

Leaders can vary drastically in terms of leadership styles, and the same applies for the characteristics that different leaders may possess; however, characteristics including kindness, selflessness, and a caring attitude toward others form a specific type of leader known as a servant leader. Servant leaders place the ideas and emotions of fellow collaborators before their own, with a leadership style that places them on the same level as those who they are leading.

While athletic teams represent an informal leadership setting, opportunities are still presented for them and others to step up and lead the group. For instance, I have been running Cross Country for over four years, and season after season, servant leaders step up and lead the team in various ways. Whether they have made it to the podium at the state meet or are not on the varsity team, these people make sacrifices for the greater good of the team. Last season, for example, the fastest person on our team, a senior, led a pack of runners from our team in the state meet, sacrificing a higher finish to allow my other teammates and I to achieve stronger races by keeping us on pace. In turn, these actions of servant leadership compel our team to give back to our teammates as well. Another instance of this is when I came to the junior varsity meet to support my teammates and walked all around the course to cheer them on, despite that I was on the varsity team and had no need to be there. The instances of servant leadership from my teammates prompted me to give back to our team in the ways that they did and made the season better for all of my teammates.

Additionally, these leaders differ radically from traditional leaders, who often have a complex in which they are superior to those who follow them and often place their own needs first. While a traditional leadership style does not determine a leader's success, servant leadership is very beneficial to communities because a servant leader places the needs of a community before his or her own; consequently, elected officials should exemplify servant

leadership because of the need for these officials to serve the communities they represent. In a world that promotes self-centeredness and selfishness, servant leadership is a practice that challenges these norms, and it should be practiced by our representatives in order to encourage it among their communities. In addition, elected representatives have platforms with great influence, and using these positions to promote the ideals of servant leadership encourages individuals in a community to place the needs of the community before their own. Not only would these selfless actions promote focus on the community rather than individuals, but it also provides a way to give back to the very people who allowed the elected representative to come to power in the first place.

If even a few people, be it leaders with a large platform or a small one, give back to their communities and practice servant leadership, they can influence entire communities to do the same. As a member of the community of the United States and of Tennessee, it is their duty as a member of these communities to serve others and to turn their focus outward to their communities. Even if one has a formal leadership position, be it in the workplace, a government building, or no title of leader, servant leadership should be practiced by all to allow communities to grow stronger and help resolve problems.

Whether one simply belongs to a community or is the leader of one, practicing servant leadership allows great strides to be made for the greater good of a community. By placing the needs and desires of a community before one's own, a sense of unity and of progress can be achieved. If all people, be it athletes or elected officials, choose to practice even smaller aspects of servant leadership, then great progress can be made for the goals of a community.