



REACHING SERVANT-LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE JOURNEY OF FORGIVENESS

—KATHRYN ACORDA HARLAN

THE INTRODUCTION OF FORGIVENESS AND SERVANT- LEADERSHIP

I was introduced to the true magnitude of forgiveness through a leadership course at Gonzaga University in the early summer of 2021. The basic definition and meaning of forgiveness was evident. However, understanding the value of forgiveness, as a recipient and giver was a new endeavor. We are introduced to forgiveness as early as preschool. However, to truly understand, recognize and practice forgiveness is a lifelong lesson and journey. Forgiveness is a process. Since this course at Gonzaga University, I have continued to research forgiveness and how it relates to human interaction, our physical and emotional health and how it plays a role on a macrolevel within societies and countries. In addition, I incorporated the ability to forgive within that of a servant-leadership perspective and how learning to forgive others and ourselves defines a true servant-leader where we put those around us before oneself.

According to Parry Stelter (2018), founder of Word of Hope Ministries and Doctoral Candidate in Contextual Leadership through Providence Seminary and University:



Forgiveness is one of those experiences that you participate in as a receiver and as a giver. With all the talk in the circles of the truth and reconciliation meetings that have taken place, and all the recommendations that came forth, forgiveness must play a vital role in that process. Forgiveness is the only way to freedom. Forgiveness is the only way to be set free. Forgiveness is the only way to heal your broken heart. Forgiveness is not easy, but it is worth it. Truth and reconciliation can't happen fully without forgiveness extended both ways. (pp. 1-2)

While forgiveness often requires a conscious effort and practice, forgiveness also creates freedom and humility (Fox et al., 2017).

Robert Greenleaf is the founder and father of servant-leadership. He defined servant-leadership where leaders put others before themselves. Greenleaf (1970) states in his first chronicled and coveted essay, *The Servant as Leader*:

I am hopeful for these times, despite the tension and conflict, because more natural servants are trying to see clearly the world as it is and are listening carefully to prophetic voices that are speaking *now*. They are challenging the pervasive injustice with greater force and they are taking sharper issue with the wide disparity between the quality of society they know is reasonable and possible with available resources, and, on the other hand, the actual performance of the whole range of institutions that exist to serve society. (p. 11)

In essence and in its simplest form, Greenleaf's leadership theory is that the servant-leader is servant first (Greenleaf, 1970). He elaborates, "It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead" (p. 15). Throughout the last five decades, Greenleaf's theory of servant-leadership has gained tremendous recognition throughout the various spheres of academia,



business management, leadership, humanities, psychology, sociology, communication and anthropology. Servant-leadership emphasizes “on leaders whose primary aim is to serve their followers while developing employees to their fullest potential in different areas such as task effectiveness, community stewardship, self-motivation, and also the development of their leadership capabilities” (Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015, p. 119).

While servant-leadership has taken a center stage in the world of business and management, servant-leadership also plays a crucial role and importance within non-profit organizations, within religious affiliations, within our personal relationships with our families, friends and also within our role as individuals in our collective society.

Larry Spears (2020), who led the Greenleaf Foundation, ultimately “decoded” much of Greenleaf’s research and writings and comprised a list of ten characteristics of servant-leadership including: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people and building community. Through these characteristics of servant-leadership, individuals can strive towards leading a life of servant-leadership both personally and professionally. Greenleaf (1970) adds, “so many, having made their awesome decision of autonomy and independence from tradition, and having taken their firm stand against injustice and hypocrisy, find it hard to convert themselves into affirmative builders of a better society” (p. 12). Effective leaders build relationships with others through reciprocity and the virtues of love, forgiveness and trust (Caldwell & Dixon, 2010). Great leaders transform the lives of others and understand the value of others (Caldwell & Dixon, 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2006). By understanding the importance of others, servant-leaders can work to create healthy interactions, situations, environments and societies.



As employees within a professional organization, as teachers and college professors within a classroom, as members within a family and as individuals within a society, we must continually practice and work to perfect the characteristics of servant-leadership. Putting others before ourselves. Striving to serve and support others by putting their needs before ours is the essence of servant-leadership. By practicing servant-leadership, our organizations become more ethical and profitable, our families and personal relationships become stronger and our society becomes more cohesive and unified. Through living virtuously with kindness, forgiveness and patience, we can become servant-leaders.

“Servant leadership is the kind of literary image that is sown into the fabric of life, and when applied to personal responsibility in relationships, reconciliation and forgiveness replace retribution and blame” (Ferch, 2012, p. 32). Caldwell and Dixon (2010) summarize and connect servant-leadership and forgiveness:

Connecting forgiveness with servant leadership, Greenleaf (1998, p. 21) explained that the “servant always accepts and empathizes, never rejects. The servant as leader always accepts the person, but sometimes refuses to accept some of the person’s effort or performance as good enough.” Forgiving others frees them from the burden of past mistakes and grants them the opportunity to begin anew. The concept of forgiveness is characterized by the Greek *metanoia*, which literally means the changing of one’s mind. The implication of *metanoia* is that those who have evolved from error to obedience merit the forgiveness and support of others. (p. 94)



FORGIVENESS AND HOW IT DEFINES US—A PERSONAL REFLECTION

Since being introduced to the concept of forgiveness on deeper and more significant level by Dr. Shann Ferch at Gonzaga University, I have consciously looked within myself. I have taken a true self-reflective view of my life, both personally and professionally, and what I owe to others.

Engagement with my peers and delving deep into the content, readings and films which encompassed this Leadership, Justice and Forgiveness graduate level course at Gonzaga, I realized that while I have personally and easily apologized throughout my life, I have actually never truly asked for forgiveness. I can remember many times throughout my life where I owe many people a true and heart-felt apology and more importantly, I owe these individuals the opportunity to accept my apology. Tragically, some of these people are no longer with me. I have a personal example of how the lack of forgiveness within a relationship can create fissions, division and animosity towards one another.

I have been married to my husband for over 12 years. I was 35 when I married him; he was 10 years older than I. It was quite a personal adjustment for both of us. He had two adolescent children. I left my job, career and life in Hawaii to move to the Pacific Northwest. We were adults with careers, assets, one of us with children, different political and ideological views and a general way of living. Tremendous sacrifices and comprises have been made by both of us.

Like most marriages, we have our conflicts and disagreements and like most, we work through them. Several months ago, we both behaved poorly to each other and became agitated and unkind to each other. Phones were hung up, an unkind text message was sent and then began days of “talking-when-necessary” in order to manage our household, kids and the overall day.



In the past, I would not have apologized. I would not have worked towards kindness and I would not have considered forgiveness. I would have just let time cover the conflict; not heal the wound, just cover it. No one would have apologized and our relationship would have been bruised. While those bruises heal, the unresolved conflicts continue to build and create walls. Walls of animosity, resentment, blame and indifference. Through the freedom of choice, I decided to take a step forward. I chose through free-will to not only simply apologize, but to sincerely and honestly and without conditions ask for forgiveness. One of the contributors of *Servant-Leadership and Forgiveness: How Leaders Help Heal the Heart of the World* Rakiya Farah (2020) writes,

According to Greenleaf, the servant “views any problem in the world as *in here*, inside oneself, not *out there*” (as cited in Senge, 1995, p. 240). In the light of this statement, self-responsibility requires an honest examination of one’s personal role in contributing to conflict, and to its potential resolution. (p. 89)

Farah continues and quotes Reyes (n.d.), “I take total responsibility for everything that happens to me and what I create . . . I have sovereignty and self-determination over what I say and how I interact. I choose consciously to interact with love and compassion” (p. 89). Each of us has sovereignty and we as individuals need to take personal responsibility for our actions rather than to place blame on others who surround us.

A couple of days after the conflict, we were at dinner at an amazing Indian restaurant in Bend, Oregon. We were sitting at the table and I told my husband that I was sincerely sorry for the way I behaved and how I spoke to him during our conversation on the phone. I asked for his forgiveness and then, I sat in silence. For the first time, I gave him the opportunity to either accept or deny my apology. I suddenly realized that I had the potential, the strength and the power to make personal changes in



our relationship through my actions. I had the opportunity to strengthen our relationship or continue to allow it to weaken. I took personal responsibility for my actions during the argument and for my actions sought forgiveness and resolution. His reaction to my apology was that of gratitude. He was relieved that I took the first step and more importantly, he was honored that I asked for forgiveness. I made a conscious effort to knowledge the importance of our relationship and the importance of his feelings. Through forgiveness, gratitude and kindness we embarked on a new level of our relationship. Forgiveness comes in many shapes and forms. As humans, we must learn to apologize to those around us for small wrongdoings and furthermore, provide those around us the time and opportunity to accept this apology. As part of a greater whole, we must learn to grant forgiveness as we cannot move forward without this. Finally, we must also learn to forgive ourselves. Small wrongdoings within personal relationships over time will weaken relationships. They will erode the love, kindness, patience and respect that once existed. Different from small wrongdoings, major atrocities against others must also be recognized and forgiven. We must forgive and be forgiven as individuals to truly strengthen our families, societies and countries.

Shann Ferch (2012) writes:

In my experience, unless we are presented with the idea, we rarely think of forgiveness. For most, forgiveness and the world of relationships in which forgiveness exists and finds its home are like an alternate universe behind an ever-hidden door. And even on the chance that we find the door open and light sifting from the opening, our own anger, bitterness, fear and shame often keep us from entering in. A unique progression asserts itself: (1) we don't often think of forgiveness; (2) when we do, we often resist the idea; (3) when we cease our resistance, we may think, *maybe I need to forgive someone*. Strangely, however, if the progression stops there,



life remains somewhat muted. (p. 46)

My natural tendency in these types of situations is allow time to simply run its course. No apology. No acknowledgement. I would exist in a muted form. At best, I may have apologized in passing while putting groceries away in the midst of another conversational topic. I would have placed the blame and responsibility on my husband and I would have waited for him to apology to me. This time, I chose to take personal responsibility, accept my faults and my actions, and ask for forgiveness. I gave this situation and my husband my time and attention to ask for forgiveness and find resolve. I chose to continue and try to go beyond the progressive process of self-reflection and personal responsibility. I realized, through forgiveness, that I am able to strengthen my personal relationship. As forgiveness became present in our relationship, other virtues naturally evolved; virtues of love, patience, gratitude and empathy. In addition to the art of forgiveness, gratitude and kindness are important aspects of servant-leadership. As Ferch (2012) so eloquently writes, “forgiveness takes a conscious effort; it takes practice” (p. 46).

Academic and professional research on emotion and the implications of how we cope with emotion continues to advance. Research from the lens of sociology, psychology, physiology and humanities seeks answers and consequences of how we handle and cope with various types of emotion including that of forgiveness. According to Karen Swartz (2022), MD at Johns Hopkins University:

Forgiveness is not just about saying the words. It is an active process in which you make a conscious decision to let go of negative feelings whether the person deserves it or not. As you release the anger, resentment and hostility, you being to feel empathy compassion and sometimes even affection for the person who wronged you. (para. 3)



We need as individuals to understand what forgiveness truly is and how to continue to ask and seek for forgiveness both of ourselves and of others. The emotional impact of learning to forgive will allow us personal freedom and with this personal freedom comes a greater appreciation for not only ourselves, but a greater appreciation for those around us. According to Dirk Van Dierendonck and Kathleen Patterson (2015), “Gratitude can be defined as a feeling of thankful appreciation for the good things received in life. There is abundant evidence that a grateful attitude is related to a greater sense of well-being and happiness” (p. 125).

Everett L. Worthington Jr (2022), Commonwealth Professor Emeritus at Virginia Commonwealth University, has done extensive research and lectures on forgiveness. He coined the model of forgiveness with the acronym, REACH (Fox et al., 2017; VanderWeele, 2018). The REACH model of forgiveness includes the process of recall, empathize, altruism, commitment and holding/maintaining (VanderWeele, 2018; Worthington, 2022). In the *American Journal of Public Health*, Dr. Tyler VanderWeele (2018) concluded, “When you learn to forgive, you are no longer trapped by the past actions of others and can finally feel free” (pp. 189-190). He elaborates his research by stating:

Forgiveness is generally understood as a victim’s replacing ill will toward the wrong doer with goodwill or as the reducing of negative thoughts, emotions, and behaviors and replacing these with positive thoughts, emotions, and behaviors toward the offender.

Observational studies suggest that forgiveness is associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, and hostility; higher positive emotion; higher satisfaction with life; higher social support; and fewer self-reported health symptoms. (pp. 189-190)

Identifying, learning and practicing the process and emotion of forgiveness can lead to physical and emotional health benefits, but



equally important are the benefits of being an individual who is able to play an instrumental and beneficial role within their home, their workplace and within society.

Van Dierendonck and Patterson (2015) elaborate by stating:

Gratitude has a strong otherness orientation, which differentiates it from psychological capital dimensions such as hope and resilience. Leaders with a grateful attitude are more likely to have an open attitude toward the people around them, which is an essential characteristic of servant leaders. (p. 125)

By expressing gratitude, leaders and individuals are able to place importance on others and show a self-less way of leading and living. Gratitude and forgiveness are interesting qualities many believe can be learned skills. Individuals can learn to forgive and individuals can learn to be grateful.

I believe through kindness, gratitude for each other, and forgiveness, we as individuals, parents, educators and leaders can perpetuate these virtues as we live our lives. Extending a heartfelt apology acknowledged my husband's feelings and his perspective. Through my past actions of allowing time to "settle the conflict" created a relationship oftentimes of animosity, personal discord and emotional separation. I can honestly confess that within 100% of all of my personal disagreements and conflicts, I have responsibility and culpability. I may not have started or been the direct cause of all conflicts, but my reactions, communication skills, words and actions could serve to divide and alienate. I take responsibility for not working towards unity, love, patience and grace. I take responsibility for not showing gratitude and kindness. I take responsibility for not taking the first step forward. If individuals made a conscious effort to choose kindness, gratitude and forgiveness, imagine the strength and success of family units, classrooms, organizations, societies, and countries. Since this situation, I find myself finding daily



opportunities to extend myself and truly practice that of forgiveness. Similar to that of listening, patience, and kindness, forgiveness is a skill that takes practice; it takes effort; it takes refinement.

“Forgiveness, a choice to accept and to look past the faults of another and to reconcile a relationship despite a perceived betrayal” (Caldwell & Dixon, 2010, p. 93), has been acknowledged as a noble quality of a compassionate and effective leader (Ferch, 2004). Caldwell and Dixon (2010) continue, “forgiving another person for failing to honor a perceived duty allows that person to regain self-esteem and stores the ability of people to work together comfortably” (p. 93). This applies within our personal relationships as well as our professional relationships. Furthermore, the practice of forgiveness also allows us to live within a society of restoration rather than retribution.

THE EXPERIENCE OF ANOTHER

I have the honor and pleasure to teach communication studies at a Washington State community college. In an intercultural communication we discuss communication processes and theories in relation to emotion and cultural differences. In class one quarter, we discussed the emotion of forgiveness and they were asked to write a short essay on a time when they either sought or granted forgiveness. One of my students wrote on a personal and life-changing event in her life. Her story was poignant, powerful and life altering. With her permission, I am able to share Courtney Olsson’s (2022) personal experience. This is her story:

Back in high school, I had recently started driving. The kind of freedom that comes with driving your car is unmatched, which is why I would run at every chance I got to drive a car. Whether it was after I came back home from school, or late after I was done with my homework. Driving a car came with the edge of showing off to my friends as I was one of the first ones from my friend



group to learn to drive. I was in a different state of mind at the time; one where I thought I was above the world and nothing could ever come in my way to stop me. It was probably the raging hormones and the adolescence that had this effect on me but soon enough I would realize how damaging my mindset was. The consequences that could follow were unfathomable for me, at least.

On one unfortunate night, I was up to no good and decided to go out and drive my father's car. I was simultaneously texting my friend while driving. Unbeknownst to me, there was a young man on the pavement who was on his way home. Being the novice driver I was, the car got out of control and I ended up hitting the young man. Dumb and dazed, I quickly snapped out of the trance I was in and went to help him. The man was in immense pain and I could see that his leg was hurt. I called my parents to take over the situation as I was in too much of a mental turmoil to deal with the ordeal unfolding before me. The man was treated for his wounds and he ended up not pressing charges. The only thing he asked for was a sincere apology from me, for which my parents pushed me as well. This is where I came to a crossroad and made another poor decision. I did not apologize because my ego was too big to be apologetic in the slightest.

Months passed and this incident would not leave my mind. Day by day, I was falling into an abyss that was swallowing me whole. The guilt and regret would conquer me every day and my actions would flash into my mind, making me realize how weak of a person I truly was. I could not apologize in a situation where I was completely in the wrong because I was in denial and could not imagine myself being wrong, ever. At this point in my life, I was desperate to see the young man once so I could ask for forgiveness because if I did not, the guilt and regret would eat me alive.



All of this changed when I came face-to-face with the man in a parking lot. This meeting caught me completely off guard. My emotions welled up all of a sudden and all the thoughts I had in these past months came rushing back to me. This time, I was determined not to let this chance pass. Not being able to control my emotions, my eyes welled up and I started crying, struggling to mutter an apology. I could tell that the man recognized who I was and he just stood there with a blank expression. I managed to blurt out an apology and it was the sincerest I had ever been with my emotions. The man told me that he had forgiven me and that I had a long way to go as I was still a teenager.

This encounter not only made me realize the strength that lies within a person, but also taught me the value and power of one sincere apology.

I found Courtney's personal experience so powerful and profound. We hear of major atrocities to others through historical events including the Holocaust and the South African Apartheid, yet we really cannot fully understand the magnitude of personal loss and suffering. Courtney's experience was that of a tremendous wrong doing and the initial inability to accept responsibility and ask for forgiveness. Through her personal process, she was able to overcome her emotions and fears, and ask for forgiveness. By doing so, Courtney was able to begin healing as was the individual seeking forgiveness.

In a book titled *Dilemmas of Intervention: Social Science for Stabilization and Reconstruction*, Wilke, Davis, and Chivvis (2011) discuss establishing social conditions of trust and cooperation using apology and restitution:

Apologies have a powerful social impact. Although they cannot undo past wrongs, they can help to undo some of the damage of



past wrongs by delegitimizing them (Tavuchis, 1991). Some authors argue that reconciliation efforts without any form of apology cannot hope to succeed (Smits, 2003) . . . Apologies that are qualified, appear insincere, or are inconsistent with the apologizer's behavior will irritate conflict and reduce cooperative drives; unfelt apologies are better left unsaid. (pp. 207-208)

Enright (2001) writes:

Forgiving is the act of mercy toward an offender, someone who does not necessarily deserve our mercy. It is a gift to our offender for the purpose of changing the relationship between ourselves and those who have hurt us. Even if the offender is a stranger, we change our relationship because we are no longer controlled by angry feelings toward this person. In spite of everything that the offender has done, we are willing to treat him or her as a member of the human community. (pp. 25-26)

EFFECTS ON SOCIETY AND WITHIN A COMMUNITY

Most of us do not have a voice that can impact an entire society. We aren't authors, celebrities, politicians or charismatic public figures. Most of us will not be the next Martin Luther King, Jr, however, there is a possibility. While we don't have the impact in numbers and volume, we can carry the impact of substance and change. While we may not be in the position or have the capacity to influence and lead the masses, we are also not isolated humans and we do have the ability to influence those around us. As one individual human, I can truly impact other humans around me. I can set an example and put forth action and treat the people that I interact with kindness, gratitude, forgiveness and servanthood. I can impact the lives of my children, the lives of my students, the lives of strangers I interact with and the life of my husband. In effect, those individuals can then impact the lives of other humans and perpetual



process continues. Earlier, I reference Greenleaf and how individuals have an amazing decision to take a stand against injustice and hypocrisy (Greenleaf, 1970). While we have that ability, finding the action to make the change can be challenging as Greenleaf (1970) concurs, “[individuals] find it hard to convert themselves into affirmative builders of a better society” (p. 12). “Great leaders build trust, commitment, and meaning for the followers because of their commitment to the welfare of others” (Caldwell & Dixon, 2010, p. 94).

In Desmond Tutu’s book *No Future Without Forgiveness* regarding South Africa’s Apartheid and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Judge Mahomed claims:

The country has neither the resources nor the skills to reverse fully these massive wrongs. It will take many years of strong commitments, sensitivity and labor to “reconstruct our society” so as to fulfill the legitimate dreams of new generations exposed to real opportunities for advancement denied to preceding generations initially by the execution of apartheid itself and for a long time after its formal demise, by its relentless consequences. (as cited in Tutu, 1997, p. 59)

Even as a result of the decades long racism and violence in South Africa, servant-leaders united to create the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which ultimately allowed perpetrators to ask for forgiveness and it provided a time and space for victims and victims’ families to receive and accept forgiveness. The world watched Mandela and the country create peace and move forward together. We have the ability as individuals and as a society to choose forgiveness, gratitude and kindness. Not only will that create peace for all people, but these actions will perpetuate through generations.

It’s perplexing that humans can choose through free will the ability to help others and perpetuate kindness, compassionate and forgiveness



and yet, natural instincts are to exhibit blame, anger, impatience, animosity, rudeness and hatred. We chose this harmful and negative path even as a detriment to our own personal, spiritual and mental health. Research is showing that choosing a life of servanthood, forgiveness and gratitude can lead to better health (Ferch, 2012). Why is it easier to blame and engage in hate and violence? Why do we instinctively choose the path that harms our personal relationships and is a detriment to our personal health?

By looking within ourselves and how we choose to live our lives and learning to accept forgiveness and grant forgiveness, we can live a meaningful life full of virtue. By living a virtuous life, we can learn to love, give, offer grace and extend forgiveness. All of us face daily challenges where we conflict with others. By extending forgiveness and kindness, we can live harmoniously. Some of us have faced major atrocities and wrong doings. These personal experiences are also opportunities to learn to forgive not only of others, but also of ourselves.

“Forgiving allows others to move forward within the burden of weight that accompanies resentment, distrust, and animosity” (Caldwell & Dixon, 2010, p. 94). Further elaborating, Lennick and Kiel (2008) define forgiveness as “both letting go of one’s own mistakes and letting go of others’ mistakes while learning from and addressing those mistakes both short and long term” (pp. 109-110).

PERSONAL PLAN OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP THROUGH FORGIVENESS, EMPATHY & LISTENING WITH A CULTURALLY DIVERSE LENS

Ferch (2021) during one of his presentations stated, “When you are a servant leader, those around you become more autonomous, wise, free, healthier and are more likely to become servant leaders themselves.” The qualities and characteristics of servant-leadership are vast. Leadership experts agree that servant-leaders concentrate on the greater good of



society as well as the individuals around them putting both before themselves. Servant-leadership has respect for cultures and personal upbringing (Green, 2010).

Listening is a key attribute of servant-leadership. Spears (2010) in earlier interviews discusses servant-leadership and conflict. He points out that conflict is inevitable both in personal interactions and within professional settings. He believes one the most poignant characteristics of excellent servant-leadership, is that of listening (Spears, 2010). Spears (2010) believes that conflict generally escalates when no one is listening. I know that from my personal and professional interactions, the lack of listening can have serious consequences including confusion, errors, and people feeling under-appreciated and under-valued. Spears states that servant-leaders should focus on listening and refining listening skills. The art of listening will build relationships, create a greater understanding of others and foster diversity (Spears, 2010).

Through empathy and listening, one can truly engage with individuals on a personal and professional level. Empathy is the ability to relate to others on a deeper emotional level. Greenleaf (1970) states, “empathy is the imaginative projection of one’s own consciousness into another being. The servant always accepts and empathizes, never rejects” (p. 21). Having a deep understanding of forgiveness and empathy creates a servant-leader. Forgiving others and ourselves allows us to perpetuate those virtues onto those who surround us.

Martin Luther King Jr, in one of his many historical acclaimed speeches proclaimed that anyone can lead (Vivanco, 2016). King said, “Everybody can serve. You need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love” (as cited in Vivanco, 2016). We can lead through empathy, listening and honoring others. We can lead through putting others needs before our own. Greenleaf concentrates throughout his essays on the essence and principle that anyone can truly practice servant-leadership



just as Martin Luther King, Jr spoke of so eloquently in his time.

Francis Benedict (2010) talks of how a servant-leader is someone who tries to promote the best for the individual and what is best for the community. He elaborates that servant-leaders must have a sense that, “all individuals are sacred and worthy” (Benedict, 2010). This is an important and crucial quality we need to instill within our society and within all individuals within a collective society. For my personal plan, working towards servant-leadership while focusing on forgiveness, gratitude and kindness in my classroom, in my home and throughout my life will be through empathy and listening.

The three most important roles I currently play in my life are that of mother, wife and educator. The profession of an educator is servanthood-based. As a teacher, instructor or professor, it is not necessarily one’s place to tell students the answer, but to guide them into forming their own thoughts and perspectives and to exercise and encourage critical thinking. I believe that by practicing servant-leadership in my classroom, I am able to show empathy and stewardship towards my students. One of the greatest gifts I can provide to them is my ability to listen. These servant-leadership qualities also play a pivotal role in the relationship with my husband and how I ultimately choose to raise my children.

I will continue to work to honor diversity. I have lived most of my adult life in culturally-rich environments, including 15 years in Hawaii. I also worked in Tokyo for a short time. I concur with Spears in which, “diversity has everything and nothing to do with servant-leadership (Spears, 2010). Spears clarifies this powerful statement and claims that regardless of differences in gender, race, and religious affiliation, anyone has the ability to practice servant-leadership. And on the contrary, diversity plays a very important role in servant-leadership in that differences are significant and should be recognized, celebrated and honored (Spears, 2010). Cultural differences play a significant part of



healthy and productive decision-making and collaboration. In my personal life, I will continually strive for patience, kindness, grace, gratitude, empathy and forgiveness. My relationship with my husband and the wellbeing of my children are the most important aspects of my life. While I am unable to ask for forgiveness of those who have passed, I can lead a life of servant-leadership, forgiveness, gratitude, and kindness within my home and in honor of my family.

Greenleaf (1970) states:

My hope for the future rests in part on my belief that among the legions of deprived and unsophisticated people are many true servants who will lead, and that most of them can learn to discriminate among those who presume to serve them and identify the true servants. (p. 16)

Olsson's (2022) experience is so profound. As we continue to work towards a path of learning to forgive and ask for forgiveness on a daily basis to strengthen our relationships both personally and on a societal level, many of us may have faced a life-altering situation in where people's lives changed because of the inability to forgive and reconcile. Whether learning to forgive on a daily basis or learning to recover from a major loss, we must continue to work towards a path of learning to forgive each other and ourselves.

Each of us regardless of our upbringing, social class, race, religion or any other classification has the ability to practice servant-leadership. We all have the ability to practice kindness, gratitude and forgiveness each day that we live. I know that I need to be consciously aware of criticizing, blaming and judging other individuals for their ideologies, actions and words. Instead, I need to offer understanding, grace and patience through listening and empathy. As individuals within a society, we each have the decision to offer forgiveness, gratitude and kindness and move towards a healthy collective society. Putting the interests of



others before our own personal interests will contribute to a more productive and healthy community. “Meaningful dialogue gives rise to the forces that unhinge the way we harm each other, opening us towards a more accepting and empathic understanding of one another” (Ferch, 2005, p. 107).

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Kathryn Acorda Harlan is a college instructor at the Lower Columbia College in Longview, Washington where she teaches various communication, English, career education and college readiness courses. She has a Master's of Arts degree in communication leadership with a concentration in college teaching of communication from Gonzaga



University in Spokane, Washington, and a Bachelor of Science in organizational communication from the University of Portland in Portland, Oregon. She is currently a member of Alpha Sigma Nu and Lambda Pi Eta. Harlan is also a member of the International Leadership Association, National Communication Association and the Greenleaf Center of Servant Leadership. She is a strong advocate for philanthropy work and has served on numerous boards throughout her career including: Cowlitz County CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate for foster children), Child and Family Services, Domestic Violence Action Center and the Japanese Chamber of Commerce.

Harlan resides in Longview, Washington and spends much of her free time in Bend, Oregon with her family where they enjoy mountain biking and trail running. Harlan lived and worked in Honolulu for over a decade where she was in corporate communications and public relations. Her focus was on real estate development, construction and engineering, tourism and philanthropy. While a part of her heart will always remain on the island of Oahu, she loves the pacific northwest and the beautiful forests.