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**The Impact of Servant Leadership within a US National Campus Ministry: An  
Examination of Effective Leadership among Millennials**

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### Abstract

In order to examine the impact of servant leadership practice in an organizational context, this research project used self-typing paragraphs to assess the leadership culture of each organizational area within a national campus ministry. Research participants selected from four leadership cultures: (a) autocratic, (b) paternalistic, (c) servant, and (d) laissez-faire. Data from five and a half years of ministry reports were used to measure whether each area was growing, plateaued, or shrinking. The findings were analyzed and compared to determine whether there was a relationship between the leadership culture style of the area and the growth of the area defined by staff recruitment and total number of ministries on campuses. The findings indicate there is a positive relationship. Those areas for which the highest number of staff chose servant leadership as the culture of their area were the areas experiencing the greatest degree of growth. Conversely, the area with the least amount of servant leadership responses was the area experiencing the greatest decline in staff recruitment and ministry numbers.

*Key words:* servant leadership, leadership effectiveness, campus ministry, millennials.

## The Impact of Servant Leadership within a National Campus Ministry

Little research has been done on leadership with college students and even less has been written on campus ministry. This research examines the effectiveness of a servant leadership culture within a campus ministry context. It goes beyond the scope of worker contentment and productivity to support the premise that servant leadership is positively related with quantifiable results in the success and growth of the larger organization. This is even more pertinent in that college students are the next generation of leaders and workers, and success with them points us to the likelihood of future success in the workplace where servant leadership is adopted.

The research of this project set out to assess whether there is a positive relationship between the leadership culture and growth within a national campus ministry. After tabulating staff and ministry numbers for the past five years and assessing the leadership culture for each area, a positive relationship was found. Those areas that were strongest in servant leadership culture were also the areas seeing growth. The area that was the weakest in servant leadership culture was the one that had experienced the greatest decline in staff and ministry numbers.

This article will compare servant leadership to the preferences and traits of the millennial generation to build a theoretical argument for the use of servant leadership with college students and organizations that work heavily with them. Following the theoretical argument is a description of the process of data collection, the findings of the research and the implications of study.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Biblical Leadership Style**

In Scripture the leadership style presented by Christ is that of a servant. After arguing about who is the greatest, the sons of Zebedee ask if they might sit in places of honor next to

Christ. His answer enlightens his followers on his view of leadership.

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42-45 TNIV)

Jesus contrasts the leadership practices of the Gentiles to that which he expected from his followers. Jesus chooses two words to describe the leadership of the Gentile rulers. The first is *katakuriuo*, which translates to lord against, that is to control or subjugate. The second is *katexousiaz*, which means to have or wield full privilege over someone. Juxtaposed against this description, Jesus tells his disciples that if they desire to be great or first they must be the servant or even the slave of all. He then reminds them that even he did not come to be served but to serve and sacrifice his life for many.

The model of leadership presented here by Jesus is clearly a rebuff of a hierarchical or autocratic model. Leadership is not to be about honor or position but about serving the needs of the follower. Leaders should be sacrificial in their leadership and with strong language Jesus makes it clear that his followers are not to take their leadership style from the Gentiles, meaning those outside the community of faith but from his own example.

### **Servant Leadership**

In contrast to the teachings of Christ on leadership, the church and Christian organizations have more often than not modeled their leadership style on that of secular business practices. It is ironic that Robert K. Greenleaf would introduce the term "servant leadership" to the secular business world in 1970 in his now famous essay, "The Servant as Leader" and that the church would then follow the business world in rediscovering this fundamental teaching of Jesus. In the business world, the concept of the leader as servant gradually caught on and was

expanded by a plethora of authors.

One of those authors was Larry Spears who set out to distill a list of the characteristics of a servant leader based on Greenleaf's work. Spears felt that Greenleaf's essay worked well for those who were conceptual thinkers but that for some a more concrete list would be helpful. His ten characteristics are: Listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Dierendonck & Patterson, 2010).

Another author who further developed Greenleaf's work was Peter Senge, who felt that servant leadership was the best leadership style to engage in systems thinking. Senge, who found Greenleaf's essay both simple and profound, wrote that "The Servant as Leader" offers a, "new basis for 'health'" (Spears, 1995, p. 234). Rather than just correct a problem, servant leadership lays the groundwork for an approach that seeks to understand what makes permanent change difficult and addresses the underlying forces that cause the problem. In an earlier article, Senge develops another key thought. Building a case that the organizations that will have the greatest success in today's rapidly changing environment will be learning organizations, Senge describes a learning organization as one where the leader designs, teaches, is a steward and creates a shared vision (Senge, 1990). Though he does not mention Greenleaf in this article, it is clear that Senge's descriptions of a leader of a learning organization are best met by a servant leader.

Another scholar to develop the concept of servant leadership is Jim Laub. In 1999 he set out to answer three key questions, "How is servant leadership defined? What are the characteristics of servant leadership? Can the presence of these characteristics within organizations be assessed through a written instrument?" (2003). His creation of the Servant Organizational Leadership Assessment (SOLA) provided for the first time an assessment tool to

determine the leadership culture of an organization (1999). In the opening remarks of his dissertation, Laub gives a possible explanation for why servant leadership has increasingly changed the landscape of leadership.

In the past 25 years we have seen a dramatic increase of women in the workplace, a growing ethnic and racial diversity and a desire to see the workplace serve as a learning environment for personal growth and fulfillment. These changes, among others, have prompted a reexamination of the effectiveness of the traditional leadership model of power and authority. The traditional model has held prominence since the beginning of time, and our history is written around the use and abuse of leadership power. There is a growing call for new leadership thinking and a new vision of organizations that place service to others over self-interest and self-promotion (p. 3).

### **Leadership and College Students**

Certainly the changes alluded to by Laub are present on today's college campus. Unfortunately there has been little research done on the leadership preferences of college students with the exception of the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (Student LPI) developed by Kouzes and Posner in 1998 and updated in 2006. Kouzes and Posner found that most leadership development programs for students came from the business world, so they created an inventory of student leadership behaviors and actions. These behaviors were categorized into five leadership practices: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart (Posner, 2004).

The five categories were arrived at by asking students to describe their actions and behaviors when they are at "their personal best as leaders" (p. 443). The results give us a better understanding of what leadership style works on the college campus. These results may also be an indicator of what style will be more effective in the future since today's college student will be tomorrow's leader. Though Kouzes and Posner don't use the term servant leader, a comparison of their terms to those of Spears and Laub will reveal similarities.

Reviewing Larry Spears' ten characteristics of a servant leader: Listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community, we see that Kouzes' and Posner's inspiring and challenging are elements of Spears' persuasion, since to persuade someone requires a mix of inspiring and challenging them in their thinking and actions. Kouzes' and Posner's enabling and encouraging are necessary factors for a leader to demonstrate Spear's commitment to growth. To enable someone by common definition is to equip, make competent and to give ability to that person. All of these factors lead to a person's growth. The same is true for encouraging which is a key influence of growth.

Going beyond Spears' list, Laub comes up with six characteristics of a servant leader: values people, develops people, builds community, displays authenticity, provides leadership and shares leadership (Laub, 2003). Comparing Laub's list to Kouzes and Posner there are even more similarities. Laub's understanding of developing leaders is that it is done by providing opportunities for learning and growth, modeling appropriate behavior and building up others through encouragement and affirmation. That description clearly encompasses modeling, encouraging and enabling and likely challenging as well. Laub's descriptions of displays authenticity, provides leadership and values people all fits well with Kouzes' and Posner's five practices.

### **Additional Leadership Styles**

Laub (2003) designates three types of leadership: Autocratic, paternalistic and servant. Describing autocratic he says, "This kind of leadership is one of "self-rule" where the organization exists to serve the needs and interests of the leader first" (p. 7). Of paternalistic he writes, "This kind of leadership is one of leaders seeing themselves as parent to those led. This



parental view of leadership encourages the led to take on the role of children. This leads to an unhealthy transactional leadership that operates more on compliance rather than true individual motivation” (p. 7). Finally for servant he writes,

It is the view of leadership characterized by the six key areas of servant leadership. This view sees leadership as serving the needs of those led over the self-interest of the leader. In this kind of organization all people are encouraged to lead and serve. This produces a community of care where the needs of all are served and the organization is able to put its energy into fulfilling its shared mission. (p. 7)

Comparing these three categories to Kouzes’ and Posner’s five leadership practices, the best fit is once again servant leadership. Neither autocratic nor paternalistic put an emphasis on modeling or inspiring, and enabling connotes the development of the follower, which is a hallmark of servant leadership.

### **Millennial Generation and Leadership Style**

In the campus ministry that is the focus of this study, the staff range in age from college age to retirement age but 10% are in college and 58% of the staff are under age 35. Growth in campus ministry is closely tied to student leadership development for two key reasons. A completely staff-led campus ministry is limited in size to the number of staff leading. With strong student leadership a campus ministry can grow considerably larger, as student leaders assume many of the leadership needs of the group. The second reason student leadership is important is that the majority of new staff come from student leaders. For this reason it is important to investigate which leadership style is most effective with college students and makes Kouzes’ and Posner’s inventory, which compliments the servant leadership model, important as the most significant work done to understand college student leadership preferences.

Though research on effective leadership styles among college students is rare, there is an abundance of books and articles on the preferences and traits of the millennial generation. By

comparing these characteristics for millennials with current leadership styles it becomes evident that some styles are more attractive to millennials than others and by implication will be more successful with them. The millennial generation was born on or after 1982 (Howe & Strauss, 2000). They began attending college in 2000 and hit the workforce about 2004 and will continue to do so until 2022 (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). The predominate assessment of millennials is that “They hold opinions, attitudes, values, and technological competencies that are very different from the generations that preceded them” (Beinhoff, 2011, p. 2225). Therefore a careful evaluation of which leadership styles fit best with the millennial generation’s characteristics and preferences is critical. What follows are some of the major descriptions given for millennials and a comparison of those against four common leadership styles: Autocratic, paternalistic, servant and laissez-faire (Wong, 2003).

For purposes of this comparison, the description of the first three leadership styles will be those of Laub (2003).

**Autocratic** - This kind of leadership is one of “self-rule” where the organization exists to serve the needs and interests of the leader first. This often leads to the oppression of the worker to satisfy the whims of the leader.

**Paternalistic** - This kind of leadership is one of leaders seeing themselves as parent to those led. This parental view of leadership encourages the led to take on the role of children. This leads to an unhealthy transactional leadership that operates more on compliance rather than true individual motivation. Most organizations find themselves operating within this understanding of leadership.

**Servant** This is the view of leadership characterized by the six key areas of servant leadership. This view sees leadership as serving the needs of those led over the

self-interest of the leader. In this kind of organization all people are encouraged to lead and serve. This produces a community of care where the needs of all are served and the organization is able to put its energy into fulfilling its shared mission.

Laub describes the six key areas in the following chart (2003, p. 3):

Table 1  
*Laub's (2003) Servant Leadership Characteristics*

Characteristics	Associated Behaviors
Values People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– By believing in people</li> <li>– By serving other's needs before his or her own</li> <li>– By receptive, non-judgmental listening</li> </ul>
Develops People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– By providing opportunities for learning and growth</li> <li>– By modeling appropriate behavior</li> <li>– By building up others through encouragement and affirmation</li> </ul>
Builds Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– By building strong personal relationships</li> <li>– By working collaboratively with others</li> <li>– By valuing the differences of others</li> </ul>
Displays Authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– By being open and accountable to others</li> <li>– By a willingness to learn from others</li> <li>– by maintaining integrity and trust</li> </ul>
Provides Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– By envisioning the future</li> <li>– By taking initiative</li> <li>– By clarifying goals</li> </ul>
Shares Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– By facilitating a shared vision</li> <li>– By sharing power and releasing control</li> <li>– By sharing status and promoting others</li> </ul>

The fourth leadership style that will be used for comparison is laissez-faire and was added to Laub's styles by Wong in a paper at the same 2003 Roundtable conference. Wong describes laissez-faire as a leadership style that is hands-off and has the effect of being detached, weak and disinterested.

The first defining characteristic of millennials contrasted against the above four leadership styles is that they trust that the organization will act in their best interest. According to

a study of 800 business students from four universities, 60% agreed with the statement, “I trust authority figures to act in my best interest” (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010, p. 215). This trust is based on a belief that the system is equitable and that hard work and positive results will be rewarded and encouraged. At its roots is the way millennials have been raised. They have always been cared for by doting parents who worked hard to build their self-esteem. Contrasting this trait to leadership styles the best fit is servant leadership. Autocratic does not act in the follower’s best interest but in the leader’s best interest. Laissez-faire acts essentially when a problem arises but not proactively in the best interest of the follower. Paternalistic does care for the follower but as the name implies it is in a parental manner and the ultimate goal is not the development of the follower, as it is with servant leadership. As Laub points out, the relationship is intrinsically unhealthy and tends more toward compliance. According to Hershatter and Epstein, younger workers tend to want to choose “the specific tasks in which they will engage and the conditions under which they will engage in them.” This added understanding of expectations on the part of millennials toward the organization makes it evident that though paternalistic leadership cares for the follower, the parental type control will come into conflict with millennials.

Millennials value teamwork, community and collaboration (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). The only leadership style to include these three values as core to the style is servant leadership. Larry Spears states that servant leadership is based on teamwork and community, and goes on to say that it is a model that attempts to involve others in the decision making process. He elaborates, “Today there is a growing recognition of the need for a more team-oriented approach to leadership and management. Robert Greenleaf’s writings on the subject of servant-leadership helped to get this movement started, and his views have had a profound and growing effect”

(Spears, 1995, p. 2). Laub lists building community as one of his six descriptors of servant leadership and specifically states that working collaboratively with others is part of this process (2003).

A trait of millennials, which is sometimes viewed as negative, is their need for guidance, reassurance and direction (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). This can be frustrating to managers who may feel they must spend a large amount of time assisting millennials to function well at work. Instead of the millennial helping with the workload, the millennial may actually initially increase the workload. Though this may be draining to any leadership style, only the servant leadership style has the development of the follower as a key tenet to its philosophy of leadership. Robert Greenleaf put it best himself in his statement that, “The best test is: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” (Spears, 1995, p. 1). Certainly millennials need assistance in becoming more autonomous and again servant leadership holds this as a basic precept. In his ten characteristics of servant leadership, Spears names a commitment to growth as his ninth. He says,

Servant-leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As such, the servant-leader is deeply committed to the growth of each and every individual within his or her institution. The servant-leader recognizes the tremendous responsibility to do everything within his or her power to nurture the personal, professional and spiritual growth of employees. (p. 7-8)

Not only do millennials require a high degree of guidance and reassurance, they have an expectation that the organization will accommodate them (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). The autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles have nothing in their styles to address this expectation and even if the paternalistic style might see accommodation as positive, it is done in a paternalistic manner which in and of itself will be distasteful to millennials. With a basic

premise of serving followers, servant leadership is best suited to accommodate the needs of millennials in the workplace.

The expected and desired relationship with the workplace that millennials have is far different from previous generations. They expect to bring about change through their work and for that reason the values of the organization and its authenticity are extremely important to them (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Stephen Covey describes the process of leadership alignment as defining the organization's vision, mission and values and then making sure that all the structures and systems reflect those three (Spears, 1995). This approach is important to millennials because it speaks to the authenticity and integrity of the organization. Laub lists authenticity as another one of his six elements of servant leadership, making it clear once again that servant leadership is the style best suited for millennials (2003).

Comparing each of the four styles to the needs and preferences of millennials finds that the paternalistic style may address the desire of millennials for more guidance but will not be attractive to them because they will want involvement in the decision making process. Laissez-faire does not address the needs of millennials but also does not interfere with them. So though there is an element of compatibility for millennials in these two styles they overall do not fit well because they do not address expectations such as bringing change through their workplace and that the organization will act in their best interest.

It is difficult to find anything attractive for millennials in the autocratic style because its basic focus is not the good of the worker but of the leader. The heavy-handed, top down leadership approach of the autocratic style goes against the grain of the needs and preferences of millennials. Their high need for guidance and their expectations for the organization are not met in the autocratic style of leadership.

Of the four leadership styles, only servant leadership addresses the requirements and expectations of millennials. In fact, it is as though Greenleaf designed a leadership style to meet the needs of the millennial generation. The fit is so natural that it is hard to imagine any style but servant leadership working well for the millennial generation, so though there may be limited research done on which leadership style works best for millennials, based on a comparison of millennial traits and characteristics and common leadership styles it is obvious that servant leadership is the best fit.

## **Methods**

### **Organizational and Sample Characteristics**

The campus ministry that is the focus of this research is broken down into seven areas with an area supervisor responsible for leading each area. Following its launch in 1965, the ministry was comprised of independent campus ministries that had little connection to one another other than a national student conference held each summer. For the first 15 years the ministry grew but by the 1980s it began to decline in ministries, staff and student numbers.

In 1992 the ministry was restructured into regions with a supervisor appointed to oversee the ministries and facilitate expansion. Following this structural change the national ministry began to grow overall but that growth was not uniform. Some regions saw growth, some stayed the same size and others declined. When one region lost its supervisor it steadily declined until only one campus ministry remained. However, the new region to which that supervisor was relocated also saw decline. In 2005 the remaining four regions were subdivided into seven areas in an attempt to shrink the geographical area size each supervisor was responsible to oversee. Once again the growth of each area varied significantly. What remained constant was the growth or lack of growth pattern for each individual supervisor.

Though there can be many contributing factors to the expansion of ministry, the consistency of growth for some regions and/or areas and the lack of growth for others indicated that leadership style was an influence. This was particularly apparent in those regions and then areas that had maintained the same supervisor for nearly two decades. In no instance had an area grown significantly and then begun to shrink under the same supervisor.

### **Data Collection**

The evaluation tool for this research was self-typing paragraphs. This instrument was chosen because of accuracy and for the ease of use. According to James and Hatten in a study done in 1995, self-typing paragraphs prove as accurate as other models of assessment and are desirable because of their ease of use.

In 2003 Laub presented a paper at Regent's Servant Leadership Research Roundtable where he noted that historically servant leadership has been contrasted to autocratic leadership. The weakness in this approach is that in most instances the alternative to servant leadership is not autocratic but paternalistic leadership. Laub then specifies three categories: Autocratic, paternalistic and servant.

For this project, four paragraphs were written based on the four leadership styles Paul Wong uses in his 2003 typology of leadership styles. Wong uses Laub's three categories, autocratic, paternalistic and servant and adds laissez-faire as a fourth. Prior to the appointment of regional supervisors, the organizational leadership style of the campus ministry being researched was essentially laissez-faire. For this reason using Wong's four leadership styles, which included laissez-faire, was preferable over using only the three utilized by Laub.

The next step was to write the paragraphs in language that was not pejorative. When these paragraphs were sent out, the labels were removed for fear that even the terms might be



understood in a negative light. For clarification purposes they are included here. The rewritten paragraphs were:

**Autocratic** - Leadership decisions are made primarily by those at the top and other staff are rarely consulted nor are their needs considered. Decisions are made which appear to primarily benefit the leader. Staff are expected to follow instructions even if they strongly disagree with them.

**Paternalistic** - Leadership decisions are made primarily by those at the top and staff have limited input into decisions. Leaders feel they know what is best for the ministry and make their decision based on that assessment. Staff are encouraged and cared for by the leadership even if they don't feel that they have much input into decisions.

**Servant** - Leadership decisions are made by the leader or staff best qualified to make the decision. Leaders express a high concern for the wellbeing of the staff and function more as partners in the ministry. Leaders are respected and model good leadership.

**Laissez-Faire** - There is little leadership for the area and staff are left to work independently. Leaders step in only when there is a serious problem or need.

All staff who had been on campus for at least three months were sent the paragraphs. Those removed from the list had been appointed less than three months or had been raising support and not working directly with their area leadership. Those on campus less than three months were not sent paragraphs under the assumption that their exposure to the ministry was too brief for them to give an accurate assessment of the area leadership style. In addition to current staff, any staff who had resigned from staff in the previous six months were included. The staff were told that their individual responses would be seen only by the national supervisor and that their confidentiality would be protected. Six staff had no area supervisor and therefore

related directly to the national supervisor. The results of those six were removed from the responses, since those staff might not be completely candid in their responses to their supervisor. After all these adjustments a total of 57 possible respondents were left assessing seven different areas.

Reminder emails clarified that the staff were to rate the leadership culture of their area and not their own personal style on campus. This was done in response to a few responses where the staff were unclear on what they were rating. The option was given to all staff to change their answers if they had mistakenly evaluated their own style or misread the question.

To determine the growth of each area the staff and ministry numbers for each area were analyzed starting with the fall of 2005 through the spring of 2011. The staff of this ministry fill out six-month ministry reports twice a year. Three categories were created: growing, plateaued and shrinking. Growing areas were those where the ministries in the area had increased by four and the staff numbers by six or more in the five and a half year period being measured. Plateaued areas ended the time period with the same number of ministries and had only a staff increase of four or less. Shrinking areas lost one or two ministries and gained less than two staff. The emphasis was placed heaviest on ministry expansion because some staff appointments are short term with no potential for that person to ever plant or even direct a ministry. These staff help their specific ministry but will not be able to directly contribute to the growth an area.

### **Data Analysis**

After tabulating results from ministry reports for the past five years, of the seven areas, two fell within the growing category, two plateaued and three shrinking.

Of the 57 staff surveyed for organizational leadership culture, 50 responded with answers and one abstained stating that the survey was not truly anonymous since the person collecting the responses knew him. Six staff failed to respond to the survey and did not give a reason for their nonparticipation. Of the missing responses, only two were currently working with the ministry. Six former staff were sent surveys with only two responding. As a general rule, former staff are more likely to be candid in their responses, especially if those responses are negative, since they no longer work for the organization or have working relationships that may be damaged by negative feedback. Of the two former staff who responded, both gave servant leadership responses.

Only three staff currently employed at the time of the study failed to return a response or abstained from responding. The area with only four staff received responses from all staff in the area. One area with only six staff received only five responses and one area with seven received six. The other missing responses were from the two largest areas with one missing three responses out of 16 surveys sent and one receiving ten out of twelve surveys sent. The 50 responses out of the 57 total staff fell within the guidelines established by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for research within finite populations. Though an attempt was made to broaden the number of staff surveyed by including six former staff, the final result was that 48 current staff out of 51 responded making the results fairly comprehensive. It can be assumed that the results of the 48 will be representative of the entire population of current staff.

Forty-three staff making up 86% of the staff responded that servant leadership was the organizational leadership style of their area. Four staff or eight percent chose Laissez-Faire and three staff or six percent chose paternalistic. No respondents selected autocratic. Autocratic leadership style is the least desirable style for millennials, therefore it is not surprising that no

staff selected this style as operating in any area. Given the compatibility of the servant leadership style to millennials, it is to be expected that any campus organization with a high makeup of millennials will need servant leadership as its predominate leadership style to grow.

Breaking down organizational leadership culture according to the growth taxonomy listed above found that the overall percentage of staff who chose the paragraph describing a servant culture was highest in those areas that were growing. In the area experiencing the greatest growth, amounting to eleven additional staff and four additional ministries, the area leadership culture was 92% servant with one person giving an alternate paragraph of parental. In the other area categorized as growing, the result was 100% servant. This area saw six additional staff and four additional ministries. The five areas categorized as plateaued or shrinking had responses from four to six staff and the results were between 80-83% servant culture except for the smallest area which came out only 50% servant. This area had an increase of one staff and decrease of two ministries over the last five and a half years. Of the four respondents, two described the culture of the area as paternalistic. In the other two areas categorized as shrinking, both had one respondent describe the culture as laissez-faire. The same was true for the two areas categorized as plateaued.

**Table 2**  
***National Campus Ministry Growth and Area Leadership Style***

<b>Area</b>	<b>5 Year Staff Numbers</b>	<b>5 Year Ministry Numbers</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Servant Leadership</b>
<b>Growing 1</b>	Increase of 11	Increase of 4	13	92%
<b>Growing 2</b>	Increase of 6	Increase of 4	11	100%
<b>Plateaued 1</b>	Increase of 4	Same	6	83%
<b>Plateaued 2</b>	Increase of 3	Same	5	80%
<b>Shrinking 1</b>	Increase of 2	Decrease of 1	6	83%
<b>Shrinking 2</b>	Increase of 2	Decrease of 2	5	80%
<b>Shrinking 3</b>	Increase of 1	Decrease of 2	4	50%

For those staff responding with an answer other than servant leadership, there was no clear connection of years with the organization or gender. Four had been with the ministry less than five years and three had been with the organization around 10 years. Likewise there was no connection found with gender. Four were men and three were women. Considering age, four of the seven non-servant responses were 21 to 26; the remaining three were 31, 39 and 46. Though those under 30 who responded with a non-servant answer were around the same percentage as the overall staff numbers under 30, it is interesting that of the 16 staff over 50 all responded with a servant answer. This may be explained by different expectations. Older people are more likely to have worked in organizations where employees were expected to follow directions and little was done to serve their needs or take into account their emotions (Parolini, 2005). For these older staff, any element of servant leadership may have been adequate to prompt a servant leadership response. For younger staff, the converse may be true in that any lack of a servant leadership style will evoke a non-servant leadership answer. They expect servant leadership and where it is weak they are more likely to choose another leadership style as operating in their area.

All seven area supervisors responded and all seven listed servant leadership as the culture of their area. Since they were evaluating the leadership culture of the area in which they are the

primary leader, their responses might be considered more subjective or biased. The tendency to self-enhance by over-claiming strengths or accomplishments is a recognized problem in any self-evaluation tool (Paulhus, Bruce, Harms & Lysy, 2003). This may well not be a conscious decision but the result of self-deception. Area supervisors may have read the paragraphs, determined which leadership style they desired to describe themselves and chosen that style rather than the style closest to their actual style.

Though staff were asked to assess the leadership style of the area, the leadership style of the leader, in this case the area supervisor, would influence their answers. The presence, or lack thereof, of servant leadership traits in a leader is reflected in a follower's perception of whether or not an organization practices servant leadership (Parolini, 2005). Since the area supervisor's leadership style is so closely tied to the style of the area and since the area supervisor's response may be biased in their assessment of themselves, it seems prudent to at least consider the data with their responses removed.

When the responses of the area supervisors are taken out of the data, the servant leadership percentage goes down. This change drops those areas with six respondents to 80% servant leadership and those with five to 75% servant leadership. For the area with four responses the percentage drops to 33% servant leadership. For the number one growing area the percentage drops only .7% and the second has no change since the respondents returned a 100% servant leadership response. Given the possible bias of the area supervisors in assessing essentially themselves, these percentages may be more true to the reality of the leadership style and demonstrate a greater variance between growing, plateaued and shrinking areas.

## Findings and Discussion

Given how important those under 30 are to the future of business alone, it is astounding that there is not more research on which leadership styles are most effective with them. By comparing their generation's traits to current leadership styles it is arguable that the servant leadership style best fits the characteristics of the millennial generation. This may in part explain why servant leadership practice has been growing, for as more and more of the millennial generation enters the workforce their influence on organizations and corporations will increase.

Based on the findings of this research, it would appear that even a small deviation from servant leadership can have a negative impact on the growth of campus ministry. That four of the five areas categorized as plateaued or shrinking fell within the 80-83% of the responses being servant leadership and the fifth, which was the area with the greatest decline, had only 50% respond servant leadership seems to support that servant leadership has a significant impact on campus ministry. Combining the two areas experiencing growth, there was only one deviation from a servant leadership response despite the fact that the combined responses amounted to 24 of the 50 responses. For the plateaued and shrinking areas the responses other than servant totaled six of the 26 responses.

The variance between paternalistic and laissez-faire responses when servant leadership was not chosen was most intriguing. In the four areas that fell within 80-83% servant leadership, the leadership culture chosen was laissez-faire. This might suggest that the area supervisors were too hands-off in their leadership style and needed to adjust their leadership to provide more care and involvement for their staff. The fact that these areas still came out as 80-83% servant leadership suggests that it was not a major tendency but impactful just the same.

In the one area that scored only 50% servant leadership, the results were even more

conclusive with 50% responding that paternalistic leadership was the culture of the area. This area was the smallest area and had lost two ministries in the last five years. At only a 50% response for servant leadership rather than 80-83%, the results indicate that the leadership culture was at best a blend of servant and paternalistic. This was in contrast to the other plateaued or shrinking areas which might have been considered mostly servant leadership but perhaps too hands-off. Since the variance from servant leadership was so much higher, it mitigates a conclusion that paternalistic leadership is less effective than laissez-faire in campus ministry. It may simply be that the farther a leadership culture diverges from servant leadership the more profound the negative impact on growth will be. Given that most businesses today practice paternalistic leadership (Laub, 2003) this does at least raise the question of whether the next generation of followers will remain in organizations that continue strongly paternalistic leadership practices.

When the results of this research are combined with the history of this campus ministry the trend of growing or shrinking areas are even more obvious. On closer inspection of the three remaining area supervisors who were appointed as regional supervisors in 1992, the regional supervisor for the second growing area had seen steady growth from 1992 to the present. Two area supervisors who were previously regional supervisors had seen a slow decline in first regional and then, after the restructuring in 2005, the area size. Though many factors came into play that could have convoluted the growth of each region and then area, the sheer length of time from 1992 to the present indicates that those factors do not account for the growth or decline of campus ministry's areas. In light of this, it may be argued that the leadership culture of an area is more likely the cause of this growth or decline.

When Jesus commands his disciples to be servants in their leadership, he does so as a



moral imperative that should define who we are in Christ. He does not speak to the benefit of those who are leaders or to the group or organization. It is doubtful that his listeners saw any benefit beyond that to the follower. What is apparent from this research is that the benefit of servant leadership extends beyond the follower to the organization as a whole. So while servant leadership is a moral imperative, it is also pragmatically advantageous for campus organizations to practice it as a leadership style. This conclusion may extend beyond campus ministry to any organization that works heavily with millennials.

### **Study Strengths and Limitations**

As with all data collection, this project has weaknesses that might reduce the accuracy and cloud the conclusions. Though the instructions sent with the self-typing paragraphs stated that the assessment was to be of the leadership of the area, some staff still expressed confusion over whether they were describing their own leadership or that of the area. This prompted a clarification email but even with that it must be assumed that the potential exists for answers assessing something other than the leadership culture of the staff person's area.

In the self-typing paragraphs the final sentence for servant leadership read, "Leaders are respected and model good leadership." The use of the phrase "good leadership" for this leadership style and the absence of its use for the other styles had the potential to bias the responses. If staff determined that servant leadership was the best response and were concerned with giving the desired response of the leadership, they may have chosen this style over the one they actually felt best described the area leadership style.

Although staff with the campus ministry less than three months were removed, it must be recognized that three months is not a long time to assess leadership culture especially with younger staff who may have had limited exposure to different leadership types. In the greatest

growing area, the only assessment that was not servant leadership out of the 13 returned was given by a younger staff person who had been with the ministry for less than a year. The brevity of time on staff coupled with some specific training needs for this staff person, which required greater supervision, may have produced a non-servant leadership answer. In time, and with a greater grasp of ministry skills, that response might change.

Another possible confusion with selecting the leadership culture might occur where a follower prefers a paternalistic or laissez-faire leadership culture. In this case the follower may influence the working relationship between leader and follower especially in the unstructured environment of campus ministry, which involves setting and completing goals rather than a close office type environment where tasks are assigned and carried out.

One staff person felt the survey was not anonymous and he chose to abstain from making an assessment. It must be acknowledged that others may have felt the same and chose to give the response that appeared to be the most flattering, rather than abstain and risk being perceived as contrary.

The difference in the size of the areas lent itself to less balance in results. Some areas had 16 staff in them and some had four. Within the smaller areas, one non-servant response made up a greater percentage than in the larger areas.

Leadership style does not exist in a vacuum. The followers of an area and the relationship of the leader and follower, as noted by Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, may influence leadership dynamics in an organization (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The growth within an area is not influenced only by the leadership culture but also by the followers and their relationship to the leader among other factors. So though this study contrasted and compared growth to leadership culture, there are other factors that might influence growth such as follower

motivation, expectations and competence and the strength of the working relationship between the leader and the follower. In one of the shrinking areas, three of the staff avoid any interference on the part of the area supervisor. This tense working relationship undoubtedly has a negative impact on growth. Though the area supervisor attempts to recruit staff, the rest of the staff have done little to nothing to support that goal.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Though limited in scope, the present study indicates that a positive relationship between servant leadership and growth in campus ministry exists. Larger studies need to be done to substantiate these initial findings. The focus of this study was on campus ministers of which a high percentage of workers are categorized in the millennial generation. Further research needs to be done to determine if the connection between servant leadership and growth exists with populations that are older than the millennial generation.

### **Summary**

This research project contrasted the characteristics of the millennial generation against four leadership styles: autocratic, paternalistic, servant and laissez-faire. The style most compatible with millennials was determined to be servant. Then ministry and staff numbers for a national campus ministry were analyzed to ascertain which areas were growing, plateaued or shrinking. The staff of these same areas were asked to select a leadership culture for their area. Their responses were compared to the growth of each area and it was found that the areas where servant leadership was selected in the highest percentages were also the areas that were growing. The area with the least growth had the lowest number of respondents select servant leadership for the area culture.

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