The Advisor as Servant: The Theoretical and Philosophical Relevance of Servant Leadership to Academic Advising

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In 1979, Robert Greenleaf published Teacher as Servant. This novel actively portrays Greenleaf's concept of servant leadership by describing the extracurricular work of a university professor. Consequently, some scholars have demonstrated the relevance of servant leadership to classroom instruction (Powers & Moore, 2005). However, it was not as an instructor, but as an advisor that the fictional Mr. Billings engaged in servant leadership and deeply transformed his students' lives. By explaining the philosophy and practice of servant leadership, I demonstrate how it can contribute to the theory and practice of academic advising. The characteristics of servant leadership are discussed as a theoretical-philosophical construct relevant to academic advisement.

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Relative Emphasis: theory, practice, research

The Advisor as Servant

In 1979, Robert K. Greenleaf published a novel entitled *Teacher as Servant*. In it he portrayed, through the art of story, the behavior of what he called "a servant-leader." Regarding this book, Powers and Moore (2005, p. 124) wrote,

> In it he depicts a fictional university residence hall called Jefferson House in which a wise faculty housemaster helps his students come to appreciate the concepts of servant leadership on campus and in their future careers. The main character, the physics professor housemaster, embodies the characteristics of a servant leader, and in doing so is able to fundamentally transform the beliefs the students have about their world and their responsibilities for service to others.

Although the text received poor reviews when first published, it has since become more widely respected (Frick, 2004, pp. 291–92). In fact, it has even inspired the establishment of residence halls and service learning programs, patterned after Jefferson House, because some visionary leaders have extracted deep lessons from the text regarding student leadership, engagement, and development (Beazley & Beggs, 2002; Spears, 2002). Additional scholars have used the notion of the teacher as servant-leader to outline and discuss the potential application of servant leadership to classroom instruction (see Powers & Moore, 2005). In spite of its applicability and relevance to the classroom, servant leadership was not illustrated in Mr. Billings's role as classroom instructor. Instead the hero of the story deeply transformed the lives of his students in his role as an advisor.

Although operating beyond the boundaries of the traditional role of an academic advisor, Mr. Billings exemplified the characteristics that facilitate the learning and development of students as they come to integrate their academic learning with their personal and professional lives. Furthermore, if one carefully examines the character and methods of this fictional nurturer of students along with the philosophical construct of servant leadership, the seeker may witness, and perhaps learn, the key elements of being an effective advisor: an advisor as servant. Consequently, I strive to demonstrate how the philosophy of servant leadership and its practice, as exemplified by Mr. Billings, may contribute to the theory and philosophy of academic advising. To that end, I first describe the philosophy and practice of servant leadership and its broad applicability to advising. Then the characteristics of servant leadership are explored as a theoretical-philosophical construct relevant to the role of academic advisors.

Servant Leadership

It is interesting to note that the man responsible for coining the term "servant-leader" was largely a critic of traditional institutions of higher education. Throughout his writings on higher education, Greenleaf evidenced his contention that "universities had lost sight of their purpose, which he believed was to serve the needs of students" (Frick, 2004, p. 14). However, unlike many critics, Greenleaf spent many of his productive years actively seeking to alter this state of affairs by striving to develop programs and practices that nurtured in administrators and students the desire and capacity to become servant-leaders. In fact, it was in the process of striving to serve institutions of higher education that Greenleaf developed the notion of servant leadership.

The concept of servant leadership emerged in Greenleaf's consciousness following a particularly challenging consulting experience at Prescott College in Arizona (Frick, 2004). As Greenleaf and his wife drove to another college, he was pondering the challenges he had experienced and reflected on his reading of Hesse's (1956) *Journey to the East*. Regarding the novel, Greenleaf (2003a, p. 247) explained,

> *Journey to the East* is an account of a mythical journey by a band of men on a search to the East. . . . The central figure of the story is Leo, who accompanies the party as the servant who does the menial chores, but who also sustains them with his spirit and his song. He is a person of extraordinary presence.

Unfortunately, when Leo suddenly disappears, the party descends into chaos and soon disbands. The narrator abandons his quest and determines to write the tale of its unfortunate demise. As a he attempts to do so, however, Leo reemerges and the narrator comes to realize that Leo was actually the titular head of the order that sponsored the quest. Leo had been the leader all along.

As a he pondered Leo's paradoxical role in this narrative tale, as both servant and leader, Greenleaf experienced an epiphany. It was in the very role of servant that Leo most embodied true leadership influence. Consequently, Greenleaf came to believe that great leadership is not derived from position, status, or skill, but rather from the will of the individual to serve. As Greenleaf (2003a, p. 27) wrote, "The servant-leader is servant first—as Leo was portrayed. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead."

This natural feeling is grounded in spirit. According to Greenleaf, "Spirit is the animating force that disposes persons to be servants of others" (1996, p. 11). This internal force represents the spiritual core of the individual and the wellspring from which the energy, motivation, and will to serve emerge. It is manifested through and dependent on love (Greenleaf, 1977) and compels an individual to choose to lead. Thus, from one's spiritual sense of connectedness emerges a "caring for individual persons" that propels the individual to choose to lead "in ways that require dedication and skill and that help [those led] to grow and become healthier, stronger and more autonomous" (Greenleaf, 2003b, p. 37).

This emphasis on the motivational core of the leader differentiates servant leadership from other forms of leadership because it completely alters the objectives of the leader. Many traditional models of leadership are focused on the skills, methods, and strategies used to accomplish organizational objectives. In a summary statement characterizing historical models of leadership Northouse (2003, p. 3) wrote, "Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal."

However, Greenleaf's philosophy contrasts such models of leadership that focus on the achievement of organizational goals or the transformation of the individual, leader, or organization. Greenleaf (1977, p. 27) proscribed a way of leading that is focused on serving the highest needs of individuals. He argued that the best test of the servant-leader is as follows:

> Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged of society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?

Just as the motivation of the leader alters the outcomes of leadership, a shift in outcomes alters the process of leading. Instead of focusing on the use of knowledge, skills, and abilities to achieve results, under servant leadership, the character of the individual, which represents the integration of identity and action, represents the primary means of influencing others.

This integration of intent and action is evident in Greenleaf's (2003b) initial description of servant-leaders in his original essay. This essay emphasized initiative, goal development, listening and understanding, language and imagination, the ability to withdraw effectively to engage creativity, acceptance and empathy, intuition and foresight, profound awareness and keen perception, persuasion over coercion, a strong awareness of self, patience, a willingness to define one's own roles, and healing and serving. When he revised this original essay, he added community building to this list of characteristics (Greenleaf, 1977).

After Greenleaf's death, Larry Spears took over direction of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, and after an intense review of Greenleaf's writings, he altered and restructured this list of characteristics to better represent the breadth of Greanleaf's writings. He outlined the following 10 characteristics of servant-leaders: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of

people, and building community (Spears, 1998b). This list was reclassified by Powers and Moore (2005) into two categories: a) inner characteristics and commitments and b) outer characteristics and practices. I use the Powers and Moore paradigm to explore the relevance of servant leadership to advising.

Advising and Servant Leadership

Like servant leadership, effective academic advising is grounded in the motivation core of the advisor and the resultant behavioral manifestations. Effective advisors are driven by an affection for and a desire to serve students and a concern for their growth and development. This type of motivation underlies the commonly cited distinction between prescriptive and developmental advising.

In his classic article on advising, Crookston (1972) outlined two approaches to advising: prescriptive and developmental. At the heart of this distinction lies the motivational core of advisors. Advisors who love students and desire to serve them to grow as persons are more likely to focus on their potential; perceive them as motivated, capable, and desirous to learn; and engage them as partners in their own development. Thus, Rawlins and Rawlins (2005) identified "affection and caring" as central to the relationship between advisor and student. They clarified, however, that "the affection and caring in the advising relationship are not primarily aimed at developing a dyadic bond" (p. 11). Instead, the focal objective of such relational caring is directed toward facilitation of the "student's development as an informed, involved, and ethical" person (p. 11). Of necessity, the objective of advisors involves "caring and concern for the well-being of students" (p. 11). Rawlins and Rawlins' line of reasoning parallels that of Greenleaf. In contrast, advisors who are not motivated by genuine love for students and a desire to serve are more likely to see them as unmotivated and in need of prescriptive, directive advisement.

Internal Characteristics and Commitments

To the extent that advisors desire to serve students, as a result of a deep and abiding will to serve others and a love for students, they naturally seek to develop and express the characteristics of servant-leaders. Regarding the internal characteristics and commitments of servant-leaders, Powers and Morris (2005, p. 125) explained, "The inner components of the servant-leader's character—building community, commitment to the growth of people, foresight, conceptualization, and awareness—are powerful values sets that have as much relevance for the servant-teacher as they do for the servant-leader." The significance of character is similarly relevant for the servant advisor.

Building Community

According to Greenleaf (1977), love and the capacity to grow and develop as human beings are nurtured through community. Powers and Moore (2005, p. 126) further argued, "A key role of the servant-leader is to counteract the forces of individualism by role modeling and creating opportunities for others to gather naturally in small groups, which are the backbone of the community." In the *Teacher as Servant*, Mr. Billings accomplished nurturing through community by his own interaction with the students, wherein he invited them into an authentic community-based relationship, as well as through the group-oriented, service-based work and accountability of Jefferson House (Greenleaf, 2003c). Indeed, Billings's character declared that one of the most important learning outcomes he hoped to achieve through his work was that the students learn "to use their common sense and to live and work in community" (Greenleaf, 2003c, p. 237).

Community can emerge within the advising relationship as well as in the engagement of the student and the advisor within the institution. Within the advisor-student relationship, community is manifest through authentic interpersonal interaction characterized by friendship; this type of community is particularly important in a society in which community is on the decline. As Rawlins and Rawlins (2005, p. 11) explained,

> In a violent, distracted, increasingly fast-paced and changing world, it is important for students to feel that somebody cares about their unique presence and possibilities in the educational institution. Enhancing such caring and regard for learners is a vital activity of academic advising.

Caring is also a fundamental characteristic of community building through relationships. It was a part of the environment that Mr. Billings created for his students at Jefferson House.

Through engagement in outside activities that foster community within the institution, such as those undertaken by Mr. Billings in founding and continually influencing the service of Jefferson House, advisors contribute to the environment in which students grow and learn. They also model community-oriented behavior to students. As students engage in ways they have witnessed from mentors, they increase their capacity to contribute to lasting community within and beyond the insti-

tution. The nurturance of this desire and capacity is central to effective advising. It is evidenced by the following statement from the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) (2006) regarding the concept of advising: "Through academic advising, students learn to become members of their higher education community, to think critically about their roles and responsibilities as students, and to prepare to be educated citizens of a democratic society and a global community." In the words of Greenleaf (1977, p. 197), one of the goals of higher education, and therefore advising, is "to prepare students to serve and be served, by society."

Commitment to the Growth of People

The idea that servant-leaders are committed to the growth and development of people is central to the philosophy of servant leadership. Greenleaf (1977, p. 158) argued that "growth of those who do the work" within institutions, not on profit and customer service, should be seen as the primary aim of the institution. Thus, as Spears (2002, p. 8) explained,

> Servant-leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As such the servant-leader is deeply committed to the growth of each and every individual within his or her institution [and]. . . . recognizes the tremendous responsibility to do everything within his or her power to nurture [their] personal, professional, and spiritual growth.

Such a commitment to growth and development is fundamental to the character and practice of servant-leaders as well as to that of advisors.

Perhaps no other characteristic of servant-leaders is more central to advising than this commitment to the growth of people. Creamer (2000, p. 19) explained, "The purpose of academic advising is student learning and personal development." Similar statements have been made by additional advising experts (Gordon, 1995; Habley, 2000; Rawlins & Rawlins, 2005). Consistent with these statements, the CAS Standards for Academic Advising (Council for the Advancement of Standards [CAS], 2005) assert that academic advising programs "must incorporate student learning and development in [their] mission[s]" (p. 1). The following are outlined as "relevant and desirable outcomes" of advising:

> intellectual growth, effective communication, realistic self-appraisal, enhanced self-esteem, clarified values, career choices, leadership development, healthy behaviors, meaningful interpersonal relations, independence, collaboration, social responsibility, satisfying and productive lifestyles, appreciation of diversity, spiritual awareness, and achievement of personal and educational goals. (p. 1)

This formal statement of desired outcomes reflects the desired outcomes effective advisors strive to achieve in relation to their students. Thus effective advisors, as servant-leaders, must approach their work with a commitment to the growth of students.

Foresight and Conceptualization

Foresight involves the capacity to bring together an understanding of past, present, and future to develop "a better than average guess about what is going to happen when in the future." (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 38). This prescient capacity combined with the power of conceptualization, or the capacity to develop a big-picture perspective and plan, result in action-oriented vision. Action-oriented vision refers to a vision of the possible combined with a viable plan for its achievement. Neither the vision nor the plan must come entirely from the leader. As Moxley (2002, p. 47) explained, "Leadership is cocreated as individuals relate as partners and develop a shared vision, set a direction, solve problems, and make meaning of their work." Consequently, the gift of the visionary servant-leader is found in her or his ability to understand and "articulate where a group is going," "help people see how their work fits in to the big picture," and facilitate the development and implementation of plans (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002, p. 57).

For advisors the capacity to envision the potential of students and conceptualize a plan for achieving that potential is absolutely elemental to the process of advising students. These skills also allow advisors to develop general degree plans, function effectively within organizational structures, manage caseloads, and accomplish the other essential tasks related to their jobs that involve foresight and conceptualization. Without these capacities, advisors are likely to limit their effectiveness as a result of an overemphasis on immediate positional needs and interests without the advantages that come from a big picture perspective. Likewise, they are more likely to find themselves stuck in regimented degree plans and processes that do not take into account the unique needs and potential of individual students.

As is the case with leaders of organizations, foresight and conceptualization are developed in

partnership within the advisor-student relationship. Equal, though different, contributions must be made by each participant as they work together to create a vision and develop a plan for the education and personal development of the student.

Awareness

One of the pivotal internal characteristics and commitments of servant-leaders is awareness. A commitment to awareness, which nurtures the characteristic of awareness, emerges from an individual's desire to serve. As a result of this desire, servant-leaders intentionally open "wide the doors of perception" to stock their minds "with a richness of resources for future need" (Greenleaf, 1977, pp. 40–41). Such individuals maintain a curiosity-based openness toward information that facilitates learning. As a result, when opportunities arise to serve, they can draw upon the knowledge of resources and understanding of situations they have acquired to meet the needs of the immediate situation.

For an individual to capitalize on the asset of awareness and thereby nurture growth and serve well, he or she must not only be open to positive or neutral information, but also to disconfirming data. Such openness is pivotally important. To the extent that servant-leaders are willing to appreciate even the most disconfirming data, they increase their effectiveness to respond in particularly challenging settings. To maintain such openness, servant-leaders must possess a strong sense of personal awareness and self-acceptance, which gives them "their own inner serenity" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 41). Thus internal awareness and acceptance becomes the fountain from which external awareness, learning, and service flow.

Willingness to accept difficult truths is as critical to advising as it is to leadership because of the constantly changing environment within which advisors work and the uniqueness of each individual student's experience. Advisors must vigilantly scan their environment consciously and unconsciously to take in as much information as possible. They must maintain constant awareness so they are able to draw upon the knowledge and resource information they have accumulated when a student presents atypical challenges. In addition, awareness opens advisors to receive the interaction-based information necessary to understand the needs of students as well as their own needs in responding to students.

Outer Characteristics or Practices

Internal characteristics and commitments of servant-leaders represent the foundation upon which the outer characteristics and practices are based. The relationship between these two groups of attributes is essential to both leaders and advisors. While listening represents an effective practice for all leaders, when coupled with the characteristics and commitment of awareness and concern for the growth of others, it becomes an even more powerful growth-oriented means of influence because it nurtures trust and positive relationships. Such relationships are essential to effective leadership. Consequently, the outer characteristics must be outlined, discussed, and applied to the concept of advising.

Listening and Empathy

In his essay on servant leadership, Greenleaf (1977, p. 31) firmly declared "only a true natural servant automatically responds to any problem by listening." Through listening, servant-leaders are more able to gain an awareness and understanding of the critical problems that underlie the challenges they face and are, therefore, more able to overcome them. Their success is in part due to the creative energy that emerges from the act of deep listening. Young (2002, p. 252) eloquently wrote, "Listening helps us go to the depth in order to sense the lift that comes as leadership forges the way. From listening, we get the insights and creative thoughts to lead." Listening is a powerful tool for problem solving.

However, listening is not only about solving problems, it is also a lubricant for relationships and effective communication as well as a mechanism for facilitating learning and growth. Greenleaf (1977, p. 31) explained,

> Most of us at one time or another, some of us a good deal of the time, would really like to communicate, really get through to a significant level of meaning in the hearer's experience. It can be terribly important. The best test of whether we are communicating at this depth is to ask ourselves first: Are we really listening? Are we listening to the one with whom we want to communicate? Is our basic attitude, as we approach the confrontation, one of wanting to understand?

Approaching the practice of listening with this attitude results in a deeper form of engagement with others, which Covey (1989, p. 240) referred to as "empathic listening." This deep form of listening involves a focused effort to really understand what the other is both saying and experiencing.

This understanding leads to a willingness to appreciate, respect, and relate to the experience of the other in a way that contributes to mutual understanding, respect, trust, and openness (McClellan, 2006) even though agreement may not occur. As Covey (1989, p. 240) explained, "The essence of empathic listening is not that you agree with someone; it's that you fully, deeply, understand that person, emotionally as well as intellectually." Research has demonstrated that students desire and seek the kind of "warmth and depth in advising relationships" characterized by this approach (Mottarella, Fritzsche, & Cerabino, 2004, p. 58).

In addition to nurturing deep understanding and effective relationships, listening and empathy also contribute to growth and learning. This is depicted vividly in the role of Mr. Billings in relation to the students at Jefferson House. The fictional student narrator of the story vividly explained,

> During my four years at Jefferson House I often wondered how Mr. Billings could be so wise in so many things. Now I understand this. He kept saying that he was learning to be a servant-leader with us. What he was really doing was listening carefully to what we students were bringing back as we ventured into the inner circles of a wide range of institutions. The rest of us learned much from those reports. But we were not as accomplished listeners as Mr. Billings was. Part of his great productivity as a person came, I believe from the intentness of his listening. He was taking in more than anybody realized and he was digesting it and filing it away for future use. High on the long list of things I learned from Mr. Billings was the crucial role that listening plays in being a servant. (Greenleaf, 2003c, p. 180–81)

As is evident from this statement, in Mr. Billings's role as an advisor, listening proved fundamental to his own growth and his ability to nurture the growth of his students. The same is true for academic advisors.

In relation to the development of effective advising relationships, Nutt (2000, p. 221) wrote, "Advisors must understand that listening effectively to both what their advisees are saying and are not saying is an essential communications skill in creating an environment of trust in the advising relationship." In addition, listening is fundamental to understanding student needs, helping students to manage motivation, and engaging students in problem solving and conflict resolution (McClellan, 2005, 2006). Thus listening, as a part of the communication process, may well represent the most essential skill of academic advising.

Healing

While the common usage of the word *healing* implies health-related restorative processes, the way in which the term is used in the context of servant leadership is far more specific to the notion of holistic personal growth and development as well as relationships. Spears (1998a, p. 6) explained,

> The healing of relationships is a powerful force for transformation and integration. One of the great strengths of servant leadership is the potential for healing one's self and one's relationship to others. Many people have broken spirits and have suffered from a variety of emotional hurts. Although this is a part of being human, servant-leaders recognize that they have an opportunity to "help make whole" those with whom they come in contact.

Servant-leaders do not necessarily do this through therapeutic counseling (though if qualified they may). Instead, leaders nurture healing by striving to restore their own "emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and physical health" and then by striving to engage in "leadership that heals and transforms the quality of life and work within organizations" (Sturnick, 1998, p. 186). Often through the pursuit of healing others one fosters her or his own healing and vice versa. Greenleaf (1977, p. 50) explicated, "There is something subtly communicated to one who is being served and led if, implicit in the compact between servant-leader and led, is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something they share. . . . The motive for the healing is . . .one's own healing." This is exemplified in the life and practice of Mr. Billings in the description of his need to serve in the capacity of housemaster: "Were it not for my work with students in Jefferson House, and the sense of community that you share, I would find the self-serving and competitive striving and lack of human feeling in this university unbearable" (Greenleaf, 2003c, p. 238).

Through his efforts to serve students, the community, and the institution, Billings finds that his own healing is promoted as well as that of others. No doubt, many advisors have discovered the same reality.

Persuasion

Another fundamental skill of the effective advisor and servant-leader is the capacity to persuade others to take actions that nurture their own growth

and development and those of others. In a statement to his son, Newcomb, on how to successfully influence others, Greenleaf (as cited in Frick, 2004, p. 154) stated,

> First, decide who are the key people in getting the idea adopted. Then begin to tell them the idea, but only suggestively and a bit at a time. Let them come to the idea themselves, so that they think that it is their own idea.

In response, Newcomb queried, "But how will they know that it really was your idea?" (p. 154). To which his father responded, "'They will never know,' as if that were the core of the beauty of the stratagem" (p. 154). As is evident from this story, Greenleaf believed that servant leadership was largely about the act of motivation by persuasion as opposed to coercion or manipulation. The art of this approach is in the capacity of the leader to foster what Greenleaf referred to as an *imaginative leap:*

> As a leader (including teacher, coach, administrator), one must have the facility in tempting the hearer into that leap of imagination that connects the verbal concept with the hearer's own experience. The limitation on language to the communicator is that the hearer must make that leap of imagination. One of the arts of communicating is to say just enough to facilitate that leap. Many attempts to communicate are nullified by saying too much. (p. 32)

This process is at the heart of effective motivational advising, which involves "deeply listening to, empathizing with, and exploring alongside students as they strive to understand the nature of the challenges or conflicts they are dealing with" (McClellan, 2006). Then, once understanding is achieved, through advising and counseling processes, advisors can,

> encourage students to make choices and take actions that will lead them in positive directions. As students do so, advisors can be there to support them throughout the process. In so doing, the advisor becomes a facilitator of the motivation process, but respects the reality that the impetus to move must come from within the student. (¶ 21)

This paradigm of engaging students in the process of decision making while respecting their right to make decisions for themselves and encouraging them to do so with confidence lies at the heart of the distinction between prescriptive and developmental advising (Crookston, 1972; Gordon, 1995).

Stewardship

Frequently cited within the literature of servant leadership is a statement by Peter Block wherein he defines stewardship as "holding something in trust for another" (cited in Spears, 2002, p. 7). According to Burkhardt and Spears (2002, p. 227),

> Greenleaf's view of organizations was one in which CEOs, staff members, and trustees all play significant roles in holding their institutions in trust for the greater good of society. In effect everyone has a responsibility to be a good steward within an organization.

This perspective emerges from Greenleaf's (1977, p. 28) view of initiative, which is central to the notion of stewardship. He declared, "The forces of good and evil in this world are propelled by the thoughts, attitudes, and actions of individual beings." Recognition of this reality, a willingness to take responsibility for the power of individual influences, and the desire to serve others cause individuals to take the initiative to lead by proactively engaging in the task of striving to identify and overcome challenges and to seize opportunities.

These characteristics also inspire them to accept responsibility and accountability for their actions, though this is virtually always managed from a perspective of learning. The stewardship initiative is exemplified in Mr. Billings's approach to working with students when they experienced failure. Unless failures became repetitive and needed to be addressed in another way, he simply asked what they had learned and moved on (Greenleaf, 2003c).

Central to the notion of stewardship is the use of power, which Greenleaf (2003c) saw as the central issue of leadership. From his perspective, those who wield power must learn how to do so from the perspective of stewardship and servanthood. He wrote,

> Power is benign when, in the course of using it, both the user and the subject grow as persons, when they become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants—as a result of powers being used. Power is a malignant force when people are coerced by it. No one grows when coerced. The best that can be hoped for is that they will conform. (Greenleaf, 2003c, p. 231)

Power, therefore, is the means whereby leaders serve. Stewardship is the sense of responsibility leaders have with regard to the use of the power they possess.

Academic advisors, whether they recognize it or

not, hold tremendous power. Light (2001, p. 81), as a result of his exhaustive study on success in college, stated, "Good advising may be the single most underestimated characteristic of a successful college experience." The importance of advising is largely the result of the nature of the relationship: It is often the first and frequently the primary ongoing supportive relationship that students develop within today's context of higher education. Through this relationship, students gain understanding of and access to the world of the institution, including its many resources and opportunities, develop academic and career plans, and receive guidance when they experience challenges. Consequently, advisors possess a significant amount of power in relation to their role in the institution. This power represents their stewardship: They "hold in trust" the future of the students they advise.

In recognition and as a result of the power that advisors possess, NACADA has issued a statement regarding the ethical use of this power. In 2005, it described the responsibilities of advisors in relation to the multiple constituencies, including the individuals they advise, their institutional network of support personnel, their institutions, higher education, their educational community, their professional practice, and themselves personally. Underlying all of these stewardship responsibilities are the characteristics and commitments of servant-leaders. Thus, it is in their role as stewards that effective advisors come to embody and reflect the notion of servant leadership.

Conclusion

As a philosophical model, servant leadership is emerging as one of the most relevant constructs in today's society for enlightening the theory and practice of leaders (Covey, 2002; Ruschman, 2002; Spears, 1998b). The 10 characteristics previously outlined represent one paradigm that has been applied to leadership within many contexts. As a result of the publication of the *Teacher as Servant*, the role of servant leadership in the classroom has received some significant study and exploration (Powers & Moore, 2005). Unfortunately, the relevance of servant leadership in relation to advising has largely been left unexamined in spite of the fact that it was in the role of an advisor, not that of a classroom teacher, that Mr. Billings modeled and nurtured the growth of servant leadership among his students. Thus the purpose of this paper has been to outline the relevance of servant leadership in relation to advising by discussing the internal and external aspects of this philosophy and their direct implication in relation to advising. Hopefully this will spawn interest in further exploration of this relationship in both theory and practice.

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