

**Servant First:  
Perceived Characteristics of Servant Leadership  
Within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes Organization**

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**Jennifer Jill Gomez**

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**Matthew Boyne**

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## **APPROVAL**

**Name:**           **Jennifer Gomez**

**Degree:**       **Master of Business Administration**

**Title of Thesis: Servant First: Perceived Characteristics of Servant Leadership**

**Within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes Organization**

**Advisor: (Name)**

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**MBA Program Director: José Muñoz, C.P.A., MBA**

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Dean of the Fermanian School of Business: Ivan Filby, Ph.D.**

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date Approved:** \_\_\_\_\_

This project is dedicated to my mother, Brenda Gomez,  
and to the memory of my father, Camilo Gomez –  
who epitomize hard work and perseverance and have taught me there  
is no reason to settle for mediocrity when I have  
the opportunity to do great things.

## **Abstract**

This present study used survey data from 12 leaders volunteering for the Sports for Exceptional Athletes Non-Profit Organization, located in San Diego, CA. This study was performed in an effort to assess which of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of Servant Leadership are both important to leaders within the organization and prevalent among leaders within the organization. Participants of the survey varied in age, gender and type of sport they were involved in within the organization. The data from the study was collected through the distribution of surveys, as well as formal interviews. The study employed quantitative research methods in order to collect and analyze the data collected from the participants within the organization. Positive correlations did exist between leaders within the organization and various characteristics named on Greenleaf's ten key characteristics list.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

“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.” – (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 6)

This definition of servant leadership is perhaps the most recognized description to date. Robert K. Greenleaf, who is responsible for this definition of servant leadership, has been described as the founder of modern day servant leadership. Greenleaf intentionally sought a description that would give people pause for thought and challenge any long-standing assumptions that might be held about the relationship between leaders and followers in an organization. By combining two seemingly contradictory terms, Greenleaf asks us to reconsider the very nature of leadership. Although aware of the negative historical connotations associated with the word ‘servant’, he felt it a necessary choice to turn established conceptions about the organizational pyramid on their head and jump-start insight into a new view of leadership (Smith, 2005).

Robert Greenleaf believed that most people have an innate desire to serve others, but he also believed that institutions and society did not encourage this kind of behavior as much as others. He also thought that servant-leaders were hard to find, but with increasing literature and companies engaging servant leadership, they are beginning to

surface everywhere (Dittmar, 2006). Servant leadership is a style of leadership that is on the rise and is becoming popular among many of today's top leaders. This is evident through resilient companies such as Southwest Airlines, TDIndustries, and Synovus Financial Corporations who are finding that serving customers as well as employees make not only better business but better profit (Sendjaya, 2005). It is a trend that has been having positive sweeping results with more than a third of Fortune's "100 Best Companies to Work For", as they have been focusing on or participating in servant leadership (Hunter, 2004).

Larry Spears, Executive Director of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant-leadership, succinctly defines servant leadership as:

...A new kind of leadership model – a model which puts serving others as the number one priority. 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 (Spears 1996).

Each of these central tenets is explored individually below, to present a fuller picture of the servant leadership framework.

- 1) *Service to Others.* Servant leadership begins when a leader assumes the position of servant in their interactions with followers. Authentic leadership arises not from the exercise of power or self-interested actions, but from the fundamental desire to first help others. A servant-leader's primary motivation

and purpose is to encourage greatness in others, while organizational success is the indirect, derived outcome of servant leadership.

- 2) *Holistic Approach to Work.* Servant leadership holds that the work exists for the person as much as the person exists for the work. It challenges organizations to rethink the relationship that exist between people, organizations and society as a whole. The theory promotes a view that individuals should be encouraged to be who they are, in their professional, as well as personal lives. This more personal, integrated valuation of individuals, it is theorized, ultimately benefits the long-term interests and performance of the organization.
- 3) *Promoting a Sense of community.* Greenleaf lamented the loss of community in modern society, calling it “the lost knowledge of these times.” Servant leadership questions the institution’s ability to provide human services and argues that only community, defined as groups of individuals that are jointly liable for each other, both individually and as a unit, can perform this function. Only by establishing this sense of community among followers, can an organization succeed in its objectives. Further, the theory posits that this sense of community can arise only from the actions of individual servant-leaders (Greenleaf, 1991).
- 4) *Sharing of Power in Decision-Making.* Effective servant leadership is best evidenced by the cultivation of servant leadership in others. By nurturing participatory, empowering environments and encouraging the talents of

followers, the servant-leader creates a more effective, motivated workforce and ultimately a more successful organization. As phrased by Russell (2001), “Leaders enable others to act, not by hoarding the power they have, but by giving it away.” The organizational structure resulting from servant leadership has sometimes been referred to as an “inverted pyramid” with employees, clients and other stakeholders at the top and leaders at the bottom.

In addition to Spears’ framework for servant leadership listed above, Spears is also well known for comprising a list, which reflects the ten essential characteristics of servant leadership. Spears spent many years reviewing Greenleaf’s essays and books; from all of Greenleaf’s writings, Spears arrived at the ten essential characteristics of any servant-leader, according to the work of Robert Greenleaf. The ten characteristics are listed as follows:

- Listening
- Empathy
- Healing
- Awareness
- Persuasion
- Conceptualization
- Foresight
- Stewardship
- Commitment to the growth of people
- Building Community

Researchers have long since used these ten characteristics as a benchmark when studying servant leadership within organizations. These ten characteristics of servant-leaders will be explored in further depth and detail throughout this thesis. They will also play a major role in attempting to determine the elements of servant leadership that are evident within the sports-related non-profit organization that this thesis will focus on.

## **SPORTS FOR EXCEPTIONAL ATHLETES**

Sports for Exceptional Athletes (S4EA) is a 501(c)(3) sports related non-profit organization based in San Diego, California. S4EA was founded in 2007 by Walter Jackson. After spending many years volunteering for the San Diego chapter of The Special Olympics, Mr. Jackson desired to form an organization in which athletes with, and without, intellectual and developmental disabilities were able to compete together and learn valuable lessons from each other. Teams may be made up of athletes with intellectual and developmental disabilities, family members of athletes with disabilities, friends of athletes with disabilities, and others who want to play on inclusive teams. S4EA serves athletes ages 5 through adult.

Sports for Exceptional Athletes offers training and competition opportunities in 24 sports over 4 seasons to over 1,350 athletes with developmental disabilities and over 150+ non-disabled friends, family and community members who play on inclusive sports teams (Guidestar, 2012). S4EA has hosted numerous competitions that have attracted disabled athletes from throughout Southern California, as well as teams from Tijuana, Mexico. S4EA hosts 3 Sports Camps during the year; camps offer multiple sports activities, as well as traditional camping activities to athletes.

S4EA offers competition and training opportunities for athletes of all ages. Athletes compete in such sports as: Bowling, Cycling, Golf, Judo, Sailing, Swimming, Tennis, Bocce, Soccer, Softball, Figure Skating, Flag Football, Floor Hockey, Volleyball, Cross Country Skiing, Downhill Skiing, Snowboarding, Table Tennis, Track, Basketball and Baseball. Select sports take place over four seasons and are offered to all athletes who wish to become involved in a particular sport. Sports are offered in the evenings Monday through Friday and various tournaments take place on designated weekends.

S4EA depends heavily on its volunteers in order to help make the organization a success. Volunteers for this organization serve in many different types of leadership positions such as coaches, referees, league coordinators and chaperones, among other various duties. S4EA's volunteers have a direct impact on the athlete's growth, judgment and their attitude towards many aspects of their lives.

Sports for Exceptional Athletes lists their mission statement on their website (2012) as follows: "The purpose of SPORTS for Exceptional Athletes is to create enhanced opportunities for people, with and without disabilities, to interact and form lasting bonds of friendship through shared sports and recreational activities in their community."

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

Leadership can be described as a function of knowing yourself, having a vision that is well communicated, building trust among colleagues and taking effective action to realize your own leadership potential and the potential of those around you (Teal 2012).

Leaders in all types of organizations play a key role in enhancing the growth of the people they lead.

Although Greenleaf's theory of servant leadership has been explored and researched at length within the educational sector and business sector, little research on servant leadership has been performed within the sports related non-profit sector. Sports for Exceptional Athletes has thrived within the past five years and the organization continues to grow every year. S4EA's leaders play a vital role in each athlete's growth and development. These leaders possess specific leadership qualities which directly enable each athlete to further develop both on and off the field. Many of these qualities which S4EA's leaders possess may be qualities which Greenleaf described in his ten key characteristics of a servant-leader. The purpose of this research is to evaluate the impact of servant leadership characteristics which are evident in leaders within sports related nonprofit organizations; in particular, the Sports for Exceptional Athletes nonprofit organization located in San Diego, California.

This study will focus closely on Greenleaf's ten characteristics of a servant-leader. These ten characteristics, which will be discussed in further detail in chapter two, will be used as a benchmark when examining the S4EA organization. The leadership qualities that S4EA's leaders find important and exhibit on a daily basis when interacting with the organization's athletes will be examined in further detail.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

This research will consist of a two-phase exploratory study. Phase one will consist of a survey which will be given to 5-20 leaders within the S4EA organization. Phase two will consist of 2-5 in-depth interviews with leaders within the organization.

Phase one will attempt to determine which of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of a servant-leader are important and prevalent among leaders of the S4EA organization. For each of Greenleaf's ten characteristics, two questions will be listed on the survey. One of these questions will ask if the characteristic is important and the other question will ask if the characteristic is prevalent among leaders within the organization. These two questions will directly correspond to Greenleaf's definition of each key characteristic.

Phase two will also attempt to determine which of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of a servant-leader are important and prevalent among leaders of the organization, while also taking into consideration other key leadership qualities that are not among those on Greenleaf's list. There will be a series of questions that will be asked to the leader, as well as an opportunity for the leader to add any other significant leadership qualities that appear to be evident among the leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes Organization.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study will attempt to answer two research questions within phase one's research and four research questions within phase two's research.

Phase one research will attempt to answer:

- 1) Which of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of servant leadership are important to leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization?
- 2) Which of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of servant leadership are prevalent to leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization?

Phase two research will attempt to answer:

- 1) Do the interviewee's answers to the interview questionnaire further affirm the data gathered in phase one, or, do their answers bring forth discrepancies when compared to phase one data?
- 2) Do leaders consider various characteristics within Greenleaf's servant leadership list to be more important to leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization than others?
- 3) Do leaders consider various characteristics within Greenleaf's servant leadership list to be more prevalent among leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization than others?
- 4) Are there any other leadership characteristics, not listed among Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of a servant leader, which stand out

among leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes  
organization?

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **INTRODUCTION**

A leader's personal values are known to have great impact on the resulting culture and performance of an organization. Russell (2001) notes, "Organizational cultures consolidate the shared beliefs, assumptions, goals and values of their members"- (p. 117). In particular, senior leaders infuse their personal values throughout an organization through the process of modeling (demonstrated, observable actions). Leaders who exhibit their values through deeds, as well as words, which will instill those values over time into the organizational culture; this in turn initiates organizational change. Thus, a leader's personal values can be seen as a major source of influence for bringing about change.

This chapter explores the definition and essence of servant leadership. This chapter also illustrates Robert Greenleaf and Larry Spears' (considered by many as the two most influential figures regarding servant leadership) theory on servant leadership, what they consider to be the key characteristics that one must possess in order to be a servant-leader, as well as the growing impact of servant leadership.

### **DEFINITION OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

Although there is no single definition of what constitutes a servant-leader, many scholars, such as Greenleaf, have spent a great deal of time, research and thought outlining the definition and characteristics of what it means to be a servant-leader. The term servant leadership was first coined in a 1970 essay by Robert K. Greenleaf (1904 –

1990) entitled “The Servant-Leader.” Greenleaf describes a servant-leader as somebody who 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” – (Greenleaf 1970, p. 6). Greenleaf goes into further detail in describing a servant-leader by saying that 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 to determine an effective servant leader, 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? (Greenleaf, 1998).

In his second major essay, *The Institution as Servant*, Robert K. Greenleaf articulated what is often called the "credo." He said: " This is my thesis: caring for persons, the more able and the less able serving each other, is the rock upon which a good society is built. Whereas, until recently, caring was largely person to person, now most of it is mediated through institutions - often large, complex, powerful, impersonal; not always competent; sometimes corrupt. If a better society is to be built, one that is more just and more loving, one that provides greater creative opportunity for its people, then the most open course is to raise both the capacity to serve and the very performance as

servant of existing major institutions by new regenerative forces operating within them" - (Greenleaf, 1998, p. 87).

Many servant leaders today are familiar with Larry Spears' definition of servant-leadership, which he defines as: a leadership model that attempts to simultaneously enhance the personal growth of workers and improve the quality and caring of our many institutions through a combination of teamwork and community, personal involvement in decision making, and ethical and caring behavior. Spears goes on further to say that servant leadership is providing a framework within which many individuals are helping to improve the way in which they treat those who do the work within their many institutions. Servant leadership truly offers hope and guidance for a new era in human development (Spears, 1995). At its core, servant leadership is a long term, transformational approach to life and work – in essence, a way of being – that has the potential for creating positive change throughout our society (Spears, 2004).

Servant leadership can derive only from the selfless, “others-directed” motivation that resides within the leader. This foundation is distinctive to servant leadership. According to Smith, Montagno and Kuzmenko (2004), “Typically, models of leadership do not begin with an analysis of leader motivation, and Greenleaf’s concepts in this regard are unique” (p. 23). Accordingly, aspiring servant-leaders must first scrutinize their personal belief systems and reasons for aspiring to lead. Strong leader ethics, principles and values lie at the core of the theory and are seen as being key to the long-term interests of the organization being served. A leader’s motivation is viewed as another critical distinction between servant leadership and other management theories.

Researchers suggest that motivation to lead also arises from an individual's core belief system. In the case of servant leadership, a leader's motivation derives from a core, egalitarian belief that they are no better than those whom they lead (Sendjaya and Sarros, 2002).

For others, the essence of the idea of servant leadership is written in their hearts (Lawrence, 1998). This is a meaningful way of describing servant leadership, but many people need a more concrete description. Several people have attempted to develop lists of characteristics of a Servant Leader; it is interesting to note that while each is different, all lists share the same theme. The idea is that servant leadership is about making the goals clear and then rolling up one's sleeves and doing whatever it takes to help people win by accomplishing the goals – the followers do not work for the leader, the leader works for the followers (Blanchard, 1995).

### **ROBERT K. GREENLEAF**

Robert Greenleaf was born in Terre Haute, Indiana. He was raised in a household committed to both strong personal ethics and community involvement. His father, George Greenleaf, was actively involved in community and business affairs, serving on the local school board and city council, and active in union politics. George was a blue-collar worker as well as an educator, a machinist and mechanic at the local Rose Polytechnic Institute, who rose to become head of the institute's educational machine shops. In Robert Greenleaf's father, one can see the roots of Greenleaf's philosophy – a strong identification with average, working people, a belief that leadership resides in all of us, and that a true leader is one who serves first.

Robert Greenleaf displayed early aspirations to leadership, becoming president of his Wiley High School senior class in 1922. After graduating from Minnesota's Carleton College in 1926, Greenleaf immediately went to work for AT&T at their New York headquarters. At the time, AT&T was the world's largest corporation. He spent most of his organizational life in the field of management research, development, and education at AT&T. During his 38-years of employment at AT&T, Greenleaf's was selected to participate in Smith 11 identification and training. Smith 11 identification and training was a training designed for promising managers within the company. This activity developed his growing recognition that the best leaders are driven by team interests, not self-interests, and display a shared set of ethical characteristics (Greenleaf, 1998).

Following a 38-year career at AT&T, Greenleaf enjoyed a second career that lasted another 25 years, during which time he served as an influential consultant to a number of major institutions, including: Ohio University, M.I.T., Ford Foundation, R.K. Mellon Foundation, the Mead Corporation, the American Foundation for Management Research and Lilly Endowment, Inc. In 1964, Greenleaf also founded the Center for Applied Ethics, which was renamed the Robert K. Greenleaf Center in 1985 and is now headquartered in Indianapolis (Greenleaf, 1998).

As a lifelong student of how things get done in organizations, Greenleaf distilled his observations in a series of essays and books on the theme of "the servant as leader" – the objective of which was to stimulate thought and action for building a better, more caring society.

## THE IDEA OF THE SERVANT-LEADER

The idea of servant-as-leader came partially out of Greenleaf's half-century of experience in working to shape large institutions. However, the event that crystallized Greenleaf's thinking came in the 1960's when he read Herman Hesse's novel *Journey to the East*, an account of a mythical journey by a group of people on a spiritual quest (Spears, 1995).

While serving as a consultant for many different universities, Greenleaf's interactions with university students during the social upheaval of the 1960's led him to explore what they were reading. His encounter with this short German novel, written in 1932, led to a dramatic coalescing of Greenleaf's thinking and the birth of servant leadership. The story and its impact are best described by Greenleaf himself:

The idea of The Servant as Leader came out of reading Herman Hesse's *Journey to the East*. In this story we see a band of men on a mythical journey, probably Hesse's own journey. The central figure of the story is Leo, who accompanies the party as the servant, who does their menial chores, but who also sustains them with his spirit and his song. He is a person of extraordinary presence. All goes well until Leo disappears. Then the group falls into disarray and the journey is abandoned. They cannot make it without the servant Leo. The narrator, one of the party, after some years of wandering finds Leo and is taken into the Order that has sponsored the journey. There he discovers that Leo, whom he had

first known as servant, was in fact the titular head of the Order, its guiding spirit, a great and noble leader (Greenleaf, 1970).

Greenleaf immediately recognized the fundamental message of the novel; the great leader is seen as servant first, and that simple fact is the key to his greatness (Greenleaf, 1970). True leadership emerges out of a deep-seated desire to first help others. Greenleaf began to write, publishing his emerging thoughts on servant leadership in a privately published essay in 1970, entitled *The Servant as Leader*. Only 200 copies were printed initially; these he privately distributed to friends and key leaders of the day. Positive response led to increasingly larger reprint orders for the essay. To date, more than half a million copies have been distributed worldwide, translated into multiple languages. Although not his first or last publication, this 35-page treatise written at the age of 66 remains his most influential.

### **LARRY C. SPEARS**

Larry C. Spears was born in Virginia. He has lived much of his life in Detroit, Philadelphia, and Indianapolis. Larry is a graduate of DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana. He began his writing and editing career at the age of fourteen.

Previous to his involvement with servant leadership, Spears was the Managing Director of the Greater Philadelphia Philosophy Consortium, a cooperative association of 12 colleges and universities in the Philadelphia area. He also served as a staff member with the Great Lakes Colleges Association's Philadelphia Center and with the Quaker

magazine, *Friends Journal*, in Philadelphia, PA. Spears then served as President and CEO of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant leadership from 1990-2007.

During his time at the Center for Servant Leadership, Spears wrote, edited and published hundreds of articles, essays, newsletters, books and other publications on servant leadership. Dozens of newspapers and journals have interviewed him regarding servant leadership and a 2004 television broadcast interview of Spears by Stone Philips on NBC's *Dateline*, helped to introduce servant leadership and Robert Greenleaf to ten million viewers. Larry C. Spears is currently the President and CEO of the Larry C. Spears Center for Servant leadership, Inc., established in 2008.

The newly established Spears Center for Servant Leadership is committed to enhancing the global understanding and practices of servant leadership. Larry has encouraged a deepening understanding of Robert Greenleaf's original writings on servant leadership, while also significantly enlarging upon our understanding of its applications (Spears Center, 2009).

## **GUIDING CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

There have been many different lists in reference to the characteristics necessary to become a servant-leader. For the purpose of this research, we will focus solely on the characteristics derived from Robert K. Greenleaf's writings. After several years of carefully considering Greenleaf's original writings, Spears (1998) identified a set of ten characteristics of the servant-leader that he views as being of critical importance, central to the development of servant-leaders.

- 1) *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 (and not said). Listening coupled with regular periods of reflection, is essential to the growth of the servant-leader.
- 2) *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 co-workers and does not reject them as people, even when one is forced to refuse to accept their behavior or performance. The most successful servant-leaders are those who have become skilled, empathetic listeners.
- 3) *Healing*: The healing of relationships is a powerful force for transformation and integration. One of the great strengths of servant leadership is the potential for healing one's self and one's relationship to others. Many people have broken spirits and have suffered from a variety of emotional hurts. Although this is a part of being human, servant-leaders recognize that they 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.”

- 4) *Awareness*: General awareness, and especially self-awareness, strengthens the servant-leader. Making a commitment to foster awareness can be scary – you never know what you may discover. Awareness also aids on in understanding issues involving ethics and values. It lends itself to being able to view most situations from a more integrated, holistic position. Awareness is not a giver of solace – it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed. They are not seekers of solace. They have their own inner serenity.
- 5) *Persuasion*: Another characteristic of servant-leaders is a reliance on persuasion, rather than on one’s 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.
- 6) *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. The traditional manager is consumed by the need to achieve

short-term operational goals. The manager who wishes to also be a servant-leader must stretch his or her thinking to encompass broader-based conceptual thinking. Servant-leaders are called to seek a delicate balance between conceptual thinking and a day-to-day focused approach.

- 7) *Foresight*: Closely related to conceptualization, the ability to foresee the likely outcome of a situation is hard to define, but easy to identify. One knows it when one sees it. 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.
- 8) *Stewardship*: Peter Block has defined stewardship as “holding something in trust for another.” Robert Greenleaf’s view of all institutions was one in which CEO’s, 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.
- 9) *Commitment to the growth of people*: Servant-leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As such, the servant-leader is deeply committed to the growth of each and every

individual within his or her institution. The servant-leader recognizes the tremendous responsibility to do everything within his or her power to nurture the personal, professional and spiritual growth of employees.

10) *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 business and other institutions. Greenleaf believes that all that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant leadership demonstration, his (or her) own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION RELATED TO SERVANT LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS AND SPORTS RELATED NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS**

Different characteristics of servant leadership are evident in many facets of society; those characteristics which are evident in sports related non-profits will be further explored. Nonprofit organizations encompass a significant portion of the world's servant leadership roles. Although nonprofit organizations have a large reach, many of them are lead in different ways, depending on the leaders and the focus of the nonprofit. In addition to nonprofit organizational leadership, many sports organizations, nonprofit

and for-profit, tend to lead and manage their teams in different fashions, depending on their leadership style and the goals they desire to accomplish. A study from Human Resource Development International (Hamlin, 2011) performed on nonprofit leaders found that the top ten behaviors exhibited by these leaders consisted of:

- Showing genuine care and concern.
- Speaks to people individually, showing a genuine interest by using names and personal anecdotes.
- Says ‘thank you’ and recognizes performance in a personalized way.
- Is able to place themselves in the position of others.
- Consults, includes and involves others in decision-making, listens to ideas and is open to people’s views.
- Identifies the right people, at the right time, for the right tasks.
- Gives personal praise, acknowledges achievements, good work, commitment, ideas and celebrates success.
- Greets (and interacts with) others in an approachable, warm and welcoming manner.
- Forwards important, appropriate and relevant information to team members promptly
- Respects, values and makes good use of individual strengths.
- Does what they say they are going to do.

Another study which focused solely on the traits of successful nonprofit leaders was that from the Ivey Business Journal (Crawford, 2010). The traits of successful nonprofit leaders were identified as:

- Relationship builder
- Collaborative decision-maker

- Effective communicator
- Inspiring motivator
- High integrity
- Adaptable
- Patient
- Passionate

These studies, among others, had many of the same characteristics in common when comparing successful characteristic traits among nonprofit leaders. Successful leaders identified in these studies appear to place a significant amount of effort towards building relationships. However, when comparing nonprofit leaders to sports leaders, the similarities do vary to a degree. Although successful sports leaders tend to share many of the characteristics as successful nonprofit leaders, successful sports leaders appear to place a substantial amount of focus and effort towards inspiring individuals.

A study from Livestrong.com, a partner company of The Lance Armstrong Foundation, was performed on sports leaders and coaches throughout the nation. This study determined that the most successful coaches have specific characteristics and qualities that maximize game performance (livestrong.com, 2011). This study found the top ten characteristics of a leader in the sports field is somebody who:

- Is committed to individual integrity, values, and personal growth.
- Is a Profound thinker who sees themselves as an educator, not just a coach.
- Is well-educated (formally and informally) in a liberal arts tradition.
- Possesses Long-run commitment to their athletes and their institution.

- Is willing to experiment with new ideas.
- Values the coach-player relationship, winning aside.
- Understands and appreciates human nature.
- Loves their sport and loves their work.
- Is honest and strong in character.
- Is Human and therefore imperfect, and recognizes this.

Another study, performed by the United States Sports Academy, focused on characteristics that contributed to the success of a sports coach (Frost, 2009). The contributing characteristics of success were listed as:

- Effective communication with athletes
- Motivating athletes
- Developing athletes skills
- Possessing knowledge of the sport
- Patience

## **THEORY CRITICISM**

Like other disciplines in the social sciences, modern study of organizational behavior employs the scientific method, and requires empirical validation. Servant leadership has come under some fire for remaining grounded in philosophical theory, and for lacking empirical substantiation. Stone, Russell and Patterson (2003) call the theory “systematically undefined and lacking in empirical support”, while Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) note that the “current literature is filled with anecdotal evidence” and that “empirical research is critically needed.” Rigorous academic research on servant leadership remains in its infancy (Stone, 2003).

Others criticize servant leadership from a social perspective, identifying it as either antifeminist or religious in nature. In a recent paper, Eicher-Catt (2005) argues that the values attributed to servant leadership are gender biased and accuses the theory of perpetuating “a theology of leadership that upholds androcentric patriarchal norms” and “insidiously perpetuates a long-standing masculine-feminine, master-slave political economy.” Smith, Montagno and Kuzmenko (2004) warn that “some authors have attempted to couch servant leadership in spiritual and moral terms.” Other authors are careful to distinguish between religion and spirituality, but still express concern about servant leadership’s potential for conflicting with the spiritual orientations of individual followers (Lee & Zemke, 1993).

Lastly, some researchers question the practicality and applicability of the theory to real-world scenarios. They question whether the collectivist aspirations of servant leadership are compatible with today’s emphasis on individual effort and performance (Lloyd, 1996). Others argue the theory is unrealistic, in that it ignores accountability and the underlying fundamental aggression of people in the workplace, and fails to consider differing levels of competence among individuals (Lee & Zemke, 1993).

## **THEORY SUPPORT**

Academic researchers that advocate servant leadership rarely address theory effectiveness from an empirical standpoint. Instead, they almost uniformly focus on the individual, organizational and societal needs that can be filled by adherence to the theory’s profound spiritual and moral underpinnings (Lee & Zemke, 1993).

Literature suggests that the theory's emphasis on leadership motivation addresses the inherent weaknesses that reside in people. These weaknesses include an individual's potential for error of judgment, the excess of pride and self-interested actions that can occur in persons holding high-level positions, and the "unhealthy subordinate relationships" that can occur between leader and follower in traditional hierarchical institutions. Researchers point to recent corporate scandals as examples of the organizational dangers of self-serving leadership. A leader that operates from a desire to first serve others avoids these power traps by building consensus, follower empowerment and a sense of egalitarianism in the workplace (Lee & Zemke, 1993). As Lee and Zemke (1993) state, "The servant-leader's belief system says he or she is no better than those who are led." Even researchers who identify an erosion of personal influence in the modern workplace see a need for servant leadership. Russell (2001) notes, "Position power is eroding in many organizations; therefore, leaders must derive their influence from values."

Servant leadership is also praised for its emphasis on a "holistic" approach to the individual worker, one that addresses his or her spiritual, as well as economic needs. Lee and Zemke (1993), for example, point to the instabilities of today's work environment. Layoffs, plant closings, corporate scandals and increased competitive pressures have all contributed to a heightened uncertainty and stress in the workforce. There is a growing need for psychological security and stability and a sense of moral and ethical grounding. Researchers cite a "growing preoccupation among individuals with the spiritual side of life" and a need for follower empowerment and personal development (Lee & Zemke, 1993). Servant leadership is described as a new paradigm that meets these needs,

because corporate culture is most influenced by the beliefs, values and actions of its leader. An inspirational, spiritually strong leader, it is argued, is the most direct route to a spiritually satisfying (and therefore more productive) workplace.

## **THE GROWING IMPACT OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

Given the importance of values, researchers have begun to examine the belief systems of practicing servant-leaders and are exploring whether identified values correlate positively with the theoretical outcomes of servant leadership, like organizational success. Russell (2001) has examined the question from a non-empirical perspective and calls for further research into the value systems of servant-leaders. In a recent study, Joseph and Winston (2005) were able to positively correlate honesty, integrity, benevolence and other leader values to the attribute of leader and organizational trust and organizational effectiveness.

Greenleaf's idea of servant leadership, now in its fourth decade as a concept bearing that name, continues to create a quiet revolution in work places and organizations around the world. Since the time of the Industrial Revolution, managers and leaders have tended to view people as tools, while organizations have considered workers and members as cogs in a machine. In the past few decades we have witnessed a shift in that long held view. In countless for-profit and nonprofit organizations today, we are seeing traditional, autocratic, and hierarchical modes of leadership yielding to a different way of working—one based on teamwork and community, one that seeks to involve others in decision making, one strongly based in ethical and caring behavior and one that is

attempting to enhance the personal growth of people while improving the caring and quality of our many institutions (Spears, 2004).

An increasing number of companies have adopted servant leadership as part of their corporate philosophy or as a foundation for their mission statement. Servant leadership is also increasingly in use, in both formal and informal education and training programs. This is taking place through leadership and management courses in colleges and universities, as well as through corporate training programs. A number of graduate and graduate courses on management and leadership incorporate servant leadership within their syllabi. Several colleges and universities now offer specific courses on servant leadership. Interest in the philosophy and practice of servant leadership is now at an all-time high. The seeds that have been planted have begun to sprout in many institutions, as well as in the hearts of many who long to improve the human condition. Servant leadership is providing a framework from which many thousands of known and unknown individuals are helping to improve how we treat those who do the work within our many institutions. Servant leadership truly offers hope and guidance for a new era in human development and for the creation of better, more caring institutions (Spears, 2004).

Greenleaf's theory was developed in the 1960's and 1970's, but is today finding new proponents who see it as a theory for its time, one that provides an ideal and necessary alternative to the traditional, hierarchical paradigms of the industrial past. King (1994) observes that business timescales are being dramatically compressed...with business conditions changing every 18 to 36 months. As organizations convert from

large, bureaucratic structures to smaller, more flexible units that can better respond to today's competitive environment, a new management paradigm is required. Servant leadership, with its emphasis on employee empowerment, teamwork and flatter organizational structures is seen as an ideal fit for today's leaders.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHOD/RESEARCH**

### **INTRODUCTION**

There have been numerous studies completed on servant leadership within nonprofits, as well as servant leadership within sports organizations; however, minimal research exists within the field of sports related nonprofit servant leadership. The research performed within this study will focus solely on the sports related nonprofit organization, Sports For Exceptional Athletes, based in San Diego, California. This research attempts to determine which of the afore mentioned servant leadership characteristics, described by Greenleaf and Spears and referred to within this thesis as Greenleaf's ten key characteristics, are evident in the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organizations.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study will attempt to answer two research questions within phase one's research and four research questions within phase two's research.

Phase one research will attempt to answer:

- 1) Which of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of servant leadership are important to leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization?

- 2) Which of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of servant leadership are prevalent to leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization?

Phase two research will attempt to answer:

- 1) Do the interviewee's answers to the interview questionnaire further affirm the data gathered in phase one, or do their answers bring forth discrepancies when compared to phase one data?
- 2) Do leaders consider various characteristics within Greenleaf's servant leadership list to be more important to leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization than others?
- 3) Do leaders consider various characteristics within Greenleaf's servant leadership list to be more prevalent among leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization than others?
- 4) Are there any other leadership characteristics, not listed among Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of a servant leader, which stand out among leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization?

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The data for this study will be collected through individuals who currently serve as leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes non-profit organization. For the

purpose of this study, the term “leaders” will be defined as: coaches, referees, league coordinators and chaperones within the non-profit organization. Both men and women leaders, from all S4EA athletic sites around San Diego and various sports teams within the organization were targeted for this survey in an attempt to collect the data from a wide spectrum of leaders within the organization. Phase one data was collected through traditional paper-and-pencil administration. Phase two data was collected and recorded by the researcher by way of a face-to-face interview.

Phase one will consist of a 20-question survey. This survey will be administered to 5-20 leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization. The questions on this survey will directly correspond to Greenleaf’s ten characteristics, central to a servant-leader. For every one of Greenleaf’s characteristics, two survey questions were developed. These two survey questions have been tailored to Greenleaf’s definition of the specific characteristic trait that the survey question is focused on. One of the two questions seeks to determine if that characteristic is important to leaders within the organization. The second question seeks to determine if that characteristic is prevalent among leaders within that organization. The framework of these two questions was repeated for each of Greenleaf’s 10 characteristics.

The Likert survey template was used to administer this survey. For the purpose of the survey, each of the twenty questions were changed to statements and placed in random order on the survey. Participants were given the following choices when answering the statement: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Undecided, Agree, Strongly Agree. Participants were asked to check the box that corresponded to the answer which

they felt was most closely associated with the given statement. The research statements given on this survey were as followed:

- 1) Listening intently to others is important.
- 2) I take time to reflect on conversations I have had with athletes and other members of the organization.
- 3) I strive to understand and empathize with others.
- 4) I find it important to recognize athletes for their special and unique spirits.
- 5) As a leader, I see an opportunity to help athletes heal emotional hurts.
- 6) I consider emotional healing to be an important part of an individual's growth.
- 7) Self-awareness makes me a better leader.
- 8) Being aware of the happenings within the organization is important.
- 9) I prefer to use persuasion before I use authority.
- 10) Building consensus within groups, when making a decision, is important.
- 11) Although short-term focus is important, I also find it important to think beyond day-to-day realities and conceptualize the organization's future.
- 12) Dreaming great dreams for the organization is something I do.
- 13) I feel confident that I am able to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present and the likely consequence of a decision for the future.

- 14) I consider a “forward looking” (foresight) approach to the organization important.
- 15) In this organization, it is important to serve the needs of others first.
- 16) I often act as a steward towards athletes within this organization.
- 17) I am deeply committed to the growth of each and every athlete within this organization.
- 18) It is important to do everything within my power to foster the growth of our organization’s athletes.
- 19) As a leader, it is important to build a sense of community among athletes.
- 20) I believe a true sense of community within this organization has been/is in the process of being created.

Phase one will attempt to identify trends among those surveys collected. These trends will serve as a guide to determine answers to the two research questions of phase one. Answers to phase one data will determine which of Greenleaf’s ten key characteristics the servant-leaders within the S4EA organization find important. The answers will also determine if the leaders within this organization consider Greenleaf’s ten characteristics of a servant-leader to be prevalent within S4EA.

Phase two will attempt to validate or dispel phase one data. The interview will also attempt to identify if leaders within the organization find some of Greenleaf’s ten key characteristics more important and more prevalent than others within their

organization. Lastly, data gathered in phase two will determine if there are characteristics, not listed within Greenleaf's ten key characteristics, that leaders within the organization feel that stand out and best represent the organization.

A face-to-face in-depth interview was used to administer this phase of the study. Participants were assured that there were no "right answers", nor was the researcher looking for any specific answer to the question. Participants were asked to answer each question as truthful as possible. Along with the interview questions, participants were also offered access to the definition of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics, if they had any questions regarding the meaning of the words on question three. The interview questions on this study were as followed:

- 1) As a leader, do you feel it is important to serve the athlete's needs before the needs of the organization? Does this occur often within the organization?
- 2) Why do you like working at this organization?
- 3) Do you believe every leader of your organization should possess these ten characteristics? If you do not agree with any of these characteristics, please explain.
  - a. Listening
  - b. Empathy
  - c. Healing

- d. Awareness
- e. Persuasion
- f. Conceptualization
- g. Foresight
- h. Stewardship
- i. Commitment to the growth of people
- j. Building community

- 4) Out of the characteristics listed above, do you believe one or more of these characteristics is/are more prevalent within the organization? If so, which one(s)?
- 5) Out of the characteristics listed above, do you believe one or more of these characteristic is/are more important for a leader to possess within your organization? If so, which one(s)?
- 6) Are there any other leadership characteristics, not mentioned above, that stand out among leaders within Sports for Exceptional Athletes?
- 7) Would like to add anything further regarding the leaders of your organization and the characteristics they possess?

## **PARTICIPANTS**

Phase one participants were not asked to reveal their name, what athletic site at which they volunteer, nor were they asked what sport they were involved in. Anonymous questionnaires that contain no identifying information are more likely to produce honest responses than those identifying the respondent (Statpac, 2012).

A similar procedure was followed for participants of phase two. Although the interviewees were face to face with the interviewer, the interviewer did not ask for name, their respective athletic site or what sport they were involved in.

In order to have taken part in this study, participants needed to be actively involved as a leader within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization. As previously stated, for the purposes of this thesis, a leader within the S4EA organization is defined as: individuals within the organization who hold positions such as coaches, referees, league coordinators and chaperones. Participants for research question one were required to currently be a volunteer for S4EA and have worked as a “leader” within the organization for at least six months. Participants for research question two were required to currently be a volunteer for S4EA, have worked as a “leader” within the organization for at least one year and have volunteer experience in more than one sport. There were no age limitations set for participants of this study and both male and female leaders were considered for participation in this study.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

Walter Jackson, the founder of Sports for Exceptional Athletes, allowed leaders to take surveys before and after their respective sporting events. S4EA provides team sports activities on a daily basis for a variety of sports every evening, Monday through Friday. The researcher attended sporting events on various days and requested the leader's participation for phase one and phase two. Surveys and interviews were completely voluntary; surveys and interviews were performed only after the leader consented. The researcher confirmed the participants' anonymity and verified at the beginning of the survey that any response would be kept confidential. By providing anonymity, the researcher hoped participants would be able to provide unrestricted replies to the survey questions.

The surveys for phase one were administered in print form. Print surveys offer several advantages in contrast to online surveys (Evans & Mathur, 2005). Participants did not need to have the technological skills or online experience necessary to complete the surveys accurately. Print surveys can be more costly and take more time inputting the data, but can be seen as more personal due to being face-to-face. Print surveys in a face-to-face setting also typically offer more socially desirable responses (Heerwegh, 2009).

The surveys for phase two were administered verbally. The researcher read the question aloud to the participant and then recorded their answer. There was an extra interview questionnaire available for the interviewee, if they desired to follow along as the questions were read to them. Definitions to Greenleaf's ten key servant-leader

characteristics were also available upon request should the participant ask for clarification.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

After collecting all surveys and recording all responses from the interview, the researcher created a document in order to input the responses and begin analyzing the data. For analysis on phase one, the 5 point likert-scale survey, the researcher created an answer document which listed all questions, and responses to each question, in their original order. In order, the questions consisted of two statements which corresponded to each of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of a servant leader. For analysis, these two questions were considered a "group" relating to one of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics. Each group consists of one statement which seeks to answer research question one: if, and to what degree, the characteristic is important to leaders within the organization. The other statement in the group seeks to answer research question two: if, and to what degree, is the characteristic prevalent within the organization. The leader's answers to each question were totaled up and analyzed in an effort to identify trends. These responses were also calculated into percentages. For the purposes of this survey, answers of "strongly agree" or "agree" were to be considered important and prevalent among the organization.

The percentage of "strongly agree" and "agree" responses were also analyzed in an effort to determine how important or prevalent Greenleaf's characteristics are within the S4EA organization. When analyzing the data, these answers were translated into

percentages. For the purpose of this survey, characteristics, which scored between 90% and 100%, were considered to be either important or prevalent within this organization.

Analysis on phase two was performed in an effort to acquire a more in-depth view of phase one analysis. Key words and phrases were noted and analyzed from the responses in phase two. These responses served as either further affirmation, or brought forth discrepancies when compared to the responses gathered in phase one. This interview was also used to determine if leaders considered some of Greenleaf's key characteristics more important and prevalent than others. Lastly, this questioner attempted to determine if leaders within the organization consider any other characteristics, which do not appear on Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of a servant leader list, to be a defining quality among the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization.

The researcher was consistent with this method of data entry throughout the entirety of this study. The consistent approach enabled research reliability and validity.

## **VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF INSTRUMENTATION**

The survey instrument was crafted using The Servant Leadership Survey (SLS) from Dierendonck and Nuijten (2010) as a base to modify specific questions related to Greenleaf's ten essential characteristics of servant leadership. The SLS is an instrument specifically designed to measure multi-dimensional servant leadership. Results show that the Servant Leadership Survey (SLS) has convergent validity with other leadership measures, and also adds unique elements to the leadership field.

de Vaus (2001) emphasizes that researchers must be confident that the research design can sustain the conclusions that are drawn from the data. Internal validity is the extent that the structure of the research allows unambiguous conclusions can be drawn from the results. The way the research is set up can eliminate alternative solutions. The researcher is responsible for the validity in the data collection. de Vaus (2001) recommends that qualitative researchers employ specific processes to ensure internal validity and verification that the results avoid ambiguous outcomes. Researchers in qualitative research should be consistently engaged in the field of study and carry appropriate levels of knowledge to understand the context of the responses. The researcher, for this thesis, will ensure the results of qualitative research are taken back to informants, to act as member checking and ensure the accuracy and credibility of the interpretations. The researcher's advisor will be debriefed periodically as to the results, as part of peer review (Creswell, 1998; de Vaus, 2001). As an additional measure for validity, data sources should be given transcripts of their interview for user validation.

Using returns from the survey questions seeking volunteers for interviews, the candidates will be subject to random sampling. Random sampling methods, as described by Bryman and Bell (2007), will ensure adequate representation in the sample of the population study for the interviews. Bryman and Bell (2007) emphasize that choosing a representative sample, as done with random methods, helps ensure external validity, which addresses whether the results can be generalized beyond the original research context. The sample will be representative because a small population of S4EA leaders will be contacted until the theoretical saturation of sufficient interview numbers for

qualitative research are reached (Creswell, 1998). There will not be “representativeness” as delineated by a probability sampling strategy.

Reliability is seen as the repeatability of the study. By writing a detailed description of the study process, greater reliability can be achieved (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Stebbins (2001) emphasizes that judgments about reliability and validity of a study can only be made when the research is collated and compared with other research on the same topic.

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

Stebbins (2001) describes exploratory researchers as inductive theorists. The principle mission of inductive theorists is to create descriptive and generic concepts along with generalizations of topics that do not have a clearly defined history of research. Researchers make a concerted and systematic effort through direct, empirical observation of a group, process or activity. To create meaning from the observations, researchers must carefully transcribe recordings and notes in order to create summaries, receive feedback from participants and then create visual and tabular displays to depict categories of information developed from collected data.

Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the evidence to address the initial propositions of a study. Yin (1994) notes the analysis of qualitative data is one of the least developed aspects of exploratory methodology. The researcher needs to rely on experience and the literature to present the evidence in various ways, using various interpretations. Creswell (1998) suggests that categories of information or themes should be created to categorize observations and data

under the title of labels. Exploratory data should be developed in spirals with the first loop of the spiral concerned with the management analysis and organization of data. The second outward loop of the spiral classifies and interprets the data developing recurring themes from which understanding of the explored activity might be developed. The intent of the categorization is to reveal patterns from the research that allows the formation of hypotheses and theories, giving indication further research will be of use.

This categorization of data becomes necessary because statistical analysis is not necessarily possible. Miles and Huberman (1984) have suggested alternative analytic techniques of analysis in such exploratory situations, such as using diagrams to display the data, creating displays, counting frequency of events, ordering the information based upon occurrence or priority assignment to terms. This prioritization must be done in a way that will not bias the results.

Yin (1994) and Trochim (1989) provide analytic techniques to fit within a larger analytic strategy. The strategy guides decisions as to what data will be analyzed, for what reason, to create information for the researcher. Some possible analytic techniques are pattern-matching, explanation-building and time-series analysis. The analysis itself should be founded upon the theoretical propositions found in the literature review as part of the exploratory research. If the theoretical propositions are not found in literature, the researcher should consider developing a descriptive frame of reference around which the exploration can be organized

Trochim (1989) offered that pattern-matching is one of the most useful strategies for analysis for exploratory research. This technique compares a scientifically developed

pattern with a predicted one. If patterns match, the internal reliability of the study is solidified. The relationship of the predicted and actual pattern might not have any quantitative criteria, being instead based on common attributes. The experience of the researcher is therefore required for interpretations, but bias should be mitigated with additional peer review.

Explanation-building is considered a form of pattern-matching and is useful in exploratory research (Trochim, 1989). The data analysis is carried out by an explanation of the observed activities or responses. This implies that explanation building is most useful in explanatory research, but it is possible to use it for exploratory research, as well as part of hypothesis creation (Trochim, 1989). The process of explanation building follows an experiential learning cycle as a theoretical statement is offered. Data and observation refines that statement; the proposition is revised, as to content and meaning, and then a refined hypothesis is tested once again. Trochim (1989) warns that a loss of focus is a possibility in this iterative cycle.

Time-series analysis is a well-known technique in experimental and quasi-experimental analysis. Given the reliance upon dependent and independent variables, and reliance upon regression techniques, the application is best suited to quantitative data and has limited applicability to exploratory research (Trochim, 1989).

A researcher must be knowledgeable of the topic being explored, according to Yin (1994). The researcher must be aware of, and explicitly depict that the analysis is of high quality. All relevant evidence was collected, competing outcomes considered,

significant aspects have been considered and the specific research results address the questions asked.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THE STUDY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The data from this survey was gathered using two methods of data survey collection. The first method consisted of a likert survey questionnaire, which consisted of twenty questions, and the second method consisted of a structured interview, which consisted of seven questions. The study employed quantitative research methods, in order to collect and analyze data received from the participants at Sports for Exceptional Athletes. These methods allowed the researcher to measure respondents within the partnering organizations, who actively serve as a volunteer for the organization.

Data was collected from individuals who currently volunteer in a number of different sports within the Organization; most of these sports occurring on different days of the week and at various locations. In an effort to gather the most honest answers, the researcher did not ask participants to disclose any personal information such as: name, gender, age, specific sport or specific location. Participants for research question one were required to currently be a volunteer for S4EA and have worked as a “leader” within the organization for at least six months. Participants for research question two were required to currently be a volunteer for S4EA, have worked as a “leader” within the organization for at least one year and have volunteer experience in more than one sport. The study contained a total of 12 participants. A total of 11 participants participated in the phase one survey. A total of 3 participants, 2 of which also participated in question one, participated in the phase two interview.

The data for the study was collected through the distribution of surveys, as well as an interview questionnaire. The data was collected through traditional paper-and-pencil administration. Statistical data was analyzed, in reference to the two research questions in phase one and the four research questions in phase two. In this section of the results, the findings are discussed in relation to each grouping of the survey questions.

Regarding phase one, the survey questions were divided into ten groups. Each of the ten groups, which contained two survey questions, corresponded to one of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of servant leadership. Analysis was performed to determine if, and to what degree, the characteristic is important to the leaders within the organization. Analysis was also performed to determine if, and to what degree, this characteristic is prevalent among leaders within the organization.

Regarding phase two, interviewees answered questions read aloud to them from the interview questionnaire. Analysis was performed on these answers, in an effort to acquire a more in-depth view of phase one analysis. Key words and phrases contained within the interviewees answers were noted, analyzed and compared to phase one data. These responses would serve as either further affirmation, or, bring forth discrepancies when compared to the responses gathered in phase one. This questionnaire was also used to determine if leaders consider some of Greenleaf's key characteristics more important and more prevalent than others. Lastly, this questionnaire also attempted to determine if leaders within the organization consider any other characteristics, which do not appear on Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of a servant leader list, to be exhibited among leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization.

## PHASE ONE: ANALYSIS OF EACH SURVEY GROUP

The following two statements, which were in the “listening” group, were used in the study and participants indicated responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

<b>LISTENING</b>
- Listening intently to our athletes is important.
- I take time to reflect on conversations I have had with athletes and other members of the organization.

The first item on the survey related to listening was, “Listening intently to our athletes is important.” In response to the first item, 10 (91%) respondents indicated they strongly agree and 1 (9%) respondent indicated they agree. Thus, none of the participants were undecided, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The results indicate that 100% of the volunteers found listening to be important.

The second item on the survey related to listening was, “I take time to reflect on conversations I have had with athletes and other members of the organization.” In response to the second item, 5 (45%) respondents indicated they strongly agree, 5 (45%) respondents indicated they agree and 1 (9%) respondent was undecided. Thus, none of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed. The results indicate that 91% of respondents feel that listening is prevalent within the organization.

The following two statements, which were in the “empathy” group, were used in the study and participants indicated responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

<b>EMPATHY</b>
----------------

- I find it important to recognize athletes for their special and unique spirits.
---

- I strive to understand and empathize with our athletes.
---

The first item on the survey related to empathy was, “I find it important to recognize athletes for their special and unique spirits.” In response to the first item, 8 (73%) respondents indicated they strongly agree and 3 (27%) respondents indicated they agree. Thus, none of the participants were undecided, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The results indicate that 100% of the volunteers found empathy to be important.

The second item on the survey related to empathy was, “I strive to understand and empathize with our athletes.” In response to the second item, 7 (64%) respondents indicated they strongly agree, 3 (27%) respondents indicated they agree and 1 (9%) respondent indicated they disagreed. Thus none of the participants were undecided or strongly disagreed. The results indicate that 91% of the volunteers found empathy to be prevalent within the organization.

The following two statements, which were in the “healing” group, were used in the study and participants indicated responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

<b>HEALING</b>
----------------

- I consider emotional healing to be an important part of an individual’s growth.
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- As a leader, I see an opportunity to help athletes heal emotional hurts.
--

The first item on the survey related to healing was, “I consider emotional healing to be an important part of an individual’s growth.” In response to the first item, 5 (45%) respondents indicated they strongly agree, 4 (36%) respondents indicated they agree and

2 (18%) respondents indicated they disagree. Thus none of the participants were undecided or strongly disagreed. The results indicate that 82% of the volunteers found healing to be important.

The second item on the survey related to healing was, “As a leader, I see an opportunity to help athletes heal emotional hurts.” In response to the second item, 2 (18%) respondents indicated they strongly agree, 6 (55%) respondents indicated they agree, 2 (18%) respondents indicated they were undecided and 1 (9%) respondent indicated they disagree. Thus, none of the participants strongly disagreed. The results indicate that 73% of the volunteers found healing to be prevalent within the organization.

The following two statements, which were in the “awareness” group, were used in the study and participants indicated responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

<b>AWARENESS</b>
- Being aware of the happenings within the organization is important.
- Self-awareness makes me a better leader.

The first item on the survey related to awareness was, “Being aware of the happenings within the organization is important.” In response to the first item, 7 (64%) respondents indicated they strongly agree, 3 (27%) respondents indicated they agree and 1 (9%) respondent indicated they were undecided. Thus, none of the participants disagree or strongly disagree. The results indicate 91% of the volunteers found awareness to be important.

The second item on the survey related to awareness was, “Self-awareness makes me a better leader.” In response to the second item, 10 (91%) respondents indicated they

strongly agree and 1 (9%) respondent indicated they agree. Thus, none of the participants were undecided, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The results indicate that 100% of the volunteers found awareness to be prevalent within the organization.

The following two statements, which were in the “persuasion” group, were used in the study and participants indicated responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

<b>PERSUASION</b>
- Being conscious within groups, when making a decision, is important.
- I prefer to use persuasion before I use authority.

The first item on the survey related to persuasion was, “Being conscious within groups, when making a decision, is important.” In response to the first item, 6 (55%) respondents indicated they strongly agree, 3 (27%) respondents indicated they agree, 1 (9%) respondent indicated they were undecided and 1 (9%) respondent indicated they disagree. Thus, none of the participants strongly disagreed. The results indicate 82% of the volunteers found persuasion to be important.

The second item on the survey related to persuasion was, “I prefer to use persuasion before I use authority.” In response to the second item, 4 (36%) respondents indicated they strongly agree, 3 (27%) respondents indicated they agree, 2 (18%) respondents indicated they were undecided, 1 (9%) respondent indicated they disagree and 1 (9%) respondent indicated they strongly disagree. The results indicate 64% of the volunteers found persuasion to be prevalent within the organization.

The following two statements, which were in the “conceptualization” group, were used in the study and participants indicated responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

<b>CONCEPTUALIZATION</b>
- Although short-term focus is important, I find it important to think beyond day-to-day realities and conceptualize the organization’s future.
- Dreaming great dreams for the organization is something I do.

The first item on the survey related to conceptualization was, “Although short-term focus is important, I find it important to think beyond day-to-day realities and conceptualize the organization’s future.” In response to the first item, 10 (91%) respondents indicated they strongly agree and 1 (9%) respondent indicated they agree. Thus, none of the participants were undecided, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The results indicate that 100% of the volunteers found conceptualization to be important.

The second item on the survey related to conceptualization was, “Dreaming great dreams for the organization is something I do.” In response to the second item, 3 (27%) respondents indicated they strongly agree, 4 (36%) respondents indicated they agree, 3 (27%) respondents indicated they were undecided and 1 (9%) respondent indicated they disagree. Thus, none of the participants strongly disagreed. The results indicate that 64% of the volunteers found conceptualization to be prevalent within the organization.

The following two statements, which were in the “foresight” group, were used in the study and participants indicated responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

<b>FORESIGHT</b>
------------------

- |   |
|---|
| - I consider a “forward looking” (foresight) approach to the organization to be important.  |
| - I feel confident that I am able to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future. |

The first item on the survey related to foresight was, “I consider a “forward looking” (foresight) approach to the organization to be important.” In response to the first item, 7 (64%) respondents indicated they strongly agree, 3 (27%) respondents indicated they agree and 1 (9%) respondent indicated they are undecided. Thus, none of the participants disagree or strongly disagree. The results indicate that 91% of the volunteers found foresight to be important.

The second item on the survey related to foresight was, “I feel confident that I am able to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future.” In response to the second item, 5 (45%) respondents indicated they strongly agree, 5 (45%) or respondents indicated they agree and 1 (9%) respondent indicated they are undecided. Thus, none of the participants disagree or strongly disagree. The results indicate that 91% of the volunteers found foresight to be prevalent within the organization.

The following two statements, which were in the “stewardship” group, were used in the study and participants indicated responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

<b>STEWARDSHIP</b>
--------------------

- |   |
|---|
| - In this organization, it is important to serve the needs of others first. |
| - I often act as a steward towards athletes within this organization.       |

The first item on the survey related to stewardship was, “In this organization, it is important to serve the needs of others first.” In response to the first item, 5 (45%) respondents indicated they strongly agree, 2 (18%) of respondents indicated they agree and 4 (36%) respondents indicated they are undecided. Thus, none of the participants disagree or strongly disagree. The results indicate that 64% of the volunteers found stewardship to be important.

The second item on the survey related to stewardship was, “I often act as a steward towards athletes within this organization.” In response to the second item, 3 (27%) respondents indicated they strongly agree, 7 (64%) respondents indicated they agree and 1 (9%) respondent indicated they are undecided. Thus, none of the participants disagree or strongly disagree. The results indicate that 91% of the volunteers found stewardship to be prevalent within the organization.

The following two statements, which were in the “commitment to the growth of people” group, were used in the study and participants indicated responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

<b>COMMITMENT TO THE GROWTH OF PEOPLE</b>
- It is important to do everything within my power to foster the growth of our organization’s athletes.
- I am deeply committed to the growth of each and every athlete within this organization.

The first item on the survey related to commitment to the growth of people was, “It is important to do everything within my power to foster the growth of our organization’s athletes.” In response to the first item, 5 (45%) respondents indicated they

strongly agree and 6 (55%) respondents indicated they agree. Thus, none of the participants were undecided, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The results indicate that 100% of the volunteers found commitment to the growth of people to be important.

The second item on the survey related to commitment to the growth of people was, “I am deeply committed to the growth of each and every athlete within this organization.” In response to the second item, 7 (64%) respondents indicated they strongly agree and 4 (36%) respondents indicated they agree. Thus, none of the participants were undecided, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The results indicate that 100% of the volunteers found commitment to the growth of people to be prevalent within the organization.

The following two statements, which were in the “Building community” group, were used in the study and participants indicated responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

<b>BUILDING COMMUNITY</b>
- As a leader, it is important to build a sense of community among athletes.
- I believe a true sense of community within this organization has been/is in the process of being created.

The first item on the survey related to building community was, “As a leader, it is important to build a sense of community among athletes.” In response to the first item, 10 (91%) respondents indicated they strongly agree and 1 (9%) respondent indicated they agree. Thus, none of the participants were undecided, disagreed or strongly disagreed. The results indicate that 100% of the volunteers found building community to be important.

The second item on the survey related to building community was, “I believe a true sense of community within this organization has been/is in the process of being created.” In response to the second item, 3 (27%) respondents indicated they strongly agree, 4 (36%) respondents indicated they agree and 4 (36%) respondents are undecided. Thus, none of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed. The results indicate that 64% of respondents feel that building community is prevalent within the organization.

**PHASE ONE: ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH QUESTION ONE**

As previously discussed, question one, within phase one, seeks to determine if Greenleaf’s ten key characteristics are important to leaders within the S4EA organization. For the purposes of this study, the “strongly agree” and “agree” answers will be considered important to leaders within this organization. The table below lists Greenleaf’s ten key characteristics and the corresponding percentages to which leaders within the organization feel these characteristics are of importance.

Listening	100%
Empathy	100%
Healing	82%
Awareness	91%
Persuasion	82%
Conceptualization	100%
Foresight	91%
Stewardship	64%
Commitment to growth of people	100%
Building community	100%

The researcher found significance in research question one relating to a positive correlation between many of Greenleaf's key characteristics of a servant leader and the importance of these characteristics within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization. Leaders who completed the survey placed the highest importance (100%) on: listening, empathy, conceptualization, commitment to growth of people and building community. Other characteristics which rated as being highly important (91%) were awareness and foresight. The characteristics which leaders did not seem to place a significant amount of importance (82%) on were healing and persuasion. Finally, leaders did not appear to place importance (64%) on stewardship.

As previously discussed, for the purposes of this survey, answers which score between 90% and 100% are considered important characteristics within this organization. Findings show that within this organization, Greenleaf's key characteristics which S4EA leaders find important are: listening, empathy, conceptualization, commitment to growth of people, building community, awareness and foresight. These results show a total of seven of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics which are important to leaders within the S4EA organization. Key characteristics left out were: healing, persuasion and stewardship.

## PHASE ONE: ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

Question two, within phase one, seeks to determine if Greenleaf’s ten key characteristics are prevalent among leaders within the S4EA organization. For the purposes of this study, the “strongly agree” and “agree” answers will be considered prevalent among leaders within this organization. The table below lists Greenleaf’s ten key characteristics and the corresponding percentages to which leaders within the organization feel these characteristics are exhibited among S4EA’s leaders.

Listening	91%
Empathy	91%
Healing	73%
Awareness	100%
Persuasion	64%
Conceptualization	64%
Foresight	91%
Stewardship	91%
Commitment to growth of people	100%
Building community	64%

The researcher also found significance in research question two, relating to a positive correlation between many of Greenleaf’s key characteristics of a servant leader and the prevalence of these characteristics within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization. Leaders who completed the survey placed the highest importance (100%) on: awareness and commitment to growth of people. Other characteristics which rated as being highly important (91%) were: listening, empathy, foresight and stewardship. The characteristic, which leaders did not seem to place a significant amount of importance

(73%) on, was healing. Finally, leaders did not appear to place importance (64%) on: persuasion, conceptualization and building community.

Following the same guidelines as research question one, answers which score between 90% and 100% are considered prevalent characteristics within this organization. Findings show that within this organization, Greenleaf's key characteristics which S4EA leaders find prevalent within the organization are: awareness, commitment to growth of people, listening, empathy, foresight and stewardship. These results show a total of six of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics which are prevalent among leaders within the S4EA organization. Key characteristics left out were: healing, persuasion, conceptualization and building community.

## **PHASE TWO: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNEER FINDINGS**

Phase two was performed in an effort to further validate answers from phase one, or, bring forth discrepancies when compared to phase one data. During the interview, the researcher directly asked participants which of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics were important to them and which characteristics they felt were prevalent within the organization. This questionnaire was also used to determine if leaders consider some of Greenleaf's key characteristics more important and prevalent than others. Lastly, this questionnaire was used to determine whether or not leaders within the organization consider any other characteristics, which do not appear on Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of a servant leader list, to be significant among leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization.

The table below states question one; below the question, answers from all three leaders are stated. Question and responses to the first item are as follows:

<b>QUESTION:</b>	<b>As a leader, do you feel it is important to serve the athletes needs before the needs of the organization? Does this often occur within the organization?</b>
Leader 1	Yes, it is important. This does not always occur within the organization because some leaders are too opinionated and stubborn to do this at times.
Leader 2	Yes, it is important. Yes it does occur often.
Leader 3	Yes, it is important. Yes it does occur often.

In response to the first item, all three leaders felt it was important. Although the first leader felt serving the needs of the athletes occurred at times, but did not feel it occurred as much as it should, due to some of the leaders within the organization allowing their personal agendas and emotions to become involved.

The table below states question two; below the question, answers from all three leaders are stated. Question and responses to the second item are as follows:

<b>QUESTION:</b>	<b>Why do you like working at this organization?</b>
Leader 1	I like helping the athletes become better people.
Leader 2	Because of the athletes. I like helping them develop and learn skills.
Leader 3	I like trying to help the athletes integrate within the community because this will give them greater opportunity in life.

In response to the second item, all three leaders responses involved helping the athletes to become better or to gain skills as the reason they liked working for this organization. By analyzing the leader's answers to this question, the leaders essentially confirmed they are acting as servant leaders within some capacity.

The table below states question three; below the question, answers from all three leaders are stated. Question and responses to the third item are as follows:

<b>QUESTION:</b>	<p><b>Do you believe every leader in your organization should possess these ten key characteristics? If you do not agree with any of these characteristics, please explain.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Listening</b></li> <li>- <b>Empathy</b></li> <li>- <b>Healing</b></li> <li>- <b>Awareness</b></li> <li>- <b>Persuasion</b></li> <li>- <b>Conceptualization</b></li> <li>- <b>Foresight</b></li> <li>- <b>Stewardship</b></li> <li>- <b>Commitment to growth of people</b></li> <li>- <b>Building community</b></li> </ul>
Leader 1	Healing jumps out at me as something we are not required to possess. Our role is to help the athletes; however, some of these athletes have significant healing needs that are beyond our capabilities.
Leader 2	Healing is not our role as coaches.
Leader 3	Yes, I believe every leader should possess these characteristics.

In response to the third item, two of the three leaders questioned healing. From the researcher's observations during the interview, it appeared as though leaders one and two believed healing should be left to a licensed professional counselor or psychologist. It appeared as though these leaders considered healing in a major context and did not consider healing in the minor, day to day, context that many people experience.

The table below states question four; below the question, answers from all three leaders are stated. Question and responses to the fourth item are as follows:

<b>QUESTION:</b>	<b>Out of the characteristics listed in question three, do you believe one or more of these characteristics is/are prevalent within the organization? If so, which one(s)?</b>
Leader 1	I believe listening, empathy and building community are more prevalent within our organization.
Leader 2	I think listening, awareness and commitment to the growth of people are the most prevalent characteristics.
Leader 3	I believe listening, empathy and awareness are more prevalent within our organization.

In response to the fourth item, it appears as though listening was overwhelmingly chosen as being prevalent within the organization. Empathy and awareness were also called out by two of the three leaders as being more prevalent than others within the organization.

The table below states question five; below the question, answers from all three leaders are stated. Question and responses to the fifth item are as follows:

<b>QUESTION:</b>	<b>Out of the characteristics listed in question three, do you believe one or more of these characteristics is/are more important for a leader to possess within your organization? If so, which one(s)?</b>
Leader 1	I believe listening, empathy, awareness and commitment to the growth of people are important for leaders within this organization to possess.
Leader 2	I believe persuasion, conceptualization and commitment to the growth of people are important for our leaders.
Leader 3	Listening, empathy and commitment to the growth of people are the most important for us to possess.

In response to the fifth item, all three leaders targeted commitment to the growth of people as being important to leaders within the organization. Two leaders also called out listening and empathy as being an important characteristic to leaders within the organization.

The table below states question six; below the question, answers from all three leaders are stated. Question and responses to the sixth item are as follows:

<b>QUESTION:</b>	<b>Are there any other leadership characteristics, not mentioned above, that stand out among leaders within Sports for Exceptional Athletes?</b>
Leader 1	Patience.
Leader 2	Patience, integrity and understanding.
Leader 3	Communication.

In response to the sixth item, two leaders listed patience as a characteristic that stands out among leaders within this organization. During the interview, leader one appeared to stress patience as a great characteristic for S4EA leaders to possess, due to the nature of this organization and the athletes they interact with.

The table below states question seven; below the question, answers from all three leaders are stated. Question and responses to the seventh item are as follows:

<b>QUESTION:</b>	<b>Would you like to add anything further regarding the leaders of your organization and the characteristics they possess?</b>
Leader 1	Our leaders are good leaders who take a real interest in helping our athletes.

Leader 2	The majority of our leaders possess a real talent in working with our athletes. Our athletes like them and will listen to them; and that is not always an easy thing to do.
Leader 3	Our leaders are selfless.

In response to the seventh item, it appeared as all leaders wished to stress that the leaders who volunteer at Sports for Exceptional Athletes are people who care deeply about the organization’s athletes and have a desire to help them.

**PHASE TWO: ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONNEER**

In analyzing phase two research, it appears as though many of the answers from the questionnaire provided validation to phase one research questions one and two. Just as in phase one research, leaders found listening, empathy, awareness, conceptualization and commitment to growth of people as being important characteristics leaders within the organization should possess. Foresight and building community were also listed as being important to leaders on the survey; however, not listed as important during the interview. Contrary to this, persuasion was listed as being important during the interview, but not listed as being important on the survey.

When analyzing prevalent characteristics within the organization, phase one and phase two data both show that leaders agree listening, empathy, awareness and commitment to growth of people are prevalent with the S4EA organization. Foresight and stewardship were listed as being important in phase one research; however, not listed on interview questionnaire. Contrary to this, building community was listed as being prevalent in phase two research; however, not called out in phase one research.

Another finding, which appears to be consistent with phase one findings, were that leaders did not agree with Greenleaf's "healing" characteristics as being a quality a leader within their organization should be inclined to possess.

When considering question six, leaders within the organization did not appear hesitant to list other characteristics they believed were not listed on Greenleaf's ten key characteristics list. Leaders within this organization also listed patience, integrity, understanding and communication as characteristics they believed were important and prevalent among leaders with the S4EA organization. During their interviews, leaders also stressed the great deal of desire that all of S4EA's leaders have in helping the organization's athletes develop and grow, both on the field and off the field.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this survey was to investigate which of Robert Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of a servant leader are important to leaders, as well as prevalent among leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization. Additionally, this survey investigated which, if any, characteristics not listed by Greenleaf, that leaders within the S4EA organization considered important or prevalent. A likert scale, as well as an interview questionnaire, were the research methodology used to investigate the importance and prevalence of Greenleaf's ten servant leadership characteristics within the organization. The participants included leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization. For the purpose of this study, a S4EA "leader" was defined as either a: coach, referee, league coordinator or chaperone. This chapter discusses the survey's analysis in further detail and limitations to this study.

### **DISCUSSION**

Leaders have different characteristics and behaviors which they use to motivate employees. Leading people is a big responsibility and not one that should be taken lightly. There are many different approaches to leadership (Blewett 2009). Servant leadership is a type of leadership that takes leadership to a deeper level. According to Greenleaf (1977), leaders are first and foremost servants who fulfill a desire to serve others. The embodiment of servant leadership is the principal of putting other people first. Every leader should have a servant's heart and show care and concern for others. Greenleaf (1977) suggests that caring for others has moved from personal involvement to

becoming something that is mediated through organizations, companies and institutions, which are often large, complex and sometimes incompetent.

### **PHASE ONE: RESEARCH QUESTION 1 & 2**

As previously stated, phase one data analysis sought to answer two research questions. Below are phase one research questions, along with their respective answers. Below the questions and answers is a discussion of the answers to phase one questions.

1) Q: Which of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of servant leadership are important to leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization?

A: Listening, empathy, awareness, conceptualization, foresight, commitment to growth of people and building community.

2) Q: Which of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of servant leadership are prevalent to leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization?

A: Listening, empathy, awareness, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of people.

Although it would seem that an organization, such as Sports for Exceptional Athletes, which serves youth and adults with intellectual disabilities, would embody Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of servant leadership, this does not appear to be the case. After analyzing the survey data, the important and prevalent qualities within the organization are shown in the table below.

KEY CHARACTERISTIC	IMPORTANT	PREVALENT
Listening	100%	91%
Empathy	100%	91%
Awareness	91%	100%
Conceptualization	100%	n/a
Foresight	91%	91%
Stewardship	n/a	91%
Commitment to growth of people	100%	100%
Building community	100%	n/a

Of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of a servant leader, S4EA's leaders identified eight of them as either being important to the organization, being prevalent within the organization or both important and prevalent within the organization.

Listening, empathy, awareness, foresight and commitment were the only key characteristics which were determined to be both important to the S4EA leaders, as well as prevalent within their organization. Judging from this set of data, it appears as though leaders within the organization not only feel that listening to the athletes is important, they also consider themselves competent and aware that listening is essential within the

organization. Empathy was also both important and prevalent to S4EA's leaders. It appears as though the leaders assume the good intentions of the athletes and do not reject them as people; even when they are forced to refuse to accept their behavior or performance. It also seems as though awareness was important and prevalent. It can be assumed that S4EA's leaders possess both general awareness and self-awareness. Awareness of S4EA's leaders also aids in understanding issues involving ethics and values. It lends itself to being able to view most situations from a more integrated, holistic position. Another one of Greenleaf's characteristics, to be both important and prevalent among S4EA's leaders, is foresight. The organization's leaders have the ability to foresee the likely outcome of a situation. Foresight enables these leaders 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. Lastly, commitment to growth of people is both important and prevalent among leaders of the S4EA leadership community. S4EA's leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As such, these leaders are deeply committed to the growth of each and every individual within the organization. The leaders recognize the tremendous responsibility to do everything within their power to nurture the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of their athletes.

#### **PHASE TWO RESEARCH QUESTIONS 1, 2, 3 & 4**

As previously stated, phase two data analysis sought to answer four research questions. Below are phase two research questions, along with their respective answers. Below the questions and answers is a discussion of the answers to phase two questions.

1) Q: Do the interviewee's answers to the interview questionnaire further affirm the data gathered in phase one, or, do their answers bring forth discrepancies when compared to phase one data?

A: The majority of data gathered was affirmed. Discrepancies in the data were found among: persuasion, awareness, foresight, stewardship and building community.

2) Q: Do leaders consider various characteristics within Greenleaf's servant leadership list to be more important to leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization than others?

A: Listening and empathy were found to be the most important. Awareness, persuasion, conceptualization and commitment to growth of people were also found to be more important than the remaining ten key characteristics.

3) Q: Do leaders consider various characteristics within Greenleaf's servant leadership list to be more prevalent among leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization?

A: Listening and empathy were found to be the most prevalent. Awareness and commitment to growth of people were also found to be more prevalent within the organization than the remaining ten key characteristics.

4) Q: Are there any other leadership characteristics, not listed among Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of a servant leader, which stand out among leaders within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization?

A: Patience, integrity, understanding and communication.

In an effort to further validate phase one research, phase two research was performed. The table below depicts answers to question's four and five from the survey questioner.

KEY CHARACTERISTIC	IMPORTANT	PREVALENT
Listening	X	X
Empathy	X	X
Awareness	X	X
Persuasion	X	n/a
Conceptualization	X	n/a
Commitment to growth of people	X	X
Building community	n/a	X

When comparing the two tables, the top two characteristics which were overwhelmingly called out as being both important, as well as prevalent among the organization, were listening and empathy. Phase one and phase two results for listening and empathy showed the greatest number of leaders, both in phase one and phase two, calling these characteristics out.

In phase one results, findings showed awareness as being both important and prevalent. In phase two findings, one leader in each question also listed awareness as being important and prevalent within the organization.

Another item which corresponds to phase one's results is conceptualization. In both phase one and phase two, conceptualization was found to be important among leaders, but not prevalent within the organization.

Commitment to the growth of people was another finding that was the same in both phase one and phase two. Leaders surveyed in both phase one and phase two agree that commitment to growth of people was important and prevalent among leaders within S4EA.

One commonality in which leaders in phase one and phase two did not list a characteristic as being important was when discussing stewardship. In both phases of research, stewardship was not found to be important to leaders.

Another commonality in which leaders found a trait to be both unimportant and nonexistent was when discussing healing. In both phases, healing was not named by leaders as being important or being prevalent within Sports for Exceptional Athletes.

One discrepancy comes when examining foresight. Although foresight was found to be both important and prevalent in phase one research, leaders interviewed in phase two did not find foresight to be important or prevalent to the organization.

Building community is considered to be another discrepancy because, although listed as both important and prevalent, the data from phase one and two did not match up.

Phase one data listed building community to be prevalent, but not important and phase two data listed building community to be important, but not prevalent.

Stewardship was also found to be a discrepancy among phase one and phase two research. Leaders in phase one of the research feel that stewardship is prevalent within the organization. Phase two research did not find that stewardship was prevalent within the organization.

Another discrepancy comes when examining persuasion. Although persuasion is listed in phase two research as being important, this is considered a minor discrepancy because it was only listed by one of the tree leaders as being important. None of the three leaders listed persuasion as being prevalent with the organization in phase two research; this piece of data corresponds with phase one data as well.

Reasons for these discrepancies could potentially be due to the way the data was presented to participants in each of the two phases. Phase one data did not state the characteristic directly, but took key words and phrases from Greenleaf's definition and asked leaders if the characteristic was important or prevalent in this manner. Phase two, on the other hand, directly asked leaders if they felt the characteristics were important or prevalent among the organization. If leaders within the organization possessed a different definition for some of these characteristics, their answers may have been skewed depending on their interpretation of what the characteristic traits meant.

For further analysis, the below table is a summation of the characteristic traits in which leaders in both phase one and phase two identified as being both important and prevalent within their organization.

KEY CHARACTERISTIC	IMPORTANT	PREVALENT
Listening	X	X
Empathy	X	X
Awareness	X	X
Commitment to growth of people	X	X

From these findings, listening and empathy were the two characteristics, in both phase one and phase two, in which leaders overwhelmingly identified most, within their organization. Other characteristics which were important and prevalent to many of the leaders surveyed were awareness and commitment to growth. Characteristic traits which ranked very low in both surveys were healing, persuasion, foresight and stewardship. One reason for the variation among Greenleaf's characteristic traits may be due to the possibility that many leaders within the organization are unfamiliar with the definition of some of these traits. For example, during discussion regarding leaders in chapter three, the researcher provided lists of key characteristic traits for leaders within the nonprofit leadership field, as well as the sports leadership field. There were many similarities when comparing the lists. Key words and phrases such as listening, placing yourself in other's position and development, were especially common within these lists. However, healing and persuasion were not listed among any of those lists. Although these lists are a minute sample compared to the thousands of lists which name specific characteristic traits for a leader, a great deal of those lists contain the key words and phrases listed above and very

few of those lists contain words such as healing, persuasion, foresight and stewardship. It is possible that leaders did not identify with these characteristic traits because they are not traits of the norm for leaders. S4EA's leaders, just as millions of leaders in other organizations, may believe these traits are insignificant and not mandatory to possessing.

Another potential reason for the organization only identifying with four out of ten characteristic traits, which were determined to be both important and prevalent with the organization, may be due to that organization's dynamic. While gathering phase two data, the researcher noticed leaders being especially cautious when discussing healing. Leaders did not consider themselves responsible to help athletes heal emotional hearts because a great majority of athletes within the organization seek specialized help for these types of issues. Leaders also admitted that dreaming big dreams for the organization was not greatly important to them; they preferred to focus on dreaming big dreams for their athletes.

Perhaps another reason Greenleaf's ten key characteristics are not all encompassing within the Sports for Exceptional Athletes organization may be due to the leaders being unaware of the concept of servant leadership and Greenleaf's findings. Perhaps, if the leaders within the organization became familiar with servant leadership, and took an interest in the desire to develop as a leader in this manner, they would place a higher importance on characteristic traits such as: healing, persuasion, conceptualization, and foresight, which scored low on phase one and phase two research.

Leaders did appear to place significance on other outside characteristics, which they feel leaders within their organization possess. Leaders stated: patience, integrity,

understanding and communication are they key characteristic traits, not mentioned in Greenleaf's list, as being qualities that their leaders possess. Patience was the most common answer given by interviewees; this answer may have been provided as the most popular response, perhaps, due to the nature of the organization. All outside answers provided are closely related to Greenleaf's ten key characteristics.

## **LIMITATIONS**

This study involved 13 participants from a variety of different sports teams and locations throughout the organization. In studying sports related nonprofit organizations, a more effective approach would involve incorporating other sports related nonprofit organizations within a greater geographic area; such organizations could include Special Olympics chapters throughout the nation. A larger study with an increased number of participants and organizations from different locations in the United States would add to the significance, validity, and overall scholarly impact of a study.

The participants were completing a survey based on their perceptions of the entire organization. Although all sports within the organization are organized by the same guidelines, many of the sports consist of different leaders and different athletes. Although leaders may have answered honestly for themselves and athletes they lead, their particular sport may not produce consistent results when compared to a different sport or location.

The survey contained a consent form which stated that all responses would be kept secure and that these documents could only be accessed by the researcher; however, participants may have been hesitant to reveal their true feelings about the organization.

Leaders may have been hesitant to divulge their true feelings for fear other leaders within the organization would discover what they had said. The researcher took measure to enable the data to remain confidential, but participants may still have feared possible repercussions.

The participants who took part in the survey used in-print surveys in an effort to increase the response rate. However, the in-print surveys required a large amount of time to collect, input, and analyze the data. The researcher input the data manually into a document prior to analyzing the data. The in-print surveys were beneficial, due to the fact that leaders within the organization may not have access to a computer to take the survey. However, using in-print surveys in a larger study would be unrealistic, due to the amount of time and tedious nature of inputting the entirety of the data. Electronic surveys would enable a larger amount of participants to take part in the study, along with a smoother and quicker input and analysis of data.

The current study did not give leaders any incentive to take part in the survey. Participants were primarily recruited by the researcher the day of their sport and had to take time out of their day to participate in the study. An incentive to take the study could increase the willingness of leaders to take the survey and could increase the response rate.

In addition to the lack of incentive to take the survey, the survey was only distributed over a period of several days. Some leaders may not have been volunteering during those days. A longer length of time distributing the survey to leaders could increase the over-all number of participants. By addressing these limitations in future research, more thorough conclusions could be brought forth.

## CONCLUSION

Servant leadership has become a highly discussed topic. Levels of servant leadership can be measured through evaluation listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth and building community within an organization. This present study was able to focus on all ten measurements of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of servant leadership. With over 1,350 athletes, Sports for Exceptional Athletes is a growing organization that serves the needs of athletes with intellectual disabilities. Successful leadership principles will continue to help propel this organization to grow in an efficient and effective manner. The ability to lead as a servant first comes from an inward desire. Servant leadership begins with the self; a person that exemplifies this leadership style has a mindset of service. Oftentimes people focus on how to climb the corporate ladder, while stepping over and on top of others. Servant leaders put others before themselves.

This study attempted to identify which of Greenleaf's ten key characteristic traits are common within sports related nonprofit organizations; in particular, Sports for Exceptional Athletes. The researcher used a quantitative approach while examining servant leadership within the organization. Specifically, the study focused on surveying and interviewing leaders from different sports and locations within the organization. The purpose of using two different survey instruments was to gain a better understanding of which of Greenleaf's characteristics existed within the organization.

Prior to this study, the examination on which of Greenleaf's ten key characteristics of servant leadership within a sports related nonprofit organization did not

exist. Thus, by studying Greenleaf's servant leadership characteristics and the measurements of their importance and prevalence within an organization, such as Sports for Exceptional Athletes, the researcher and society gained a better understanding of the effectiveness of servant leadership in a sports related nonprofit organization.

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APPENDIX A

PHASE ONE SURVEY

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Listening intently to our athletes is important.					
2	I take time to reflect on conversations I have had with athletes and other members of the organization.					
3	I prefer to use persuasion before I use authority.					
4	I find it important to recognize athletes for their special and unique spirits.					
5	Being consensus within groups, when making a decision, is important.					
6	I consider emotional healing to be an important part of an individual's growth.					
7	Self-awareness makes me a better leader.					
8	Although short-term focus is important, I also find it important to think beyond day-to-day realities and conceptualize the organization's future.					
9	I consider a "forward looking" (foresight) approach to the organization important.					
10	In this organization, it is important to serve the needs of others first.					
11	I am deeply committed to the growth of each and every athlete within this organization.					
12	Dreaming great dreams for the organization is something I do.					
13	As a leader, it is important to build a sense of community among athletes.					
14	It is important to do everything within my power to the foster the growth of our organization's athletes.					
15	I strive to understand and empathize with our athletes.					
16	I believe a true sense of community within this organization has been/is in the process of being created.					
17	Being aware of the happenings within the organization is important.					
18	I feel confident that I am able to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future.					
19	I often act as a steward towards athletes within this organization.					
20	As a leader, I see an opportunity to help athletes heal emotional hurts.					

## APPENDIX B

### PHASE TWO INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1) As a leader, do you feel it is important to serve the athlete's needs before the needs of the organization? Does this occur often within the organization?
- 2) Why do you like working at this organization?
- 3) Do you believe every leader of your organization should possess these ten characteristics? If you do not agree with any of these characteristics, please explain.
  - Listening
  - Empathy
  - Healing
  - Awareness
  - Persuasion
  - Conceptualization
  - Foresight
  - Stewardship
- 4) Out of the characteristics listed above, do you believe one or more of these characteristics is/are more prevalent within the organization? If so, which one(s)?
- 5) Out of the characteristics listed above, do you believe one or more of these characteristic is/are more important for a leader to possess within your organization? If so, which one(s)?
- 6) Are there any other leadership characteristics, not mentioned above, that stand out among leaders within Sports for Exceptional Athletes?
- 7) Would you like to add anything further regarding the leaders of your organization and the characteristics they possess?