

Leadership

We are going to appoint the Committee Prefects for the Prefects' Council on Wednesday and the newly elected SA President and his cabinet, the Executive Council of the Students' Association on Friday. The scouts from our 10th Scout group are also going to give a presentation this Thursday on their activities which, for many years, have trained a lot of our students into leaders in society. I should have included the peer mentors also, but their appointment was conducted during the summer holiday when they received their green badges from me. Since we are going to appoint our student leaders this week, I would like to say something about leadership and in particular, what kind of student leaders we want to have in St. Paul's College.

People often equate "leadership" with status, title, power or authority. If you google the word "leadership", there are thousands of entries on the Internet and everyone seems to have something to say either about the qualities of leadership or the styles of leadership. The latest buzzwords in the literature include "distributed leadership", "transformational leadership" and the more popular "servant leadership". Although the phrase "servant leadership" was coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970, this is actually nothing new. Two thousand years ago, Jesus already talked about the king being a servant. In the gospels, Jesus' disciples were involved in a dispute over who would be the greatest among them (Luke 9: 46-50; 22: 24-30; Mark 9: 33-37; 10: 35-45; Matt. 20: 20-28). They were preoccupied with themselves and their positions of power and authority. However, Jesus teaches them that they should not be like the leaders of the Gentiles who lord it over them, but be like Himself and learn to lead by serving (1 Peter 5: 1-4). "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." He then went down on his knees to wash the feet of the disciples.

It has now become fashionable to talk about servant leadership. However, what does it really mean by a leader as a servant? How can a leader be a servant? Does it mean that they have to do all the manual labour work and get their hands dirty? Should a CEO of a company be working side by side with the cleaners?

I was working on this speech one day until 6:45pm and as usual Fu Gor was waiting for me in the office so that he could lock the door. He always waits until we leave the office even though he knows very well that we do have the key to the office. Anyway, I said goodbye to him and turned around to leave the office, still thinking about this idea of servant leadership on my way to the elevator when I suddenly realised what was meant by serving. Fu Gor is always the first one to be at school and the last one to leave (and sometimes he does not leave at all!). He works very hard to make sure that everything is in place for us to start the day and he also wants to make sure that everything is in order after we leave. Even though he speaks loudly all the time, he mostly works behind the scenes to provide the support, never boasting, never taking credit for what he has done. He is doing all these tasks not because he is paid a huge amount of salary, nor is he doing this because he has been given a particular title. He does not need to demand respect but we all respect him because we know that he is doing all these out of a genuine love of the College and the people in it. That is what serving others is all about.

A genuine love. The word “love” has a much distorted use nowadays but the Bible has given us a very good description of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7: “⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

In the same way, prefects, SA officials, peer mentors, student leaders, when you serve the College and your schoolmates out of love, you should be patient, kind, humble and not brag about your achievements. You should not seek your own

interest but forgive other people's mistakes. You must walk in truth but not in darkness, you should protect your team members, you trust them, you are always hopeful and you always persevere even in the face of difficulties.

Leadership skills can be taught but a heart to serve cannot. The wish to serve is not something you can instill by yourself. It has to come from within. It has to come from a real passion for what you do and a real love of the people that you serve. A leader should be much more than a badge, a status or a title. These are only given to you externally and they are not permanent.

As Greenleaf rightly puts it, the starting point should be that one wants to serve and that brings one to aspire to lead. In this way, other people's need will always have the highest priority. On the contrary, if a person sets out to lead because of other ulterior motives such as power, status or material possessions rather than to serve, self-interest will always come first in any decision making. That is why the word "leadership" on our PowerPoint slide today has a small letter "i".

Mr. Yuen, you may say, this is not relevant to me because I am not a student leader. You may not be one now but all of you will be called upon to be a leader of some sort in the future, be it a CEO of a company, a leader of a small team, a teacher of a class or a Sunday school teacher. I hope you will remember this. To lead is to serve and when you serve you always put other people's interest first because it is the people you serve that are more important.

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