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Foreword by Kent Keith
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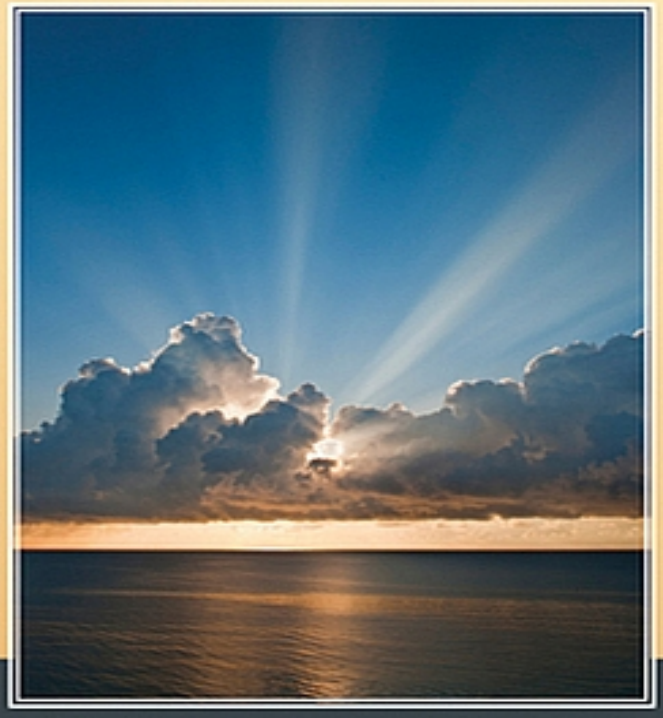
SERVANT LEADERSHIP FOR HIGHER EDUCATION



PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

FOREWORD

This book opens the door into an important field—the study and practice of servant leadership in higher education administration. It provides a comprehensive overview of the philosophy, principles, and practices of servant leadership that can make a positive difference in daily administrative work on campus. It is grounded in specific values and applied to real cases.

The book is timely because change is on us, and servant leadership offers a way to achieve the kind of thoughtful, positive change that addresses real needs. Institutions of higher education are complex and difficult to govern well. Typically, three groups have opportunities for leadership in governance and administration—the board, the faculty, and the administration. If each group focuses only on its own power and prerogatives, little good is likely to occur. If instead all three groups work together to identify and address the highest-priority needs of the institution and those it serves, then authentic and lasting progress is possible. Bold plans can be developed and implemented; dreams can be fulfilled.

No one knew this better than Robert K. Greenleaf, who launched the modern servant leadership movement in 1970 with the publication of his classic essay, *The Servant as Leader*. The first edition of the essay was addressed to students, faculty members, staff, and board members in institutions of higher education. It was a result of the time he spent in the late sixties teaching and consulting on college campuses.

It is easy to imagine that Greenleaf's best test of the servant leader was shaped by his extensive experience on

campus. He wrote “The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” This test is exceptionally relevant to the work of educators. We gather together in our campus communities to help each other learn and grow. We focus on the growth of students, of course, but to serve them well we also need to support the growth of faculty members, staff, and board members. Our effectiveness as leaders should be measured by that growth.

Servant leadership is being taught today in the classrooms of many colleges and universities throughout the country. A number of universities grant master’s degrees in servant leadership. Scholarly articles are appearing in refereed journals, and more than a hundred master’s and doctoral dissertations have addressed various aspects of servant leadership. At the same time, many universities have incorporated elements of servant leadership into their community service or service learning programs. Servant leadership is alive and well in the classroom and in activities programs.

It is time for servant leadership to make a difference in university governance and administration. We badly need leaders on our campuses who are committed to fundamental values, demonstrate the importance of high ethical standards, and have the courage to raise questions about purpose, direction, and the means to each end. We need servant leaders whose decisions are grounded in the highest-priority needs of those served, not the political preferences of individuals or groups jockeying for position. We need servant leaders who know that it is not about them, but rather it is about the future of the entire campus community.

That is why Dr. Wheeler's book is so welcome. It provides ideas that will help leaders to be effective servant leaders and stay centered on service, in the midst of a dramatically changing environment.

Kent M. Keith
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PREFACE

In 2001, I accepted a new assignment as a professor of leadership studies and was looking for a research area to investigate. Because I was a part of the land grant tradition, I thought that servant leadership with its emphasis on service was an area to explore.

In my career as first a professional and organizational development consultant and then as a developing leadership scholar, I had heard about servant leadership but had found little research-based information to support it. There was a significant and passionate group of practitioners who claimed servant leadership was the best way to lead, but most of the claims were based on testimonials from business leaders and consultants who were working with servant-oriented organizations. There was little outside evaluation or tangible evidence to support the claims. An additional complication was that there was only one servant leadership instrument that offered an organizational assessment, not an individual one, and it had some psychometric problems.

I even attended one of the servant leadership conferences sponsored by the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership to try to gain a better picture of whether this was something we should explore in our leadership work at the university. In addition to hearing many testimonials and explanations of why servant leadership was better than other forms of leadership, my most memorable moment was a conversation, or perhaps better stated a witnessing, of a young man at a reception who exclaimed that he had found a philosophy that fit him—in short, he was a believer!

As I looked more closely at the literature in this area of study, very quickly it became apparent that servant leadership was not taken seriously by leadership scholars and was not seen as a theory of leadership that could be tested. However, a quote by Peter Senge, management professor at MIT and well-known systems thinker, stuck in my mind:

> I believe the book Servant Leadership, and in particular the essay, “The Servant as Leader,” which starts the book off, is the most singular and useful statement on leadership that I have read in the last 20 years. Despite a virtual tidal wave of books on leadership in the last few years, there is something different about Bob Greenleaf’s essay, something both simpler and more profound. This one essay penetrates to such a depth that it resonates in us, like the overtones of a Buddhist meditation gong, calling us to quiet. Rereading the essay I found myself stopped, repeatedly, by a single sentence or phrase. For many years, I simply told people not to waste their time reading all the other managerial leadership books. “If you are really serious about the deeper territory of true leadership,” I would say, “read Greenleaf.” (Senge, 1995, pp. 217–218)

At this point, my curiosity was raised, and I decided that servant leadership was an important concept and one well worth studying. With over forty years of experience, my sense was that higher education leadership was becoming more corporate (instituting many of the business practices, some of which made sense but some that didn’t fit). I was searching for a philosophy that would preserve the best of higher education and also incorporate appropriate business practices. When I speak of the best of higher education, I am referring to the sense of community based on learning and developing together, empowerment, embracing

curiosity and innovation, and making society better. Servant leadership seemed to be a good match.

My colleague and I decided that one of the first requirements was to develop an instrument to measure servant leadership on an individual level so that it would be possible to compare studies that to this point were primarily descriptive and anecdotal. We went back to the writings of Robert Greenleaf, generally acknowledged to be the father of servant leadership, to describe the essential attributes he formulated. Our intent was to use his terms and meanings to develop a scale that would capture the essence of servant leadership. After extensive testing with a leadership panel of experts and field work with practitioners, we developed the Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ). We developed a self-rating form as well as another rater version. It was published in 2006 and the requests for use, particularly in doctoral dissertations, have been immense. Since 2006 in the leadership literature, servant leadership has become well represented. Two other scales have been described—again representing an indication of the interest.

When I began my initial investigation of who was using servant leadership, I expected the best examples to be in nonprofits because it seemed as though the philosophy would most appropriately fit with their goals and approach to the world. However, to my surprise the most highly visible examples were in the business world—TD Industries (a mechanical construction company in the Fort Worth—Dallas area), Southwest Airlines, Synovus Financial Services, and Duncan Aviation. Many, like Synovus and Duncan, were family owned and provided not only high-quality customer service and employee empowerment but also extensive involvement in the community. For example, Duncan Aviation, whose employees are extensively involved in the Lincoln, Nebraska, community, only receives 4

percent of their business (high-end airplane refurbishing) from the Lincoln area. Yet they are committed to serving and making the community better through their employees' service. Many of these businesses have been committed to servant leadership for ten to fifteen years and are often identified as one of the one hundred best companies for people to work in. As you are aware, businesses do not stay with any philosophy unless it benefits their bottom line. As the president of Duncan Aviation was quoted as saying, "If we take care of our employees, they'll take care of the customers and we'll make money" (Piersol, 2007).

The more I studied servant leadership, the more I thought it was a philosophy and way of leading that might fit with higher education. I began to ask questions about its use and effectiveness. Where are the institutions committed to servant leadership? Is the philosophy incorporated across whole institutions? Are there pockets of activity in particular segments of higher education? Is it even appropriate for higher education? Who are the visible servant leaders? What are the results from using the servant leadership approach? These questions were running through my mind when I decided to focus on a book to frame and describe what might be useful to those already using servant leadership and to those considering it.

There is still much more to know and explore. We would benefit from more case studies of higher education servant leaders and controlled studies of the results of the work of servant leaders. No doubt more will be available as studies using the SLQ are published and more comparison studies are completed. So far studies suggest servant leaders generate engagement, trust, hope, and employee satisfaction. From what we now know, it is clear that servant leadership has great promise for higher education

with its emphasis on service, people, and the greater societal good.

Focus of the Book

The book is intended primarily for administrators at all levels of higher education. You'll see examples from all levels of administration, including presidents, vice-chancellors, deans, and chairs. My hope is that whatever your position, the examples provide illustrations of important aspects of servant leadership that you can apply.

When I use the term *servant leadership* I am using Robert Greenleaf's definition, which begins with the desire to serve and sees leadership as a part of that service. Another way to think of servant leadership is to see service as a prerequisite to leading. Because I see servant organizations as full of leaders, both formal and informal, I tend to use the terms *associates* and *colleagues* more than *followers* to describe coworkers. The leadership I describe goes beyond the single leader with a group of followers. The focus is on empowering people to lead and follow depending on their assignments and skills. The central message I want to convey is that we are all on a critical mission to serve the highest-priority needs of those we serve—this book is about what it takes to accomplish this task.

What Supports the Book?

The book is based on my own research, interviews with ten servant leaders, the research of others, forty years of work in higher education institutions with a range of consulting experience within and outside the academy, three years as a department head, teaching undergraduate and graduate classes that involve servant leadership, site visits to private and nonprofit organizations that practice servant

leadership, and supervising doctoral students involved in the research of servant leadership. This book combines experience, thought, and academic study to make the case for servant leadership in higher education. It is not intended to be comprehensive of all the research literature, although that literature does inform the principles and practices suggested.

Organization of the Book

The book is organized into fifteen chapters. The Introduction describes my attempt to find servant leaders in higher education and leaders to interview. Chapter One identifies a number of leadership styles that are commonplace in our institutions and makes the case for why they are not sustainable and require some different ways of leading. In Chapter Two servant leadership is introduced by recognizing some cornerstones and research that illuminate its promise. Cornerstones include a call to serve, authenticity, humility, moral courage, and healing one's own emotional state. Chapter Three introduces ten principles that servant leaders can use as guidelines in their practice. The principles are based on values that provide a compass for leaders. Chapters Four through Thirteen focus on each of the ten principles and providing background, examples, and strategies. Chapter Fourteen suggests some ways that servant leaders can renew and take care of themselves. Chapter Fifteen addresses some myths about servant leadership that prevent some leaders from considering the practice. The Epilogue wraps up the book.

The chapters also end with three learning tools:

- Points to Consider highlight a number of the central points in the chapters.

- Developmental Aspects to Explore provide a number of questions to think about the ideas and principles presented.
- Strategies to Develop identify ways that are helpful in using the concepts and principles presented.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In writing this book, I am indebted to many people, including my colleagues Jay Barbuto and Leverne Barrett, who originally encouraged me to investigate servant leadership. Again I am grateful to Jay for suggesting and collaborating on the development of a measure of servant leadership. To the many graduate students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication, who discussed and studied servant leadership, and the undergraduates in our leadership classes, who have studied many aspects of leadership—you have helped refine our work. To my longtime colleague Alan Seagren, who has been a partner in studies of department chairs for more than thirty years and who practices many of the principles of servant leadership, I am always learning something. To my many colleagues who have suggested possibilities, I do appreciate your thoughts and interest. To those in my workshops who have challenged my thinking about servant leadership, you have been most helpful.

I am indebted to Kent Keith, director of the Greenleaf Center, who helped identify servant leaders in higher education and encouraged me to pursue writing this book. To Kent Crookston, who allowed me to use some of his data from an extensive chair study, it made a difference in describing practice. To executive editor Sheryl Fullerton of Jossey-Bass, who encouraged me to write this book and who has put up with fits and starts, a thank-you is in order. To the many people at Jossey-Bass, particularly Megan Scribner and Joanne Clapp Fullagar, who played a role in developing and publishing this book, you have been most helpful. To Cindy DeRyke, who has helped me

immeasurably with the manuscript format and editing, thank you so much. To my wife, Diana, who has encouraged my devoting the time to the book, I appreciate your continuing love and support. To the various servant leaders who were willing to talk with me and provide examples of my suggested servant leadership principles, you have made a difference in the book and in the organizations where you work. For those who are acting like servant leaders and may not know it, thank you for making a difference in people's lives and the organizations that serve them. Finally, my thanks to my leadership colleagues, who continue to investigate servant leadership and provide further evidence that it can improve leadership in higher education.

Introduction

When I first began this book, I thought it would be an easy task to identify servant leaders in higher education. I was already familiar with a number of servant leaders in business and nonprofits so I thought there would be a parallel in higher education. I also thought I could contact a network of professionals (administrators and faculty members) from across the country who have years of experience in a range of institutions and are quite familiar with what is going on nationally—and just watch the names roll in.

After sending out my request to this network I was surprised that I received little response. Then gradually I began to hear that “I can’t think of anyone” or “you know the field better than I do” or “everyone in this business is a servant leader.” In short, it was a fishing trip with a few bites but almost no catches!

The thought crossed my mind that this must be a similar experience to what Jim Collins (2001b) described in his quest to find Level 5 leaders, those who moved their companies from good to great. In his search he heard about luck and contributions of others rather than a focus on the leader’s activities, which is described in the following passage:

> The emphasis on luck turns out to be a part of a broader pattern that we have come to call “the window and mirror.” Level 5 leaders, inherently humble, look out the window to apportion credit—even undue credit—to factors outside themselves. If they can’t find a specific person or event to give credit to, they credit good luck. At the same time, they look in the mirror to assign responsibility, never citing bad luck or external factors when things go poorly. Conversely, the comparison executives [in their studies] frequently looked out the window for factors to blame but preened in the mirror to credit them when things went well. (pp. 34–35)

Returning to my search I continued to wonder why so few servant leaders were identified. Are they too humble to suggest they are servant leaders? Do they think they only represent certain aspects of servant leadership so they wouldn’t be as bold as to suggest they are one? Or a related aspect could be that they feel like a lone wolf with no others in the institution so it’s better not to make themselves highly profiled with a philosophy that is not well known and would be subject to intense scrutiny.

It did become apparent after talking with some of the leaders that they didn’t want to describe themselves as servant leaders. They gave a number of reasons for this: (1) they don’t understand the concept well enough and so are uncomfortable being described as a servant leader; (2) they don’t want to be put in any “leadership box” that may limit their flexibility (in their mind being a servant leader suggests you must respond in a particular manner or have a particular set of techniques); (3) these leaders tend to be eclectic, picking ideas and practices from whatever philosophy or theory fits their needs and personality; (4) they may have a sense that servant leadership is too religious or faith based; (5) they don’t like the term

servant, which to them implies they are subservient (I have particularly heard that from people who felt oppressed in the past); and (6) they felt the leadership expectations are too high—something unattainable.

Whatever the reason, I found it frustrating. I did receive some leads through Kent Keith, CEO of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, but he indicated that he too was looking to identify more servant leaders across the spectrum of higher-education institutions. Many whom he had identified were in small, often religiously affiliated colleges, in student affairs, or in community colleges. He had been largely unsuccessful at finding administrators in state universities and research institutions. In our conversation it became obvious that he was looking to me and I was looking to him for sources, so we agreed that we would refer people to each other. One lead he did provide was to president James Underwood from Kaskaskia Community College in Illinois. To my surprise he had previously been a president at a community college in my home state of Nebraska.

This exploration suggested to me that I should continue to look for mature or consummate servant leaders and that I also needed to look for examples of particular characteristics not only in orientation but also in attitudes and practices in hiring, people development, and a host of other processes. I decided when I observed a servant leadership perspective to just ask them to describe how they addressed a process, such as hiring, and then look for attitudes and behaviors that would suggest a servant-leader orientation. In conversations with administrators whom I saw as having servant leadership characteristics, it was evident that they did approach some issues from more of a service perspective. However, again they wouldn’t describe themselves as servant leaders. Given this

cumbersome pursuit, how could I highlight servant leadership in higher education?

I decided to begin this book by making the case for servant leadership by pointing out that many of the leadership models or philosophies in use aren't effective now and certainly will not be in the future. Then I suggest that to be a servant leader one must come to terms with understanding oneself: the Socratic admonition, know yourself. I also submit that it's not only important to identify and create more servant leaders, but it is also critical that the institutions of higher education play more of a servant role in society. After laying this framework, the rest of the book posits and explores the ten principles that form the basis for being and leading as a servant leader. The chapters provide examples, encourage reflection, and distill the lessons learned.

Here are some beginning points to consider as you begin to read more about servant leadership.

Points to Consider

- Servant leaders aren't showy because they don't seek the limelight or call attention to themselves.
- Sometimes particular aspects of leaders suggest they have a servant orientation but they might not describe themselves as servant leaders.
- You can find servant leaders at all administrative levels.
- Institutions should embrace the servant perspective as central to a system that attempts to meet people's highest-priority needs.

Developmental Aspects to Explore

- Do you describe yourself as a servant leader?
- How would you describe your leadership philosophy or style?
- Are there aspects of servant leadership that you see as valuable in your leadership?
- Do you know anyone you would describe as a servant leader? What do you admire about his or her leadership?

Strategies to Develop Servant Leadership Awareness

- Interview someone you see as a servant leader. At this point the person could be outside of higher education. Listen to how he or she lives and leads.
- List the major goals you have in your work and as you move through the book; reflect on whether servant leadership is a philosophy that will help you achieve those goals.
- Consider whether you are pleased with your leadership philosophy and style. If you have concerns list them and keep them in mind as you read through the book.

CHAPTER 1
Unsuccessful Leadership Models

Dr. Green became the chair of a chemistry department a year ago when he came to the university from another prestigious university. Although he had never been a chair, he had secured a number of research grants and had a number of people working on these grants. The selection committee was impressed with his credentials (several million dollars in grants) and believed that his record and name would lift the department to new heights. Because the department had only fifteen faculty members, the administration believed that the chair could effectively lead and manage this group. They were sure that his grant writing and management success would translate into a successful department administrator. As you might expect, Dr. Green was able to negotiate a well-equipped lab and continuation of travel to fulfill his obligations as an international scholar.

Let’s fast-forward and see how Dr. Green is doing now. In his administrative evaluation session, he complains that the administrative tasks are overwhelming and he is not spending enough time in his lab (his first love). His faculty members indicate that he is out of town so often that staff have to deal with issues or they have to wait until he returns, and other people have to cover his classes. And it’s unclear how the functions of research, teaching, and service fit together in the department. Some in the department have the impression that only research is important to him, and one member suggests that with the present emphasis the department is essentially becoming a research institute.

Even though this is a scenario built from multiple situations, it illustrates some issues that higher education needs to address in terms of administration selection and operation. The administration needs to recognize its assumptions about Dr. Green's strengths and abilities, how well he will work with the rest of the department, and the assumptions of the department based on past chairs.

First, there is an assumption that the skills that made Dr. Green a successful research professor will transfer to being a successful department chair. They assume that his project management skills will translate to effectiveness as a chair leading a wide range of people. Yet we know that these are two different sets of skills. Second, they assume Dr. Green, who has been successful through a narrowly focused agenda, would change his focus to the bigger picture of not only the department operations but also how the department fits into the university. This is one of the greatest failings of unsuccessful chairs; they don't let go of their previous role and allegiance.

Third, colleagues see the chair as competing for resources because he has inside knowledge and a strong research network to use. In our research on chairs, faculty members commented that being a role model was different from being a competitor whom these high-profile chairs sometimes became (Wheeler, Seagren, Becker, Kinley, Mlinek, & Robson, 2008).

Fourth, they assume the chair will be able to deal interpersonally with faculty members and staff and that he or she will get to know them and appreciate what they offer even if a number may not have strong research credentials or background and yet are essential to the operation. Fifth, the department has a previous history of expecting that the chair be available to address the everyday issues that invariably arise. Yet externally connected chairs are often

away from the office building to maintain their research work.

Given this scenario, is it any wonder that many chairs often are unsuccessful and find the position unmanageable particularly when they continue to place a high premium and time commitment on their scholarship? No doubt you've heard it everywhere—the chair is the most important administrative position in the institution. Yet these positions turn over quickly with the average life of four to five years (other administrators also typically have tenures of similar length). Some suggest the position is too demanding, others indicate that those in the position lose their academic credentials if they remain for more than five years; still others say it's a choice problem—we just need to select the right people.

As a consultant to many chairs, and a former chair myself, I have watched people in these positions see the workload increase, be pulled in so many directions that they just try to cope with the demands, and receive little appreciation for their efforts by either department members or administrators. My belief is that part of the problems with how chairs and other administrators are selected and sustained is that the leadership models or philosophies that are used do not consider the demands of the job, the skills needed, or the long-term effects. Let's look at a few examples.

Administrator as father or mother figure. Administrators sometimes develop a relationship with their faculty members, staff, and students that is similar to being a parent. In this role, everyone brings a problem to the parent and expects that he or she will solve the problem. What happens is an expectation by the followers that the next time they have a problem they will return to the administrator—think parent—to solve the problem. Not

only is this time consuming for the administrator but a dependency is also created in which the people with the problem really haven't developed their own problem-solving skills and taken responsibility. Effective parents and administrators understand developing responsibility is a process that develops over time, but in this case institutional leaders are dealing with people who should be treated as adults and who are capable of solving their problems. I have observed a pattern in which colleagues won't even attempt to resolve issues between them but would rather go to the administrator who interacts with them separately. Not only does this pattern occupy much time and attention, but it also reduces the development and use of any negotiation skills among the players.

Administrator as firefighter. Other administrators are so busy putting out fires that they don't have time for important leadership activities such as reflection, visioning, planning, and investing-in-others development. Sometimes situations require that this leadership style be used, but when it becomes the dominant modus long-term goals will be sacrificed. Possibly a department or college is in such a state that the processes and people are not in place to move to a different stage. There are also situations when administrators perceive themselves as problem solvers and they create problems to solve—sometimes the bigger the better! Being at the center of issues can certainly provide a sense of self-importance and indispensability, but it can be all consuming and take away from long-term goals and development responsibilities.

Administrator as the role. Some administrators put on their administrator hat when they head for the office and never take it off. In this case the role provides formal authority and some insulation from the ups and downs of office relationships. The belief is that if everything is just defined, procedures are in place, and the administrator treats

everyone equally, there won't be any major problems. Administrators in these situations are perceived as bureaucrats or technicians who are experts at covering their behinds and hiding behind the role. These administrators are thought of as not authentic and often with little personality.

Administrator as transactional leader. This model is based on the idea that everyone is motivated by external rewards —particularly money and exchanges of this for that. Thus if a chair or other administrator wants faculty members to accept additional duties or change instructional methods, he or she can influence them by an external reward. This orientation can lead to ignoring the intrinsic motivation of faculty members and can eventually lead to a situation in which people will only do what they are explicitly rewarded for. Comments from faculty members and staff about doing anything beyond their usual work are characterized by "it's not part of my job description" or "what is the reward for doing this?" This model was particularly effective when institutions were attempting to carefully control the management process. Even if it were an effective model in changing institutions, most administrators, particularly chairs, don't have enough control over the reward system to make it work.

Administrator as micromanager. Some administrators operate in a fashion that suggests that they have to see and approve everything. This may be a control issue or belief that only they can do things correctly. Or the administrators may be protecting themselves from a bad outcome because someone did not perform as expected or there was a lack of confidence that others could do the work. Not only is this strategy a time drain for the administrator and the people involved but it also sends a message that the administrator doesn't believe associates or unit members will meet their responsibilities and

achieve the expected standards. Does this mean the leader should just assign tasks and then stand back and wait for the results? Effective leaders know they must monitor periodically and also know which people will require more supervision and mentoring.

Lassiez-faire leader. Administrators may see the role as little more than a maintainer, particularly when they didn't want the position or may have been the only acceptable choice and therefore forced to take it. In this case the chair may perceive the situation as one in which the primary motivation is not to create enemies because shortly this temporary chair will be back in the faculty ranks. Difficult problems will be ignored or deferred until "the permanent chair" is in place. Such an environment creates a power vacuum in which things either won't get done or others, often without the formal authority or responsibility, will step forward because they see the need and are not willing to sit back and wait.

All of these styles are limited in their leadership potential. They are formal leader-centered approaches and don't empower others to develop the involvement and commitment to be a part of a more integrated and synergistic environment. Too much time is spent sorting through responsibilities and often exacerbating problems. So even though administrators may have chosen the previously described styles in specific situations, when these become the dominant way of working, leadership and institutional culture is less effective and efficient. The long-term health and productivity of the unit and the institution will suffer. An analogy can be drawn from ropes with knots in that the more you pull on the ends of the rope the tighter the knots become. Powerful, effective leaders understand that just doing the same thing, only harder or more intensively, will not lead to a different outcome. It's time we loosen the knots and find different ways to lead.