



## Build a Resourceful Team

*Managers doing what others can and should do multiplies "learned helplessness"*

Tim Stevenson

**MANAGERS CAN LOSE** sight of their proper goal. Shaped by habit to be the best "doers" in the office or department, they forget that success is not determined by how much *they* do, but by how much *gets done because of* what they do

In this and following articles I want to develop a concept I call **Servant Managing**. It is a philosophy and approach that develops individuals, enables teams to hit on all cylinders, and leads to greater creativity and innovation.

Servant Managing begins with a manager who remembers his or her proper goal. Oddly, one of the role models who helped me learn this was a teacher I had in Junior High.

### Giving back the work

Mr. Kurtz was my 7<sup>th</sup> grade wood shop and drafting teacher (this was obviously back before the earth's crust had fully hardened). He was an unusual character, and to our ears had a funny way of talking. He was a nice

*"It's my job to build the people who are going to build the company."*

*— John Schnatter, founder & chairman, Papa John's Pizza*

man, but — being 13 year-old boys — we were merciless: acting obnoxious, drawing cartoons of him, and imitating his manner of speaking. I can still do a good Mr. Kurtz impression today, as a matter of fact.

Years later I realized he was a lot smarter than I thought.



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Mr. Kurtz would give us drafting assignments to work out at our desks. We were lazy and didn't want to do the hard part (thinking), so we always tried to trick him into giving us the answers (in technical terms, this is called "work avoidance").

A few minutes into the time we were supposed to be working, I'd walk up to his desk. "Mr. Kurtz," I'd say, with a pained, bewildered look on my face, "I don't understand what I'm supposed to be doing." I'd make a couple more lame comments about how confused I was, hoping he would start telling me the answers without my having to figure them out myself.

***"Leaders who teach are more effective than those who tell."***

***— Robert Fulmer***

Mr. Kurtz would look at me and say what he always said, the thing that never failed to burn me up: "Stevenson. Read the book. Then ask questions."

Defeated, I'd trudge back to my desk with the manual. We all tried this tactic — sometimes there was practically a line of guys waiting their turn — but it never worked. He always said the same thing: "Read the book. Then ask questions."

### **Managers who won't delegate**

Mr. Kurtz knew what a lot of managers have forgotten: If you are willing to **do** for others what they are capable of doing for themselves, they are willing to **let you**. Work avoidance is not limited to middle schoolers!

Beyond that, there is a major consequence of doing for someone else what they can and should do for themselves: **You promote dependency instead of initiative and self-sufficiency.**

Many managers fall into this trap. I'm amazed at finding, at all levels, managers who are apparently content to be the "chief doer" in their offices, while capable employees are working below capacity. When I ask them why they continue doing things themselves rather than giving responsibilities away, they respond:

- **"To make sure it's done right."**
- **"It's easier doing it myself."**
- **"Doing it myself is faster than training someone else to do it."**
- **"To protect the company from people making mistakes."**

Let's be honest: In the short run it *is* faster and easier to do it yourself, and it probably will result in fewer mistakes. But in the long run, it promotes dependency upon you as an individual manager and your abilities rather than developing a team of people with far greater capabilities. Doing things for people that they should do for themselves does not help them grow to their potential. It promotes and multiplies the quality of **"learned helplessness."**

"It might indeed be easier and faster in the short run to do it yourself," I say to those managers, "but what about the future? If I come back a year from now — or two years, or three years — what will I find?"

"I'll still be doing it myself," they admit. Correct.

### **Transition to Servant Managing**

Leaders who want their teams to develop in initiative, problem-solving ability, resourcefulness, and self-sufficiency must

transition from *doers* applying command-and-control methods to **teachers, coaches, and facilitators**. This is what **Servant Managing** is all about. It is a mindset, philosophy, and practice that develops **great teams who display creativity and innovation** — the polar opposite of learned helplessness.

Duke University professor Robert Fulmer is a leading authority on leadership development in today's business world. He is co-author with Jered Bleak of *The Leadership Advantage*, in which they profile what some of the best companies do to develop their next generation of executives. In an interview with Marshall Goldsmith, Fulmer said, **"One of our key findings was that leaders who teach are more effective than those who tell."**

### What you can do

Ask yourself: "Do I want to develop **helpless followers**? Or, Do I want to develop **growing learners and potential leaders**?"

If you're tempted to develop helpless followers, ask yourself: **Why?** Do you need to be needed? Is the thought of your team becoming more self-sufficient threatening? Is your sense of job security wrapped around the illusion of being indispensable?

If you struggle with this, let me encourage you: First, developing others will not make your position insecure. Leaders who develop others are always in demand. Second, you'll create a better functioning **team**, which is the key to great accomplishment. Third, in my experience there is nothing more rewarding than investing in someone's life, then seeing that person go on to do far greater things than I could have imagined. Once you've experienced it for yourself, you'll never want to go back to the old way.

Developing the people who work under you is one of the best contributions you can make to the success of your organization or team. John Schnatter, founder and chairman of Papa John's Pizza, describes his role this way: **"It's my job to build the people who are going to build the company."** That's at the heart of what I call Servant Managing.

Here are some suggestions:

- Reexamine your definition of success: Is it based on how much *you* do, or on how much **gets done** because of what you do?
- Resolve that from now on you will be in the **people-development business**. That requires you to not do for others what they can and should do for themselves.
- Results of this choice: 1) You are freed up to pursue the highest and best use of your time and abilities, and 2) Your people will stretch and approach their real potential.
- Invest the time to **teach**. Don't just tell people *what* to do. Tell them **why**. Share your knowledge and experience. The short-term investment of time to develop your people will **save** you enormous amounts of time later.
- Beyond imparting information, **ask questions**. Questions force people to exercise their minds and think through issues and decisions. That's when people really *learn*.

We will continue exploring what Servant Managing is all about in future articles. This is how you can lead yourself and your team to the next level of excellence. **L**