



The Impact of Servant Leadership on Racism in Society

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Roundtable: Servant Leadership

The purpose of this paper is to address the issue of racism in society and offer solutions through the impact of servant leadership. The development of racism and the present circumstances today call for change to bring healing and justice. Biblical principles can be applied to combat racism, along with servant leadership, to reflect the love of God for the entire world. The Old Testament and the New Testament confirm the message of Christ to bring good news to all people. Servant leadership can foster service to others, move society toward community, and build trust (Reinke, 2004). Many scholars have studied the theory of servant leadership, and the contribution of research can engage the issue of racism. The attributes and characteristics of servant leaders implemented can result in justice for all and transform communities. The humility of servant leaders puts the leader as a servant and embraces the differences of others to show compassion to those they serve (Northouse, 2019). The impact of servant leadership empowers the oppressed and brings forth freedom. As a result, action steps can be taken by utilizing awareness and perception, demonstrating acceptance and empathy, exemplifying altruism and love, and building community and trust (Greenleaf, 1977; Patterson, 2003).

Keywords: servant leadership, racism, reconciliation

Servant leadership challenges the traditional leadership approach and brings effectiveness to change (Winston & Fields, 2015). According to Ramsey (2006), servant leadership attempts to heal injustices that destroy the human spirit and seek truth, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Greenleaf (1977) offers the best test when applying servant leadership:

Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? What is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived? (p. 27).

The problem of racism causes racial privilege that divides our communities and nation, but servant leadership can provide solutions or recommendations. Displaying awareness and perception removes fear and insecurities to address racism as servant leaders (Tilghman-Havens, 2018). The ability of a servant leader to demonstrate acceptance and empathy puts the leader in the "shoes of another person" to understand ethnic and cultural differences (Northouse, 2019). The attribute of altruism and love is the main focus on bringing light to the issue of racism with the virtues of servant leadership (Patterson, 2003). Finally, building community and trust can offer a solution to foster collaboration and provide shared interests that can move beyond racial barriers (Northouse, 2019). This paper contributes to the hope of justice, diversity, inclusion, and crossing cultures through the impact of servant leadership to diminish racism.

Development of Racism

The social issue of racism has developed throughout history from the early stages of European culture, where they exploited African individuals and indigenous Americans (Mitchell-Yellin, 2018). Individuals that were "black, brown, red, or yellow did not have rights to land, labor or bodily integrity" (Mitchell-Yellin, 2018, p. 61). Chamberlain (1976) described that racism is within the prisons of unawareness and, throughout American history, has always been a threat toward Indians, immigrants, and people of color. Racism and slavery in the United States progressed even with the disenfranchisement of Africans in the USA and omitted from public consciousness (Prieto et al., 2018). The concept of racism in the historical account reflects the driving force of slavery, with not only Africans but the exploitation of poor English and Irish brought over to America for cheap labor (Mitchell-Yellin, 2018). Political and economics were the catalyst for racism and injustice toward people of color.

Historical decisions have led us to the current state of racism today with unequal practices and discrimination. Due to the original sin of slavery and racism, the superior attitude of hatred, indifference, and disrespect toward people with different cultures have impacted society (Mitchell-Yellin, 2018). This social issue of racism is present today, shown by the marginalizing of people of color, recent police brutality against unarmed African Americans, discrimination in housing and job opportunities. JPost Editorial (2020) discussed the coronavirus spreading; however, racism is also spreading due to the breakdown in society. Many young people of all races and ethnicities are turning away from the racist and bigoted rhetoric as today's world is becoming more diverse with people of different cultures and backgrounds (Harris, 2020). Presently racism has a more significant presence because of technology and social media influence and attention to the current social injustices.

Analysis of Servant Leadership and Biblical Principles

Leadership takes responsibility for healing communities, nations, and the world to move to reconciliation due to the pain of inequality (Tilghman-Havens, 2018). Servant

leadership is "the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first, then brings one to aspire to lead" (Greenleaf, 1977). This approach puts people's needs and interests above their own and can change the scope of racism (Ramsey, 2006). Nelson Mandela is an example of a servant leader that exemplified servant leadership to facilitate change, end violence, heal injustice, and combat racism (Ramsey, 2006). Servant leadership is a holistic approach and is not about power but about serving others in which followers can have a voice to restore justice (Ramsey, 2006).

Greenleaf (1977) denoted that blinders can become created by a lack of self-awareness, but servant leaders can bring awareness to social issues. Servant leadership crosses cultures to connect opposites to bring forth answers to racism and other issues in society (Trompenaars & Voerman, 2010). Servant leaders have core qualities that transform tension and respect diversity (Trompenaars & Voerman, 2010). According to Tilghman-Havens (2018), "the model of servant leadership brings forth action and contributes to healing injustices for those that are unheard or misrepresented due to traditional power structures" (p. 88). Greenleaf (1977) concluded, "the effect on the least privileged in society" is an effect of servant leadership.

There are Biblical principles when addressing the issue of racism, calling followers of God to justice (Johnson, 2012). Ephesians 6:12 (New King James Version) states, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." The stronghold of racism can divide and take control within the world today, but spiritual warfare, as noted by Paul, can give us the strength to stand against it (Harris, 2020). According to Harris (2020), the Bible is culturally inclusive despite a society that consists of increased division and conveys a message of equality.

The Old Testament and the New Testament provide biblical context regarding the issue of racism to bring clarity and insight. Genesis 12:1 (New King James Version) acknowledges the command to Abraham to "get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you." The Bible continuously calls for individuals to leave the limits of their ethnic boundaries to mix with other diverse groups (Harris, 2020). The New Testament described in Luke 4:18 (New King James Version) declares justice, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed." This passage illustrates that the Holy Spirit enables freedom to those bound by racism.

Recommendations

The attributes of servant leadership and servant leaders can effectively engage the social issue of racism. The dimensions, values, and commitments of servant leadership allow

leaders and followers to relate with each other in a more ethical and meaningful way (Sendjaya, 2015). The following are recommendations to address racism:

Utilize Awareness and Perception

Awareness and perception give attention to others, allow detachment from prejudgment, and recognize prejudice (Greenleaf, 1977). Implementing this attribute as a servant leader brings forth unity and inclusion. According to Van Dierendonck and Patterson (2010), described "awareness, and especially self-awareness, strengthens the servant leader to understand issues" (p. 17-18). Reflecting awareness and examining perception allows reconciliation and change biases to support equality between races (Cabezas, 2012). Being aware of the oppression and racial divide in the world can cross cultures to work together and live together in harmony.

Demonstrate Acceptance and Empathy

Servant leaders that exhibit acceptance and empathy can show compassion toward healing the divide of racism. When a leader shows empathy, it attempts to understand the view of others and allows the followers to feel accepted (Northouse, 2019). These characteristics are vital for bringing solutions to the issue of racism for healing. Greenleaf (1977) ascribed that servant leaders "accept and empathize, never rejects (p.33)." The demonstration of acceptance and empathy produces trust and recognizes that no one is perfect, but it performs to understand. Having an open mind and heart as a leader provides a connection with others to create change in society. Ramsey (2006) ascribed that the understanding of the role of empathy brings forgiveness and healing for those victimized by racism.

Exemplify Altruism and Love

Altruism and love in servant leadership bring forth justice in society and make a difference in the lives of others. Altruism and love emerge from the basis of empathy and acceptance to promote social justice (Johnson, 2012). The altruistic approach and genuine love for others is the essential role of a servant leader to take on racism and eliminate fear. Patterson (2003) denoted that exemplifying love shows concern for others without pretense and can actively listen and communicate to unite cultures. Servant leadership seeks to understand and love others, which is implacable to freedom and effective in irradicating racism (Tilghman-Havens, 2018).

Build Community and Trust

Servant leaders can build community and trust to address racism by fostering relationships. Reinke (2004) explained that servant leadership is not a position, but the main focus is on the relationship to serve others by building community and trust. There are many barriers, hurt, and a history of pain pertaining to racism; however,

gaining trust as a servant leader can transform individuals. According to Joseph and Winston (2005), servant leaders can build trust by a) empowering, b) involving others, and c) honoring commitments and being consistent (p. 11).

The model of servant leadership and the attributes of a servant leader can bring solutions to racism as a starting point to resolve dilemmas and conflicts. Trompenaars and Voerman (2010) concluded, "servant leadership works in cultures because it has different starting points" (p. 55). Servant leaders provide a connection with experience and learning to initiate steps to get results, and the recommendations in this paper can bring forth change (Trompenaars & Voerman, 2010).

Conclusion

The central theme of this paper highlights the fact that servant leadership embodies a holistic approach that can address racism in society and bring forth solutions for hope in the world today. The attributes of servant leaders and biblical perspectives can bring healing despite the development of racism and the present circumstances in society. Harris (2020) asserted "that God loves everyone equally, and it does not matter the race, ethnicity, gender, religious background, or economic status, but we should love each other" (p. 148). John 3:16 (New King James Version) says, "For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." The approach of servant leadership offers a unique perspective that can challenge the divisiveness of racism and serve humanity (Northouse, 2019). Trompenaars and Voerman (2010) described that integrating opposites is the key to resolving problems, and servant leaders can demonstrate core values to respect diversity. According to Tilghman-Havens (2018), society has to acknowledge the fears and vulnerabilities of going beyond unjust divisions and structures so love can conquer fear. There are hope and restoration for the community when servant leadership is applied. The impact of servant leaders can raise awareness and take action to bring solutions to racism and social injustice that will change behaviors (Johnson, 2012).

About the Author

Tamara Morton graduated from Regent University School of Business & Leadership with a doctorate in Strategic Leadership with a concentration in Servant Leadership. For the last 20 years, she has been involved in the ministry of St. James Missionary Church of Va. Beach, Va., and impacting the local community. She conducts leadership development, teaching, training, strategic planning, organizational design, coaching, and recently she established TMorton Consulting, LLC to provide consulting for faith-based ministries and organizations. She has organized and implemented various ministry and community projects to make a difference.

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