivators come in two general categories: money or threats. Perform the desired behavior (meeting sales objectives, for example) and you get promoted, commissions, bonuses and other awards. Failure to perform gets you reprimanded or fired. Extrinsic motivators are vital to a healthy sales organization but, when used to excess, fall short of providing a fully functioning sales team. People want more than a paycheck. They want to feel that ever important sense of purpose to what they are doing. Extrinsic rewards are the levers of command/control management. On the flip side of the coin is intrinsic motivation, a form of psychological pay: feeling respected, appreciated, believing that they are doing important work towards a meaningful vision. Intrinsic motivators are the currency of the servant leader, providing powerful and sustained progress towards success. If all you offer sales people is extrinsic motivation, when it's taken away, you have nothing left. You'll see it happen when you offer a bonus to sell a particular product. Product sales increase, temporarily. Take away the bonus and sales drop. Intrinsically motivated sales people work harder, consistently harder, because they are doing something they actually want to do. They believe that they are playing an important role in the company and they have a stake in its future.

“Most companies have it all wrong. They don't have to motivate their employees. They have to stop demotivating them,” states an article in the Harvard Management Update by David Sirota, Louis Mischkind and Michael Meltzer. “Incorporating a command-and-control style is a sure-fire path to demotivation. Instead, redefine your primary role as your employees' expediter: It is your job to facilitate getting their jobs done. Your reports are, in this sense, your 'customers.'”

Researchers have found that such intrinsic factors as achievement, recognition, meaningful work, responsibility, advancement, and personal growth are far more effective than pay and commissions in motivating people. James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, in their book, *The Leadership Challenge*, wrote: “The research is very clear. External motivation is more likely to create conditions of compliance or defiance; self-motivation produces far superior results. There’s even an added bonus. People who are self-motivated will keep working toward a result even if there’s no reward, but people who are externally controlled are likely to stop trying once the rewards or punishments are removed.”

At the core of servant leadership is the constant effort to make sales work more fulfilling and energizing so that sales people want to stay. When sales reps feel challenged, valued and capable they will go beyond what’s expected, for example staying late to perfect a presentation. They don’t do it for overtime pay, which is an extrinsic motivator, rather they are driven by the personal achievement of doing the best possible job.

The question is: How do you make sales work more meaningful and energizing? You can call it job enrichment or personal development, but there are ways to help your people feel a sustained sense of meaning on the job. It all begins with the individual sales person. You have to take the time to discover their needs, aspirations and motivation, then construct a plan for them individually. Here are a few ways to heighten intrinsic motivation within your sales team:

1. First of all, make sure you have a vision that gives your sales people a meaningful reason to come to work every day, other than just to get a paycheck. Your sales people should know that their efforts are helping to improve people’s lives, increase customers’ business, create a better community or world. They need to understand how their efforts are impacting people as well as the company’s bottom line. The connectivity between sales people and end user benefits makes their jobs worthwhile.

2. For sales reps that aspire to be promoted, provide them with management assignments. For example, ask them to coordinate sales meetings, setting the agenda, getting speakers, and creating reports for the sales team. The list of possible assignments is endless, ranging from pricing strategy to innovative product applications. Be sure to make the assignment challenging and is a good match for the skill set of the rep. And don't forget to provide ample recognition for the rep's efforts.

3. Even reps who don't want to be managers can add meaning to their job and provide a sense of self-esteem that they may not receive in their regular duties. A good example is to have them lead a training session which focuses on their specialties and strengths. If you have someone who is particularly adept at selling a particular product, ask him or her to train the sales team on that product. This provides the dual benefit of informing your sales team as well as building the confidence of the rep doing the training. Again, there are many opportunities for assignments as long as they fit the skills and interests of the sales rep.

4. Opportunity for career advancement. Many sales reps are motivated by the opportunity for advancement in the organization. Be sure to take time to discuss the opportunities with your people. And more importantly, help them develop a detailed plan to progress to more responsible jobs. Outline their strengths and weakness, and explore training and development needed to match their skill set with the requirements of the types of jobs in which they are interested. Sales reps who believe in the prospects for promotion are far more intrinsically motivated than those who feel like they are in a dead-end job.

5. Make sure you have a recognition program that rewards sales reps, not only for sales achievement, but for such servant leader activities as teamwork, helping other reps and outstanding customer service. Provide cash awards, trophies or certificates for the achievements and present the awards at sales meetings or awards banquets (sales reps love to be in the spotlight and see their names in

newsletters, emails, etc.). Even consider a Hall of Fame for outstanding accomplishments in sales and non-sales activities that support the spirit and intent of servant leadership.

6. Similarly, on an informal basis, send emails, make phone calls or just stop by to congratulate a rep who has done a good job. These personal interactions are morale builders, and help form lasting bonds with your people.

7. Create a mentor program in which seasoned reps help newer reps come onboard. This kind of program is a self-esteem builder for the mentor who is able to use years of experience to help a new rep. On the other hand, it gives the mentee someone to lean on and learn from. Mentor programs can be shaped to fit the team's needs, and can even match veteran reps who have different but complimentary skills. Mentoring is a perfect fit for servant leadership as it captures the essence of teamwork and helping each other succeed.

8. Participation in management decision making. A certain way to increase intrinsic motivation is to encourage sales reps to make decisions concerning policy, plans, and procedures. By being involved in the process, reps feel a sense of buy-in, as well as being respected for their opinions. In addition, sales reps who help design sales plans are much more likely to make those plans succeed.

9. Stretch goals are a way to challenge your sales people to push themselves to be their best. Servant leaders expect the best of their people, which provides reps with the satisfaction of being part of the "A Team" but they have to work hard to stay there. A great intrinsic motivator is meeting a goal that you had to use all your skills to attain.

10. Frequent feedback is another intrinsic motivator. Coaching and personal evaluation lets sales reps know where they stand and where they can improve. This gives sales reps a sense of control over the quality of their work and keeps them on track for continuous improvement of their skills. Servant leaders know the value of individualized feedback, and provide it informally or formally as



needed – enough to be helpful but not so much that it overwhelms the rep.

11. Teamwork is another intrinsic motivator that matches closely with the spirit of servant leadership. Sales reps love to be part of a team that is supportive and morale building. A team provides a sense of belonging that enhances reps' responsibility and accountability. A sales team, in many cases, is like a safety net which helps build self-esteem and confidence for its members.

Jim Loehr, in *The Only Way to Win*, discusses intrinsic motivation as practiced by basketball coach John Wooden: "The legendary UCLA men's basketball coach oversaw an impressive amount of winning of the extrinsic kind: He won 10 national championships, including seven in a row; led the Bruins to a record 88-game winning streak; and sent numerous players to the NBA, including several all-time greats. He was the first man, and one of only three ever, to be inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame as both player and coach. The reason so many former players remember him with such love, affection and respect, though, has to do with the immense intrinsic success he helped them – and himself – to achieve. He was legendary for never mentioning winning to his players, certainly not as the aim. As you get stronger as a person, he felt, you'll probably win your share, but the important thing is that your value cannot be taken from you... When he spoke of poise, self-control, alertness, loyalty, or enthusiasm to his players, he modeled the strength in the reality of his own life:

***Never strive to be better than someone else, because you have no control of that.***

***Strive to be better than yourself – every day.***

***Character is what you are. Reputation is what others think you are.***

***Never lie, never cheat, never steal. Don't whine, don't complain, don't make excuses.***

“More important than anything, perhaps, was the genuine care Wooden showed his players, as people first. His former players all say that he never used them to build his coaching legend.”

### **Servant leaders build rapport with authenticity**

We live in a “look at me” society. Our athletes unabashedly celebrate touchdowns in the end zone with elaborate dances, chest-beating and other self-congratulatory antics. Facebook is filled with posts of exotic vacations and extravagant birthday parties. Conspicuous consumption is running rampant as mid-income people carry \$5,000 purses and drive \$100,000 cars. Effective servant leaders are the antithesis of “look at me” – taking the contrarian position of being anonymous, of being real. They have the confidence to stand in the shadow while their people get the limelight. They have the courage to show themselves – their fears, anxieties, and failures – to others. And they have the wisdom to know that subordinates don’t care about the leader’s awards and accomplishments. All they care about is that the leader cares about them.

We all know that sales is a minefield of rejection and disappointment. They need you as their safety net, to help them stay positive and motivated. However, we can’t get so obsessed with positivity that real feelings get pushed to the side, where anything other than a positive attitude is vilified and held in contempt. Yes, positivity, resilience, and optimism are all vital to our mental health to counteract the vicissitudes of selling. But leaders can’t afford to become one-dimensional smiling faces, lacking in depth and authenticity. Your followers want authentic leaders, people they can identify with and respect for their vulnerability. It’s ok to show fear, disappointment, anger, remorse, to admit mistakes and to say “I don’t know.” Authenticity takes a pretty big ego – a servant leader ego that accepts blame and admits that they don’t have all the answers. This isn’t to say that you need to walk around showing every emotion you feel. The key is that you show resilience and optimism in the face of difficulties. Admit you’re disappointed about the team missing an objective, but show persistence in the pursuit of reaching the next one.

It's alright to express fear of a new competitor in your market, but show resolve in winning the battle. Similarly, if you confess that you're nervous about the upcoming presentation to the board of directors, express your game plan to win them over. If you just can't figure out a solution to a problem, acknowledge your dilemma but enlist the help of your sales team in solving it.

One word of caution, and you know what I mean about this: Authenticity is not an excuse for rudeness, abruptness, tantrums and other bad behaviors from leaders who say, "I'm just being me." If being a jerk is your default behavior, go back to review what makes a servant leader.

Similarly, it's important to teach authenticity. You're absolutely lost without a positive, hopeful mindset. But, as a manager, don't insist that your people act like cheerleaders all the time. Allow – even encourage – them to express frustration about policy or managerial obstacles. Their comments can lead to process improvements and better sales. In other words, encourage a positive mindset but insist on honesty. Don't get ensnared by a foolish insistence that your sales team be "positive" all the time while criticizing your people's complaints as being "negative." To a reasonable extent, let your people grumble and complain. If you insist that everyone be positive, you're insisting that they be dishonest and phony. Surprisingly, the more you allow and encourage honesty, the more likely it is that your people will complain less. And when they do complain, there could be fire behind the smoke, allowing you to discover issues that need to be addressed.

### **Servant leaders give their best to their people**

"People don't care about what you know until they know how much you care," says Ralph Chester, quoting Zig Ziglar. Chester is an award-winning servant leader sales manager for Pfizer. "Kind gestures, listening, empowering your people with freedom to make their own decisions – those are things that let your people know you care about them. You can preach servant leadership all day, and it

won't mean anything until you live it. It's not just a conscious thought but a habit that you demonstrate in your daily life.”

Chester's servant leadership has made him one of Pfizer's top producing sales managers. To qualify for the company's Hall of Fame award, a manager has to win the top sales award six times. Chester has won the award an impressive 10 times. His sales teams have also built a reputation for new product launches ranking first or second in the company with nearly every product launched during Chester's 27 years with Pfizer. His turnover rate for sales people has been remarkably low. “I keep a spreadsheet of everyone I've hired. I have hired more than 50 sales people, and have had to terminate only two.” Chester explains that he is a trusting person, and on a rare occasion a sales representative will abuse his trust and fail to meet expectations. However, he notes that the trust returned to him from his trusting sales representatives is worth the risk of a sales rep taking advantage of the situation. “In fact, in a few rare cases I've had reps come to me to report a sales person who is not meeting our standards, which says a lot about the pride our people take in their sales team's accomplishments.”

In addition to establishing trust with his sales team, Chester says five principles are vital to his servant leader success:

1. A clear vision that provides an over-arching purpose to what our sales people do. “That vision for us is to take care of our patients. It's not all about sales results, but more about making the world a better place by helping patients become healthy. If we do that well, sales results will follow.”

2. Selflessness. “Zig Ziglar once said, ‘You will get all you want in life if you help enough other people get what they want out of life.’ I encourage our sales reps to look outside themselves, at their customers' needs and at the needs of their team members. It pays off with good sales results,” Chester said.

3. Leading by example. “I try to walk the talk, and don’t expect anything from my sales team that I wouldn’t do myself. It’s a daily habit. It takes constant repetition, but your subordinates pick up on it. And they imitate your servant leadership without being told to do so.”

4. Followership. “My people pass along servant leadership to their customers. I encourage “lagniappe” with our sales people – that is providing that something extra that sets you apart, that leaves a lasting impression with customers. For example, I had a female sales rep whose tradition on Christmas was to open presents then take her mother out for Christmas dinner. While at the restaurant, she bought an extra Christmas dinner and delivered it in person to a customer, a Jewish doctor who was working that Christmas day. I can tell you, it’s been very gratifying to see how she has evolved and applied servant leadership in her life.”

5. Sharing stories. Chester says he frequently shares such stories as the Christmas meal with his reps. “There are hundreds of these anecdotes that help build your servant leadership sales culture. You just have to encourage your sales reps to tell you their stories, listen and share them with others. It’s a powerful way to get across key points in a fun and meaningful way. It also serves to reward reps’ efforts while catching them doing the right thing.”

Chester said his faith is an instrumental part of his servant leadership, “I believe it could be said that Jesus Christ was the greatest sales person in history,” he said. “He convinced 12 people to leave their families, friends and jobs to serve others and change the world. He led by his own example and his parables created the Christian culture of service to others that has persisted for 2000 years.”

### **The servant leader expects, respects and inspects**

Even though it sounds like some touchy-feely management fad, servant leadership dates back to biblical times and is still energizing leaders around the world. It is a discipline, a tough-love approach

requiring character strength from the sales leader and accountability from the sales team.

The concept is best defined by Robert Greenleaf, former AT&T executive, who coined the term in 1970: “The servant leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible.” It’s a form of “reverse delegation” with proven bottom line results.

A recent *Harvard Business Review* article stated, “Leaders are shepherds, goes the conventional thinking, protecting their flocks from harsh surroundings. Not so... Leaders who truly care for their followers expose them to the painful reality of their condition and demand that they fashion a response. Instead of giving people false assurance that their best is good enough, leaders insist that people surpass themselves. And rather than smoothing over conflicts, leaders force disputes to the surface... But leaders who cultivate emotional fortitude soon learn what they can achieve when they maximize their followers’ well-being instead of their comfort.”

Frequently, there is an assumption that servant leaders are simply nice guys, going to great lengths to make their subordinates happy. On the contrary, effective servant leaders are people-oriented but are obsessive about sales results. They know that everyone’s job depends on selling effectively. Consequently, they maintain a dual focus of developing people and sales productivity. Adam Grant, author of *Give and Take*, described this duality of people and results: “One of the things that impressed me when I was doing research is how many givers (servant leaders) in leadership roles drew a sharp distinction between being liked and being respected. They said you don’t want to wander around thinking that being a giver means everybody loves you. Then you end up being this insufferable people-pleaser who never makes the right or the tough decisions. Being respected is about doing what is right for the organization or the group as opposed to the individual or certain constituents. There’s a lot of wisdom in that.”

Servant Leadership requires the sales leader to expect, respect and inspect.

They **expect** their people to surpass their best, to constantly seek ways to improve their performance. Servant leaders provide support, training and resources for their sales team to get the job done. In return, they require accountability from the sales team to be successful. After all, the servant leader is a member of the team – a partner – one who shares accountability with the people who do the work, the sales reps.

They **respect** their sales people, their opinions, their skills, professionalism and ability to succeed. Servant leaders are respectful enough to listen to their people and humble enough to let their people take the lead when appropriate. (After all, it takes a big ego to be humble.) They are self-confident enough to share power and decision making with their reps. And they are wise enough to know that sharing creates a fusion exponentially more powerful than the efforts of any one manager.

Finally, they **inspect** results continuously to ensure they are proceeding on the right track. They establish measurement systems that keep them and the sales team informed of every phase of daily performance. As former President Ronald Reagan said, “Trust but verify.”

### **Servant Leaders and the Golden Rule**

Edward Hess, professor at the University of Virginia, has studied top-performing corporations throughout the country and found many of them being led by servant leaders whose management philosophies run counter to more traditional, authoritarian management styles. “Many people believe great leaders are charismatic, have a commanding presence, are visionary and educated at elite schools. Almost all of the leaders of the high performing companies I studied had none of those traits,” Hess said, emphasizing that they were more likely to be humble and subordinate-focused who lead by example

and the “Golden Rule.” Hess adds, “How servant leaders behave is a key to their successful leadership...For example, treating people with dignity, being in the moment and not multi-tasking, not interrupting others, listening intently, smiling, saying please and thank you, acknowledging the contributions of others, admitting mistakes, apologizing, not having to be the smartest person in the room all the time, and spending time on the front line with employees and customers...Servant leaders do not think that unless employees are watched like hawks, they won’t work hard. They believe that if you create the right values and culture, normal people will do extraordinary things.”

If you look at an organization as an inverted pyramid, you see the role of the servant leader. Instead of the CEO at the top, he’s at the bottom of the pyramid while the hourly workers are at the top and the managers in-between working for their people.

After assuring that the sales team is well-trained and well-armed, the servant leader and the team create a common vision and objectives. Then, the servant leader turns them loose – with adequate monitoring of progress – to get the sales job done. Micro-managers not allowed.

The servant leader has to take chances for his people. This is not for the weak at heart. There are times when the leader has to turn it over to subordinates and show confidence in their ability. Then, the leader has to fight relentlessly to help them get where they are going. Sales people always notice their leader’s efforts for them, and even if they don’t show it, they will remember when you went to bat for them. The payoff is developing that ever-so-important element of trust.

### **Servant leaders trust, and teach trust**

The single, most important factor of leadership and all relationships is trust. To be a trusted leader, you have to be honest, caring and competent. Those are the entry level elements of trust. If



your people question your integrity, they will not trust you. Similarly, if they don't think you care about them – if you won't sacrifice for them or have little interest in them as people – they will not follow you. And, if you don't know the sales business, they'll ignore you. Lacking any one of these three factors makes you untrustworthy.

But there's one more, a fourth ingredient that's equally important: You have to trust to be trusted. Now things get a little tough. You mean, you may ask, you have to put them out there on their own, making their own decisions and acting independently like they own their jobs? Exactly. You mean they don't have to check in every day, and let me know when they're on the job or not? Yes.

In *Primal Teams*, author Jackie Barretta, says, “But how do you instill trust in a group? You begin by placing your faith in them. Over the years, I have made this my motto: ‘Expect people to do the right thing, without the need for a lot of rules.’ These words visibly light up a team. They resonate. And they get results... Whenever I have shown teams that I trust them, I have seen fairly immediate results. People no longer show up late for work or meetings, and they don't need prodding to put in extra hours to complete a project on time.”

Sales people relish their autonomy. They don't want to be managed or bossed. If you don't respect them as hard working, competitive entrepreneurs, capable of handling their accounts by themselves, they will not trust you. And they won't stay with you. Think about it, do you want sales people who are waiting for your help before making a close, waiting for your instructions before they make a move? That's a lot of pressure on you, and there's not enough hours in the day to manage like that.

Rules can become the wrecking ball of the lazy manager. This kind of manager finds it easier to design rules that apply to the entire sales force, rather than take the time to handle the daily nuances and needs of the individual sales person.

A sales force needs structure and guidelines; however, rules can become a substitute for taking the time to solve an individual's problems. For example, if a sales team's results are below objective, the lazy manager will impose procedures to address team performance – such as remedial training sessions for everyone – rather than addressing individuals' sales performance. Sometimes this thinking gets even more twisted as the sales boss tries to exert peer pressure from the sales team to remedy a problem such as making the team go to remedial training because one rep failed the original training. The problem with that is inflexible guidelines frequently waste time, as well as distracting and undermining the confidence of your good performers. Before establishing a rule that applies to everyone, ask yourself if the problem couldn't best be solved by attention to individual sales reps.

The key is to minimize the rules, and maximize your reps' independence. That takes three things: Hiring, preparation and measurement.

Hire people who aren't order takers, who won't sit around waiting for your directions. The ones you want are those with drive, initiative, competitiveness. They don't like being told what to do, and they don't like a lot of rules and office hours and daily check-ins. Of course, they need teamwork skills to balance their entrepreneurial attitude – a lone wolf maverick can be as counterproductive as an order taker.

Second, prepare your sales people to be successfully independent. Not all sales intrapreneurs are created equal. Some are ready today – they have the skills and experience to make it happen now. Others may need to break in gradually. Make sure they have the sales and organizational skills to succeed. Develop them, train them, coach them, observe them. You'll know when they're ready for full autonomy.

Finally, use metrics to continuously measure sales activity and results. Performance measurement facilitates trust between the servant

leader and sales team for this simple reason: metrics alone can tell both the sales manager and reps everything they need to know. A good measurement system means the sales manager doesn't have to know where the reps are or what they're doing; no need to have them checking in and reporting their whereabouts. All measurement systems are different but many include **important** performance functions ranging from sales objectives to number of appointments to deadlines and closes per day. These indices can also include new business, increased sales to existing accounts, or loss of accounts. Daily reports should capture these key statistics and be shared continuously with your sales people to keep on the right track. It's as simple as the old adage, "If it doesn't get measured, it doesn't get done."

A good performance measurement system allows the manager to target strengths and weaknesses of sales people, prevent problems in advance, and create training and remedial programs based on individual needs. Equally important, it will build rep's independence because no one is looking over their shoulder but the metrics are keeping them on track daily. Essentially, a good performance measurement system gives sales people the responsibility and accountability to do their jobs. For the cynics among us, consider this: When sales people are empowered, when they are given authority and accountability, underperformers can't blame the manager. The numbers don't lie. Essentially, it shifts the blame from the boss to the subordinate.

To promote personal development, it's vital for your people to firmly grasp their own skill level, comparative performance and potential. A good metrics system provides a realistic view of their abilities in order for them to build on strengths and improve weaknesses. It will help you, the servant leader, avoid what's known as the Dunning-Kruger Effect, a condition where employees have an exaggerated sense of their competence. This is a condition common to sales people who frequently have to be their own cheerleader, using positive self-talk to overcome the daily rejection they face with customers. Self-confidence is vital to sales people's success, but it can

sometimes give sales reps an inflated view of their ability. According to a recent *Forbes* magazine article, one study showed that only 39% of employees accepted constructive coaching on the job and tried to analyze ways to improve their skill set, while 69% failed to use the criticism constructively, perhaps even resisting criticism that points out their weaknesses. Other studies have shown the following statistics, most mathematically impossible:

- 32 to 42% of software engineers said their skills ranked in the top 5% of the company.
- 21% of Americans believe it's very likely or fairly likely they will become millionaires in the next 10 years.
- A University of Nebraska faculty study showed 68% considered themselves in the top 25% and 90% rated themselves above average.
- 29% always know whether their performance is where it should be while 36% say they never or rarely know.
- A Cornell University study of grammar skills showed those in the lower 10% of results rated themselves in the upper third of respondents.

The *Forbes* article, written by Mark Murphy, says, "I recently spoke with Professor Dunning, who now teaches at the University of Michigan, and he told me that one of the problems in many organizations is that many people are underperforming simply because they don't know that they could be doing better or what really great performance looks like... In fact, he told me that research subjects were willing to criticize their own previous poor skills once they were trained up and could see the difference between their previous poor performance and their new improved performance.

"The irony of the Dunning-Kruger Effect is that, Professor Dunning notes, 'the knowledge and intelligence that are required to be

good at a task are often the same qualities needed to recognize that one is not good at that task—and if one lacks such knowledge and intelligence, one remains ignorant that one is not good at that task.’ ”

It’s the job of the servant leader to clearly paint a picture of where a sales rep stands compared to other reps and in terms of the rep’s potential to improve. Good metrics tell the story convincingly by letting sales reps’ draw their own conclusion. As a leader, you can micromanage and stifle your people, or you can empower them with initiative and self-sufficiency through the judicious use of metrics. The more a manager directs and commands, the more accountability he or she takes on. Tell sales reps what to sell, when to sell it and how to sell it, and you give them a pre-excuse for failure: They’re doing it your way, and if it doesn’t work, it’s your fault. Give reps an unbiased look at their performance through the lens of good metrics. Explain the analytics thoroughly and help them determine their strengths, weaknesses and changes needed to improve. Let the numbers do the talking; they’ll speak louder than any words you can say. A self-taught lesson will stay with a sales rep more effectively than a manager’s sermon. Your reps will get it, drawing their own conclusions about their performance. Your job as a manager is to facilitate support and training in response to the statistics. This gives reps information and the freedom to use it as they elect. The decision is theirs and the accountability is theirs.

### **Servant leaders build trust through “Moral Character”**

Think for a moment of people you trust. Why do you trust them? You can like, or even love someone, and not trust them. You can admire someone’s compassion but not trust them until you get to know them. You can respect their intellect but still distrust them. Trust in the sales arena involves a complex mix of competency and sales knowledge; genuine care for the sales team; and integrity.

Geoffrey Goodwin, associate professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, has studied the way we form impressions of others. In a *Psychology Today* article, Goodwin describes two

primary ways that people form impressions of others: “warmth” – kindness, humility, compassion, gratitude and empathy; and “moral character” – honesty, trustworthiness, loyalty, justness and courage. “Moral character is indeed the predominant determinant of global impressions...and drives how impressions are formed.”

Furthermore, the article states, these character traits are “negatively dominant” which means, “A negative or immoral trait outweighs the presence of a positive moral trait on the impressions we form. One failure to recognize an injustice overshadows any number of good deeds. When it comes to moral character, says Goodwin, ‘people are judged by their weakest link.’ And a transgression in the moral domain may be less subject to forgiveness than slipups in other realms.

“Of all the elements of moral character he studied, the ones that carry the most weight are the ‘pure’ moral traits – honesty, justness, fairness, trustworthiness, courage – which have nothing to do with warmth. In our judgment of others, honesty even outranks kindness, a moral trait that canoodles with warmth. Absent honesty, no information about a person can be trusted.”

### **Servant Leaders are models for customer engagement**

In addition, this and other studies have shown that the servant leadership style also improves relations with customers, ostensibly having the effect of improved sales. According to the previously mentioned Baylor University researchers, “Essentially, employees learn to treat their customers by observing how their managers treat them.” Employees who are treated with dignity and respect, tend to treat their customers the same way, as noted earlier with Southwest Airlines. Many successful companies take this contrarian stance of “employees first” rather than “customer first,” believing that satisfied personnel create happy customers. This gives the servant leader a performance advantage that’s particularly important in sales where customer satisfaction is everything.

*Serve, Lead, Succeed!*

## **Servant Leader Moment #2**

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena.

Whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood.

A man who knows the great enthusiasms and great devotions.

Who spends himself in a worthwhile cause.

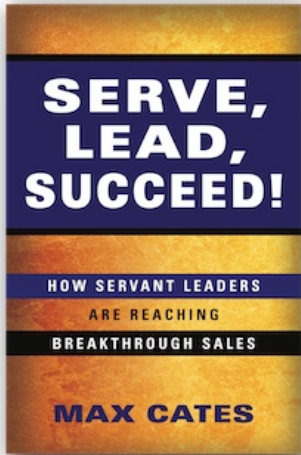
Who, in the end, knows the triumphs of high achievement.

And, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly so that his

place shall never be with those cold and timid souls

who know neither victory nor defeat.

- Theodore Roosevelt



**SERVE, LEAD, SUCCEED!** is a how-to book for successful sales management, showing how servant leaders across the nation have transformed their sales teams from mediocre to exemplary.

# **Serve, Lead, Succeed!**

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