

The Writings of Robert K. Greenleaf: An Interpretive Analysis and the Future of Servant Leadership

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This paper provides an interpretive analysis of the writings of Robert K. Greenleaf. It examines familiar aspects of Greenleaf's work on servant leadership: providing an overview of philosophy, a review of actions and activities that practicing servant-leaders take, and the identification of several critical skills needed to support servant-leaders. Next it reviews a number of less familiar aspects of Greenleaf's writings that help to put the servant-leader philosophy in proper context. It then critically examines areas that could be expanded or developed to improve servant-leader performance. Lastly, it provides the author's view of the future of the servant-leader for the 21st century.

I. Purpose

This paper examines the writings of Robert K. Greenleaf, covering two and a half decades. It first identifies and discusses some of the most recognized and important concepts that Greenleaf presented. It then examines the broader focus and lesser known concepts that Greenleaf brought forth that, if taken advantage of, can potentially extend his leadership impact even farther. Next, it provides some of this author's views regarding important areas of servant leadership that were not included by Greenleaf but which can be used to improve the concept and further the philosophy of servant leadership. Lastly, using the foundation of servant leadership provided by Greenleaf, it will present a new and fuller vision for servant-leaders for the 21st century.

II. The Philosophy of the Servant-Leader

Greenleaf is best known as the originator of the term "servant-leader." A number of other leadership ideas provided by Robert Greenleaf are fairly well known, at least to those most interested in the subject of leadership in general, and servant leadership in particular. The ideas behind what it means to be a servant-leader are many, and they deal with a multitude of leadership related topics. First among these many ideas are those that lay the basic foundation for servant leadership. These

foundational ideas also are among the most recognized and important servant leadership concepts that Greenleaf presented in his writings. What is clear is that his ideas were different and the philosophy of the servant-leader as presented by Greenleaf is dramatically counter-cultural. The prevailing institutional culture says, “watch out for number one,” whereas the servant-leader says, “put others first.” The prevailing institutional culture says, “it’s survival of the fittest,” whereas the servant-leader says, “we are all in this together.” The prevailing institutional culture says, “never trust anyone,” whereas the servant-leader says, “trust everyone unless, and until, they prove themselves untrustworthy.”

The Servant-Leader

Greenleaf’s “servant-leader” is intended to describe a type person – a person that has two distinct and different roles: one as a servant and one as a leader. Among the most famous of Greenleaf’s words are those used to describe this idea of a servant-leader:

“The servant-leader *is* servant first.... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. He is sharply different from the person who is a *leader* first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive to acquire material possessions. For such it will be a later choice to serve – after leadership is established. The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.”¹

The idea of a leader being a servant (especially a servant **first**) is more than just unique. It was, and remains, totally radical and counter-cultural on so many levels. For example, in most executive and management circles the emphasis is on leaders being served, not serving. Even the idea of being a servant, is most often seen as a weakness whereas the idea of being a leader resonates strength. The idea of being a servant is often seen as being inferior or being in a position of low regard, whereas leaders are exalted and held in the highest regard by society. In addition, the idea of serving others also stands in stark contrast to an economic system that is focused on self-interest, survival of the fittest, and fierce and often destructive competition. An even better idea of what being a servant-leader really means can be formed by examining what the servant-leader does.

What Servant-Leaders Do

Greenleaf provided more than just a vague leadership philosophy for servant leaders to follow. Greenleaf readily admits that his views on leadership are not based on academic theories or extensive research, but rather on decades of experience and observation in the workplace, in and among the institutions that are actually providing services to society. As a life-long practitioner, it is not surprising that he also choose to provide a lot of information and a number of specific descriptive actions and

¹ Greenleaf, R., *The Servant As Leader* (1991). Westfield, Indiana: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, p.7

activities regarding what servant-leaders actually do. These actions were about what he personally did and observed in others that he viewed as real servant-leaders. They were also about what other servant-leaders said they did and observed in the “real world” as practitioners. Among some of their more dominate actions and activities, servant-leaders:

- care
- know their followers well
- focus on followers and their needs
- grow and develop followers
- listen
- provide vision
- persuade
- build strong and loving relationships with followers
- empower others
- build a sense of community
- display humility.

There are many other seemingly small actions which servant-leaders take on a routine basis which also significantly contribute to making a better work environment for followers (e.g., greeting people, speaking kindly, smiling, fostering humor, recognizing and rewarding success, and celebrating important occasions) which are too numerous to detail here. What is important to understand is that the uniqueness of all these and the above actions and activities is not so much in their acceptance as being right or good. The real uniqueness comes in the doing – thus the emphasis is on “what servant-leaders do.” Many leaders, especially those exposed to 21st century management and leadership writings, would accept these as positive actions for leaders to take. Yet few leaders will take them on a consistent basis. Here the importance is on action. The consistent and repetitive display of all these actions is what makes others see their leaders as genuine servant-leaders. Follower observation of the servant-leader’s actions and activities thus is critically important for creating the follower-ship that gives breath and life to the leadership of the servant-leader.

Measuring Servant-Leader Success

There are no leaders unless there are followers that choose to follow. “If there are sanctions to compel or induce compliance, the process would not qualify as leadership. The only test of leadership is that someone follows—*voluntarily*.”² However, this only recognizes whether leadership is present or not. It does not measure the quality, quantity, or effectiveness of the leadership that is present. Greenleaf has some ideas for this: “Do those served grow as persons; do they, *while being served*, become

² Greenleaf, R., *The Power of Servant Leadership: Essays by Robert K. Greenleaf*; Edited by Larry C. Spears (1998). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., p.31

healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will he benefit, or, at least, will he not be further deprived?"³ A later addendum to the above stipulated that "[n]o one will knowingly be hurt by the action, *directly or indirectly*."⁴ In essence, the effectiveness of the servant-leader can only adequately be measured by looking at the lives of those served.

III. Looking Deeper Into Greenleaf

The previous discussion reviewed some of the more popular and well known aspects of Robert Greenleaf's work relative to the servant-leader and servant leadership. However, there is a great deal more that this brilliant thinker and writer had to say that is not only germane to understanding servant leadership, but is also germane to understanding the overall context in which Greenleaf intended for it to operate.

Beyond the Servant-Leader

Greenleaf viewed leadership as a responsibility and obligation to serve. Though he did not use the term "calling" to describe this particular view of leadership, it is a term that one might use to describe this view. This is radically different than the prevailing view that becoming a leader is all about bettering one's self and position, status, income, or advancing one's career and influence.

Greenleaf had other views regarding the quality of leadership he observed in the institutions of his day. The deficiency he saw was leadership which was self-serving rather than others-serving. He observed that the wrong kind of people (i.e., non-servants) were encumbering far too many leadership positions and seizing far too many leadership opportunities and roles and having far too much influence in these institutions. In fact, he thought the real problem with leadership in his day was the failure of "strong natural servants who have the potential to lead but do not lead, or who choose to follow a non-servant."⁵ In essence, the leadership challenge he identified was to get capable servant-leaders to step up and lead and to also insist that those that lead them be servant-leaders as well. He also believed that those that chose not to serve were cheating themselves and missing the rewards of a more meaningful, satisfying, and complete life.⁶

Greenleaf's Real Interests and Objectives

As great as the idea of servant leadership was, Greenleaf was not interested primarily in making people better leaders, or in fact, making the organizations they lead more effective or profitable. He wanted to change the quality of service being provided to the people being served by these large institutions and he wanted to impact the quality of the society. As a result, he had a number of ideas to support these interests.

3 Greenleaf, R., *The Servant As Leader* (1991). Westfield, Indiana: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, p.7

4 Greenleaf, R., *The Power of Servant Leadership: Essays by Robert K. Greenleaf*; Edited by Larry C. Spears (1998). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., p.43

5 Greenleaf, R., *The Servant As Leader* (1991). Westfield, Indiana: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, p.34

6 Greenleaf, R., *The Power of Servant Leadership: Essays by Robert K. Greenleaf*; Edited by Larry C. Spears (1998). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., p.271

Practitioner Focused - Greenleaf was not looking to build a new theory of leadership or contribute to advancing the body of knowledge regarding leadership when he first coined the term “servant-leader.” His intended influence was the practitioner. He wrote as a practitioner, not as a theoretician or academician, and he wanted to influence other practitioners.

Servanthood First - Most of what Robert Greenleaf is known for emanates from those practicing, teaching, and studying leadership. As a result, there is a great deal of emphasis (as one might naturally expect) from this group on the “leader” part of the term “servant-leader.” Greenleaf’s interest, on the other hand, was primarily on the “servant” part of “servant-leader.” This is seldom acknowledged in leadership circles even though it is emphasized in the most famous of Greenleaf’s words: “The servant-leader **is servant first.... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first.** ...The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.” (bold lettering added)⁷ Above all, it is clear that, to Greenleaf, being a leader was important, but being a servant was most critical.

More Serving Organizations and Institutions - Practicing servant-leaders were the means to another end; the creation of serving institutions. Building practicing servant-leaders was important to Greenleaf, but it was secondary to the building of servant-institutions. Greenleaf saw, before most, that it was increasingly institutions to which society had turned to provide the services it needed and he saw the immense consequences of this step. Much of what he saw, he did not like. “Most caring was once person to person. Now much of it is mediated through institutions—often large, powerful, impersonal; not always competent; sometimes corrupt.”⁸ He wrote that “[c]aring is the central motive. What we have learned about caring for individual persons we must now give to institutions.”⁹ Greenleaf was not impressed with the attention that these institutions were providing to the people they were intended to serve and sees “too many of our institutions as seriously deficient in their service to society.”¹⁰

Building A Better Society - For Robert Greenleaf servant-leaders and servant leadership were a means for obtaining more serving institutions, and more serving institutions were just a means for what Greenleaf truly sought – a more caring and just society. This relationship is displayed in Figure 1. He sought that which would contribute to the greater good of society rather than the selfish gains of a few. From the beginning, Robert Greenleaf was interested in discovering what was “required for our

⁷ Greenleaf, R., *The Servant As Leader* (1991). Westfield, Indiana: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, p.7

⁸ Greenleaf, R., *Spirituality As Leadership* (1988). Indianapolis, Indiana: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, p.1

⁹ Greenleaf, R., *Advices to Servants* (1991). Indianapolis, Indiana: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, p.53

¹⁰ Greenleaf, R., *The Power of Servant Leadership: Essays by Robert K. Greenleaf; Edited by Larry C. Spears* (1998). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., p.18

society to become more serving – to make a substantial move toward a quality of the common life that is reasonable and possible with available resources, human and material.”¹¹

He believed “that dominance of the culture by elements like coercive power, private gain, and survival in the competitive struggle do not make for the quality of society that is reasonable and possible with the resources we have.”¹² To this end he saw servant-leaders as builders of more serving institutions which then could counteract the effects of what he viewed as “a deteriorating society with little evidence of effective restorative forces at work.”¹³

Greenleaf was quite clear in his description of what he sought as a “good” society: “I believe that caring for persons, the more able and the less able serving each other, is what makes a good society.”¹⁴ He also provides a more detailed view:

“THIS IS MY THESIS: caring for persons, the more able and the less able serving each other, is the rock upon which a good society is built. Whereas, until recently, caring was largely person to person, now most of it is mediated through institutions, – often large, complex, powerful, impersonal; not always competent; sometimes corrupt. If a better society is to be built, one that is more just and more loving, one that provides greater creative opportunity for its people, then the most open course is to *raise both the capacity to serve and the very performance as servants* of existing major institutions by new regenerative forces operating within them.”¹⁵

How to Get There

Greenleaf did more than simply point out the deficiencies of the current society and share his vision of what ought to be, he provided a strategic direction in which to go: “I believe that in a society in which so much caring for persons is mediated through institutions, the most open course to build a more just and caring society is to raise the performance as servants of as many institutions as possible through new regenerative forces initiated within them by committed individuals: servants.”¹⁶ What he was looking for, and believed could be obtained through these servants, was “a path to restoring much of the dignity that has been lost through the depersonalization that industrialization has brought to us.”¹⁷ He was seeking to build servant institutions, not just servant-leaders. This restorative path was something that Greenleaf referred to as his “hierarchy of institutions.”¹⁸ This hierarchy is displayed in Figure 2.

¹¹ Ibid, p.19

¹² Ibid, p.195

¹³ Ibid, p.117

¹⁴ Greenleaf, R., *Spirituality As Leadership* (1988). Indianapolis, Indiana: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, p.1

¹⁵ Greenleaf, R., *The Institution as Servant* (2004). Indianapolis, Indiana: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, p.1

¹⁶ Greenleaf, R., *Spirituality As Leadership* (1988). Indianapolis, Indiana: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, p.13

¹⁷ Greenleaf, R., *The Power of Servant Leadership: Essays by Robert K. Greenleaf*; Edited by Larry C. Spears (1998). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., p.53

¹⁸ Ibid, p.170

Greenleaf summed up the way his hierarchy would bring about a better society this way:

“...I have hope that is supported by the belief that some seminaries and foundations will have (or find) trustees of the stature who will help them (seminaries and foundations) to be self-generating institutions. These then will become sources of prophetic visions for, and supports of organizational strength in, schools and churches which will minister to individuals and to the vast structure of operating institutions that make up our complex society.”¹⁹

IV. Taking the Next Step in Servant Leadership

As is evident thus far, the contributions of Robert Greenleaf go far beyond just another leadership fad or way to better manage a business, government, or church. His ideas are radical in their orientation and altruistic in their ultimate intent. In spite of the fact that Greenleaf brought so many terrific ideas to the leadership debate through the proliferation of the philosophy of the servant-leader, it is a concept that is far too important to leave where it was at the end of the 20th century. There is a critical need to take it farther. To do so, however, requires a deeper understanding of some very fundamental, and yet highly interrelated topics. These will be discussed next.

The Origins and Human Limits of Greenleaf’s Servant-Leader

While Greenleaf coined the term “servant-leader,” he did not invent the philosophy behind the servant-leader. The ideas behind the servant-leader are clearly Biblical in nature. Greenleaf recognized that “[t]he idea of ‘servant’ is deep in our Judeo-Christian heritage.”²⁰ He also found that “the earliest references to the idea of servant were contained in the Bible, and in particular the Old Testament,” and yet very little of what he states appears to be based on a solid understanding of Christianity or the Bible as a source.²¹

Though many may believe that religious conviction and scriptural knowledge was a major source of Greenleaf’s ideas related to servant leadership, this author does not believe that there is either substantial or compelling evidence to support this position. Greenleaf “did not grow up in a church identified home” and had “little exposure ... to churches.”²² Even though exposed in early childhood to some Methodist traditions, he “found it necessary to think my way through a spiritual orientation for my life.”²³ Later, he also dabbled in diverse religions, such as the Unitarians, and other religious activities such as transcendental and Buddhist meditation, not of a Christian nature.²⁴ Also, far too much appears to have been made of Greenleaf’s Quaker influence. Greenleaf, in spite of his in-and-out exposure to the Quaker religion, was not, by his own admitting, a devout Christian. In one instance he

¹⁹ Ibid, p.56

²⁰ Ibid, p.22

²¹ Ibid, p.58

²² Ibid, p.265

²³ Ibid, p.265

²⁴ Ibid, p.267

states that, “I was not then, am not now a pious Christian.”²⁵ He had what one author referred to as “a lifetime of exposure to a variety of religious thought.”²⁶ At best his religious journey could only be described as a continuously wondering seeker. It is not an exaggeration to say that there is little evidence available in Greenleaf’s writings to indicate that he had developed other than a cursory understanding of the Bible.

Greenleaf understood that something outside the individual had to provide the impetus for one to be a servant-leader, yet he never seemed to quite figure out or understand what that source might be. He stated that “nothing short of a ‘peak’ experience, like religious conversion or psychoanalysis or an overpowering new vision, seems to have much chance of converting a confirmed nonservant into an affirmative servant.”²⁷ In essence, Greenleaf believed strongly in the capabilities of the human spirit, but failed to really understand the capabilities of the Holy Spirit that dwells in the heart of those that are born again – those that experience the second birth. What Greenleaf didn’t understand, though it is revealed in scripture, is that God controlled “peak” experiences back in Biblical times and He still does so today. This created a particularly huge blind spot for Greenleaf. Had his spiritual formation developed further, Greenleaf may well have eventually seen the importance of more solidly tying the work of the servant-leader into the purposes of God.

The above is not intended as either a judgment or criticism of Greenleaf. Rather it is intended to help explain the circumstances surrounding Greenleaf’s own spiritual formation and how it may have limited his perspective to an earthly realm. It may well be that his lack of spiritual formation was the primary reason why Greenleaf did not take servant-leadership to the next higher level. He simply settled for what he was most familiar with, a more secular world view of the servant-leader – one more focused on the needs and deeds of man than those of God.

Understanding the “Servant” In “Servant-Leader”

As discussed earlier, Greenleaf clearly wanted leaders to be servants first and foremost and leaders second. In his words:

“The servant-leader *is* servant first.... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. He is sharply different from the person who is a *leader* first. The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.”²⁸

²⁵ Greenleaf, R., *Servant Leadership: A Journey Into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (2002). Indianapolis, Indiana: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, p.288

²⁶ Frick, D., *Robert K. Greenleaf: A Life of Servant Leadership* (2004). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., p.308

²⁷ Greenleaf, R., *The Power of Servant Leadership: Essays by Robert K. Greenleaf; Edited by Larry C. Spears* (1998). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., p.23

²⁸ Greenleaf, R., *The Servant As Leader* (1991). Westfield, Indiana: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, p.7

The prevailing culture is for leaders to focus on serving self. What Greenleaf accomplishes with the servant-leader philosophy is to shift this focus to the serving of followers, and, in the larger context, to the serving of the institution and society. While this is obviously good for followers, there is a way to take the philosophy of the servant-leader farther – to the level of a God-centered servant leader. To do so requires a deeper understanding of several areas.

Understanding the Destructive Power of Self

Robert Greenleaf has done both society and the realm of leadership studies a great service by developing and writing on the philosophy of the servant-leader. What makes this philosophy so unique and different from other leadership philosophies is that it encourages leaders to focus on followers and their needs. While much has been made about the fact that servant-leaders focus on followers, this really misses the true value of this contribution. What is most important in the above is not that servant-leaders focus on followers, (which, of course is very important for followers) it is that they (i.e., leaders) are not focused on themselves. In essence, Greenleaf has encouraged leaders to move away from a focus on self. As a result, and whether he intended it or not (and I strongly suspect not) Greenleaf has encouraged them to move away from sin.

If one digs deep enough they will find that sin resides behind every problem that every institution, organization, family, or society has – no exceptions. Sometimes it is carefully concealed, often it can be difficult to identify; but it is **always** there. If one hasn't seen it, it is because they have yet to look deep enough! In a like manner, behind every sin is selfishness. What this condition of selfishness reflects is an over abundance of love for self and a lack of love for others, especially a lack of love for God. Just as man has a sin nature – a natural propensity to sin – he has the same natural propensity for selfishness. Yet all people, to include leaders and followers, want and need to be genuinely and personally loved. Their sources for meeting this need for love are few: God, other people, and themselves. Those that reject God's love, are left to obtain this needed love from other naturally selfish people or themselves, and love of self is easier to both obtain and control.

Because the servant-leader may reduce sin from their own lives and at the same time extend love and caring into the lives of others, everyone benefits – the servant-leader, followers, the institution, and society are all better for it. As a result, there will be fewer problems for the people, institutions and their society. In simple terms, a leader focused on self is destructive whereas a loving and caring focus on others is constructive. In other words, a focus on others builds. It builds relationships. It builds other people. It builds institutions. It builds societies. This is the real reason that being a servant-leader actually works!

Understanding the Healing Power of Serving Others

Greenleaf makes the point that for genuine leadership to be present; those that follow must do so voluntarily. The same is true for genuine serving. A servant serves. Serving by force is slavery. Serving for wages or payment is a job or profession. Genuine service is done voluntarily, and without the expectation of something in return. Genuine service is an act of giving. It is an act of sacrifice. It is an act of love.

Like any genuine act of love, when genuine service is rendered, it can have an amazing, healing, and restorative impact on all involved. There is, of course, an immediate and direct impact upon those being served from whatever tangible service is being provided. Besides the value of the particular service they receive, recipients also understand from the service received that they are loved. This feeling of being loved is an emotional gift and it actually may be far more important and valuable to those served than the original tangible service received. It can also have longer term consequences for recipients that last far beyond the direct benefits of the service received. For example, it can strengthen and deepen relationships with those providing service and may even serve as an encouragement to emulate the loving attitude of the servant by taking on the role of a servant themselves when dealing with others. In other words, it can be contagious in a very good way and it is the first step in transforming followers into future servant-leaders.

There are other impacts beyond the recipient that may not be so obvious. First there are the joyous feelings one has when doing something good for another that the servant receives, even if the person (or persons) being served has no idea that they (i.e., the servant) rendered the service. There is a degree of personal satisfaction and sense of contribution to the lives of others (individuals and society) and to the greater good of all – making the world a better place – that is hard to duplicate. Even though the genuine servant should be expecting nothing in return, they may receive acts of love, loyalty, care, or expressions of appreciation from the recipient of the service in return.

Additionally there can be other not so obvious impacts on those that are outside the servant-recipient exchange – those that observe the service being rendered. These impacts can be both potentially significant and powerful. People that observe loving and caring acts by genuine servants can themselves be moved. It can strengthen and deepen their own relationship with the servant and may even serve as an encouragement for them to emulate the loving attitude of the servant by taking on the role of a servant themselves when dealing with others. As in the above situation with recipients, the impact on observers can be contagious and may serve to help transform these observers into future servant-leaders.

Understanding the Immense Importance of “Upsight”

Greenleaf correctly identifies foresight as a very critical skill of the servant-leader. As mentioned before, the criticality of foresight for Greenleaf is based on the fact that the leader must be able to be proactive – to take action before he or she is forced to do so. Once people are reacting they are no longer leading. In other words, leaders must foresee and act while they still have the freedom to do so

Most that are familiar with the importance of foresight also recognize that both hindsight and insight are important to formulating and developing proper foresight. In futuring, hindsight is used to look at where we have been and what has brought us to where we are now. Insight is used to evaluate where we are now and what forces are most important and most influential to where we are today. Finally, foresight is used to see which forces are most important and most likely to influence events in the future. While Greenleaf did not use these particular terms (i.e., hindsight and insight), he did use the term foresight and he clearly recognized the need for servant-leaders to be well aware of the past and present in order to properly anticipate the future and then take action. This is evident in his comment that the servant-leader is at all times “historian, contemporary analyst, and prophet – not three separate roles.”²⁹

What Greenleaf did not take into consideration is another fundamental need for servant-leader futuring skills; what this author refers to as “upsight.” The real key for futuring is to understand and consider the absolute sovereignty of God and His constant involvement in the affairs of men and, ultimately, man’s responsibility to “walk by faith and not by sight” in accordance with scripture.” (2 Corinthians 5:7) The concept of “upsight” is shown in Figure 3.

One of the limitations of only using hindsight, insight, and foresight for futuring is that these provide only a temporal perspective. They are bound by time – past, present, and future (i.e., green portion of Figure 3). “Upsight,” on the other hand, opens up futuring to an eternal perspective. Similarly, most futuring only takes into consideration the physical forces and the actions of man – what one might call earthly causes and effects. “Upsight” adds to this the consideration of heavenly causes and effects as God remains continuously involved in the affairs of man (i.e., blue area of Figure 3).

The track record is clear. God has shared information about the future with man for centuries. In earliest times, God personally spoke directly to men about future events (e.g., Moses, Noah, Abraham, Jonah). God also provided information about the future through dreams (e.g., Joseph). Later God provided information about the future indirectly through prophets (e.g., Joel, Ezekiel, Isaiah), or angels (encounter with Abram and Sarai, or Mary). God also provided written scriptures which contain all of

²⁹ Ibid, p.17

the aforementioned instances, plus many prophetic statements and parables by Jesus, as well as a number of additional events about the future – some of which have yet to come to pass. As substantiated by the above, God’s character over the centuries has been to repeatedly share important information about the future with his servants. God’s nature is unchangeable, thus He continues to provide critical information about the future to His servants today.

Like the Biblical servants from the past, today’s servant-leaders need to be skilled in “upsight,” constantly looking beyond time to the eternal side of futuring that comes only from focusing on God and what He has in view for the future. Without “upsight,” servant-leaders are looking to the future with one eye closed.

Taking the Servant-Leader Farther

As mentioned above, Greenleaf’s approach clearly moves leadership closer to where it needs to go. It moves the leader’s focus from self to followers with the eventual hope of altruistically moving the focus of leader and followers to the society being served by serving institutions. This is a gigantic and very positive step verses the prevailing culture! Nonetheless, the servant-leader philosophy can be a great deal more by shifting leader focus from serving followers and society to a focus on serving God; what this author refers to as the **God-centered servant-leader**. (See Figure 4)

As has been established above, the real issue is not about whether one serves or not, it is all about who is being served – self, other people (e.g., followers, society), or God. Leaving the focus on followers or even society simply moves it towards a more noble level of individual or group selfishness, when what is required is to move the focus away from selfishness altogether. The focus of **both leader and follower** service needs to be placed where selfishness does not exist – on God.

Greenleaf viewed service to followers, and eventually to society, as the ultimate end, whereas God-centered servant-leadership views these as a means to a more important purpose – service to God. If one truly understands that the ultimate purpose of **all** human activity is the glory of God, then the idea of the God-centered servant-leader becomes almost obvious.

What Greenleaf failed to see is that for the genuine servant-leader (as reflected in the Bible), it is not faith in self that is really important for leadership. It is faith in others, **especially God**, which is critically important. Genuine faith and trust in God is what allows God-centered servant-leaders to have greater faith and trust in others. God-centered servant leaders know that even if (and eventually when) others fail them, God never will fail them. God makes up for the shortfalls in both leader and follower performance when service is focused on Him!

The Paradox of Purpose and Performance

Greenleaf does not tell readers why their institutions should be lead by servant-leaders. He should have told readers the simple truth behind servant leadership: they should implement servant leadership because it is the **right thing to do** – nothing more, nothing less. Greenleaf understood that operating with a servant-leader philosophy was the right thing to do. He knew it was right for followers. He knew it was right for institutions. He knew it was right for society. He may have even understood that it was right for leaders.

What Greenleaf apparently did not understand is why servant leadership actually works – what this author refers to as the “paradox of purpose and performance.” This paradox is both simple and profound: The reason why something is done impacts performance more than what is actually done. Doing the right thing will improve performance, but doing the right thing for the right reason will improve performance far more dramatically. In other words, doing things because they are right improves organizational performance more than actually doing those right things. For the purposes here, implementing a servant-leader philosophy because it is right impacts organizational performance more than actually implementing the servant-leader philosophy.

The obvious problem presented by the “paradox of purpose and performance” is this: What is the **right** thing to do, what is the **right** reason to do it, and who gets to decide? For the first part of this Greenleaf had an answer: “The prime test of rightness of an act is: How will it affect people, are lives moved toward nobility?”³⁰ In as far as it goes, Greenleaf’s answer would appear to be one that moves people away from sin and towards righteousness. A better answer is to do what God says is right and do it to glorify God. The highest level of performance occurs when servant-leaders do what is right in God’s eyes and because they will glorify God by doing so. All other options will yield less success. (See Figure 5 below)

Greenleaf’s servant leadership should be implemented even if it is expected to decrease profits/performance. It should be implemented for one reason – it is the right thing to do from society’s point of view and doing the right thing as society sees it, honors that society. Similarly, God-centered servant leadership should be implemented because it is the right thing to do from God’s point of view and doing the right thing as God sees it, honors God.

³⁰ Greenleaf, R., *The Power of Servant Leadership: Essays by Robert K. Greenleaf*; Edited by Larry C. Spears (1998). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., p.96

Promulgating the Servant-Leader Philosophy

The approach that Greenleaf designed to promulgate servant leadership was his “hierarchy of institutions.” The hierarchical structure began at the top with seminaries and foundations, the middle was composed of churches and universities, and the bottom was made up of the operating institutions. The basic idea was a type of trickle down theory of influence until regenerative servant-leaders reside in and change their operating institutions into servant institutions. These servant institutions then operate in a manner such that the final result was to be a more caring and just society.

Greenleaf correctly saw that it was the emerging large institutions to which society had turned to obtain the services it needed – services which he viewed as highly deficient. Yet it is interesting, and somewhat surprising, that it was large institutions to which he turned in his “hierarchy of institutions” to fix the problems he saw. Unfortunately, Greenleaf’s hierarchy of institutions was deficient, maybe even fatally flawed, for the following reasons:

- Many cultures where servant-leaders operate may or may not necessarily have seminaries and foundations as a part of their societal structure.
- Potential servant-leaders inside the operating institutions may never be exposed to the influence of either church or university institutions.
- The hierarchy of institutions also uses a dependent linear process thus the failure of any link in the chain results in a systemic failure.
- Because of the dependent nature of linear processes, the probability of ultimate success can be no greater than the multiple probabilities of each of the sequential steps.
- Another smaller and more ubiquitous institutional option was available, the family.

The Right Institution

What is somewhat surprising is that Greenleaf did not see the family institution as the best institution for promulgating the servant-leader philosophy. In speaking of his experience and his own father, an intelligent man of limited education and opportunity, Greenleaf saw a man who stood tall “as a model of the true servant.”³¹ In essence, he had first learned about being a servant-leader at home!

It is possible, however, that Greenleaf failed to make this family connection because of the overwhelmingly negative influence that his own mother had on his life. In his biography, Robert Greenleaf is quoted regarding his mother, an alcoholic:

“My mother was adequate. That is the best I can say for her. She fed and clothed me and took care of me when I was sick. But she was a deeply flawed person—the product, I suspect, of a

³¹ Ibid, p.264

highly neurotic mother. From my earliest memories she was both contentious and tempestuous with her neighbors, relatives and everyone.”³²

Another, maybe even more telling, story centers on what Robert Greenleaf did after his mother died. It makes the point as well:

“George [Robert Greenleaf’s father] told his son that he simply wanted to be rid of all the furniture and other items his wife had collected through the years. Bob could have sold them to an antique dealer and given the money to his father, but he did something that was more symbolic and emotionally valuable: ‘I made a big fire out behind his house and burned the whole lot’.”³³

Both statements clearly show that Greenleaf’s home environment was anything but ideal for learning what it means to be a servant-leader – and yet he did. What Greenleaf learned in the family environment about caring and serving was basically limited to that which he received from his father. One can only imagine how his perspective on the family as an institution for promulgating the servant-leader philosophy might have changed if he had also had a more caring, loving, and serving mother.

The Family Institution or Organization

There is a very critical question that arises at this juncture: How can Greenleaf, or anyone else for that matter, expect someone to be a caring and compassionate servant-leader in the community or in the workplace if he or she has not first learned how to be a caring and compassionate servant-leader in his or her own family? The answer, at least to the thinking of this author, is you can’t. Greenleaf had been given evidence to support both sides of this answer by his own parents. Greenleaf’s own father was a servant-leader in his family long before being one in the community and work (i.e., union). His mother, on the other hand, was never a caring and serving individual at home and never became a servant-leader in the community. He had clear examples that servant leadership begins in the family.

There are a number of reasons that the family institution is a better place in which to promulgate the servant-leader philosophy. First of all, using the family institution eliminates the difficulties with the above mentioned shortfalls of Greenleaf’s “hierarchy of institutions.” All more developed cultures where servant-leaders exist already have families as a part of their existing culture. The family structure is already in place and it is ubiquitously present in all cultures. Even the potential servant-leaders that reside in operating institutions and are never exposed to churches and universities are exposed to the family institution. As Figure 6 demonstrates, the family institution is able to directly impact all the other institutions both directly and indirectly. This eliminates the problem previously discussed with linear dependent steps of the hierarchy of institutions. This is particularly important in that a direct impact can be made on creating a more caring and just society, irrespective of whether

³² Frick, D., Robert K. Greenleaf: A Life of Servant Leadership (2004). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., p.25

³³ Ibid, p.26

any of the other institutions in the hierarchy are changed. In other words, fix the family institution and by default you will have a more caring and just society.

One of the really great things about focusing on the family institution as the key for promulgating both the servant-leader or God-centered servant-leader philosophy is the ease of implementation versus other institutions. All it takes is for an individual parent to make a difference, as demonstrated so well by George Greenleaf, Robert Greenleaf's father. Clearly, an even greater impact is possible where both parents operate with a God-centered servant-leader philosophy. In fact, if one looks at the attributes of good parents they will see the attributes of good servant-leaders.³⁴ Unfortunately, too few parents make the time to lead first where God has said they are to focus leadership – the family, the first institution or organization He created.

Best of Both Worlds

One might make the case that the family approach and the hierarchical approach could be combined taking advantage of the strengths of each and the synergy of the combination, as shown in Figure 7. This appears both feasible and highly advantageous, especially if the various institutions in the hierarchy of institutions were successful in impacting the next level as envisioned by Greenleaf. There is also great benefit possible from how these institutions could reinforce and build upon the solid foundation laid by the family institution.

Greenleaf believed that the effectiveness of the servant-leader had to be measured by looking at the lives of other people. In fact, he believed that it was far more important to look at what followers achieved and whether they had become servants as a means to measure the effectiveness of the servant-leader. It was also necessary to make sure that society in general was not only better off but that those least privileged within it also were protected from harm.³⁵

Not only is Greenleaf correct in his assessment of the problem, it is the perspective of this author that the same fundamental problem of inaction is applicable to God-centered servant-leaders as well – those that God has prepared and called to serve Him, yet fail to do so. Just as this inaction on the part of servant-leaders causes the benefits to society to be diminished, when those that should be God-centered servant-leaders fail to serve Him, the glory of God is diminished. Like Greenleaf, God is not calling everyone to step up and become a God-centered servant-leader either, just those that have a heart for serving Him and whom He has called to lead.

³⁴ Anderson, J., (2005). Servant Leadership and the True Parental Model: A Construct for Better Research, Study and Practice. Paper presented at the 2005 Servant Leadership Research Roundtable, Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA.

³⁵ Greenleaf, R., *The Power of Servant Leadership: Essays by Robert K. Greenleaf*; Edited by Larry C. Spears (1998). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., p.43

What is important for servant-leaders to understand is that both one's calling to lead and one's approach to leadership will have a profound impact on their performance possibilities and that of their organization or institution. (See Figure 8) It matters whether the servant-leader is called to lead by men or called to lead by God. When one is called by God to lead, and he or she answers that call, God takes a direct and personal interest in ensuring the success of that endeavor. However, one needs to ensure that they are correctly responding to God's call by serving when, where, and in what capacity God has called them to.

It also matters whether one's leadership focus is God-centered or not God-centered. As mentioned earlier, the overall guiding principle for the God-centered servant-leader is whether God is glorified by the decisions made and the actions taken. When God's glory is at stake, He literally will move heaven and earth to ensure success. The graph in Figure 8 attempts to capture visually this important concept of relative performance.

Being a Servant-Leader

There is a vast difference between following a servant-leader philosophy and actually being a servant-leader. Anyone can follow a servant-leader philosophy, not everyone can be a servant-leader. In a world full of politically correct inclusiveness, such a statement may seem very exclusive – and so it is. However, truth, by definition, is exclusive. That's what makes truth different from the thousands of different lies that are constantly seeking to distort the truth.

An earlier section of this paper discussed what servant-leaders do. However, Greenleaf never presents these actions as a “cookbook” way to **become** a servant-leader. It is critically important to understand that one doesn't do these actions in order to **become** a servant-leader; one does them because they **are** a servant-leader.

What few want to admit, or even address, is that most people are far too selfish to be servant-leaders, to serve other people, to put others first. Not everyone is willing. It takes heart for one to be a servant leader. The case for the God-centered servant-leader is much the same, except for one very unique, important, and yes, exclusive, difference. To be a genuine God-centered servant-leader one must be given a new heart, one that is born of the Spirit of God. It is the actions of God, not man, that provide this critical prerequisite for the God-centered servant-leader. While this may be an unpopular view for non-Christians, and even some Christians, the truth seldom is popular.

Looking Forward

Armed with background on servant leadership as provided by Robert Greenleaf and the consideration of a number of additional thoughts on how the servant-leader philosophy can grow and develop

further, opportunities for the future are unlimited. Thus an examination of how the servant-leader philosophy of the 21st century looks is still needed.

V. The God-Centered Servant-Leader

So what exactly is God-centered servant leadership? In simple terms, it means the exercise of leadership in such a manner that God is always honored by the decisions, actions, service, and intentions. Rather than servant-leaders being focused on serving followers, other people, or even the greater society, they are focused on serving God. This is not to say that serving followers, other people, or even the greater society is bad. All are better than serving self. The difference for the God-centered servant leader is that serving followers, other people, or the greater society is a means to glorify God, their ultimate purpose.

God-centered servant-leaders have an organizational or institutional mission that is God-honoring. They have God-centered personal and organizational values. They are about treating employees, customers, suppliers, and stockholders or owners fairly and with the utmost dignity and respect. They have a quest for excellence and perfection based not upon the standards of this world, but upon the standards of the One who created this world. God-centered servant-leadership is about human leadership being freely exercised in light of divine direction, guidance, and evaluation. As individual servant-leaders, it is about living (i.e., giving) one's life in a manner that brings joy to the heart of the Father. When lives (whether leaders, followers, or those being served) are no longer focused first on men, and on what men want, and they are all about God and what He wants, they are God-centered. Leaders are God-centered when they are doing what God has for them to do; where and how He wants it done; and when they are motivated to do so for His glory, and His joy. Acting in this manner fosters both emotional and spiritual transformation, growth, and fulfillment for everyone involved. God-centered servant leadership has significant value beyond what traditional constructs provide. These are presented in Figure 9 and will be discussed in greater detail below.

Factual and Substantiated Bases

First, the God-centered servant-leader construct is different because it is not based on assumed theory, unsubstantiated speculation, or the latest nuance or fad in management and leadership thinking. It is based on fact and, more importantly, it is rooted in truth. It is also supported by a substantial and compelling body of documented evidence extending back for many centuries, and yet is still perfectly applicable for the 21st century. This evidence is contained throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Throughout Biblical history, when Godly servants live and operate in a manner that honors God, God in turn honors the work of those servants and generates eventual success in spite of their many faults, flaws, and shortcomings and whatever the consequences of the environment. See examples:

- The life of Noah (Genesis, Chapters 6-9)

- The life of Joseph (Genesis, Chapters 39-41).
- The life of Moses (Exodus, Chapters 3-8).

Focused On “Why”

God-centered servant leadership is different in focus. Unlike most other leadership theories today, this approach is not based exclusively on the “what” or the “how” of leadership – the actions that should be taken or how they should be taken to create a positive shift in personal, organizational, or institutional success. This approach is different because its primary focus is on the “why” of servant leadership – the “what” and “how” are secondary and dependent activities which naturally flow from the “why.” The “why” of leadership is like the first button on a shirt – if you don’t get that one right, it is impossible to end up with a great final result. In other words, this approach focuses on the motivation behind the leadership. Most important is the overall guiding principle for the God-centered servant-leader: *Is God glorified by the decisions made and the actions taken?* It all starts with the institutional or organizational vision.

Revaluating Organizational Purpose - An extremely important part of organizational strategy is the determination of the organization’s vision, to include purpose, mission and values. In essence, purpose refers to the primary reason the organization exists, normally something external to the organization itself (e.g., to enrich people’s lives, to enhance safety of travel, to improve the health of the nation’s elderly). James Autry states that “[w]ithout an understanding of purpose, an organization will become dysfunctional (and many have).”³⁶

When it comes to actually establishing the organizational or institutional vision, servant-leaders must give serious consideration to serving people and meeting the needs of people because serving people and meeting their needs is a paramount characteristic of God. Following Autry’s model for vision (i.e., purpose, mission, and values), the God-centered servant-leader’s first need is to ensure that their organization has a Godly purpose. “The organization’s purpose, and thus the leader’s purpose/focus, is what can and should drive the organization to great accomplishments.”³⁷ When it comes to purpose, being God-honoring is not so much about what you say, or even what you do, so much as it is about who you are.

Revaluating Organizational Mission - Mission is about what the organization does in order to accomplish its higher external purpose. It is about how the organization will achieve its purpose. Therefore, mission is always a means, and not an end unto itself. “A mission statement communicates legitimacy to internal and external stakeholders, who may join and be committed to the organization

³⁶ Autry, J., *The Servant Leader, How to Build a Creative Team, Develop Great Morale, and Improve Bottom-Line Performance* (2001). New York: Crown Publishing Group, p.26

³⁷ Winston, B., *Be a Leader for God’s Sake* (2002). Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA, p.74

because they identify with its stated purpose.”³⁸ It also is absolutely necessary that God’s ways guide the way in which the organization or institution actually operates. It is not enough just to have a Godly purpose for the organization in view; God-centered servant-leaders must ensure that what the organization does to carry out its business and to achieve its purpose is ultimately also God-honoring. In other words, the organizational or institutional mission must properly align with its purpose.

Reevaluating Organizational Values - The third element of the organization’s strategic vision is the establishment of values. The establishment of institutional or organizational values may well be the most important thing a leader can do for the organization. In fact, Winston adamantly claims that “[l]eadership starts with values.”³⁹ Values communicate what is important to an individual, a group, an organization or an entire society. They also differentiate and define organization and declare who we are to the world around us. Values help us align ourselves with others, and they help identify common ground with others of like heart and mind. Our most important, or core values, “drive a fixed stake in the ground that says to all: ‘This is what we stand for; this is what we are all about; this is who we are; this is what we can do for you. Thus values are defining.”⁴⁰

One of the most important things about values is that they help to motivate and influence human behavior and they provide guidelines for that behavior – what we will or won’t do. Thus God-honoring values naturally lead to God-honoring decisions. In fact, well thought out value statements often can replace specific and detailed organizational rules and regulations, especially in the more empowered structures used by servant-lead organizations.

Ubiquitous Application

Next, the philosophy for the God-centered servant-leader can be applied to organizations ubiquitously. It can be used by commercial businesses, churches, military and other governmental organizations, educational institutions, or even families (the first organizations ever created). It can be used for the local “mom and pop” hardware store or a company with global markets. It can be used by simple home-based businesses and by large and complex corporations.

Wisdom Oriented

God-centered servant leadership is also different because it relies upon timeless learning in its emphasis on wisdom over knowledge. Often what is taught in management and leadership training classes today is discarded tomorrow in favor of the next great theory or technique that replaces it. When focused on God and His unchangeable wisdom, the God-centered servant-leader is freed from a reliance on the transient knowledge of man. God’s wisdom is unchanging thus what is learned today

³⁸ Daft, R., *Organization Theory and Design* (2004). Mason OH: Thomson Learning, South-Western, p.55

³⁹ Winston, B., *Be a Leader for God’s Sake* (2002). Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA, p.1

⁴⁰ Malphurs, A., *Values-Driven Leadership, Discovering and Developing Your Core Values and Ministry* (2004). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, p.14

will not only suffice for tomorrow, it will last for eternity! It will not need to be replaced with a new leadership philosophy next year, or the year after, or even twenty five years from now.

Focused on the Unchangeable Rather than Change

The prevailing organizational culture is heavily focused on change and managing change. The God-centered servant-leader focuses on what is unchangeable rather than what is changing. In essence it views change as a leadership distraction, not as the major focus of leadership's attention. The reason a different view of change is needed is both simple yet profound: "when the changeable collides with the unchangeable, it is the changeable that **must** change."⁴¹ In other words, the real power of the God-centered servant-leader over the environmental changes being faced is in his or her ability to remain focused on the unchangeable Lord of Glory, in spite of the environmental changes being faced by the organization or institution. In other words, to remain properly focused in spite of the changes going on. The Apostle Peter also learned this lesson when he walked on the water. (Matthew 14:28-32). Unlike those of the secular world, God-centered servant-leaders respect, rather than fear, change. God-centered servant-leaders seek out and serve as change agents for those very selective changes that bring themselves, their people, the institution, community, or the overall society closer to being God-honoring.

More Stable Environment

The next advantage is that the God-centered servant-leader stabilizes the entire organizational design process and the organization's operational environment. This does not mean that the organization or institution cannot change, if needed, but it does mean that the organization will need to change its configuration less often as every aspect of its strategy, design, and operation shifts to a timeless, eternal, and unchanging perspective. By being God-centered, servant leaders constantly infuse truth into the organization's operating environment. Truth (which is unchangeable) adds stability to what otherwise would be a more unstable organizational environment.

As complexity and instability increases, more and more, people will need and seek simplicity and stability in both their work organizations and in their personal lives. They also will not be able to find stability in this unstable and changeable world, or its unstable and changeable institutions and organizations. Environmental stability will only be available from that which is rooted in an unchangeable God and His unchangeable Word. Society will look to its leaders (e.g., business, community, political and social) to help find this stability, but most leaders will not know where to turn themselves and will not be able to provide a true vision of the future for their followers. There is no better way to provide this stability for all than to ensure that their organizations are aligned with the

⁴¹ Anderson, J., (2002), The Law of Leadership for the 21st Century. Unpublished paper submitted to Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA

values of an unchanging God and savior, Jesus Christ, who is “the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

Reliance On Upsight

The seventh advantage is that rather than relying primarily upon hindsight, insight and foresight for visioning purposes, the God-centered servant-leader relies upon “up sight.” As mentioned before, hindsight, insight and foresight are all bounded and limited by time, whereas “up sight” enables organizational leaders to develop strategies with a timeless perspective and eternal purpose in view. This adds a critical and absolutely essential new eternal dimension to the organization’s strategic thinking and strategic planning processes.

God both sees and controls the environment. God also has perfect insight into the present and not just the events of the present. Unlike men, the Holy Spirit of God sees even into the intents and motivations of the hearts of men. This means God knows what ones enemies (and competitors) are thinking and what they are planning to do. Yet, He says, “let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them; For the LORD your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you” (Deuteronomy 20:3-4). There is no better source for futuring than He who has seen it and ultimately holds it in His hand.

Guaranteed Performance

Lastly, and most important, with the God-centered servant-leader successful organizational performance is guaranteed – these leaders have God’s Word on it. Trust is one of the most important concepts regarding relationships among and between people.

While success is guaranteed when this philosophy is used, it is a conditional guarantee. The degree to which implementation of this approach is successful is directly related to the degree to which one complies with the guide lines provided. In other words as trite as it may sound, the weakness is not in the construct but rather in the human ability (and willingness) to implement the model with perfection. While all leaders can use this approach, most will not, even though the results are a certainty. What Autry states is very applicable in this instance: “What you do as a leader will depend on who you are....”⁴² If one does not even believe that God exists; frankly it will be extremely difficult to utilize this construct and reap its guarantee of success. In essence, those that are able to receive and execute this different construct will be able to reap its benefits while those that doubt its value simply will miss the opportunity.

⁴² Autry, J., *The Servant Leader, How to Build a Creative Team, Develop Great Morale, and Improve Bottom-Line Performance* (2001). New York: Crown Publishing Group, p.1

If an organization is God-honoring in every aspect of its existence, it can count on performance that goes beyond that made possible by mere men. In fact, any organization or institution should expect that inspirational thinking, enthusiastic employees, wise and prudent decision-making, and, when and if needed, divine intervention, will generate miraculous results. The way the Bible states it is: “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31) We truly have a choice. “We can lead based on authority given by man or based on authority given from above” and with this choice comes the associated outcomes.⁴³

The 21st Century World

There are many stories of businesses that apparently have no other earthly purpose than to maximize their profits (even though they won’t normally publish this as their true purpose). In the extreme, they steal from their employees, overcharge their customers, cheat their suppliers, and operate with little if any regard for community or respect for the laws and regulations of government. They value personal power, wealth, and status above all and their behaviors reflect these selfish and greed based values. Such organizations eventually spin out of control, and ultimately fail, because they are rooted in the temporal and evil things of this changing world.

God honoring organizations are not just theory. To varying degrees they exist in today’s practitioner’s world:

- Hallmark Cards, Inc.,
- Wegman’s Grocery Stores,
- Rotary International,
- Chick-fil-A’,
- On-Target Supply and Logistics.

These and others have, at least to some extent, already successfully used (and are using) such a God honoring construct. Some of these organizations openly share and express what they are all about on their respective websites. For example, Wegman’s official website states, “What sets us apart is that we live our values every day: making a difference; empowerment; respect, caring and high standards. It’s all about what we do, not about what we say.”⁴⁴ In another instance, Chick-fil-A states that their corporate purpose is: “To glorify God by being a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to us. To have a positive influence on all who come in contact with Chick-fil-A’.”⁴⁵ These words are publicly displayed on a large bronze plaque placed outside the front doors of the corporate headquarters.

⁴³ Winston, B., *Tabletalk: Foundations of Biblical Leadership* (2006). Virginia Beach, VA: School of Leadership Studies, Regent University, Compact Disc, Segment 1

⁴⁴ Wegman’s Grocery Stores Corporate Website: Retrieved 1/29/08
www.wegmans.com Select “Community Giving” under “Information” then “Giving Priorities”

⁴⁵ Truett Cathy (founder of Chick-fil-A’) Website: Retrieved 1/21/08. (www.truettcathy.com/photos.asp)

Unfortunately, too many institutions today lack faith and are fearful of publicly stating their purpose or mission in such an openly God honoring way. This fear is due to the political correctness that is so prevalent in today's culture and the fear that someone might be offended by their "stained glass" approach to their business. As a result of the lack of courage and faith by their leaders, many of today's institutions opt for what they perceived as a less offensive and safer "plain glass" approach to their business. They erroneously hope to please men without offending God even though scripture states: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 6:24) Sadly, there also are always consequences from operating in a manner which lacks faith. Scripture plainly states: "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Hebrews 11:6). For this reason it is important that organizational leaders be told the truth; they need to be willing to boldly honor God if they seek to have Him boldly honor them and their leadership.

Another more positive note is that many companies also do an excellent job of actually operating in a God-honoring manner, and their performance reflects that commitment. However, and in spite of the attention afforded to the business community, this is not the most critical area of concern regarding the God-centered servant-leader. The true leadership crisis today is in the family! Unless that is first fixed, there is, in this authors view, little chance to fix the leadership deficiencies in the community and even less chance of fixing those in professional and business institutions. Family is the place where servant leadership begins. When we have more God-centered servant-leaders in families developing and molding the next generation of God-centered servant leaders, we will have a much greater chance to develop God-centered servant-leaders in our churches and communities. When we have more God-centered servant-leaders in our churches and communities, we will have a much greater chance to develop servant-leaders in our professional and business institutions.

For those that have been born of the Spirit of God, the message is the same as it was in Moses time. They were not set free from serving self and sin to go back to serving men. They have been set free to serve the Living God!

"Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when **ye were the servants of sin**, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become **servants to God**, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (Romans 6:18-22).

It is now time for those that claim to be Christian leaders to step up and be the God-centered servant-leaders that God has always intended them to be.

FIGURE 1:

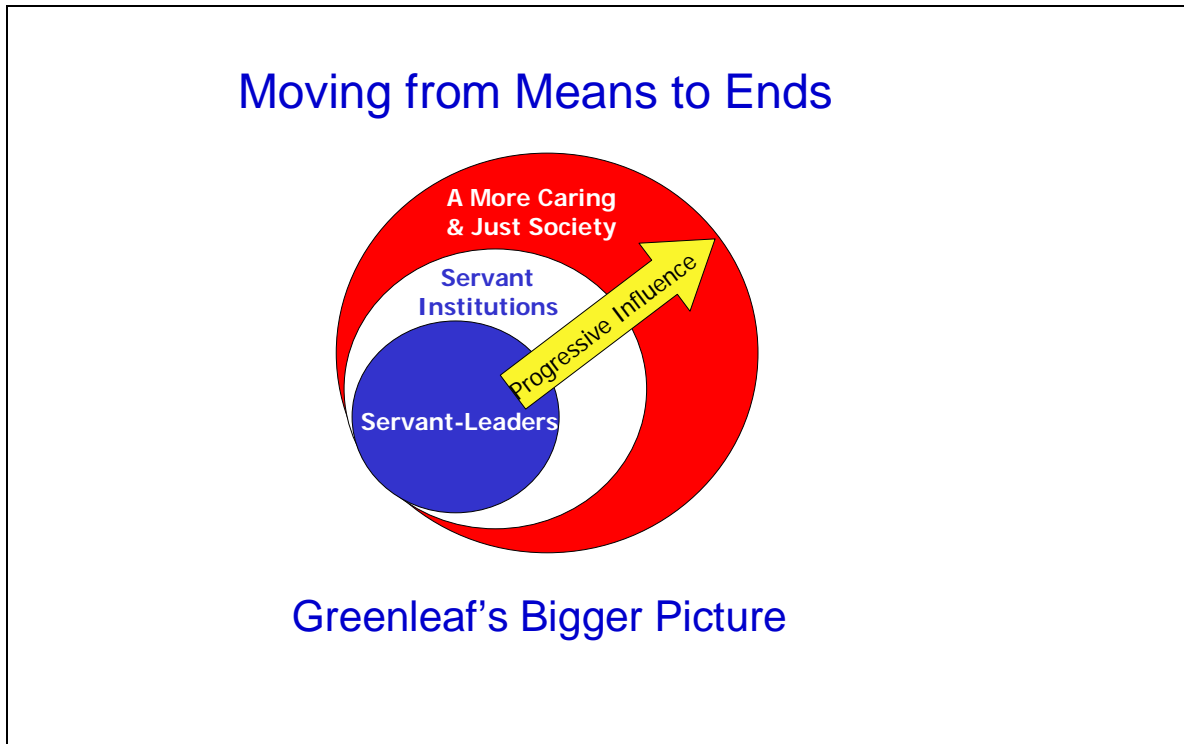


FIGURE 2:

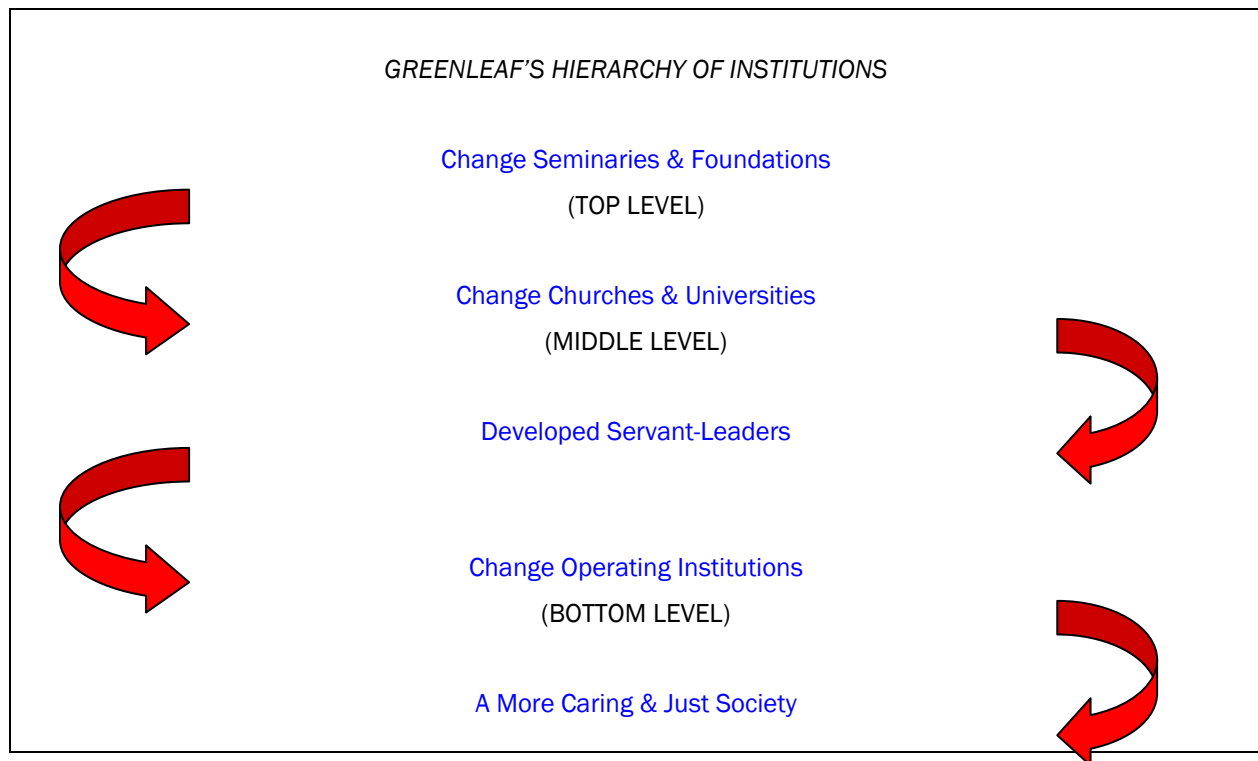


Figure 3: The Concept of Upsight

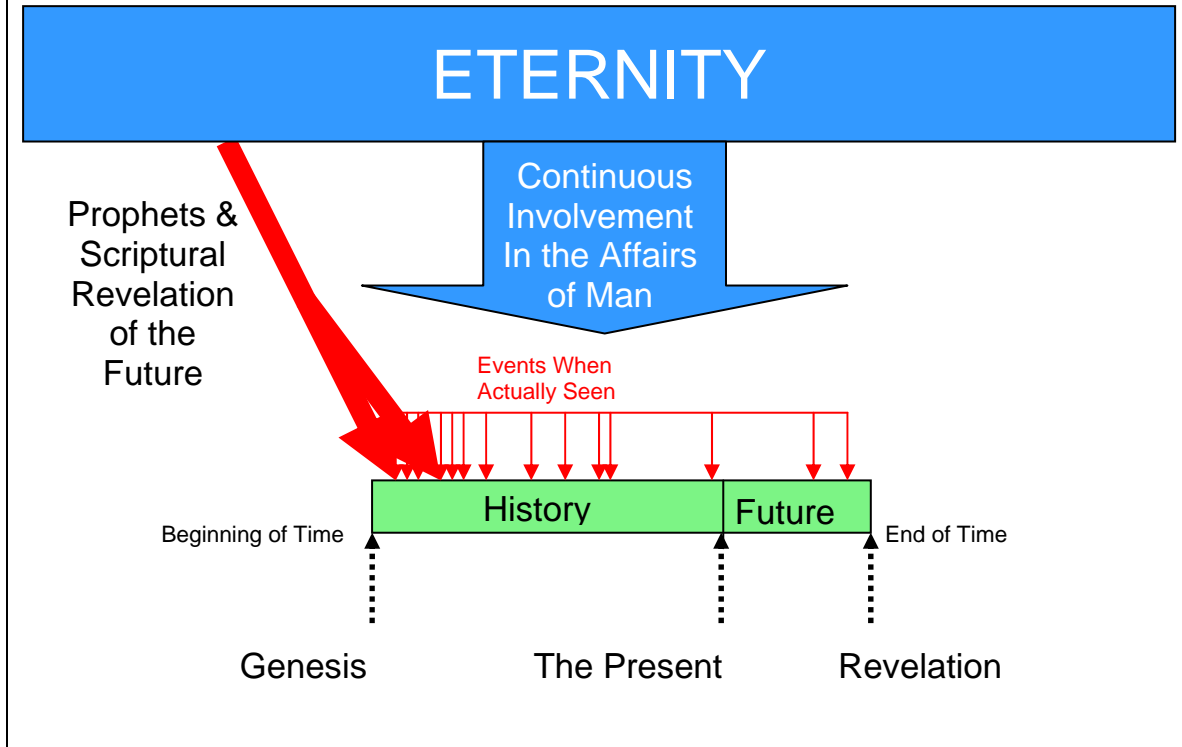


FIGURE 4:

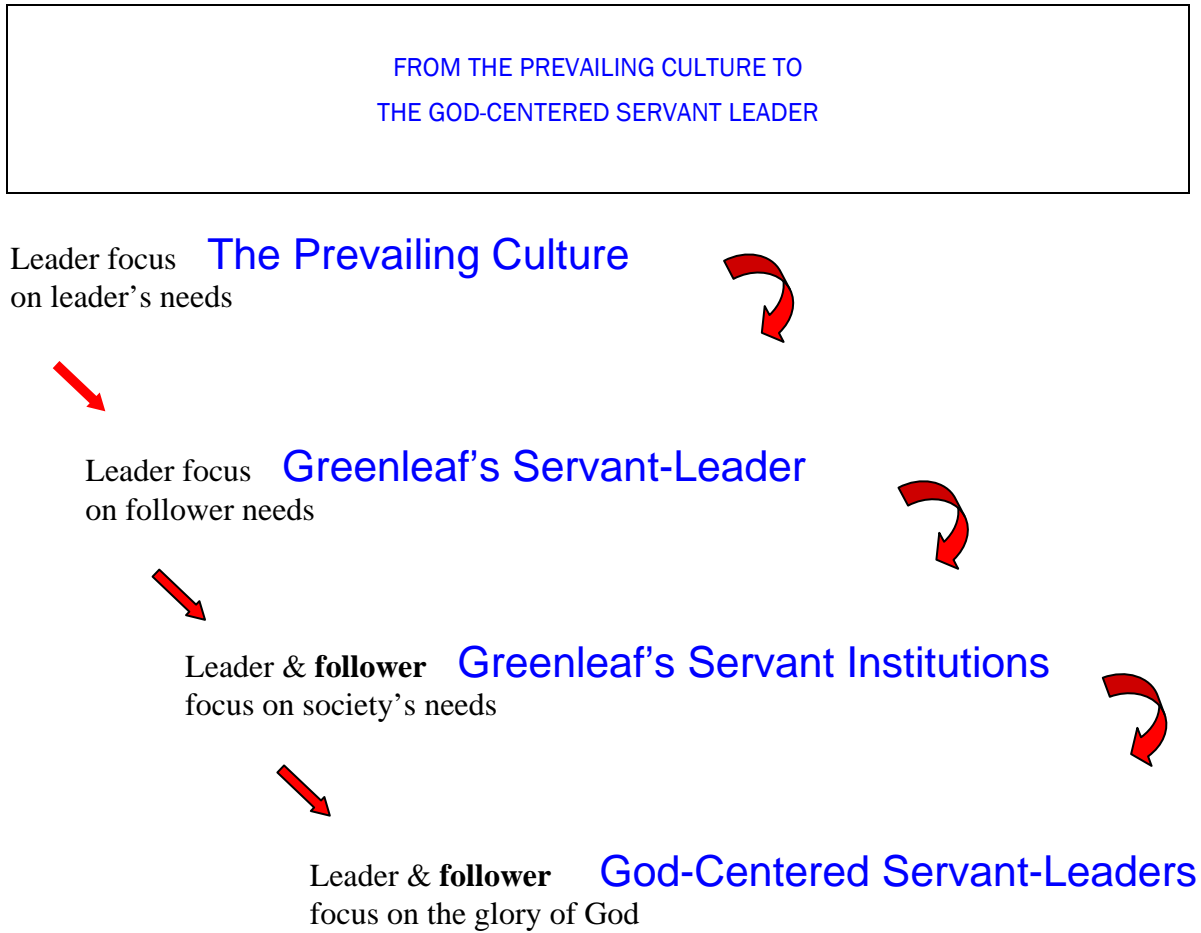


FIGURE 5: The Paradox of Purpose and Performance

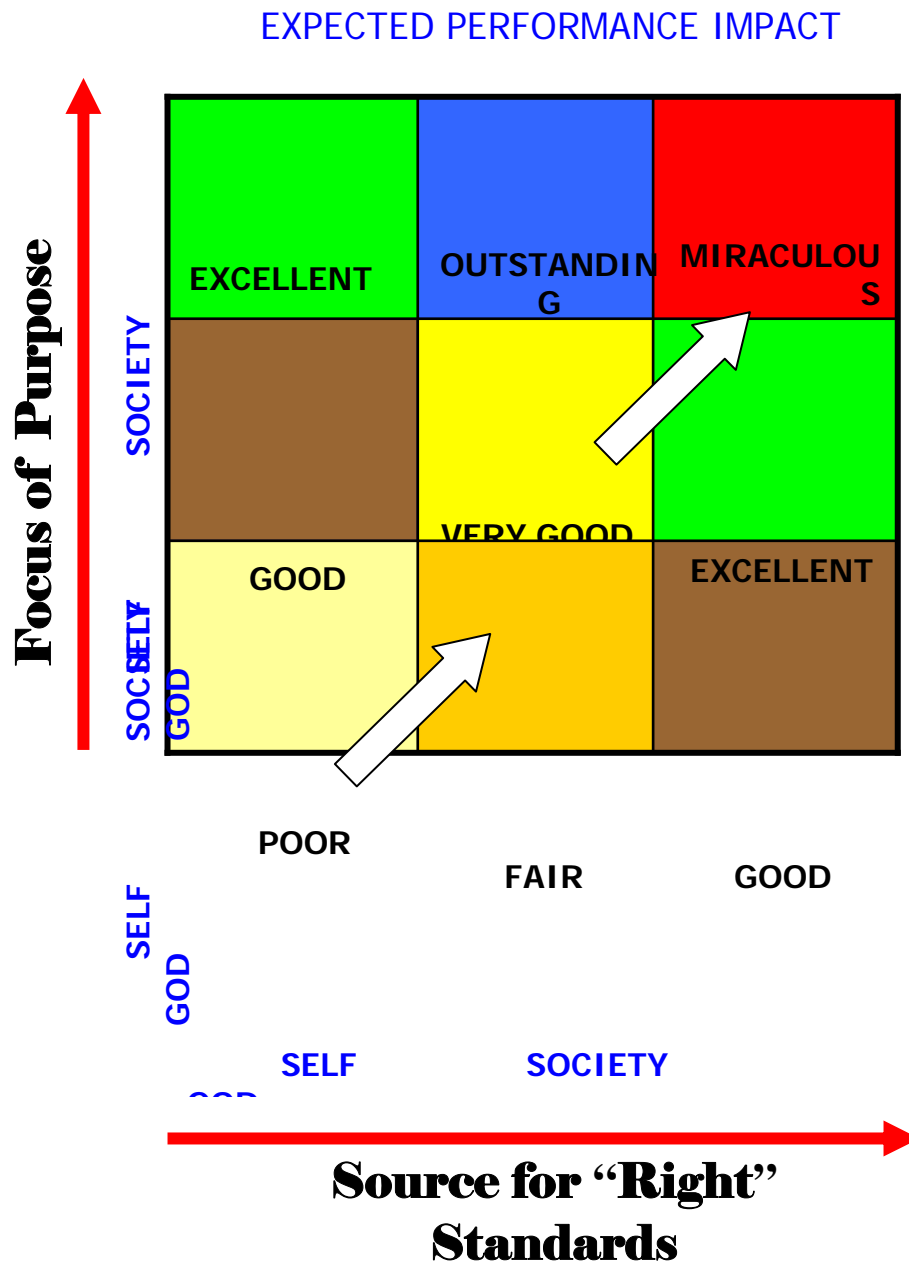


FIGURE 6:

FAMILY FOCUSED PROLIFERATION CONCEPT

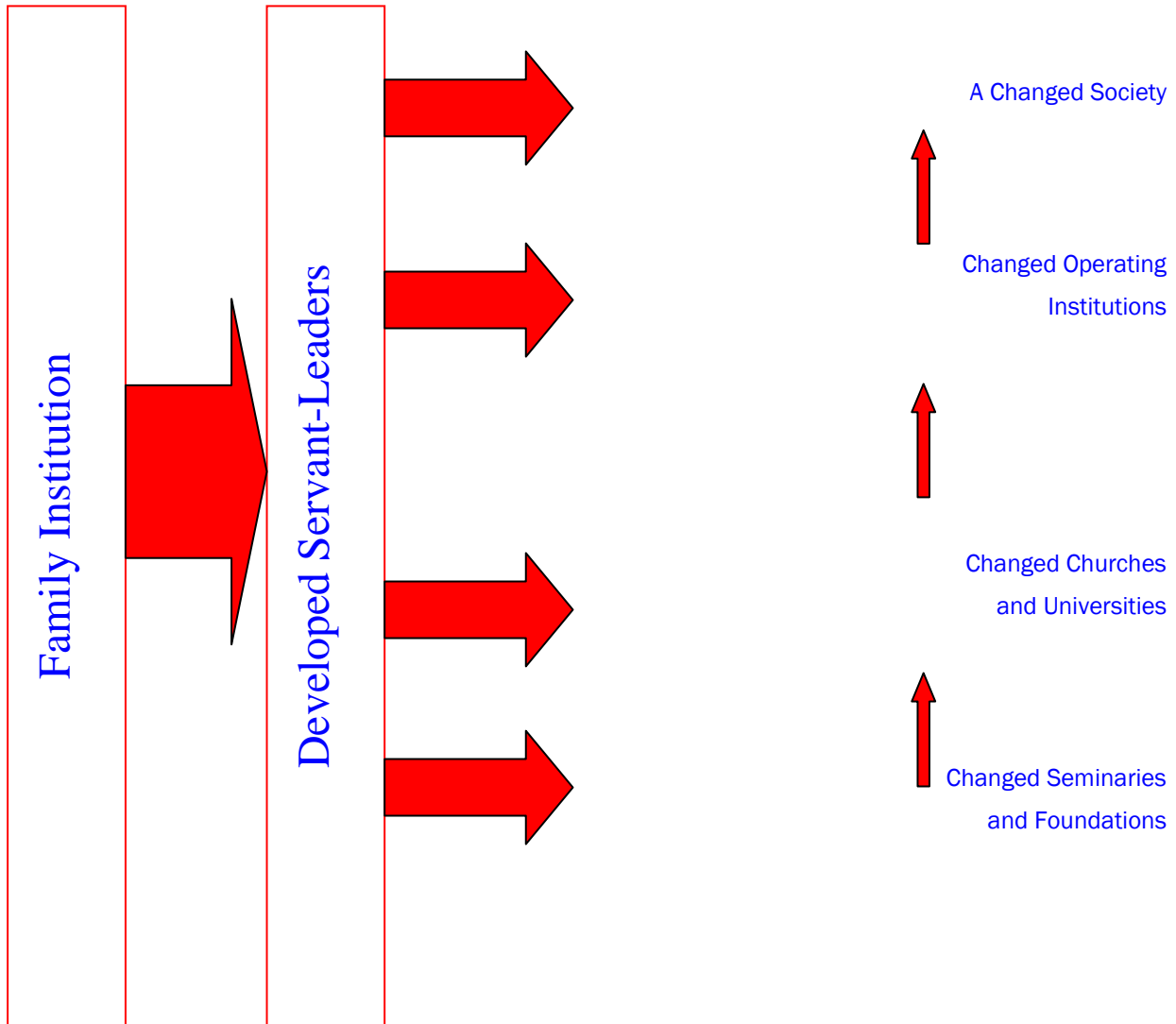


FIGURE 7:

FAMILY FOCUSED PROLIFERATION CONCEPT

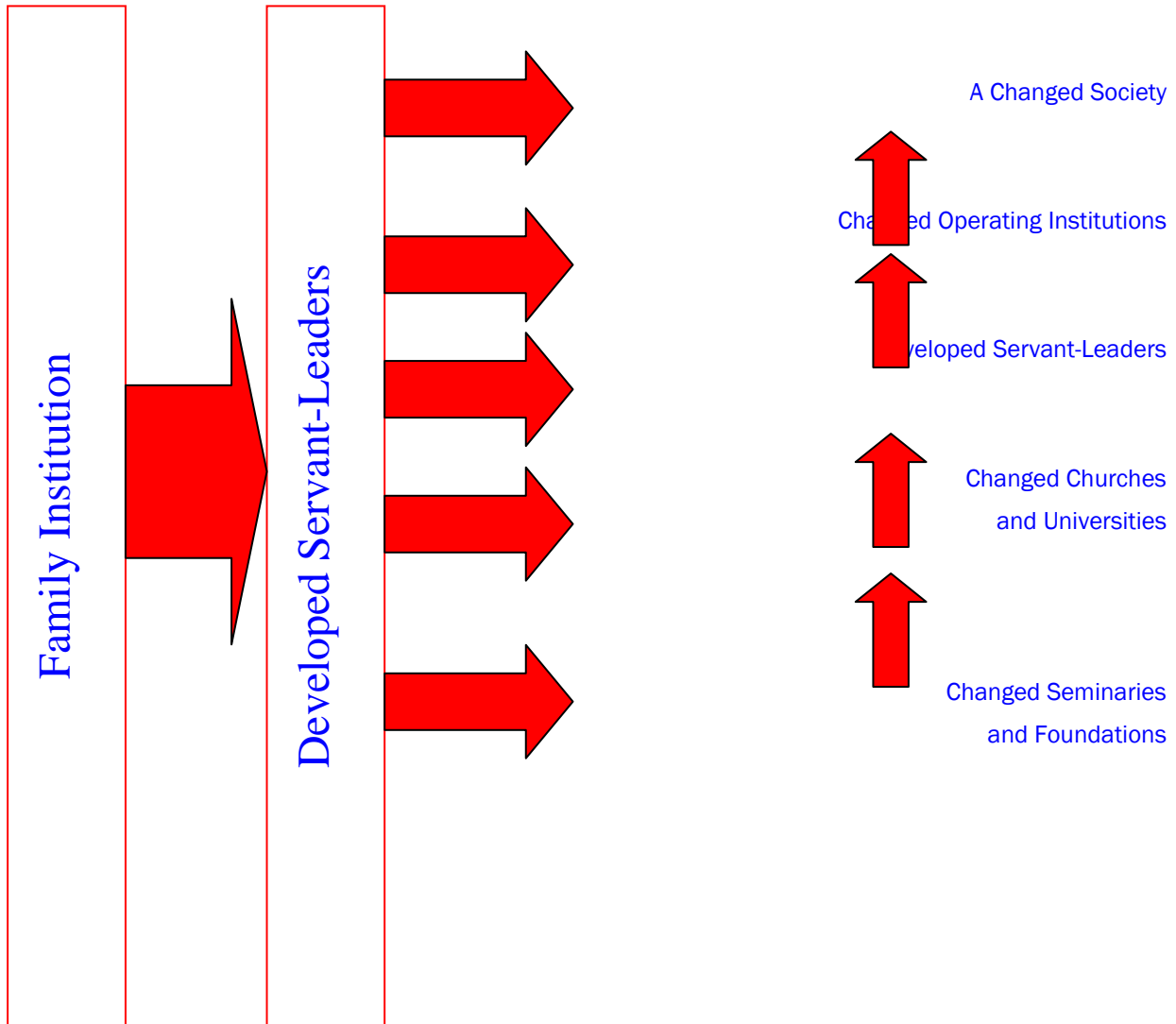


FIGURE 8: PERFORMANCE POSSIBILITIES

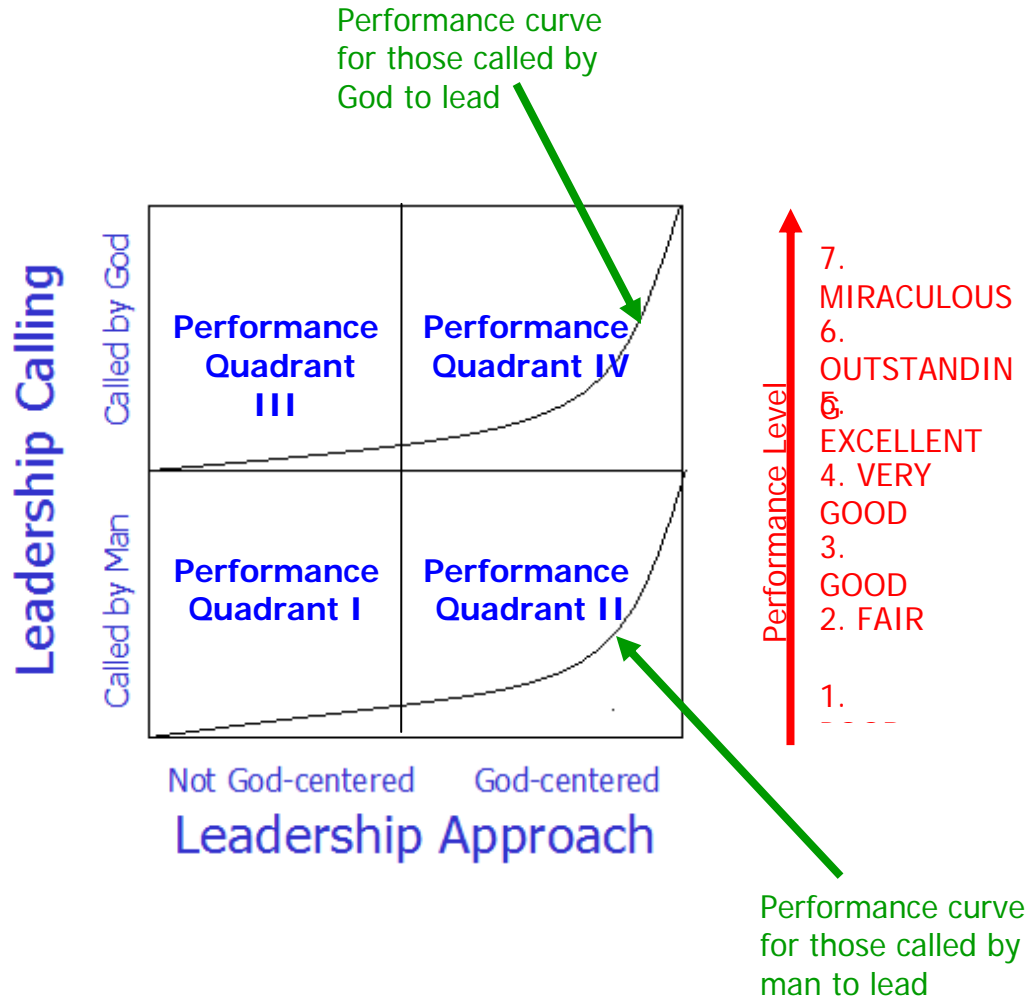


Figure 9: God-Centered Servant Leadership

Advantages of God-Centered Leadership

Traditional Construct

- Speculative & theoretical
- “What” & “How” focused
- Selective application
- Knowledge oriented
- Unstable/constantly changing environment
- Focused on change
- Relys on hindsight, insight, and foresight
- Performance/results questionable

God-Centered Construct

- Factual & substantiated
- “Why” focused
- Ubiquitous application
- Wisdom oriented
- Stable and unchanging environment
- Focused on the unchangeable
- Relies on “upsight”
- Performance/results guranteed

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