



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MANDLA S MAKHANYA

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS AND PRESENTATION

ETHICAL SERVANT LEADERSHIP AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

Invited guests, colleagues

Our sessions this morning were devoted to acquiring a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of ethics and ethical servant leadership and management, and what that implies for us as leaders of our institution. I trust that we have all gained some valuable insights and understanding through that process. And so now is a good time, I believe, to put it all into perspective and to look at how the underlying principles and practices of what we have learned tie in with our understanding of servant leadership, or, more pertinently *ethical* servant leadership as practised at Unisa and equally importantly, as aligned to the goals set out in our *Unisa 2015 Revisited*.

So let's start at the beginning

The concept of *servant leadership* that I have been sharing with the Unisa community these past months, and that we have interrogated this morning, is not entirely new. It is in fact about four decades old¹ and was coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in *The Servant as Leader*, an essay that he first published in 1970. In that essay, he said:

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. That person is sharply different from one who is *leader* first; perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions...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.

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?" (<http://www.greenleaf.org/whatiss/>)

Servant leadership emphasizes increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of community, and the sharing of power in decision making. Obviously there is a paradox in the title "servant leader", but I believe that it alludes to the meaningful end state that is achieved when that paradox has been understood and resolved. At its core, servant leadership is conscious choice, that implies a long-term, transformation approach to life and work that has the potential for creating positive change in our institution and by extension, our society.²

In his foreword to Greenleaf's book entitled *Servant Leadership: a journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*, Stephen Covey says the following:

I believe that the essential quality of servant leaders that sets them apart from others is that they live by their conscience – that inward moral sense of what is right and what is wrong.... There is a mass of evidence that shows that this moral sense, this

¹Greenleaf, RK: *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power & Greatness*. Available at: Pp5 – 6. Available at: <http://books.google.co.za/books?id=gOexpCA5JqIC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=true>

² In *Practising Servant Leadership*. Larry C Spears. Pp 8. Available at: <http://www.sullivanadvisorygroup.com/docs/articles/Practicing%20Servant%20Leadership.pdf>

consciousness, this inner light, is a universal phenomenon..... Kant, the philosopher referred to this as the “moral law within.”

Covey continues: Moral authority comes from the principled use of our natural power and the freedom to choose.... Moral authority is another way to define servant leadership because it represents a reciprocal choice between leader and follower. If the leader is principle centred, he or she will develop moral authority. If the follower is principle centred, he or she will follow the leader. In that sense, both leaders and followers are followers. Why? They follow truth. They follow natural law. They follow principles. They follow a common agreed upon vision. They share values. They grow to trust one another. Moral authority is mutually developed and shared.

The four dimensions of moral authority which form the core of servant leadership are:

1. **Sacrifice** - as opposed to self-interest and ego
2. **Service** - what do I want versus what is required of me?
3. **The ends and the means are inseparable** – a worthy end can never be accomplished with an unworthy means. (Ghandi taught that there are seven things that will destroy us:
 - a. Wealth without work
 - b. Pleasure without conscience
 - c. Knowledge without character
 - d. Commerce without morality
 - e. Science without humanity
 - f. Worship without sacrifice
 - g. Politics without principle.
4. **Shared vision** - we need to move from an independent state to an interdependent state.³

So what does that mean for you and me? What does it mean for Unisa?

Servant leadership proposes a move away from the autocratic and hierarchical mode of leadership to one that is based on teamwork and community; that seeks to involve others in decision making; that is strongly based on ethical and caring behaviour; and that attempts to enhance the personal growth of people while improving the caring and quality of our institution. ⁴ It is generally agreed that servant

³ Ibid Pg 8

⁴ In Practising Servant Leadership. Larry C Spears. Pp 7. Available at:
<http://www.sullivanadvisorygroup.com/docs/articles/Practicing%20Servant%20Leadership.pdf>

leadership rests on ten principles, which, while they are not exhaustive, articulate its promise and potential. These are:⁵

1. Listening (and we can link this to Unisa's C of *Connection*)

Listening: Leaders have traditionally been valued for their communication and decision-making skills. While these are also important skills for the servant-leader, they need to be reinforced by a deep commitment to listening intently to others. The servant-leader seeks to identify the will of a group and helps clarify that will. He or she seeks to listen receptively to what is being said. Listening, coupled with regular periods of reflection, is essential to the growth of the servant-leader

At Unisa we define Connection as follows: *Reinvigorating stakeholder relations to find greater synergy, harmony and meeting of minds in pursuit of transformational goals*

We find that while we may have articulated our understanding of Connection in our own way, it nevertheless speaks to the need to connect with others at a fundamental level to arrive at the meeting of minds, or the "will of the group," towards a common goal.

2. Empathy (At Unisa this links with *Conversation*)

Empathy. The servant-leader strives to understand and empathize with others. People need to be accepted and recognized for their special and unique spirits. One assumes the good intentions of coworkers and does not reject them as people, even if one finds it necessary to refuse to accept their behavior or performance.

At Unisa we define Conversation: Active participation in dialogue that transforms the relationship and narrows the scope of differences while enhancing understanding and empathy

While we tend to assume that empathy implies a degree of agreement with the others views or experiences, it in fact implies an understanding of the other that allows for their acceptance as a human being and a colleague – irrespective of whether their views, culture or behavior resonate with ours. This requires getting to know the other, through conversation and other forms of engagement, to a level that will open our minds and our understanding to the extent that it facilitates an empathetic understanding of the "scope of differences" that inform them.

3. Healing (This links to Unisa's definition of Co-operation)

⁵ These definitions have been taken directly from *Practising Servant Leadership*. Larry C Spears. Pp 8 – 10

<http://www.sullivanadvisorygroup.com/docs/articles/Practicing%20Servant%20Leadership.pdf>

Healing. One of the great strengths of servant-leadership is the potential for healing one's self and others. Many people have broken spirits and have suffered from a variety of emotional hurts. Although this is part of being human, servant-leaders recognize that they also have an opportunity to "help make whole" those with whom they come in contact. In "The Servant as Leader" Greenleaf writes: "There is something subtle communicated to one who is being served and led if implicit in the compact between servant-leader and led is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something they share."

We can link this to our understanding of Co-operations, defined as *working together proactively and responsively towards the realization of Unisa's goals and aspirations.*

Colleagues, this is probably one of the most important aspects of servant leadership and extremely pertinent in the context of Unisa and our society. We are surrounded by broken-ness and hurt, and healing can only happen through cooperation and common purpose. In fact Unisa's goals and aspirations can, and will only be achieved if we approach them in the kind of positive spirit that characterizes "whole" people. We share the responsibility for contributing to one another's wellbeing. I am sure that many of you are thinking that "Care" would be a more appropriate C in this case and indeed you are right. I think that you will find that as we go along, many of our Cs will be perfectly compatible with a number of the principles of servant leadership and we should feel free to explore them and see how they apply in different contexts.

4. Awareness (This links to our definition of *Communication*)

Awareness. General awareness, and especially self-awareness, strengthens the servant-leader. Awareness also aids one in understanding issues involving ethics and values. It lends itself to being able to view most situations from a more integrated, holistic position. As Greenleaf observed: "Awareness is not a giver of solace—it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed. They are not seekers after solace. They have their own inner serenity."

At Unisa we see Communication as: *Ensuring shared meaning and promoting mutual understanding at all levels, by making explicit relevant decisions, actions, choices and events timeously and transparently*

General awareness can only be truly effective where there is appropriate communication in all of its forms. Self-awareness should be informed and enhanced by general awareness and requires the critical self-reflection that we mention in our transformation charter, by being honest with ourselves in regard to the entire institutional functioning and our individualised responses to that. It begs the question: How do I measure up to the expectations imposed on me by the Transformation Charter?

5. Persuasion (links to Unisa's definition of *Collegiality*)

Persuasion. Another characteristic of servant-leaders is a primary reliance on persuasion rather than positional authority in making decisions within an organization. The servant-leader seeks to convince others rather than coerce compliance. This particular element offers one of the clearest distinctions between the traditional authoritarian model and that of servant-leadership. The servant-leader is effective at building consensus within groups.

At Unisa Collegiality is defined as: *Cultivating an ethos of professionalism, shared responsibility, mutual respect, civility and trust while understanding and acknowledging each other's competencies and roles*

I would like to think that one can only be truly collegial when one interacts from a position of openness rather than a hierarchical type of authority. The sheer pace and volume of work at most institutions tends to inhibit collegiality, and, one suspects, lends itself more easily to authoritarian practices – especially as leaders. I would suggest that to be collegial and persuasive leaders, we will need to be constantly vigilant and unremittingly committed to a leadership style that is inclusive and accommodating. And while there are undoubtedly concerns around time and workload, it seems feasible that over time the group consensus that is achieved through conviction rather than coercion will provide the necessary impetus towards a high performance institution.

6. Conceptualisation (Linked to Unisa's definition of *Creativity*)

Conceptualization. Servant-leaders seek to nurture their abilities to “dream great dreams.” The ability to look at a problem (or an organization) from a conceptualizing perspective means that one must think beyond day-to-day realities. For many managers this is a characteristic that requires discipline and practice. Servant-leaders are called to seek a delicate balance between conceptual thinking and a day-to-day focused approach.

At Unisa we define Creativity: *Nurturing an environment that is open and receptive to new ideas, that liberates potential and leads to imaginative and innovative thinking and action*

Colleagues, this is at once one of the most exciting and intimidating aspects of leadership in any institution because it speaks to our inherent dislike of, and resistance to change, and the acceptance of the new and unknown. And yet, as I mentioned this morning in my welcome address, it is absolutely fundamental to any institution's growth and development in all respects – more so a university's - because it speaks to the generation of knowledge, which is a primary responsibility. So you can imagine how delighted I am that we have at this institution a management corps and a Council, that understands the need for conceptualization and creativity and that has created the space in Unisa for it to flourish. We therefore owe to ourselves, our colleagues, our students and our society to cast aside our blinkers and to open our minds to the creative possibilities and potential that resides within our institution and its people. I

look forward with much anticipation to a wave of creative energy that will be contagious in its innovativeness and feasibility and that will drive Unisa to ever greater heights.

7. Foresight (Linked to our definition of *Consultation*)

Foresight. Foresight is a characteristic that enables the servant leader to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future. It is also deeply rooted within the intuitive mind. Foresight remains a largely unexplored area in leadership studies, but one most deserving of careful attention.

We define Consultation as: *Taking into account, in good faith, the views, advice and contributions of appropriate stakeholders and individuals on relevant matters*

How many times have we listened to a colleague, or a politician, or some other member of society warning of an impending transformation, airing a new and different idea, or identifying a new trend and laughed quietly to ourselves, writing it off as nonsense or “pie-in-the-sky,” only to find later on that it proved to be true? How often do we become so bogged down by the drudgery of our jobs and so intent on just getting things done that we do not give ourselves (or others) the space of time to explore and even implement new ways of thinking about and doing things. When really sage advice comes our way we turn our back on it because we just don’t have time to think about it in any great depth. Finally when it is imposed on us, we complain that we have not had the opportunity to contribute or engage. Do you use the views advice and contributions of appropriate stakeholders and individuals on relevant matters in formulating views on the future? We tend to close the door on thought leadership and we allow ourselves to become though followers. Which are you – a thought leader or a thought follower?

8. Stewardship (Linked to Unisa’s definition of *Conservation*)

Stewardship. Peter Block has defined stewardship as “holding something in trust for another.” Robert Greenleaf’s view of all institutions was one in which CEOs, staffs, and trustees all played significant roles in holding their institutions in trust for the greater good of society. Servant leadership, like stewardship, assumes first and foremost a commitment to serving the needs of others. It also emphasizes the use of openness and persuasion rather than control.

CONSERVATION: Preserving and utilizing what is best from our legacy, making choices and decisions and taking actions in the present, which ensure a sustainable future.

Colleagues, this is extremely topical at the moment isn’t it? I would like to suggest that now, more than ever before, we have a serious and solemn responsibility to ensure the future sustainability of this

institution. This morning Dr Phosa spoke about our roles and responsible in regard to ethical management and leadership, but I cannot emphasize enough the fact that your actions today and tomorrow as leaders of Unisa will determine its availability to future generations. Your greed and mismanagement of our resources today will impoverish future generations of learners. True servant leadership means always thinking of the future, always bearing in mind that we are but temporary caretakers and custodians of these precious assets and resources, always understanding that the legacy of honour is so much more enduring in all respects, than one of dishonor. What will your legacy to Unisa be?

9. Commitment to the growth of people (Linked to Unisa's definition of *Care*)

Commitment to the growth of people. Servant-leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As a result, the servant-leader is deeply committed to the growth of each and every individual within the institution. The servant-leader recognizes the tremendous responsibility to do everything possible to nurture the growth of employees.

At Unisa we define Care as: *Fostering a sense of belonging among the members of the Unisa community so that they feel accepted, understood, respected and valued*

This is a principle that lies very close to my heart because it speaks to that human impulse that resides in each and every one of us, no matter how noble or humble, to be acknowledged as having worth and dignity by others and quite honestly, just to enjoy a little bit of happiness and delight in our lives. In my view it captures the ethos of servant leadership. As Prof Baijnath so aptly put it: "If you occupy a senior position it is not there to lord it over others and feel superior. Servant leadership means that all your activities and thinking are aimed at achieving the objectives of the institution. It is a powerful concept." Colleagues, a high performance University will only be achieved in a caring environment and that caring must extend to all of our stakeholders. Is this something you aspire to or do you intend following a "forget about you Jack – I'm alright!" I suggest that is that is the case, you might want to rethink your position at Unisa.

10. Building community (Linked to Unisa's definition of *Community*)

Building community. The servant leader senses that much has been lost in recent human history as a result of the shift from local communities to large institutions as the primary shaper of human lives. This awareness causes the servant-leader to seek to identify some means for building community among those who work within a given institution. Servant-leadership suggests that true community can be created among those who work in businesses and other institutions. Greenleaf said: "All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant-leaders to show

the way, not by mass movements, but by each servant-leader demonstrating his own unlimited liability for a quite specific community- related group.

We define Community as: *The University staff, students and alumni cohering around our shared vision, aspirations and interests in the spirit of Ubuntu, while embracing diversity in its multiple forms*

Community is central to who we are and where we are going, and when it comes to Unisa, I believe that we are duty-bound not only as leaders, but also as a collective, to work towards the kind of community that allows each and everyone feel that they belong – that Unisa is their home. Without that we will achieve little of lasting value. And yes, it does mean constructing together a new DNA for Unisa, characterized by openness, scholarly tradition, critical thinking, self-reflection and the values of African cultures – openness, warmth, compassion, inclusiveness and community. That is the task at hand. It should inform everything that we do, because make no mistake, it is a complex task, requiring a fundamental mindset change for most of us. We cannot underestimate the challenge but I genuinely believe that if we are there for each other, if we begin to understand that we are part of a team and a family that has our respective best interests at heart, then we can make progress. This summit is in part, a community building exercise. Of course we are learning more about what is expected of us as ethical servant leaders, but I hope that in that process we are all beginning to understand that in order to get there we have to become a supportive team and an engaged community with a shared vision and aspirations.

I hope that you can see how wonderfully Unisa's C's seem to have aligned naturally to the 10 principles of servant leadership. "Aha", you are probably saying, "there are two Cs left over!" You are right. But let me suggest that without Commitment, that is - *dedicating ourselves individually and collectively, to promoting and upholding the vision, goals and values of Unisa-* and without Courage, that is - *deciding and making choices with conviction and resolution in the best interests of the Institution* - we will not succeed. I would like to believe that your presence here today is an indication of that Commitment and Courage.

Colleagues I would like to conclude by mentioning briefly that both the 10 Principles of Servant Leadership and Unisa Transformation Charter are also completely consonant with the King III report and Unisa 2015 revisited.

The King III Report asserts amongst others:

- Good corporate citizenship should be integrated into the culture of the company.

- Good corporate citizenship transforms relationships in that individual workers and stakeholders are able to communicate openly. This ensures that the business enterprise is aligned to the society in which it operates and that those involved in the operation of the company begin to align their personal and company values.

An ethical corporate culture requires:

- that all directors follow ethical standards;
- that the interests of all stakeholders should be taken into account in making decisions;
- that the conduct of individuals needs to improve moral values;
- that business activities should be conducted with integrity, fairness and vision;
- that fair competition practices are followed in all aspects of the business activity;
- that poor performance is never blamed on the exercise of good ethical standards.

And of course, as Dr Phosa mentioned this morning:

The King III Report suggests that there are five moral duties, namely:

1. Conscience: This involves intellectual honesty and avoiding conflicts of interest
2. Care: Directors are required to exercise care in the affairs of the company.
3. Competence: Directors should have the knowledge and skill required to be directors of a company.
4. Commitment: Directors should be diligent
5. Courage: Directors should have the courage to take decisions regardless of the risks.

Unisa's 2015 Revisited includes under the exposition of its vision, mission and goals include the following statements:

Our Vision

Service of humanity' underscores the traditional ideals of a university to promote universality, to produce and disseminate knowledge, promote culture, and serve causes which advance society and humanity. Elaborated from the perspective of an African University, it means that the University is one located and rooted in the African context, developing knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary for the development of the African continent.

Our values: SOCIAL JUSTICE AND FAIRNESS, EXCELLENCE WITH INTEGRITY

Inspired by the foundational precepts of our transforming society, social justice and fairness remain the values that animate our strategy, guide our efforts and influence our imagined future.

Upon further reflection, it was felt that pursuit of excellence for its own sake could be sterile. Excellence and integrity are therefore combined to suggest that excellence cannot be pursued as an end in itself and aloof from the major challenges confronting higher education. Therefore, excellence must be pursued with integrity to have value.

Finally, ethical conduct was viewed as a critical element of integrity. In practice, it requires correct action and decision-making even in the absence of direct oversight and scrutiny.

And, three Strategic goals that speak to the ethos of servant leadership:

Goal 3: Grow community engagement initiatives

Goal 5: Create an enabling environment for persons with disabilities

Goal 6: Establish Unisa as a leader in sound corporate governance and the promotion of sustainability.

Colleagues I think you will agree that Unisa is positioned and poised in terms of its strategy, vision, mission and goals, *and* in terms of its Transformation Charter and leadership strategy and intent, to grow toward the kind of high performance institution that I am sure we all aspire to. I believe that today's Summit has provided a very clear understanding of what is meant by servant leadership and how we as an institution have illuminated that in our transformation statement and 11 Cs plus one. These commitments are undergirded by our institutional strategy. The building blocks have been laid and as we progress on our path toward an affirming institutional expression of servant leadership more building blocks will be added - including an institutional Policy of Ethics.

We have no excuse now. We can't say that we don't know what servant leadership entails or now it fits into Unisa's strategy. So it is incumbent upon us as leaders to set the example and supporting one another, boldly begin reconstructing our institution's DNA in pursuit of an institutional we can be justifiably proud of.

I thank you and I wish you well.