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EFS SERVANT LEADERSHIP FOCUS

A monthly newsletter to promote and stimulate servant leadership ideas & tools into the Viox culture.

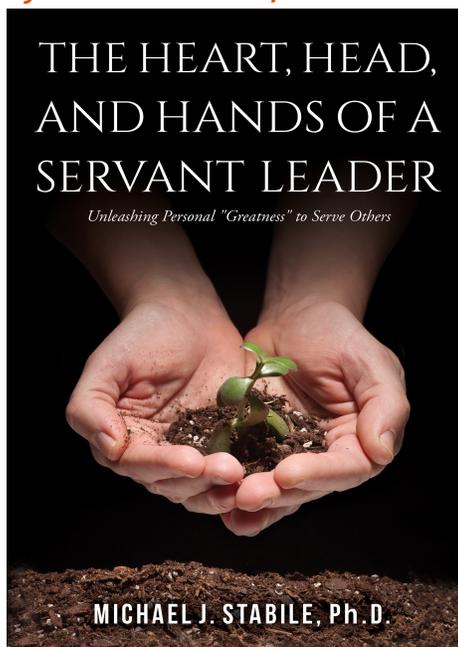
SPECIAL EDITION NEWSLETTER

This is a special edition of the Servant Leadership Focus Newsletter. Our goal is to really connect with servant leaders who desire to empower their thinking and be equipped to grow personally and professionally. **And there is no better way to connect with people than by telling your leadership story.** Sharing stories is a great transformational tool.



The Heart, Head, And Hands of a Servant Leader

By: Michael J. Stabile, Ph.D.



Those of us who experienced story telling in our families or around a camp-fire as children understand the impact stories have on our experiences and the very formation of who we are and our values. There is new research from neuroscience about the power of story telling to shape our brains and thinking.

As many of you know, we recently published our new book: ***The Heart, Head, and Hands of a Servant Leader: Unleashing Personal "Greatness" to Serve Others.*** (If you are interested in getting

the book it is available on Amazon.com and other book retailers, also if you have read my book or part of it, please write a review of it on Amazon, it is much appreciated.) In this issue, we will be hearing some of the transformational stories from clients of the *Servant Leadership Coaching System* as well as graduate students from Xavier University. These testimonies were taken from antidotal notes from our **Sixty-Day Challenge** training exercises and a vital part of the new book. To maintain confidentiality we excluded the names in the book and this newsletter article.

The Sixty-Day Challenge for Building Focus of Attention

Make a purposeful shift in your thinking and calendar to focus on relationships over task. Our modern world has put us on the treadmill of busyness and task focus. The harassed and helpless mind-set I described in the opening chapters has made us very task or “I”-focused in all of our interactions. We have become all about just getting things done versus how can we really serve the needs of others. This shift is simple, but it will have a profound effect on how you approach your daily schedule, both at home and at work.

After hearing about the sixty-day challenge to build the muscle of focus of attention, a busy central office school administrator took action by changing the background wallpaper of her smartphone. She simply printed in the background **Relationship over task**. She reported that even after one week, let alone thirty to sixty days, this simple reminder was having an amazing effect on all of her interactions:

I thought I was connected and very relational until I realized how “task” focused I had become. What I have come to realize is that my focus really wasn’t on people; it was simply getting to the next task, next meeting, and, honestly, just getting my family to the right event or activity. When I refocused every interaction and conversation with a simple reminder of who am I talking to, what is most important to them, and how can I connect with them, I found that my family, my coworkers, and my direct reports responded and were much more open. However, as I have been building this habit over the past sixty days, I can see what is happening inside of me. I am changing and really being present in the moment for what is most important, people!

After being exposed to the sixty-day challenge to build the muscle of attention, a busy senior-level business executive reported to a servant leadership training team on the power of the five-minute reboot:

I can’t tell you how much my life has been changed over the past sixty days. It has been an amazing experience in both my personal and professional lives. First, I took the suggestion to do the five-minute reboot before every interaction and meeting and to just stop and do the deep breathing. My sense of anxiousness has been lowered, and my ability to concentrate on what is most important in the moment has been enhanced.

At work, I am scheduling my meetings differently. I no longer schedule the meetings that I am in charge of on the hour; instead, I start meetings ten minutes past the hour (e.g., 9:10 a.m.) and run

thirty- to fifty-minute meetings. If meetings run longer, I try to cut them off no later than five minutes after the hour. This gives me time to reboot for the next meeting and be focused on whom I am meeting with and what is most important. The results have been amazing. Not only do I feel more connected and in tune, but others have noticed that the quality of our meetings is more “we” focused and productive.

On my ride home, I reboot and think about my wife and what is most important for her in that moment. I have thought about specific questions that progressively build connection with her. With my two children, I am more in the moment with them, and we have purposely focused on how to connect with each one of them individually. I can only tell you in tears that this has been transformational for me and my family.

Recently, a woman expressed how the five-minute reboot process has been instrumental in relieving her anxiety and high blood pressure:

I thought I was going to have a heart attack! I had severe pains in my chest and felt like someone was sitting on my chest. After a series of tests with a cardiologist, he concluded that it was not a heart issue but a result of stress. My stress levels had caused me to have high blood pressure and panic attacks. Through the process of gaining control of the anxiety and stress, I realized my thinking and mind-set were causing this problem. Over time, I was obsessing about things I couldn’t control and developed a very negative focus that was not only impacting me but all of my relationships and interactions. The simple process of the five-minute reboot that begins with deep breathing and refocusing your mind has lowered my blood pressure and given me a sense of calm in the middle of life’s storms. Over the course of the sixty days, I noticed a significant decrease in this heaviness in my chest and felt more relaxed and at peace than I had in quite a while. Recently, during a checkup with my cardiologist, I was taken off my blood pressure medication. When I sense the anxiety or rising stress levels, I immediately start the reboot process.

The five-minute reboot, as you can see from the previous testimonies, can be transformational and begin the process of renewing your mind-set. Building the muscle of attention is not just a skill for a servant leader; it is a process that can change every life.

The 70/30 Principle

(70% listen/ask questions—30% talk) Talk less, listen more, ask questions)

When you do speak, instead of giving opinions or advice, use what you have discovered about things you have in common and share a story from your personal experience. People relate to stories and personal experience. In your story, be vulnerable by relating your own struggle, and show your appreciation of the other person's point of view. Keep in mind that this conversation is not about you; it is about the other person or persons. Therefore, keep the balance of the 70/30 principle in the forefront of your mind.

People really don't care how much you know until they feel and experience how much you really care. Listening that connects allows you the opportunity to become a trusted adviser and a person who leads by serving the needs of others.

A senior-level leader in one of our servant leader training groups reported on the power of the 70/30 principle both personal and professionally:

My wife has told me that I have "husband ears"—I only act like I am listening to her. Over the years, this has been a joke she tells others; however, it wasn't until the training session on the power of connection and empathy that I realized that this was not only true but painfully negatively impacting our family. To be honest, as I reflected on my listening skills and my lack of empathy, I literally wept. It hit me like a ton of bricks. My wife and family deserve better, and I wanted to make a significant change.

I wanted to focus my attention on building relationships through connected listening, so I have been building and practicing the skill of the 70/30 principle over the past sixty days. In tears,

I have to tell you that my relationship with my wife and kids has dramatically changed. I feel like I am present and in the moment because I am hearing and asking questions that connect with them. My wife told me the other day that she feels so loved by me because she feels like I really am hearing and getting her. My college-age son said to me that he didn't feel like I was trying to control him anymore, but allowing him to make his own decisions. Wow, how simple just to listen and ask questions.

Professionally, this practice of the 70/30 principle has helped me not to be such a micromanager of my direct reports. I ask questions to which I don't have the answers and make them think about their own thinking. One of my direct reports told me that for the first time in her life, someone really believes in her. When I probed what she meant by that, she said, "You don't talk at me; you listen and talk with me." I know I still have a long way to go, but as you say, "Progression not perfection."

Reversing Negative Thinking Patterns

The power of positive self-talk can renew your thinking, create new wiring in your brain, and reverse the effects of **negativity**, the **“I can’t” virus**, and **learned helplessness**.

An educator who had been suffering from stress reported to me after going through this process over the course of sixty days that she felt like she was taking charge of her thought life and was experiencing an internal peace through this simple exercise. She commented:

My situation or circumstances have not changed, but I am taking control of my reactions. This exercise has been life changing. Not only am I lowering my stress levels, but also for the first time in many years I am experiencing restful sleep and feel energized.

A middle-level manager who had been struggling with depression and a sense of hopelessness stated:

I know people have recognized my mood and attitude at home and work, but I didn't realize how depressed I have become. My thoughts were overwhelming me, and I felt like I had no control, a victim. There were times when I just felt like this was my life, and nothing was ever going to change. I am so thankful for this exercise; it is changing my life one thought at a time. I have to admit, it is hard, but now I feel like I can take control of my thoughts, and I have hope. I have tools and weapons to combat my own negative thoughts.

Another participant reported that she struggled with self-confidence and self-image:

After sixty days, I realized that what I believed about myself was being exaggerated in my own mind. My thoughts and the “tapes” I played in

my head kept me locked in a type of prison. The messages kept repeating themselves, telling me I wasn't good enough and that I wasn't smart enough; I wasn't going to amount to much. What I have realized is by journaling and refuting is that those messages aren't true. I am good enough and smart enough, and now I am starting to believe it.

A senior leader reported that he felt like he was gaining clarity and power over his thought life:

I feel like a new man. I still struggle, but I don't feel stuck in my thinking. When I find myself drifting back to negativity, I now have tools and a process to take back control. My wife commented to me the other day that she noticed how upbeat and positive I have become. In fact, she said, I am a much better listener. Wow, I didn't realize how negative I was, and it all starts with my own internal thoughts.⁴⁹

Will you join those who are taking control of negative thinking patterns through this simple sixty-day challenge to observe, log, and refute? You, too, can experience the transformational mind-renewal process. You can take control of your thinking, which begins with inhibiting negative patterns that may be subtle or unconscious, but over time, each thought does add up.

The 4R Model Approach to Transformational Change

Typically, you can see **initial habit change in the first thirty to sixty days**; however, for the process of strength of memory for the new habit of thinking to be part of you, **sixty-one days or nine to ten months is a better estimate**. One of the reasons people don't see a renewed mind that helps them tap into their unique personal greatness is that they don't stick with the habit long enough. I don't know how it is for you, but change for me can happen very quickly. However, in order for it to become part of who I am—or, put another way, to unleash my true potential and greatness—it is a process that takes place over time.

I have used the 4R Model Approach in training sessions, coaching, and teaching. I have also taught the process as a development tool and as a framework for coaching and leading others.

A senior-level leader commented:

This process [4R Approach] has given me a handle on how to change and understand why change is so hard for me and others. It has given me a mental framework to help me to be more successful in my personal growth and development.

A graduate student and educational administrator claimed:

The 4R Approach has improved my focus on what really matters in the moment, right now. I have been using this approach for the past sixty days, and it has helped me personally to work through the process of breaking the habit of talking way too much and not listening. I am hearing more and asking more questions, and in turn, I am more in tune to people around me. In fact, my husband commented to me that he felt like I was listening and really hearing what he was saying. Wow, I guess I did talk too much.

A middle-level leader has been using the 4R Approach to work with his direct reports and team:

*I have seen the results in my own life and wanted to use this process in my one-on-one and team meetings. Over the past sixty days, my one-on-one meetings have moved from information to connecting with what is most important to that individual in the moment. I help them focus on one area and walk them through, making it **simple, succinct, and specific**. They come back to me with their plan in twenty-four to forty-eight hours, and I try to send them a note or e-mail in the first five days to ask how they are doing with the process. This gives me the opportunity in our one-on-one follow-ups to focus on what they are working on and help them with accountability. In our team meetings, an e-mail is sent at least forty-eight hours before the meeting and asks them to put down what one thing is most important for us to accomplish in this meeting. Then, someone on the team takes that input and sorts and prioritizes it for the meeting. (We try to narrow it to one to five items, depending on the scope.) After the meeting, each person is assigned a next step, and everyone has to report back to the team within five days on what has been done to that point. Then, when we have our biweekly meeting, there is a focus, and each person has ownership of the process. So far, there has been a tremendous response from my team, and they seem to be more engaged as a result.*

Having Difficult Conversations

Taking responsibility for your actions and apologizing is essential for a servant leader. Following are the four parts of the apology tool with a scenario of taking responsibility for not finishing a report on time. Notice that the ownership for the behavior and actions is taken by the person apologizing and asking forgiveness.

1. **Acknowledge:** “I didn’t get the report finished.”
2. **Apologize:** “I apologize for not meeting expectations.” **(Never use the word *sorry*.)**
3. **Make it right:** “What can I do to make it right?” **(A logical consequence)**
4. **Recommit:** “In the future, I will get assignments completed when asked.” **(Always state this in the positive—e.g., not “I won’t forget to get my report in on time.”)**

A senior executive talked about using the four-part apology:

One time I vented my frustrations with a sharp tongue onto a direct report who informed me of additional costs regarding a project we were working on. Nothing pushes my buttons more than being caught off guard by the unexpected. Ten minutes later, at a restaurant, my thinking kicked in. The only honorable thing to do was to go back and apologize. When she saw me coming toward her desk, she surely thought, “Oh no. Not him.” She braced herself when I approached. “I came back to apologize to you. You didn’t deserve the negative stuff I dished out, and I sincerely apologize for affecting you.” At first she looked at me with disbelief. Then she extended her hand toward me. “Thank you,” she said slowly and sincerely. “No one has ever done that before.” I didn’t even get to finish the four parts, but I did tell her that, in the future, I will not blame or point the finger when I hear unexpected bad news.

A team leader confessed how she hated conflict; the fear was deeply rooted in her background, and the thought of going to a person to ask forgiveness was stressful and frightening to her.

I hate conflict, and I guess I just internalize or stuff it. What I have realized is that my avoidance has only caused me and others more pain. To be honest, when you talked about the four-part apology, the first person I thought of was my husband. I need to ask his forgiveness for how I have been treating him and holding on to grudges. I have become bitter, and my attitude is ruining our marriage. I made the decision right there and then to take action, and after much worry and stress over something I found so simple, I talked with my husband and used the format of the four-part apology. I have to admit that I just read it to him, but as I did, tears welled up in his eyes, and he said, “I love you.” I have taken a big step in my life, but most of all in healing our marriage. Thank you for encouraging me to take this giant leap forward.

A school leader expressed that he thought and to some extent was taught that admitting fault or wrong was a sign of weakness:

I know that this sounds strange, but I believed and was taught that I should never show weakness and that admitting to fault or wrong is a sign that leaders are weak. Even as I write this, I feel stupid for thinking like that, but I did. Hey, I just admitted to a fault. As you can guess, apologies make me uncomfortable. However, I took the challenge, and the person I needed to apologize to was my oldest son. I realized I never admitted any wrongdoing to him, and it made me think about what kind of example am I being to him. My macho thinking was destroying my relationship with him. I am so thankful because I took the first step in repairing my relationship with my son. I asked his forgiveness for my behavior and never admitting fault. I broke down in tears, and he hugged me. I guess when you are weak, then you are really strong.

The I-message format

The I-message format is a tool to help servant leaders to communicate with others (*I Care, I See, I Feel, I Need, I Will*). It may seem at first a little too artificial or cumbersome to follow. The key is to understand that the tool is just a means to help you communicate your heart. It may seem unnatural or awkward, but over time, you may find it to be an effective tool of communication.

An HR recruiter shared how she avoided difficult conversations that involved her personally even though as part of her job, she had difficult conversations all of the time:

I hate conflict, and I know you would never guess it because of my job in HR. As a result of the training and being exposed to the tools on having difficult conversations, it made me realize that on the personal side and at times professional if it involves me, I avoid conflict at any cost. When you challenged us with thinking of a difficult conversation you need have but haven't yet had, I immediately knew the conversation I needed to have. The I-message format gave me a way to write down my thoughts and organize how I was going to approach that conversation. I have to say, I was very nervous about having that conversation, but sticking to the format gave me courage, and overall the conversation went well. In fact, I was able to communicate clearly, for the first time, what was really impacting me at work and my performance.

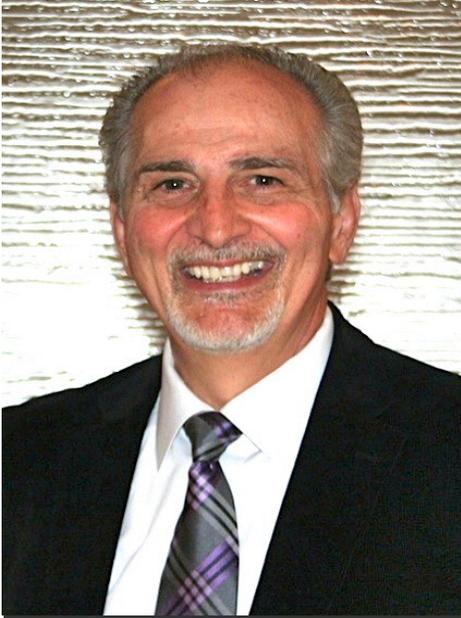
A senior-level leader expressed how he used the I-message format to have a difficult conversation with his son, who is in his early twenties:

Usually, I just wing it when it comes to talking to my children. However, I have found that I do a lot of talking and not much listening. The I-message format allowed me to have a difficult

conversation with my son about a major life and career decision he was trying to make. It allowed me to express my feelings at a level that I had never really openly expressed with him. When I shared that I was hurt by how he was behaving and proceeding without any consideration for me or his mother, he stopped being defensive and was visibly shaken. He had tears in his eyes and expressed that he had never heard me talk like this before. All I can say is that one conversation is building a whole new foundation for how we are going to interact from this point forward.

A high school administrator stated that she needed to have a difficult conversation with a teacher whom she was evaluating, but because of past history, she had been avoiding and basically allowing that teacher to get away with “bad” behavior:

I knew immediately when you challenged us with having difficult conversations that I needed to step up and have this conversation with a bully of a teacher. Admittedly, I had been avoiding this conversation because I just didn't want the stress and conflict that comes with dealing with her. Following the I-message format lowered my stress level, and especially taking the time to write down what was the main issue that I saw. It also helped me to take down the emotional level that was hindering me from having the strength and courage to confront the teacher in a healthy way. I knew along that I needed to have the conversation, but I honestly just didn't have the right mind-set or tools. Thank you, because even though the teacher didn't initially receive what I had to say to her, over the past couple of weeks, I noticed a significant change in the way she interacts with and treats people.



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My hope is that these stories will be inspirational and transformational in your journey as a servant leader.

Remember servant leadership is not just a series of “good” actions toward others; it is a set of habits of life or mindset. Learning about leadership and being a servant leader are not the same as leading by serving. Leading is doing, and you have to take action to serve.

How are you going to take action to serve?

Empowering
Thinking

Equipping
Leaders

Transforming
Cultures

...one person
at a time.



“EVERYTHING RISES OR FALLS WITH LEADERSHIP.”
CULTIVATING THE EFS WORK CULTURE