

6 Jewels of the Servant Leader

A Comprehensive Guide to Modern Leadership

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Contents

- I.
Supreme Service
- II.
The Six Jewels
- III.
Clearing the Vision
- IV.
Empowerment
- V.
Leadership-Stewardship
- VI.
Response-Ability
- VII.
Decide-Ability
- VIII.
Create-Ability
- IX.
Literature

I.

Supreme Service

When we look at motivation and attitude training in order to improve service and commitment, we naturally get to think about concepts such as:

- Vision clearing
- Empowerment
- Leadership/Stewardship
- Response-ability
- Decide-ability
- Create-ability

Some of those concepts are well established, others not yet. The central concept that I want to discuss here is *create-ability*. This word is derived from the word creativity and from the other word created: *decide-ability*.

Why don't I use the word *creativity*?

Edward de Bono has shown in his books and seminars that many of us have a problem with creativity. Actually, real creators, people who are creative, who practice creativity obviously have no problem with it. Who has the problem then? Those who are not creative, you may answer. Well, no, for there are no people who are not creative. The people who have a problem with creativity are those who are creative as everybody else is creative, *but who think they're not creative*.

Creativity in our culture is usually held as something extraordinary, reserved for some very rare genial people or artists, something rather vague and almost supernatural; or, negatively, as wacky, crazy and off-the-wall.

Most people, unfortunately also in senior positions, just do not take creativity seriously. What is the result? Lack of creativity leads to stagnation, to decay, to boredom, to a lack of new ideas. It leads straight to crisis. Where there is crisis, either on a personal, professional, community or even political level, you can be sure that before the crisis arrived, there was a lack of creativity and, as a result, of transformation and evolution.

The English word *creativity* can be translated as *create-activity*, the activity to create. This more functional way of looking at it may give a hint how irrational and dysfunctional our arrogant disregard for creativity is.

The activity to create. Well, if we don't create, nothing will be created. It's as simple as that. And then things come from outside upon us and impose themselves more or less in our lives. Then we are out of control and complain. How could this arise? Because we lacked necessary action, *creative* action, action that was more than just complacency, imitation or repetition, but focused on finding new solutions to our old problems. That's what *create-activity* is all about.

Now if we go one step further, we pass beyond *create-activity*, or mere functional thinking, to *create-ability*, and arrive at quality thinking. *Able to create*. The ability, the power to bring about a new solution, to solve a problem in a new and constructive way, in a way that, for example, saves resources or is more ecological.

Truly creative solutions often bear a quality of cost-saving or, more generally, an economic element. This does not mean that they are cheap. It means that they care for resources not being wasted.

Create-ability, then, is the ability to find new solutions that are

- Functional
- Problem-solving
- Integrated
- Original or unusual

Create-ability is the ability to step out of the common pathway and to look around. But that's not all. It is one thing to perceive different solutions, and it is still another thing to *implement* the new and original solution I have found.

This is where *create-ability* comes in. It is a more encompassing concept than *create-activity*. It is based upon two qualities that we mentioned before:

- Response-ability

- Decide-ability

If I am not response-able, if I am so stuck in my usual pattern that I can't step out and respond to a new challenge appropriately and flexibly, I am just not able to respond to that challenge. Then I lack responsibility and things may go wrong as a result.

If I am able to respond in the manner the situation needs to be handled, but I don't want to take a decision based upon that necessity to respond, I am not decide-able. Thus, I am lacking *decide-ability*.

If I do take a decision but am not able to create, to act, according to that decision, I may have made up the most wonderful decision in my mind, but I won't carry it through because I am not create-able, lacking *creativity*.

After this short and I think quite logical survey of how we get to handle creativity in its higher form of *creativity*, I would like to discuss the wider perspective of setting up a customer-oriented service structure that uses vision as well as vision-communication as its basic ingredients.

II.

The Six Jewels

We have six basic elements to deal with.

These *six steps* indicate a kind of pathway or road map to our goal. But before we now systematically go through these different steps, we should have a look at the end result we want to achieve. Is it service? Or is it customer satisfaction? Or is it quality? Or a package made from all this?

Is it important that we care about how to define the end result we want to achieve? I think it is tremendously important. Because how we envision the end result determines which way we will take to achieve it. If I envision a mediocre final result, is there a way to achieve the excellent package I would like to get? Obviously this is almost impossible. Even modern quantum physics confirms that the way we look at things, the way we are conditioned, the way we set up an experiment in itself pre-determines the outcome of it, and thus the scientific result.

It is of decisive importance what I set out to be my standard. Will it be a common standard, easily achieved by everybody, or will it be a high, excellent standard that is hard or even very hard to realize on a constant, consistent basis?

If I set out to achieve a standard of excellence, does this not also influence the way I am going to work for it? With other words: Is it possible to achieve an excellent outcome using mediocre

means? Does not every single element of my equipment need to already meet the standard of excellence I set out for the end result? Obviously so.

I can perhaps afford to neglect one element, but I will certainly at a later stage be forced to remedy this lack of attention or of motivation. And as things are, it will be more costly to remedy it or more difficult or more time-intensive than to foresee it right from the start.

To give an example. I am going to design a luxury 450 room hotel and forget to put hand sets in the bathrooms. When the hotel is going to open I suddenly get the idea that I forgot the phones in the bathrooms, and call the construction company. What are they going to tell me? They will say *“Well, Sir, if you had said this right at the planning stage or even when we were in construction, we could have offered you a good price. It would not have been very expensive actually. But if you want to do it now, it’ll be very costly. Can you imagine, we have to open the walls in every of the 450 bathrooms, get the connections, put the cables, fix the phones, close and paint the walls, clean up. . .”*

It will be very costly to remedy this little mistake. I know one hotel where it happened that way, and was talking with the General Manager about it. He just shrugged his shoulders. *“Our bud-*

get would not allow it and therefore I do not even suggest it to the owners”, he replied.

III.

Clearing the Vision

It is tremendously important to clear our vision before we even begin to plan. We do not need a strategy before we have cleared our vision because our vision will determine the strategy we are going to take. In other words, we begin our journey with our right brain and not our left brain!

A vision is coming from the right side of the brain, which has to do with associative, imaginative thinking, and not with logical deduction. If I remain left-brained and try to deduct logically, I remain in the past. The premise I am going to deduct from is within my existing pattern of experience. If I am going to create something new, and this is what I want, I must step out of this existing pattern and create a new pattern first. How can I create a new pattern? By envisioning the outcome.

Now you may argue that a vision is much too general to be able to impact upon a strategy. Well, a vision may be general at the beginning but it does not need to *remain* general. Visions can in fact be very detailed. The art is to derive the details from the general picture I first get. It is like zooming into the picture, into the vision, in order to see the details. They are already there. I do not need to invent them. They are part of the holistic picture that I have got. Visions are holograms.

Clearing the Vision means also to get clarity about what I do *not* want as a result. It may even be easier to begin with this

negative approach first. I brainstorm a moment about all the elements that I do not want to have in my final picture. If I am going to brainstorm about supreme customer orientation within a state's administration, I may want to exclude the blindly obedient civil servant right from the start. I may say *“Well, this kind of civil servant was useful in the past when we followed a different paradigm, but now this kind of civil servant would do us a bad service, and more so to our customers, the citizens. So we want to exclude this possibility right from the start.”*

Then I automatically trigger a thinking process of how I get another and very different kind of civil servant, a civil servant for example who is flexible, intelligent, well-informed, response-able, open-minded and ready to take his job by the word, and so on.

And I bypass methods that I know would bring about the old type of stiff and insensitive dread I want to get rid of.

This makes me selective and already determines the strategy I am going to take.

IV.

Empowerment

The second step in my procedure is *empowerment*.

Why do we need to empower human beings in order to achieve supreme service? Would it not be better to use obedient little robots and let them carry out precise instructions?

Well, within a robot world where everything is predictable, this approach might possibly work. But we are not living in a robot world, we are living in a real world with real and warm human beings, people who have emotions and who are pretty much irrational - at least from time to time. What about my effectiveness when I want to service irrational beings by totally rational ones? First of all no human being can be totally rational. If I cut somebody's emotions, he will not be more integrated, but in the contrary more troubled and less balanced. He will be less prepared to live in a human world with all the irrationality inherent in this human world. So he will be less adequate, clumsier, and react less intelligently.

Have you ever looked around in excellent hotels and seen one or two of the waiters or clerks who are timid? Have you noticed how maladapted, how off-track they seem despite their obvious motivation, the excellent training they got and all the efforts they put in their work? You will even see that the harder they try, the more effort they give to what they are doing, serving the cus-

tomers, the more inhibited they will be and the more inadequate they will feel.

What I want to say is that we simply cannot cut off the human element without getting completely undesirable results. The human element makes that despite all the training and experience we may have had, we may feel inadequate, shy, poor. We may lack basic self-esteem or self-confidence. We may be inhibited for one reason or another.

Empowerment means that persons are granted a space, an area, in which they can achieve solutions *in their own way*. The standards, of course, are given. This is true for the President Director of a company, and for the one who cleans the toilets. If the standard is excellence, the toilet cleaning must meet the same excellent standards as the President Directors' work.

Again I use an example out of the hotel world, because as a hotel consultant I live predominantly in hotels. Imagine you are in a luxury hotel where everything is provided, where everything is tasteful, elegant and distinct, where the staff smile at you and try to read your wishes from your lips - and then you go to the toilet and this toilet is not air-conditioned, unclean, humid, smelly. What will be your final impression of this hotel? Would you say, excusing, "*Oh they are not very good at housekeeping!*" or would you rather get a kind of gut feeling telling you "*What is all this*

luxury stuff good for if they don't even have a clean and attractive restroom?"

Would your judgment not be rather severe, much more severe than it would be for a little street corner restaurant with the same kind of restroom? I think it would.

Therefore every little detail of what we do with the customer or for the customer is important. There are no exceptions, and there are no excuses. We want the customer to be unconditionally satisfied with our service. This is the goal we are striving for.

Empowerment gives a space for decision-making, for the choice of alternatives, but more than that, it gives a space for personal growth. We grow through experience and first of all the experience to master a situation with our own resources, our own intelligence, our own inventiveness. This space is the basis for our response-ability. We are response-unable if we lack the space for a mistake, which is inherent in the space of our decision-making. If people are afraid of making mistakes they have never grasped the concept of responsibility. Thus they are basically unable to respond. They may react but they can't respond.

What happens if persons are not empowered? They just obey; they follow, which means that they have stopped thinking at some point on the way. Empowerment means giving people a space to

become creative with their own mind and to get rewarded for it at the end of the day. Therefore we can say that there is a strong element of motivation in carrying responsibility.

You see that when, as a European, you come to Asia. You see that children in Asia, as a general rule, behave more respectfully, more mature and socially much better adapted than Western children did. And in school, they are generally more motivated. Why? Because they grow up with responsibilities instead of playing with toys that completely disempower them and hold them in a voluntary stage of infancy that many of them later very unwillingly leave.

In Asia, except children from new-rich families who try to blindly copy everything from the West, grow gradually in responsibilities for their brothers and sisters, for their parents, the greater family, the family business or their own little business that helps to feed the whole family. These children, in what I have seen, are very eager to learn and appreciative of every little opportunity to grow. And since they have this attitude, they are very likely to get what they want to acquire in knowledge and experience.

Children, if they have not been abused, do not need to be empowered. This is so because, from nature, we all have personal power. The problem is that many of us have been smashed in

childhood or the burden we had to carry was just too heavy. It means that our power had been taken away from us, by force, by violence or by manipulation. If this happened it is usually not that easy to get one's power back, but nonetheless essential if one is to succeed. There is no way around it, and it involves hard work on oneself.

Some people will get from their employer the space and the personal power that their own parents denied them. This happens more often than not. Since this is so, employers have even greater responsibility toward their staff, and some companies, especially in Japan, know to profit from the care they bestow upon their workers and managers. They expect the same devotion returned back to them by their staff. And obviously, this concept works very well, much better than concepts that are not based on mutual care and responsibility.

So very smoothly we got from empowerment to leadership. The shift is almost imperceptible. Why is that so? If I have power to take my decisions I am automatically getting from a mere follower position into a leadership position. In taking responsibility for my decisions, I am getting involved in giving an example, in leading others.

We are currently moving from a paradigm of leadership to one of *stewardship*.

V.

Leadership-Stewardship

There is a gradual, very subtle change in how leaders perceive and define their role, their attitudes and even their basic vision about giving direction, motivating and managing.

Stewardship is by no means a new concept. Historically, the steward was the person in charge to carry out the function of rulership for a child-king. Stewardship was different from leadership in that the function of leading was associated with an additional function of caretaking. I may take it light-heartedly to do my job, but I may be more serious, more careful when I do the same job for somebody else. Many people will actually be more caring in whatever they do when they do it for somebody else, and especially for a child. Our inner parent will step in and act. The resulting satisfaction is one that comes less from our ego, but more from being concerned with the welfare of others. Welfare, as a value, is at the very center of stewardship.

It is not surprising that stewardship now emerges as a new paradigm at the highest level of corporate life. Too many concerns about environmental issues that are ultimately issues of survival have given rise to public discussion and even turmoil. Too many matters of innovation have been disregarded or postponed during the last twenty years. Too many people have lost their jobs. Too many companies have quit the market and declared failure while the urgent matters of restructuring the

economy remained untouched. All this while people were waiting for politicians to do something about it.

Now we are perhaps one step farther. We know that all of us are responsible for bringing about necessary change and reforms, and that it is a mere excuse to wait for political leaders to do the first step.

The politicians alone cannot make it. The industry alone cannot make it. The complexity and interconnectedness of ecological problems lead to the necessity of another approach, one that is not linear but holistic. Not one single person or group can bring solutions any more and we are obliged to sit together and talk, and become creative through exchange, interaction and intelligent co-operation.

Stewardship as a paradigm helps us to be more concerned about the periphery and the possible outreach of our political, corporate or private policies and the multitude of vibrations that every single action triggers. Stewardship sees more of the caring aspect. It also facilitates the change from single leader decisions to group leader decisions. More and more decisions, now and in the future, will be taken not by single individuals at the top of their organizations, but by top-teams, by directional teams, by groups where all members are equally in charge for the well-being of the whole.

Where there are more than one, the variety among human beings cares for you getting to brainstorm more easily to find solutions, and the chances are higher that new and original approaches are found, approaches also that '*step over the line*' of traditional or overly protective thinking.

From there to *creativity* is but a logical sequence.

VI.

Response-Ability

Even under the old leadership paradigm, responsibility was considered an important and foremost value to be pursued in corporate culture. Thinkers such as *Dr. Steven R. Covey* have led us to become aware that response-ability is the very condition for quality service and, more than that, a fundamental attitude.

There is reaction and there is response. Reaction is the immediate outburst of action that often is not reflected upon. Response is the action that is aware of alternatives. Response is the action that was mentally mirrored. In the ideal case response is careful or caring, considerate and thoughtful, too. But not necessarily. What distinguishes mere reaction from response is the use of our inner space that is awareness. Reaction is typically unaware of all the factors involved, of consequences.

Response-ability, then, is the ability to respond. Dr. Covey's way to re-spell the word rises our awareness to the point that most of us will easily associate some dynamic element in it.

I associate *flexibility* with response-ability. I would not consider somebody response-able who is deeply stuck in old habits or somebody who is afraid to behave in a warm, personal and caring way.

Actually, when you look around a bit, you see that the value of response-ability is rather declining among people in our mod-

ern civilization. Therefore in training supreme service we must deal with all the issues that are acting counter to easy response, such as anxiety, inhibitions, guilt feelings, lacking self-esteem, distorted self-image, and alike. We cannot just leave it to psychologists to deal with those matters. We should trust nature much more than that and empower the persons concerned to a point to take action about their problems, to initiate change from inside instead of waiting for sudden and often not welcomed change coming from outside.

Response-ability means also the inner strength to renew oneself through experiences, to learn from past mistakes and to have a fresh innocent approach to every new challenge. This is also something rather uncommon today, but very important. Success can be defined as flexible adaptation to circumstances while holding our inner vision.

One logical step ahead and we are confronted with taking decisions. What about our *decide-ability*?

It is obviously not enough to be empowered, aware of inner space and able to respond. What are we going to do once we face different alternatives or various levels of priority? Life often confronts us with decisions that we did not anticipate. Do we not need an ability to decide? What does that involve?

VII.

Decide-Ability

The ability to decide simply involves risk. The risk to take the wrong decision, to make a mistake, to lose something valuable, to be erroneous in our assessment of the factors involved. If I never want to take any risk, I can never make a decision. I will be vague or even fatalistic. Or I let others decide for me. Or life. It means I give up a part of response-ability by lacking decide-ability. The same is true for response-ability itself. If I lack response-ability for example by lacking awareness, by re-acting instead of acting, I give up part of my leadership or stewardship. If I lack in my stewardship ability I give up part of my empowerment.

There is a logical sequencing in the six jewels of the leader that links all its parts logically to each other. This is valid in the deductive direction and the inductive direction.

VIII.

Create-Ability

Create-ability is not just the end of our six-jewel lace. It is at the same time the beginning of it, in the sense that it will create a new cycle.

To see if I lack create-ability, I may check if I am again and again confronted with decisions that seem to fall upon me. If I cannot create change, I have to take decisions that induce it. Or I may get to a point where I have to take decisions that *force me* to change my point of departure or my basic paradigm.

The company that refuses to innovate will face, sooner or later, a crisis situation and will *have to* take decisions to cut costs, unpopular decisions, decisions that nobody likes to take. However, the cost-cut approach, as Edward de Bono showed so evidently in his books *Serious Creativity* and *Sur/Petition*, is a weak, passive approach that comes into play only once growth was impossible or denied because of mental inertia, because of lacking create-ability. Cost cutting is similar to modern medicine. I cure the symptom because I am afraid to know the true origins of the disease or because I am unwilling to discover them. It is allopathic medicine, not wise and preventive medicine. It is medicine that does not cure in the long run, but that just alleviates a current situation. In human terms, the price of cost cutting is high. There is hurt connected to it and often an unfortunate cutback in

human resources. If I declare staff to be garbage by setting them off I pay actually a very high price for economic health and further growth. It is the medicine that cures through costly and at the end rather ineffective operations that cut the flesh away instead of healing it through the intelligent care of the moderate approach such as the six steps training.

Cost-cutting cannot remedy a lack of create-ability that was the original reason leading to the crisis. It is a mere palliative covering up the true source of evil. It is the preferred method of what de Bono called the *housekeeping* kind of management. Truly, in crisis times the right thing to do is to invest more, not less, to become more active, not less, to be more creative, not less. *Housekeeping* management is very common in Indonesia; I dare to pretend that it is the prevailing management approach. This fact has many reasons, one of them being the totally uncreative upbringing of Indonesian youth, the second, perhaps more important, the lack of true leadership of Western top managers.

The crux is that Westerners, on first sight, get the impression that Indonesians need a hard, inflexible and somewhat authoritarian approach to get motivated for work. This conclusion, although it is logical and justified according to the prevailing *system* over there, is based upon a fundamental error. The error namely is related to the leadership paradigm.

IX.

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