

SERVANT LEADERSHIP THROUGH DISTANCE LEARNING: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the influence a distance learning servant leadership course had on the emergency service students' understanding of leadership. The research study utilized a case study design in order to tell the story of the lived experiences of the participants. The setting for the study was a state university in Utah, with the six participants being declared, undergraduate emergency services majors that underwent a 15-week distance learning servant leadership class. The data used in the study consisted of the post-hoc online eJournal writings of the participants. The data analysis revealed to two themes that formed the individual case descriptions presented in results section. The literature review acknowledged the problem of bureaucracy within the emergency services and identified the practice of servant leadership as a possibility for overcoming the often-bureaucratic approach towards leadership. In addition, the literature review identified commonalities between established constructs of servant leadership and the emergency services. The findings of the study seem to demonstrate that undergoing a class on servant leadership left lasting impressions on becoming a servant leader and overall was a positive experience for the student. This study's findings add to the existing body of knowledge associated with servant leadership within emergency service academia.

Keywords: Servant leadership, emergency services, distance learning

OVERVIEW

This qualitative case study explored how participating in a 15-week, undergraduate class on servant leadership influenced the emergency service students' understanding of servant leadership. The central question that guided this study asked how a course on servant leadership could influence student understanding of leadership. The findings have the potential to change emergency services curriculum delivery and content, as well as leadership within the emergency services career field. The reason, many emergency services professionals come to their careers through academic training and education; therefore, what they experience within their academic journey will go with them into their career. To date, education for the emergency services student has focused more on the technical application and management of the career field, rather than leadership (Thurnall-Read & Parker, 2008; Useem, Cook, & Sutton, 2005).

This study is significant in the fact that the emergency services student may one day become the emergency services leader, therefore, requiring specific knowledge and skills pertaining to leadership (Sargent, 2006).

This study identified how the coursework influenced students' understanding, thus opening up the emergency services academic track to the possibility of a more servant-leader focused curriculum that can be offered to a broader audience through distance learning. The course itself was designed as a distance learning servant leadership course, modeled after Palmer's (1993) argument of immersing learners into a theory or subject so they can discover knowledge on their own. Learners read required materials pertaining to servant leadership and were encouraged to explore the theory independently, keeping an electronic online eJournal throughout the course. Each week, students answered questions and reflected on servant leadership. Students used a free online, secured electronic journal known as an eJournal offered by Penzu. Penzu's online eJournaling software allowed the students to email their weekly writings to the instructor for grading. This study utilized the participant's eJournals in order to give a voice to the lived experience (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003).

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Servant Leadership theory derives itself from the writings of Greenleaf (1970), who wrote that the leader is one who seeks to serve, and who works to ensure the needs of others within an organization, regardless of type or size, are met. Greenleaf (1977/2002) claimed that the practice of servant leadership could overcome the bureaucracy that many organizations experience, the emergency services being among them. This hierarchical, top-down, bureaucratic model of leadership often exists in the emergency services career field and has been found to have a negative physical and mental impact on emergency responders (Kirschman, 2004). On the emergency scene itself, a command and control style of leadership is necessary for safe and effective operations (Smeby, 2005). However, outside of the emergency scene, it is not clear as to why the emergency services often take on the form of a hierarchical, top-down bureaucracy. This literature review attempts to find commonalities within the constructs of servant leadership and what it means to be an emergency services responder in order to offer the profession a difference approach towards leadership; an approach that deals with the human element that bureaucracy so often hurts (Mills, 1955/2002).

The Constructs of Servant Leadership

The seven virtuous constructs of servant leadership derive from Patterson's (2003) work that involved identifying specifics within Greenleaf's (1970) theory. The seven constructs embody the theoretical core of Greenleaf's (1970) original essay *The Servant as Leader*. Stone, Russell, & Patterson (2004) argued that without having concrete concepts specific to servant leadership, true empirical research could not occur. Patterson's (2003) work led to the creation of seven constructs specific only to the practice of servant leadership. In order, these constructs are *agapao* love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service.

Servant leadership Constructs and their Relation to the Emergency Services

The historical roots of the emergency services profession date back centuries from major catastrophes, which changed cities and landscapes, sparking the creation of professional emergency response organizations (Morris, 1955). The individuals that were called upon to deal with the unique situations were originally known as "firemen". Over time, they became known as firefighters. Today the firefighter is the emergency services professional taking on roles in emergency medical services, hazardous materials, and all-hazard responses (Fleming, 2010; Smeby, 2005).

The career of the emergency services professional still holds true to the same traditions and passions as those who came before and the love of serving others is still the foundation of what it means to be an emergency responder (Lasky, 2006).

Leadership in the emergency services poses a unique set of challenges, where leaders must take two separate, yet simultaneous paths. The first path is leadership associated with on-scene emergency management; this situation involves a direct-authoritative role, including giving commands and orders to crews (Anglin, 2001; Colman, 2008). The second path is leadership away from an emergency scene, which is a very different role. The reason is that the emergency responder, who one day may be the emergency services leader, comes to the career field from that desire to serve; therefore, it is the role of the emergency services leader to foster that desire (Salka & Neville, 2004; Sargent, 2006; Seigal, 2006; Smith, 1972; Smoke, 2010). The very argument that Greenleaf (1970) made regarding the servant as leader is the same driving force that brings individuals to the emergency services profession. Moreover, Carter (2007) argued that the practice of servant leadership seems to align itself based upon a common set of shared values.

Patterson (2003) placed the *agapao* love as the first virtuous construct of servant leadership. For the emergency services, it is a love for one's fellow man that brings the individual to the profession, and it is love that allows one to remain (Lasky, 2006). The conscientious decision to enter into the emergency services career field comes with an understanding of the inherent dangers associated with the profession (Salka & Neville, 2004). It is a love of serving others in their most vulnerable time of need that throughout history has called individuals to the profession (Morris, 1955).

Hayes and Comer (2010) argued that humility is humanity, and for the emergency responder, that humility shows outwardly with acts of self-sacrifice and care. The emergency responder deals with others in their most vulnerable situations and in their most critical time of need (Smeby, 2005). Through humility, one can reach out to others (Nielson et al., 2010).

Invited into the life of others (Smith, 1972), the emergency responder becomes the humble servant, who when called upon, is willing to give their all (Useem et al., 2005). Such an act is altruism in its purest form, the giving of one oneself for another (Patterson, 2003). The altruistic nature of the emergency services profession is one that reaches out to others through a willingness to sacrifice in order to save others. Altruism stems from those with a passion to serve others without question and in so doing, willing to give other people ones all (Day, 2004).

For the emergency services professional, vision involves seeing the future needs of those one serves and in doing so ensuring those needs are met. Discussed earlier, the emergency services profession has changed over time (Fleming, 2010; Smeby, 2005).

Bell and Habel (2009) argued that the visionary rejects complacency and looks towards the future. Inwardly, vision protects the emergency services profession, keeping the career field viable by meeting future needs (Whetstone, 2002).

The emergency services professional remains committed to being at the ready, which includes taking on different responsibilities for individuals within the organization, as well as the community in which they serve (Anglin, 2001; Fleming; 2010).

The nature of the emergency services operation is built upon trust. Individuals thrust into emergencies must rely on not only their own abilities, but also the abilities of others (Klinoff, 2012). At the core of the operation is a trust between leaders and followers, as well as coworkers. This trust involves believing in the abilities of those in command to make the right decisions and from this trust comes a willingness to carry out orders without question (Caldwell, Davis, & Devine, 2009).

A leader earns trust in the emergency services; it does not come automatically with a position (Sargent, 2006). Instead, it comes over time through a leader's actions (Caldwell et al., 2009). Furthermore, trust must exist from the leader to the follower, where the actions, commitment, and abilities of the follower allow for the leader to trust them to operate without direct supervision (Caldwell & Hayes, 2007; Smoke, 2010).

The trust of the follower leads to a willingness of leaders to empower their followers. Ndoye, Imig, and Parker (2010) argued for removing centralized leadership practices, which already exists within the emergency services profession. The very nature of the emergency response organization involves multiple independent companies controlled by junior officers who operate in designated strategic areas (Fleming, 2010; Smoke, 2010). Companies and crews are empowered to respond to emergencies and make tactical and patient decisions, depending on the size and severity of the situation, free from the direct supervision of chief officers (Salka & Neville, 2004; Smeby, 2005). Therefore, the emergency services profession operates in a continuous state of trust and empowerment. Leaders have to empower their officers in order to function.

As Patterson (2003) explained, the constructs come together to form the core construct of service, which Sipe and Frick (2009) argued was the absolute giving of self to service of others. Service is indeed the core value of the emergency responder; it is in that essential desire to serve that the individual steps forward. As Greenleaf (1970) wrote, it is from a desire to serve that the leader appears. Therefore, it is from that same desire to serve that the emergency services professional comes forth and through that desire, leads. Servant leadership is at the core of the emergency services profession, because the constructs that bring forth the individual and formulate their desire to serve, are the very same that make up the servant leader (Carter, 2007; Patterson, 2003). These identified commonalities indicate a need to conduct research on servant leadership within the emergency services.

METHODOLOGY

The setting of this research study took place at a state university located in Utah. The sample consisted of six undergraduate emergency services majors that took part in the servant leadership course; all six consented to being a part of this study.

The participant's age ranged from 20-45 with four being female and two being male. The level of education of the participants ranged from college sophomore to college senior. To protect the identity of the participants, each participant was designated with the letter P and then a correlating number, 1-6.

The case study utilized a pattern matching analytic technique based upon the post-hoc writings of the study's participants (Yin, 2009). To analyze the data, the researcher developed case descriptions utilizing a systematic, hierarchical approach (Stake, 1995).

The data analysis began with the researcher organizing and preparing the data for analysis, removing any personal identifiers of each of the participants, and then reading the student's eJournals to become familiar with the data. Next, the researcher, using a hand-coding process, color-coded the writings in each participant's eJournals. The coding process revealed two themes, *experiences regarding servant leadership coursework* and *impressions of servant leadership coursework*. Finally, the researcher developed narrative case descriptions based upon the two themes in order to present and interpret the findings.

RESULTS

The results of the data analysis are presented as individual case descriptions for each participant of the study. Each case description contains rich, detailed narratives to each emergent theme derived from the data analysis. Within each case description, there are italicized words and phrases showing understanding, as well as increased cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes that each participant experienced and reported (Bloom & Krathwohl, 1984).

Participant #1. Experiences Regarding Servant Leadership Coursework.

P1 wrote on the idea that leadership is about the progression of individuals and institutions, this brought about a personal reflection:

I feel that it is important to realize that there are dangers associated with any course of action, but that should not stop us from moving forward. Leaders move forward and are willing to take that bad with the good. I think this has been true for me because in every situation of venturing into the unknown, there has always been a solution (Source: P1).

P1 went on to discuss the idea of being aware of the risk, stating, "Being aware of the potential for undesired consequences in my opinion is the first step in any situation. You have to play chess; you have to be aware of what risks are associated with each action" (Source: P1).

P1 addressed the notion that leadership involves the stepping back and conceptualizing a bigger picture, writing:

I think that what Greenleaf is getting at is that leaders need to think in a different way. I like his point that trustees need to be outside of the institution in order to have a greater perspective. In any environment, public or private, I think it is very important to take a step back, take a breath and get a better understanding of the situation (Source: P1).

P1 went on to state "I think Greenleaf's outlook on institutions is accurate, what he said in regards to education I think applies to other types of institutions as well" (Source: P1). P1 elaborated, "The problem I think is that they have a limited perspective on what they are doing" (Source: P1).

P1 discussed the idea that servant leadership involves preparing others to take on challenges, writing, "I really liked what Greenleaf had to say about preparing students to confront challenges.

He talks about learning to respond to the situation, and venturing into uncertainty with confidence" (Source: P1). P1 added, "Rather than providing incentives to arouse desire for achievement, that desire evolves naturally once a person realizes that they can achieve" (Source: P1).

P1 had a realization regarding standards and rules, writing:

I have come to realize that Greenleaf has written a very positive book. He provides solutions rather than problems. He defines a problem and suggests specific solutions. One of the pivotal steps in every solution is to reevaluate current practices and make improvements. Supporting and reinforcing the rules is forming a different perspective of the rules. Rather than choosing to see them as restrictive elements, individuals and institutions can choose to see them as liberating. It is by following rules that progress is made. It seems to me that our culture is so interested in breaking the rules, or making your own to fit your own moods (Source: P1).

P1 reflected on the simplicity of being a servant leader stating, "It seems to me that servant leadership shouldn't be all that complicated. The way I see it, it's really a matter of whether or not you give a damn" (Source: P1). P1 went on to address how one becomes a servant leader and what should matter:

I believe that the desire to serve others comes after a series of self-realizations. Coming to realize that life is more worth living as one contributes refines intentions and increases determination. *The greatest happiness I have had in my life has come through the happiness of others [emphasis added]* (Source: P1).

Participant #1 then described the influence people can have on you writing:

I have been motivated to help other people any way that I can because of their influence. To this day there are people that I look up to, people who have qualities that I want to have. To me, this is what servant leadership is all about. There is great persuading power in the noble example of others. A wise man once said that, "...you radiate what you are." A servant leader influences others simply by being (Source: P1). Impressions of servant leadership coursework.

P1 addressed how love relates to leadership:

The best way to have an impact in the lives of others is by loving them; working with them regardless of how stubborn and uncooperative they can be. That through persistent kindness and patience, it is possible to influence others to make the best decisions [emphasis added] (Source: P1).

P1 wrote about leadership and education going hand-in-hand stating, "Leadership is about education; it is about being a teacher" (Source: P1). Participant #1 went on to state:

Servant leadership has helped me to understand a concept that I was not too familiar with. A good way to sum it up is teaching others how to fish rather than giving them a fish. I remember a part in the text about charitable giving, the issuance of grants etc. It seemed like the text referred to this idea, that the good way to help someone is to give them a fish, but the better way is to teach them how to fish [emphasis added] (Source: P1).

P1 addressed that the coursework supported an inner belief of what the role of a leader should be stating:

I feel like my outlook on the role of leadership has been enhanced by Greenleaf's text. As I read through it, what Greenleaf was suggesting were ideas that I already believed. I have found that my understanding of leadership has not necessarily changed, but it has matured [emphasis added] (Source: P1).

P1 discussed how servant leadership measures up to other leadership styles:

Servant leadership is more comprehensive than other leadership styles. I am not an expert, however other leadership styles appear to be tactics; methods to increase results. To me servant leadership has a greater focus. Servant leadership focuses on what is functional, rather than what is conventional (Source: P1).

On the characteristics of servant leadership, P1 wrote, "I would say it has affected my outlook in the sense that I am a little more aware of the true characteristics of a leader, which has made me a little more introspective and curious to my own character" (Source: P1). On being a servant leader, P1 stated,

"I do see myself as a servant leader. I know that my greatest joy comes from helping others. I believe that keeping those things in mind will motivate me to serve and to look for ways to assist my fellow men" [emphasis added] (Source: P1).

Participant #2. Experiences Regarding Servant Leadership Coursework

P2 discussed the absence of servant leadership in society writing:

In today's world most individuals 'step' on each other to get to the chiefs position, therefore the concept of servant as leader is foreign. If only more people understood that most individuals would be more willing to follow a caring servant than an authoritative and power hungry leader (Source: P2).

P2 reflected on the roles that administrators have within organizations and their impact on the institution and society stating:

Who is representing the public interest? Administrators do not have the objectivity to do so. Sometimes administrators get so wrapped up in making profit for their institution, whether monetary or service based, that they forget the human feeling side of society.

This is where trustees need to fulfill their role. Growth in an organization and an institution are directly related to the criticism they receive from the public, allowing the organization to implement new ideas and procedures; however, a foundation is not swayed by public criticism so they run the risk of stunted growth unless the trustees promote prudence and creativity (Source: P2).

P2 reflected upon a personal experience regarding academia stating:

In classes such as Ethics and Values a student is encouraged to explore, define, and challenge ones moral values and yet at this same time, in this ever diverse world, if one stands up for their moral values, no matter what the circumstance, they have a very likely possibility of being viewed as intolerant, especially among college courses (Source: P2).

P2 wrote on personal conduct and the perception of a generational dismissing of current opportunities:

Greenleaf spoke about how many people are so preoccupied with the future they miss the here and now where in one moment one could live for eternity. Many young individuals around my age do not take their beginning jobs seriously (1) because they know it is not what they will be doing for the rest of their lives and (2) they don't believe that the here and now and the actions they conduct in the here and now will affect their future. From my own experience I know this is a very untrue perception. Windows and doors open for those who do the best they can in the here and now and it greatly affects future opportunities (Source: P2).

P2 wrote on the concept of healing stating "In leadership principles and especially in business 'healing', especially the healing of relationships is not emphasized" (Source: P2). P2 went on to say "As servant leaders understand that the number one priority is that of being a servant to the around them, *healing is a necessary force in creating the most good*" [emphasis added] (Source: P2).

P2 wrote on the importance of humility when it comes to the receiving of something from others stating:

I agree that for both parties it is important to give, as well as to accept. For those who have the better ability to give it is a true lesson in humility to be able to accept, especially when the gift may be seen by some as inferior. It is important for this party with the greater ability to give to allow another party, maybe of a lessor standing, to have the opportunity to give for several reasons:

- **It makes the other party feel like their contributions, no matter how small, are important**
- **it helps the other party feel like they are on equal ground as the greater party and**
- **it dispels any notions of the possible inferior party to take advantage of the greater party because of their generous nature.**

Through giving and accepting both parties experience growth and independence (Source: P2).

Impressions of servant leadership coursework

P2 wrote that the study of servant leadership put into words a feeling that could not be expressed:

I always knew that great leaders should possess many of the qualities he mentioned in his book, but I could never adequately put it into words. For me Greenleaf opened my eyes to the possibilities for the future if the world was trained in his theory. I know for myself that I will strive to be a better leader and person to those round me [emphasis added] (Source: P2).

P2 went on to state that:

For me, this class added to my list of characteristics a leader should possess. Although I never thought to use the exact word of 'servant', I knew a leader should take on a more service-oriented role than that his or her followers. Servant leadership just served to deepen, expand, and more fully explain my previous view of the characteristics leaders should possess [emphasis added] (Source: P2).
P2 discussed servant leadership as coupling leadership with moral behavior stating:

Servant leadership encompasses everything that is great in people and applies it to the professional side of life. I like this theory because, most of us like to believe we are moral people (caring, compassionate, etc...); however, when it comes to business sometimes a person is seen as weak if they incorporate morals into business resulting in a moral church going 'self' and a business 'self'. Servant leadership incorporates the moral 'self' into the business 'self' and assertively pronounces that the business 'self' cannot effectively strive and succeed without the moral 'self' (Source: P2).

P2 stated that servant leadership theory affected both her view towards the role of leader, as well as how she now self identifies with servant leadership as guide for future behavior:

I believe it did affect my view of the role of a leader. In the past I have been placed into leadership positions and I tried to do my best to follow these principles, but it was never clear to me what exactly I should be doing. In the end I always felt that, no matter how well we did as a group with a project, I had still failed somehow. After going through this course, I feel more confident and next time I am placed in a leadership position this course will serve as my behavioral guide. I truly believe that unless a leader follows this theory he or she does not truly respect and care about their followers, the followers are only a means to the end [emphasis added] (Source: P2).

On being a servant leader, P2 stated:

I can see myself being a servant leader. I am a natural introvert so I have a tendency to listen rather than to speak. I have always had a great concern and compassion for mankind and believe that professional relationships should also be cultivated into personal relationships [emphasis added] (Source: P2).

Participant #3. Experiences Regarding Servant Leadership Coursework

P3 discussed the fact that the coursework caused reflection of self, stating:

Greenleaf has me constantly checking my leadership skills and instilling in me a greater desire to serve. In the past week that I have striven to serve more I have noticed not only am I more effective in many avenues of my life, but I am happier as well [emphasis added] (Source: P3).

P3 stated that the readings involving servant leadership were an inspiration, writing:

I cannot tell you how much I have enjoyed this book so far. Every page has me *analyzing more in depth* my leadership skill and those of individuals I have met. Although I always thought I had a good head on my shoulder when it came to leadership I am learning so much more. This book has been so inspirational for me I have already suggested it to four other people to read so they too can feel the benefits I have from it in their personal lives [*emphasis added*] (Source: P3).

P3 went on to say:

...this book is continually helping me assess my leadership skills and style. I never fail to learn something new as I read. It has been a very interactive read and I find myself constantly writing notes in the margin and highlighting sentences that resonate with me [emphasis added] (Source: P3).

P3 discussed passing on the knowledge of servant leadership to another person seeking a leadership position stating:

The other day I had the opportunity to talk to a young gentleman who is running for student body president. I talked to him about Servant Leadership and all it talks about a leader being. He was very receptive and mentioned that he would read it (Source: P3).

P3 pondered the idea where academia was run by servant leaders:

Consider with me for a moment how the world would be if ran by servant leadership. Would our school systems not be better? Would correct principles not be supported? Would teachers not be of better quality? Would students not learn more and grow to be responsible, respectable individuals? It is amazing how one simple way of thinking, being and living can change not only the individual, but the world if only the world would allow it (Source: P3).

P3 discussed the idea that what was being learned in the classroom put into words what could not be said before, "There are also things that I have always known, but as they are verbalized through this book it seems that those concepts really start to click internally" (Source: P3). P3 discussed the notion of why one should serve, "Serve out of love not for gain, put others before yourself, true power comes only through true service and selflessness" (Source: P3). P3 wrote about leaders being inquisitive and thoughtful and not the front-and-center type, stating:

When thinking of leaders you never think of them as the quiet reserved type. Truly thinking about it though, it would make sense that leaders, true leaders are quieter. They are reflective and inquisitive making the best most sincere leader (Source: P3).

P3 discussed the notion of giving and receiving "...givers should receive graciously and givers should give graciously is a concept that I agree with whole-heartedly. Often times we may give, but how many of us truly accept" (Source: P3).

Impressions of servant leadership coursework

P3 wrote about how to be a leader going forward:

*...going through this class has made me check my actions as a leader. It has made me more aware of my actions. I stop to think about what I do and why I do it. I have more accountability for my action because of the knowledge I have gained. I have no excuse to be mediocre in my leadership [emphasis added] (Source: P3).
Having always believed in serving others,*

P3 acknowledged that being a servant leader is the way to approach leadership stating:

Although I did not know the official term for Servant Leadership it is a type of Leadership that I have always been familiar with. I love this concept. It is the best way to serve. No one is going to care how much we know if they don't know how much we care [emphasis added] (Source: P3).

P3 went on to say what influence the course had stating, "If anything this *course confirmed my feelings* about servant leadership. That it is effective and the greatest way to lead those we are leading" [emphasis added] (Source: P3). P3 discussed that the coursework led to a state of reflection and improvement, "Going through this course has given me more to think of when it comes to characteristics of servant leaders. I find myself checking my personal leadership styles and improving or implementing characteristics to be a more effective leader" (Source: P3). On being a servant leader, P3 wrote:

I definitely see myself being a servant leader. I want to serve in leadership positions to make the lives of others better not to glorify my own name. I firmly believe a key to being any type of good leader is humility [emphasis added] (Source: P3).

Participant #4. Experiences Regarding Servant Leadership Coursework

P4 discussed what it personally meant to be studying servant leadership theory stating:

I am just so amazed at this leadership theory of Servant Leader. It has really shed a lot of light and has helped me find my way through the chaos.

I am just so grateful for the opportunity to be learning about this. It is absolutely amazing to me. It all just seems so sensible. I can recall times when I worked at different banks as a mortgage loan officer and the management that was in charge in different locations or different institutions. It is very clear to me now why some of those institutions were more successful and were better employers to work for than the others [emphasis added] (Source: P4).

P4 reflected on the topic of awareness, stating, "The one that really stuck out to me was awareness. I have been *learning more and more* about my own personal awareness and how it affects my life and the decisions I make [*emphasis added*] (Source: P4). P4 went on to say:

I believe that there are many who are so unaware of circumstances and things going on around them that a greater awareness is the only answer. There will be those 'seekers' who will start to see this and will have an increased awareness. They will change and will find themselves serving others and receive great satisfaction doing so (Source: P4).

P4 wrote on what love means, "I was browsing through my highlighted markings in the text and found something that was very profound to me. It says Love is an undefinable term, and its manifestations are both subtle and infinite" (Source: P4). P4 went on to say how the coursework influenced this meaning stating:

*I have gained a deeper understanding of love through reading about servant leadership. Not just love, but Christ's love, unconditional love. I have been practicing at home with my kids. I came to a realization that I have never known unconditional love by anyone that I know [*emphasis added*] (Source: P4).*

P4 went on to say:

It is very hard not to put a limit on the love that we give others. It's not an easy thing to achieve. But, I understand the importance of it and the effect it will have on others by not limiting our liability of love (Source: P4)

P4 acknowledged that reading about the characteristics caused a reflection of self, writing:

I really enjoyed reading this journal. I agree with the ten characteristics that were pointed out as being very critical to the growth and success of the servant leader. As I reflected on the ten characteristics and my own personal experiences, I feel that I have quite a bit of improvements to make. I think that there is always room for improvement (Source: P4).

Writing on the topic of humility, P4 stated, "Especially I liked what was written about humility and individual responsibility. I am an introvert and I can easily point out the extroverts that I have contact with, as well as the introverts" (Source: P4). P4 then wrote, "Prideful people have a hard time taking in others ideas that are contrary to theirs. This gives a good indication of when a person is humble or not" (Source: P4). P4 then discussed receiving as being an act of humility stating:

I believe what it says in the scriptures that it is more blessed to give than to receive, but I also believe that it needs to be in the right context in order for blessings to be received by that giving. I also understand how receiving is so difficult and that it requires real humility to do so and that it is also sometimes very difficult to do as well (Source: P4).

P4 realized that being a servant leaders does not mean servitude, "Service is doing something for someone else because of a desire to help that person in some way. Servitude is serving someone out of obligation" (Source: P4).

Impressions of servant leadership coursework

P4 wrote how servant leadership is becoming a way of life and pondered why others do not practice it:

Through the past few months of learning more and more about servant leadership and trying to implement it into my daily life, it makes me wonder why more people don't use this method of leadership. It is obvious to me that it works and it seems obvious to anyone who learns about it and applies it (Source: P4).

P4 went on to discuss recommending servant leadership to others writing:

I tell everyone I know about how remarkable it is and the changes it can make, not just in an organization, but in individual lives. I hope that I will continue to find ways to meld servant leadership into my life in all aspects (Source: P4).

P4 wrote about how servant leadership overcomes negativity and barriers:

This leadership theory is just absolutely amazing! I love it! I can see how conducive it would be to any organization. I can see how this would empower individuals and increase innovation, creativity and desire to do their best at whatever they are doing. It eliminates all the toe stepping, the back stabbing, and all the other nasty stuff that goes on in the workplace (Source: P4).

P4 went on to compare it to other leadership theories writing:

Throughout the last few weeks of taking this course and learning about servant leadership, I was also taking a leadership theory class. In my leadership theory class, I had an opportunity to learn about several different leadership styles. It was very interesting to compare them and to learn their weaknesses and strengths. The more I learned and read about servant leadership, the more I saw that it was really the only way to lead. Servant leadership will bring success all around in any group or organization in every aspect [emphasis added] (Source: P4).

P4 discussed how the coursework impacted how she viewed leadership characteristics stating:

I would say that it did have some impact on my view of leader characteristics. I feel that if anything, it helped me to see that there are no 'set' of characteristics that a leader has to have to be a great leader, although, I feel that a leader will naturally possess leadership characteristics. Through servant leadership, I feel that being a servant is the best characteristic to have (Source: P4).

On being a servant leader, P4 stated:

I have often thought that my greatest gift is that I naturally enjoy serving others. It is almost a fault. I used to think as a kid, that if I was rich, I wouldn't really have much, because I would probably give it all away. I have had many instances in my life where others have said that

I am a natural leader. So, with having the service strength and natural leader qualities, I feel that I am a 'servant leader'. It is my hope that I can practice this servant leadership theory and incorporate it into my leadership abilities to be a great leader in whatever I decide to do with the rest of my life [emphasis added] (Source: P4).

Participant #5. Experiences Regarding Servant Leadership Coursework.

P5 wrote about how the coursework opened her eyes stating:

I would not have looked at any of the leadership theories at all or noticed a difference until this book by Robert K. Greenleaf. What an eye-opener and how it seems to be a personal road map to my goals that I've set in my personal life. I love reading this book. It puts to words what I have been doing in actions without my being really aware of it [emphasis added] (Source: P5).

P5 went on to elaborate on what the experience means to her:

This is an ongoing experience where I learn something new each day. I have kept a private journal and have made entries of profound statements I've come across since writing about Servant Leadership. I have been very inspired and cannot get this concept out of my head. I have heard people say, "It's always the same message." I agree, the concept remains the same, but the examples are different. This book is very insightful and honest in its presentation. I am in awe over a lot of Greenleafs' words of wisdom; what a wonderful concept to use as a roadmap for life (Source: P5).

P5 reflected on others that have encouraged her, "As I kept reading I remember my professors at school who have encouraged me constantly even through bad times. They stuck it out with me and continued to nudge me along" [emphasis added] (Source: P5). P5 then reflected on listening, "I feel I have a more difficult time with listening and I will practice that this week and put it to the test" (Source: P5). P5 developed a personal relationship with the course readings:

I feel as if this book was written for me. I mean just for me. I was very young though when Greenleaf wrote this in the 70's. I have learned quite a bit and I have found a common ground between what I have been working on these past 4 years and even now (Source: P5).

P5 wrote on the idea of creating more servant leaders throughout all sectors of society:

Another important point that I have learned by reading the text is that it is important to add more Servant Leaders whether it is by examples or coming right out and asking for help, but to breed these types of people if you will, caring people who care for their institution, may it be a church, or a school or a big industry [emphasis added] (Source: P5).

P5 reflected on how servant leadership could affect humanity stating,

"I believe only then can things actually change for all humanity, when Servant Leadership comes to the forefront. Service is more important than being served and the new adage of, "Don't practice what you preach; just practice" (Source: P5).

Impressions of servant leadership coursework.

P5 wrote how the coursework affected her writing, "I have become more patient and understanding" (Source: P5). P5 went on to state that, "Servant Leadership has taught me to lead by example and I am forever thankful for it.

I have been able to do many more things that I have never dreamed of doing" (Source: P5). P5 went on to compare learning about the theory to noticing pregnant women:

There are people out there that have understood this concept of servant leadership. This is my first experience with it and it is as if you are pregnant. All of a sudden, you notice the other entire pregnant woman around you (Source: P5).

P5 discussed what servant leadership means to her and how she shares her knowledge of servant leadership with others stating:

I am full of joy that such a program has been put in place even way back in the 70's. I just wish more people could know about this program. I have begun to share Servant Leadership with my administrator who seemed very interested and we practically read the book at the same time. I also have shared this information with students and received lots of positive interest. It is actually very exciting to be part of a trend that I hope will sweep the world (Source: P5).

P5 discussed how learning about servant leadership has allowed her to overcome past fears stating:

I used to be afraid of leaders. They were authoritative and cold and unavailable and they absolutely scared me. I felt inferior and when I made a mistake I was afraid that I might lose my job. If I didn't do as they asked I would lose my job. Now I have renewed faith in great leadership and I will be looking for the roles and characteristics that servant leaders poses (Source: P5).

P5 discussed scrutinizing leaders and recommending servant leadership to them saying:

Most definitely am I going to view a leader with more scrutiny that ever before. I may even make suggestions to read the book by Robert Greenleaf. I know my administrator is reading it and who knows, maybe he will be inclined to accept this new mind set and expand on it. It cannot harm the organization, it can only grow implementing this theory and if they like test it. What harm is there in doing that (Source: P5).

P5 went on to say:

This class has inspired me to get out of my shell and work. Forget myself and give to those in need. I thrive on being able to help those, because once upon a time, I was in dire straits and I know what it means to rise above and fight for a better tomorrow. Only with servant leadership can this be done (Source: P5).

On being a servant leader, P5 stated, "Yes, I do see myself as a servant leader. Maybe not a leader with might and power, but rather lead by example, humility and honesty" [*emphasis added*] (Source: P5).

Participant #6. Experiences Regarding Servant Leadership Coursework.

P6 discussed feelings that he had towards the readings of the course saying, "I much more enjoyed the first chapter of reading to the second but I also need to give the later more consideration as it's implication are extremely far reaching" (Source: P6). P6 went on to state that:

*I would say that this point in my life, or service, is easier to relate to the core teachings of servant-leadership than its implications in the field. But I am excited to start implementing it into my current service as I just now begin. I had several odd reactions to this reading [*emphasis added*] (Source: P6).*

In discovering humility in the writings, P6 stated:

It all seemed simple however. As if I could grasp it but was unable to quite explain the structure. I came to the conclusion that it was beautifully simple though. I can only best describe what I understood to be as humble (Source: P6).

P6 reflected on the difficulty he had with grasping the concept of servant leadership saying, "It seems rather circular. Anyone can lead, and in the concept this should only strengthen the circle as a whole. Overall, quite beautiful, attainable, but difficult to grasp at first. Probably because I'm used to the pyramid structure" (Source: P6). P6 wrote about what the meaning meant to him and his feelings towards the characteristics of servant leadership:

I am continuing to love the readings. The 10 characteristics were beautiful and inspiring. It was nice to have more conceptual things to work on personally. Sometimes a lot of Greenleaf's writing flies over my head and feels like it doesn't relate to me, but things like these 10 characteristics are something I can ponder on and absorb into my life and feel out with all of my relationships and evaluate if I embody them. Though I guess it would have been nice to have a "and this is how you develop them" section but an entire book could serve that role much more effectively than a paragraph at the end of a list (Source: P6).

On the topic of love, P6 wrote, "I agreed as well that the corner stone of servant leadership is *agapao* love and the foundation is service" (Source: P6).

P6 discovered something about himself:

*I took the MBTI test online out of curiosity and found myself to be an introvert, this being said I have often wondered if I am qualified to fit as a servant leader because of this but this reading helped confirm the qualities I possess as indeed important to servant leaders [*emphasis added*] (Source: P6).*

Impressions of Servant Leadership Coursework.

P6 discussed his personal views towards leadership and how they have changed:

I now, after completing the course, have very positive feelings towards servant leadership. It has, even so early in my life, been monumental in shaping the way I perceive leadership and how I wish to treat others around me in any walk of life [emphasis added] (Source: P6).

P6 went on to say:

Before the readings of servant leadership I viewed leadership through a slightly "selfish" lens. This is not the selfish that is seen when one leads in order to gain at the expense of others. This is more of a self-focus, or determination based leadership (Source: P6).

P6 then stated:

The type of leader who sets an example, loves and understands others who have not accomplished what he has, but simply by being an example tells those whom he serves it is possible. I changed this outlook to still be an empowering, non-judgmental leadership, but rather it turned from being an inward journey that affects others simply by existing into an inward moral journey that pours out love onto those around (Source: P6).

P6 wrote about the coursework's influence on his view of the role of a leader saying:

It has affected my view of the role of a leader greatly.

I now feel I understand and appreciate much better the role of a leader, how a leader is to be always, and how that can positively affect those whom the leader serves [emphasis added] (Source: P6).

Discussing the characteristics of leadership, P6 wrote:

I feel as if this course has opened my eyes to characteristics of a leader that I previously had never thought were there. It has helped me understand how I always felt a leader should act and what attributes they should embody and strive for. I guess this course helped me understand the essence of a leader that I felt was there but now see much more clearly [emphasis added] (Source: P6).

On being a servant leader, P6 stated:

I now see how I, and really anybody, can be a leader. Whereas before I may have lacked the confidence that I possessed the qualities of a leader. But now I feel as if a leader needs only to have love. And I can possess that for people. After that I need to simply give my service to them unconditionally. By doing this I hope to empower those that I love unconditionally so that they may nurture the best qualities within themselves [emphasis added] (Source: P6).

DISCUSSION

The experiences throughout this 15-week servant leadership course varied for each participant. At different times throughout the 15-weeks, each participant had personal reflections of themselves and others, leading to personal questions regarding leaders and leadership.

The participant's weekly reflections included rhetorical and hypothetical questions surrounding leaders and leadership in their own lives and society in general. This finding shows that the servant leadership coursework influenced each student to reflect upon his or her prior experiences with leadership.

Overall, participating in the course on servant leadership reinforced the idea that this was the type of leader each student aspired to become in the future. Though the impressions varied for each participant, the coursework influenced their view of leadership.

The coursework put into words what some said they already knew in their heart, but did not know how to express. This finding goes to the core of what Greenleaf (1977, 2002) said was a "natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first" (p. 27). It is this natural feeling of a desire to serve that brings the emergency services professional to the career field (Salka & Neville, 2004). This finding also supports that the idea that the attributes of servant leadership share commonalities to the emergency services profession (Carter, 2007).

The course used in this study was a distance-learning course where students learned independently instead of a group class wherein groupthink and "warm feelings" made everyone uncritically buy in. The findings of this study demonstrated that independent learning through a distance-learning interface course design did not eliminate the real human dimensions of learning servant leadership out of the learning experience.

The subjects for this study were fulltime undergraduate college students majoring in emergency services who had never served as emergency services professionals. Thus, they did not overtly connect servant leadership with the emergency services.

A future recommendation for research involves repeating this qualitative case study with emergency services professionals to explore how they connect servant leadership to the emergency services leader.

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