“Service Above Self” is a statement that resonates with everyone who has ever been on the receiving end of the service. However, it has been my experience that the concepts of “Service Above Self” and “Servant Leadership” while often discussed, and always admired, are far too rarely practiced. It is precisely this shortcoming that accounts for many of the problems faced by our business leaders, but also by society as a whole. In today’s post I’ll share my thoughts on the value of becoming a true servant leader...

The sad reality is that human nature adversely affects our perspective in that service is often undermined by short-sighted self interest. What most people intuitively understand, but fail to keep at the forefront of their thinking, is that our personal success and fulfillment will be much more closely tied to how we help others than what we do for ourselves... While there are many motivating factors which underpin a leader’s decisioning, nothing is intrinsically more pure, and more inspiring than the call to serve. The dedication and commitment required to be a true servant leader requires a level of personal sacrifice that can only be instilled by a passionate belief in a greater good... something beyond one’s self.

Let me provide you with a personal example... I just returned from Virginia where my son commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Air Force on Saturday, and graduated from the University of Virginia on Sunday. My son is an exceptionally bright and talented individual who had every option under the sun available to him upon graduation. Rather than head off to Wall Street or to a large consulting firm, he and his fellow cadets chose to serve. They were not cajoled or coerced, but rather they felt a calling to serve as officers in the US military leading other men and women of service.
It is precisely their commitment, attention to detail, discipline, service above self, honor, integrity, perseverance, the ability to both lead and follow, to execute with precision, and the ability to adapt, improvise, and overcome that distinguish them from those that seek personal glory over service. My son and his friends are just one example (but a good one) of what character and integrity when combined with a servant’s heart can accomplish.

The characteristics mentioned above will allow you to inspire and lead with a focus and commitment not present in DNA of those leaders who don’t possess a servant’s heart. It is the ability to stay mentally focused on achieving the mission at hand through service, regardless of circumstances, that will help you take your organization to that next level.

There are many so-called management gurus in today’s politically correct world who would take great exception to what I’m putting forth in today’s post. They would tell you that the classic strong leadership traits that define our nation’s best military leaders are outdated and they don’t display a proper amount of empathy and compassion. However, I’m here to tell you that strength and compassion are not mutually exclusive terms rather the strongest leaders are in fact the most compassionate leaders. When I was in the service my troops slept before I did, they ate before I did, and they were cared for before I was. A leader’s greatest responsibility is not for his/her own glory, but it is for the well being of those whose care has been entrusted to them.

A warrior’s heart, and the spirit of a servant leader have served my family well in both business and life in general. It is the mental agility, a fierce determination, a never say die attitude, and placing other’s interests above our own that has carried us through the best of times and the worst of times. My father was a Marine before he was an attorney, I served in the Army before I entered the business world, and well, I’m sure you can tell how proud I am of my son’s choice to serve in the Air Force. While not all great business leaders have served in the military, those of you who possess the spirit of a servant leader understand the advantages you derive from a having a servant’s state of mind.

I strongly recommend to all business leaders that they learn to develop a command presence, and lead from a committed and passionate position of strength through service. The word “passion” comes from a Latin root which means quite literally to suffer. If you’re passionate about something it means you care so much that it hurts. Refusing to surrender, having the ability to make the tough decision, the needed sacrifice, and the focus to place fiduciary obligations above your self interest will allow your company to continue taking ground and will keep the competitive advantage on the side of your enterprise. Remember that the world does not revolve around you, but what you can do for others...