



REVEALING STRATEGIC SOLUTIONSSM

Talk to the Rotary E-Club of North Texas
September 5, 2017
Excerpts

I went looking for the potato sack. I didn't know where it was, couldn't remember where it was stored. At first, years ago we hung it as art. Then we had stored it in the top shelf of my closet in the bedroom. Then fearing the moths would get it, it made its way to the cedar chest in the family room. But neither my wife nor I could remember exactly. We cleared off the magazines and books on the top of the chest. Opened up the chest. And there on top was the potato sack.

This is no ordinary potato sack. It was hand woven on a primitive loom in Bolivia. The yarn is hand spun and hand died. Imagine how strong this potato sack is. Strong enough to for 100 pounds of potatoes? 150 pounds? Strong enough that it wouldn't tear apart if packed full a couple of guys lifted it and throw it on the back of a truck. On top of a dozen sacks just like it. To haul potatoes to market. Strong enough to endure ice, rain and all manner of abuse.

I first thought about this sack when I was thinking about a small slice of my experience in **servicing and leading**. I bought the sack when I was in the Peace Corps in Bolivia working with campesinos, the poor, agrarian, subsistence farmers who lived out in campo outside the big cities.

Over the past several months, though, I have come to realize this sack is the whole empanada...as they might say in Bolivia...**the whole meal**. It represents a lifetime of experiences in leading and working with people, teams and organizations. To build organizations, to get things done...sometimes...and sometimes not.

In turn, it caused me to ask what exactly is it that makes for a strong potato sack when it comes to leading and working with people? How was it over a lifetime, my potato sack was so strong. And, more importantly, now, for you, how you can make your potato sack stronger?

This is what I want for you today, now. To discover how you can weave a stronger potato sack for yourself...how you can lead more effectively. And to challenge you to combine servant and leader as the way to do so.

Oh, by the way, the weaving isn't over. Not for me. Nor, hopefully, for you.



Any weaving has a warp and a weft. The vertical and the horizontal strands. I see the warp as the servant – servant as leader. I see the weft as leader – leader as servant. A strong fabric has both a strong warp and weft, creating the strong servant leader.

What is servant leadership? Servant leadership isn't a new concept.

Lao-Tzu, the ancient Chinese philosopher, wrote about it in the 5th Century B.C. "The highest type of ruler is one whose existence the people are barely aware..." The Sage is self-effacing and scanty of words. When his task is accomplished and things have been completed, all the people say, "We ourselves have achieved it."

In the New Testament, Luke says "...but for he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief (leader, one who goes before), as he that doth serve."

More recently Robert Greenleaf in a 1970 paper said, "**The servant leader is servant first...**it begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead...vs. one who is the leader first.

In 2013, Adam Grant, the single highest rated Wharton professor, carries the torch for servant leadership in his book Give and Take.

Servant leadership is just one of several leadership styles. It's closer to democratic and transformational than to authoritarian or paternalistic. Democratic shares decision-making; transformational redirects thinking.