

Servant Leader checklist

The best performance management is observation and engagement. Attitudes bring behaviors. Behaviors are actions and the best actions bring the best results. Obtaining information through secondhand feedback is good, but understand that the feedback will come with some personal bias – favorable or negative. As a leader of leaders, it is important to have the insights of others but to also take your own firsthand position on your manager's performance.

This list is to help you focus your observations and communicate what good looks like in your subsequent coaching.

Wants to lead to help the organization be its best through the people and products

During the job interview process and subsequent observation and conversation, it is apparent that the person does not want the job for power. The person may have ego – feeling like they are a great leader and this is good. Confidence in leadership is important. The key is: what role does the ego serve – self or others? The servant leader focuses on the benefit of the entire community not merely on what his or her function produces. They bring it all together and manage the important and sometimes conflicting dynamic between organizational effectiveness and functional efficiency.

* *Confidence is believing/knowing you are capable and worthy. Conceit is believing you are better than everyone else.*

Frequently flexes approach

You can see that the person listens and adjusts his or her style to fit what people need. When the manager cannot provide the support (time? skills?) he or she helps the person get proper support. For the learner, he or she teaches and provides test situations to practice. When a person reaches expert level, the manager delegates. For the burnout or frustrated he or she motivates the person in a personalized way. Direct reports will say that this person is not a micromanager, but seems get them what they need to do their best work. They also don't report feeling left alone to struggle. A servant leader is not overly flexible and knows there is a time for consequences when performance is not meeting expectations. Sets great goals, aligned to the business and unified with the desired culture and values.

Participation and collaboration – sets the stage

You observe this person setting boundaries to help people understand the limits and opportunities to participating in problem solving groups. This person helps people understand their role and who will ultimately be deciding. Collaboration manifests in different ways and you are able to observe the person creating a safe setting where people are encouraged to speak up with a responsible voice. The manager is great at asking questions and will refrain from asking leading questions that drive his or her own agenda. Collaboration and participation does not mean manipulating the group toward something. It means getting helpful insights to make better decisions and create better outcomes.

Distributed leadership, knows when to follow

You observe this person move from leading to following. She demonstrates a belief that the work of leadership takes place throughout the company. You will see a servant leader teach and enable others to act. Delegates responsibility and power appropriately. When a problem or opportunity is apparent she will empower those to follow through and solve it.

Purpose, mission, values, centered – keeps it all connected

Tasks are transient in nature and they typically serve to support a short-term objective. The servant leader always connects the daily, short-term work to the long-term value creation in the organization. These are not trainings but in-situation conversations with individuals and teams and are often casual. These quick conversations build trust, unity and support the alignment and de-siloing of an organization. Trust is built one interaction at a time. This execution orientation with a long-term perspective builds daily productivity and organizational commitment. You will easily be able to observe the comradery, connection and hear how your leader connects people, tasks, products, consumers and purpose. Leaders can avert short-term angst or stress for long-term perseverance during a business downcycle by always making this connection. Don't forget humor and levity. We spend a lot of time with the people we work with – let's enjoy it and celebrate a bit.

Instills accountability and appropriately issues consequences

Accountability is the condition of responsibility. People who work for servant leaders feel comfortable admitting mistakes and fixing failures. Servant leaders will also coach people on a spectrum of failure. When responsible people understand the natural consequences of mistakes and failures, they are more apt to avoid these issues. There are circumstances that failure should be praised (innovation, testing new knowledge, complex situations, exploratory testing, etc.). Servant leaders set up a safe environment that recognizes situations as unique, allows for vulnerability, and allows for correcting errors. The servant leader also recognizes that there are occasions where appropriate consequences are necessary. A servant leader never tacitly approves of low performance. Observe an interaction between your leader and a team or person when a situation is not going well. How does he or she handle it? How does he or she diagnose and manage consequences, praise, coaching and/or correcting? Most importantly – servant leaders foster collective responsibility.

Communication and transparency

How does your leader plan and budget? What involvement does he seek from his team and is he able to manage this involvement in a crisp, focused flow? Does the team get regular communication on progress of individuals, teams and the company? Does the manager merely do open book reporting or does he or she model open book management? Many companies have different degrees of transparency – does this manager understand the degrees of transparency and exemplify those practices on a daily basis with his team. Is the manager able to teach business fluency at the team level to help people understand *the why* behind the plan and how their contributions grow value?

Teaches organizational citizenship

A servant leader doesn't just manage the worker on the job. They teach people how to think beyond it. They will also teach and embody organizational citizenship. They will be a role model for a high degree of responsibility and respect for others. They will be able to interpret corporate philosophies into daily action and help others to do the same. They will model critical thinking, a responsible voice and other broad aspects of business fluency. They teach respect for specialization and the value of the collective and where and how to apply them. They show people how to care about the health of the team and the company in pursuit of the common interest. They value the daily display of attitudes and behaviors that correlate to fairness, trust, excellence, humility and courage.

"Managers help people see themselves as they are; Leaders help people to see themselves better than they are."
— Jim Rohn