

CEP Magazine – February 2019 Compliance and servant leadership

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Have you ever worked for a boss who treated you poorly? A “leader” who envisioned themselves as the hammer and you as the nail? Now, how about someone who put your needs first? A leader who valued your input, listened, and helped you to succeed? I will venture to guess we have all had both experiences. So, which one did you work harder for?

As I reflect on my professional career, those leaders I respected and admired most were all servant leaders. They were more than “a boss.” They had high expectations but were also mentors and leaders who listened, cared, and were invested in my success. I respected and wished to emulate them both professionally and personally. I can say absolutely, I worked hardest for them and did so gladly.

As compliance professionals, we know employees can be afraid or intimidated by us and may sometimes view us as the hammer as opposed to a partner in their success. Might we realize better results when stakeholders buy in to our programs, because they want to and not because they have to?

I say “yes” and believe practicing servant leadership can help!

What is servant leadership?

Robert Greenleaf first coined the term servant leadership in a 1970 essay titled “The Servant as Leader.”^[1] According to Greenleaf, the most important characteristic of servant leadership is making it a priority to serve rather than lead. Instead of employees working to serve the leader, the leader exists to serve employees. Similarly, Inc. magazine’s Peter Economy describes servant leadership as, “the typical hierarchy where employees are supposed to serve their bosses is turned upside down. Instead, leaders serve their people” (2015).^[2]

Besides putting others first, some other core beliefs of servant leadership include:

- Believing everyone deserves respect and trust
- Sharing power and gaining consensus
- Knowing people perform at their best when they feel they are making valuable contributions

For me, not only are these tenants the right way to treat people, they just make good business sense. Fortune magazine’s annual rankings of “The 100 Best Companies to Work For” show companies practicing servant leadership consistently rank within their top 10.^[3]

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