

Service Based Leadership

Knowing and Serving Your Constituencies



Ed Rehkopf



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Constituencies

Before you can effectively exercise your leadership skills, you must clearly recognize your various constituencies – those groups who depend on you and for whom you must provide leadership and service. For most private club leadership positions this is clear cut; there are members, employees, and a boss. However, for some positions there may be other groups who rely upon your exercise of leadership, such as membership influencers, committee chairs, and sometimes community leaders.

So, for every leadership position, one must identify the constituencies served. Once you have identified these, make a list of each constituency's needs and how you and/or your team can best serve them. In most cases you need to visit with constituents to hear directly from them what they need or expect from you.

With a clear understanding of their needs, you are in a far better position to determine priorities and execute your responsibilities.

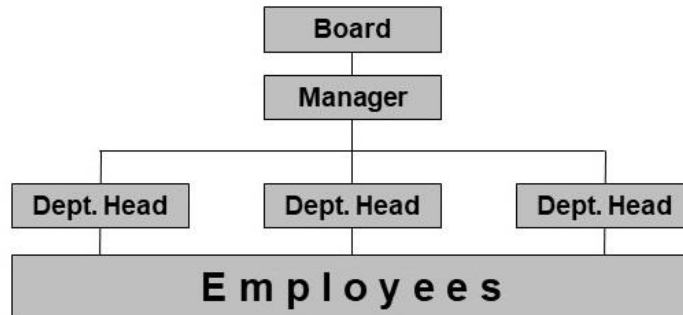
The Hierarchy of Service

Service-Based Leadership, as described in *Leadership on the Line: A Guide for Front Line Supervisors, Business Owners, and Emerging Leaders*, stresses that the leader must serve the needs of all constituencies. But not all constituent needs have equal weight or importance.

Club boards of directors are usually the smallest constituent group in numbers, but their needs are paramount. Why? Because they represent the will of the membership, whose investment in the club and their need to operate it as a going concern requires a financially viable operation. If it is not earning sufficient revenues to meet its cash needs for payroll or to pay vendors, if it cannot gain access to capital for ongoing renovations and large and unanticipated expenses, or if the members are resistant to assessments, it may begin a downward spiral of diminishing quality and service, deteriorating reputation, and declining membership that can become a threat to the club's existence.

Obviously, operating a financially viable club is crucially important and how the club is led and organized are critical factors for its ongoing success (see *PCPM, Insights and Ideas, Service-Based Leadership – The Foundation of Successful Club Operations* and *PCPM, Remarkable Service Infrastructure- An Overarching Plan for Club Operations* for more information).

The basis for the traditional hierarchical organizational model is the military concept of "chain of command." In this model, management is represented as the sequence of authority in executing the will of the board – and certainly management plays that essential role. But in addition to not representing the importance of members, it also places the employees at the bottom of the chain – thereby visually relegating them to the position of least consequence.



Traditional Top-Down Organizational Chart

It properly emphasizes the place of the Board, but where are the members?

Next in order of importance are the needs of the membership. Without sufficient member patronage, the club will not be financially viable. If not viable, all constituencies lose.



Service-Based Organizational Model

Here the importance of satisfying members is depicted, as is the important role of employees. The club's leaders are placed at the bottom, clearly emphasizing their foundational role in serving the needs of all constituencies.

Ultimately, members are attracted by price and the quality of amenities and service. Taken together, quality and price create a sense of value – the value perceived by members. If enough members perceive value, they will frequent the club to spend their money and will make it successful. If not, the club may ultimately fail.

This statement brings us to our third constituency – the employees. They are the ones who execute the board's vision for quality of product and service. They are the ones whose daily interaction with the membership creates the value the members expect. Properly led, valued, and supported, employees will enthusiastically commit to serving the club's membership, thereby fostering levels of patronage that enable it to thrive.



In simplest terms, when you serve your employees, they will serve your members, who by their continued enthusiastic patronage will serve the needs of the club board.

Our Need to Serve

Jim Collins, author of the bestselling book, *Good to Great, Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't*, says that people "want to be involved in something that just flat-out works," but I believe it is something more. I believe that people have a great need to connect with or serve something larger than themselves. Whether it's building a skyscraper, embarking on a campaign to eradicate hunger, or even dressing in favorite NFL team colors and attending all the home games – people need to connect to a larger purpose or endeavor.

Great leaders understand this basic human need and can create that connection for their followers. But the connection I am talking about need not be a life-altering cause or event. Most of us live rather uneventful lives. While our need is to earn a living and support our families, an astute leader recognizes the opportunity to create something out-of-the-ordinary – a special enterprise that performs better than others and is a source of purpose and pride for all.

In connecting people to the challenge of creating something special, the leader feeds the employees' need to do something beyond self while advancing the purpose of the enterprise. All that is necessary is for the leader to frame the challenge in terms of shared goals. In the private club industry this is a simple task. Our purpose is to serve. The quality of our service encourages member support, which in turn ensures the success of the club, and the job security and advancement opportunities of everyone involved.

Throughout my career, I have met many eager, enthusiastic young people, some just starting out their adult lives and relishing the opportunity of their first jobs. Unfortunately for many, their youthful idealism is crushed quickly by the realities of the workplace, particularly when they are not well-led, when they are not properly trained or supported, and when they are not treated as if they mattered.

At the same time, I've heard managers complain about the poor state of the labor pool and their inability to find decent employees who have commitment to their jobs. Listening to such complaints I wonder what steps these individuals have taken to motivate their employees, to provide training and meaningful work experiences, to connect their workers' labors to a larger effort.

To expect that the wide variety of applicants for positions will inherently know and understand a leader's vision and the values that underlie the club's efforts is naive. All employees, whether first-time job seekers or those who have worked in a variety of jobs and settings, need the vision of connecting to a larger purpose; and they need a Service-Based Leader who can provide them the meaningful employment that serves their greater needs.

Value Your People

Of all constituencies, the one a leader has the greatest influence over are the employees. Since they are the people directly responsible for providing service to members, their motivation and morale is critically important.

How does a leader go about ensuring a motivated team with high morale? First and foremost, are the principles of Service-Based Leadership – of the need to communicate well; of engaging



daily with team members and providing direction; listening to and addressing their concerns; providing the tools, resources, training, and support for employees to do their jobs well. Beyond that is the need to recognize the ultimate value of people and act on that principle; to treat all employees with dignity and respect; to lead by example and address concerns promptly; to ensure closure on issues; and to be open and approachable to employees.

How can leaders best demonstrate regard for their people?

Know and use employee names. Everyone likes to be recognized as an individual and called by name. Certainly, your members do, and your employees do as well. Introduce them to members and visitors when appropriate. Failing to do so implies they're just part of the scenery instead of key contributors to the success of your operation.

Learn about employees as individuals. Get to know them, their life situations, their dreams and plans, their goals in life. This does not mean you become their friend or confidante, but it does mean you have enough interest in them as individuals to try to understand their situation, their needs, and motivations.

Greet employees daily. You should never fail to greet employees when you see them each day. You don't like to be ignored as if you were unimportant, and neither do they.

Share your time with employees. As busy as you are, make time for your employees. They have questions, concerns, and needs that should never be ignored. Be open and approachable. When you are not, when they are afraid to come to you for fear of your reaction, you are kept in the dark about what is really going on in your team. If any employee is monopolizing your time or is a "high maintenance" employee, do not be shy about letting him know the inappropriateness of this behavior.

Recognize each person's strengths and weaknesses. None of us is the perfect manager, server, retail attendant, etc. Don't expect your employees to be. Learn each person's strengths and weakness. Capitalize on the strengths and help each person overcome their weaknesses. The time you invest in helping employees develop their skills and abilities is well worth the effort and will be appreciated far more than you'll ever realize.

Be involved in the workplace and work processes. Do not create a hostile work environment by failing to adequately engage with your employees. Without your ongoing guidance and direction, petty dissensions and friction will grow among the workers of your team as they struggle to figure out who must do what and when.

Look out for your peoples' welfare. Make sure your employees get adequate work breaks, that their workspaces are set up for comfort and efficiency, that they are properly trained and equipped for their jobs, that you adjust work schedules, when possible, to meet individual needs, that you resolve pay discrepancies quickly, that you get back to them to resolve issues they've raised. Make sure they understand their benefits, taking the time to explain the details to them.

Treat employees as adults. When you treat employees like children, many will act like children. Don't talk down to them or treat them as if they're immature. When you give people responsibility, most will reward your trust. Those who demonstrate they can't be trusted should be encouraged to move on.



Show respect. This is critically important in the way you speak, the tone of your voice, your choice of words, and your body language. Your respect for others cannot be faked. You must always sincerely value people to treat them with respect.

Do not take advantage of people. Employees are not your servants and should not be expected to perform personal services for you. If you delegate tasks, make sure there is value in it for them, either in enhanced compensation or a genuine learning opportunity.

Demonstrate the common decencies of human interaction in all your dealings. Be kind and courteous. Give your people the benefit of the doubt. Don't be quick to take offense or become upset. Maintain control of your temper and reaction to events.

Thank employees often. How easy is it to say, "Thank you"? It costs nothing and it reaps great rewards. The only requirement is that it must be sincerely given.

Say goodbye at the end of the day or shift. A farewell is a common courtesy that you would extend to family and friends, if for no other reason than as an acknowledgement of departure. The members of your work team, who you depend on for your success, should receive no less a courtesy. Again, the need for sincerity is absolute.

When all these things are done conscientiously and consistently by the leader, good morale and motivation is a natural by-product. By focusing on being the best service-based leader possible, morale, motivation, and its attendant enthusiasm and good cheer will come naturally.

Serving All Constituencies

The key to serving the needs of all those you serve – members, employees, and boss – lies in ensuring that you build strong relationships with individuals. How do you do this? Begin by:

- Treating everyone you meet with courtesy, respect, and good cheer.
- Focusing on each person you deal with as if he or she were the most important person in the world.
- Taking the time to get to know people, sharing your time and attention with them.
- Learning about other people's jobs and the challenges and the difficulties they face, and what you and your team can do to better serve them.
- Keeping promises and following through on commitments.
- Being principled, showing fairness, and demonstrating integrity.
- Recognizing the ultimate value of people in all you do.

Relationships depend upon how you view yourself in relation to others. If you see yourself as separate and apart from your constituencies, if you view others as the means to your ends, if your vision and goals lack a broader purpose than your own needs and ambitions, establishing meaningful relationships will be impossible. On the other hand, when you see yourself as part of a team with a shared mission, then a sense of service will be an intrinsic part of your service team relationships.

About the Author

Ed Rehkopf is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy and received a Master of Professional Studies degree in Hospitality Management from Cornell's School of Hotel Administration. During his long and varied career, he has managed two historic hotels, managed at a four-star desert resort, directed operations for a regional hotel chain, opened two golf and country clubs, worked in golf course development, and launched a portal web site for the club industry.