

### **LeaderBeing: Critical Reflections on Context, Character and Challenge in the Culture of Research and Its Administration**

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### **Author Note**

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While this article centers upon the leadership role of research executives and administrators, the substance of the material that is presented and explored is applicable to a wide and diverse expanse of professions in the global community. This expanse includes healthcare, education, social services, law, and the full range of public services.

### **Abstract**

Servant leadership is a critically needed reality in every profession. It is essential especially for those professions that impact human development and advancement in any and all fashions. The use of the term “servant” does not in any manner imply denigration. Rather, the term servant in this concept of leadership is meant to underscore the goal of placing the needs of

others before the self. Servant leadership is essential for understanding the ongoing importance of research administration as a central profession of service within the culture of research itself. The leadership of research administrators is both a unique gift and a challenge to the research culture. To ensure the continued productivity of the research enterprise, while respecting its wider and more powerful mission of service to the public trust, research administrators have a critically important role that can open the research enterprise to new depths, unprecedented possibilities, and unforeseen horizons of opportunity. Providing for these expansive missions necessitates that the research administrator as servant leader understands and courageously enters into the dynamic, never-ending processes of “LeaderBeing.”

*Keywords:* research, research administration, leadership, servant leadership, LeaderBeing

## Introduction

Research administration and management have had a profoundly rich development and history. With a professional presence in the United States and across the globe that has skyrocketed since World War II, the identity, service and mission of research administration has grown and developed in vastly unforeseen ways. It is important to understand that the growth and development of the profession has advanced in response to the unfolding nature, importance, and unprecedented pathways on which research itself has evolved as an academic and professional entity in human history. To understand the importance of research administrators and managers, it is logically and equally important to appreciate the profession’s context, namely the unfolding nature of the exploratory activities that we call research.

This article is comprised of a series of reflections aimed at helping research administrators understand our critical role as servant leaders in the world of research itself. Servant leadership has become a common term in current popular vocabulary for a variety of professions and leadership roles in society, culture and diverse institutions. Obviously, the term itself seeks to orient the practice of leadership as a service as opposed to the practice of hierarchical privilege or workplace domination. Yet what does it mean to be a leader who serves? What constitutes the act of service? How does the service of research administration assist the nature, activities, outcomes, and horizons of research regardless of discipline or institution?

It would be easy to assume that what is needed are answers to these questions. However, that may be too fast a conclusion. In a world of speed and hand-held mobility, perhaps it may be wise to take the time to articulate and grapple with the questions themselves, and then allow the answers to emerge more slowly and with greater maturity in the lives and professional work of the members of our profession.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to invite our readers to follow the proverbial white rabbit down a pathway of consideration. The hoped result would be one’s entry into a process of seasoned reflection out of which might emerge over time an ever deepening understanding of what it means to lead, assist, and bring to fruition the knowledge, application, and utility of the discoveries whose birth we are privileged to assist. We begin by reflecting on the nature of what research is and seems to be.

### The Changing Culture of Research

*“Human behavior flows from three main sources: desire, emotion, and knowledge.”*

-----Plato

In the regulatory and legal worlds, many of us are aware of and utilize those sources that define research as any systematic investigation that is intended to contribute to the advancement of knowledge of some form. That is a convenient regulatory dictum. However, to be satisfied with the two-dimensionality of that definition is to miss the larger and more important picture, namely the role of research in human society and its origins within the very nature of human experience. Why does the human animal do research at all? More deeply than publications, products, prestige, or the plenty that is appropriation, why does the human engage in research? What does research stoke in the human experience?

As the quote above attributed to Plato indicates, there is something in the human animal that seeks “to know.” We are creatures of desire and emotion. We seek “to know” because, from a certain interesting perspective, we seek to fill up in our very selves something that is lacking. Regardless of the origins of that lacking, from the moment we leave the womb it seems we leave a garden and go in search of something that can fill us. In a certain rarified respect, our search for knowledge is the search for an “other.” And in that search for the “other,” we seek to find that which can fill up the emptiness within. At its root, this quest is the ultimate passion of the human animal. It is, as some philosophers might describe, an experience of existential incompleteness that seeks that unique “other” that will complete the unfilled self. Intrinsically, we know that we will never really find it. But that does not keep us from the search. For our quest “to know” is ultimately our quest “to be” and to discover ultimately who we are, why we exist, and what we can create in the act of self-fulfillment. We are creational beings, after all. It seems that this internal, furnace-like quest would be an appropriate image for the context and subliminal drives for the act of research.

However, we are all very aware that many people might find the above reflections impractical, or perhaps even unimportant. Since the Industrial Revolution, society’s emphasis upon “outcomes” has developed rapidly. In a certain respect, the need to “establish worth via product” has become an almost ultimate paradigm for nearly every aspect of human living. If linguists are correct that “language talks,” then we can understand the pervasiveness of this approach or paradigm.

In our own times, all of us are aware how healthcare has become truly a business. Despite its really being a human service, what seems to be most important are observable, almost tangible patient outcomes that can conveniently be recorded as relative value units or metrics of productivity in electronic medical records systems. How the patient feels is not as important as what is considered to be observable data. This same reality we see in education today, particularly in higher education. Today we find the potential student being attracted to on-line programs that might be easily watched on a laptop or tablet, and then have content-acquisition verified through on-line objective quizzes or examinations. Such ventures lack peer or professor interaction, are predicated on swift completion, do not make use of substantive essay-based knowledge acquisition approaches, and lack the personalization and academic reflection that real education has always demanded since the dawn of human civilization. While business practices are extremely important to maintain prudent use of resources to attain ultimate goals,

in the contexts of human services such as healthcare and education, business is a means to an end and not necessarily an end in itself. Education and healthcare are not businesses at their very roots. They are human services.

The same is true of research.

Research in any discipline or field, is ultimately a human act. It obviously needs the best managerial and business practices to be both practically and practicably successful. Yet it is not a business at its roots. It is a human service. The business aspect of research and its human service definition are inextricably joined, though in a context of what should be healthy tension. The collision of these approaches is natural and should be welcomed. It creates a volatile, creative vortex in the experience of research and its administration.

To be able to span both perspectives and integrate them successfully, there is a need for gifted leaders whose expertise, talents, and corporate wisdom make them useful to the success of research as an enterprise and a human experience. This is, in the final analysis, the challenging identity of research administrators in the culture of research that is itself always in permanent flux. Such an atmosphere of change and collision requires careful reflection and consideration by research administrators on their role and servant leadership. However, before proceeding to core character elements and contemporary shifts in the servant leadership that is research administration, it is important to reflect upon what seems to be the pull of the popular imagination that makes the business enterprise aspects of research what some might believe are the only reality that is important.

### The Experience of Power: The Contextual Issue

*“Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power (sic).”*

-----Attributed to Abraham Lincoln

As discussed briefly in the previous section, at the root of the human story is the experience of searching. For those of us who are parents or educators, in our children and students we easily look into a mirror and see our own journeys. This “mirror gazing” provides us with an essential core understanding of ourselves as evolving and maturing persons.

When we are in the womb, we are in a state of symbiosis. Barring disease, trauma or other unknown factors, we rest in a certain form of stasis. Our needs are provided for us as we develop and evolve. Then there is the moment of birth. We are thrust into a world where the cord is cut, and things are no longer as seemingly automatic. Our reaction to this entry is all bound up so poetically in our first act: crying out. From this moment onward, we seem to begin a search, a journey. Without knowing it, we human beings take our first grips and crawls and steps looking to find again that “other” that might complete us and bring us back to some measure of the symbiosis in which we once rested and in which our every need seemed to be provided.

We might find this image to be a powerful metaphor for understanding all of our future human endeavors as experiences of “the quest.” We seek to find that which can fill up the emptiness within. Yet from the moment we begin our journey, we start to experience harsh realities that what we seek may not come easily, or at all. We encounter controversy, denial, and

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failure. We meet up in our lives with the experience of what we might refer to as ultimate “no’s.” How do we respond?

Over our growth and development, all of us enter into the world of human experience and meet up with individuals who try to exert over us a sense of power and control. Our response is to develop the same. Building upon the primordial human experience of infancy’s neo-narcissism, we begin to engage in the act of power that becomes central later on to our ability to defend ourselves, to control the factors of our lives, to compete with others for necessities and wants, and to establish our individual identity as a protected presence in family, school, community, and daily living. Power becomes our way of life. And part of the experience of power is the experience of control and domination.

As is true of so many other aspects of human living, the realities of power, control and domination come to influence human enterprises and professions including academia and research. The need to be in control leads to all forms of competition, those that are healthy and even those that are unhealthy. Parenthetically, we might surmise that the need for power and domination is ultimately what tempts the researcher to those unethical practices we call today research misconduct: plagiarism, fabrication and falsification. When universities emphasize the number and magnitude of funded research awards for the granting of tenure, the individual academic will begin subconsciously to compete in ways that are “all about the money” and not about the knowledge, application and utility for the human good that is the ultimate purpose of research. Fear becomes the dominant factor and changes the identity, structures, and approaches to research and its administration. Development becomes a financial growth activity alone, and never seems to approach the need for new ideas to meet new human issues, problems, and opportunities.

There is then a deeper calling: a need to balance out the financial and product outcomes of research with a vital commitment to the purpose of research as serving the human experience. It is in this context, then, that we come to understand the need for something new. That “something new” is the service of prudent, wise, and gifted entrepreneurs who are able to lead, administer, and manage the practical and practicable life of the research enterprise while keeping the eyes and intentions of researchers and the institutions’ leaders focused on what we call in ethics the Greater Good.

### **Confronting the Context: Paradigm Shifts and Character Formation in Servant Leadership**

*“We need heroes, people who can inspire us, help shape us morally, spur us on to purposeful action --- and from time to time we are called to be those heroes, leaders for others, either in a small, day-to-day way, or on the world’s largest stage.”*

Lives of Moral Leadership, Introduction, p. xvii  
----Robert Coles

The developments in the culture of research described in the preceding sections may appear to be daunting for those in the leadership roles of research administration and management. They may well be. However, it should be underscored that they are a natural response to a wide variety of cultural and psychosocial elements in contemporary society at

large. From this perspective, perhaps these developments and issues should more positively be seen as invitations to creative explorations and the positive evolution of the role of research administration and management.

Assuredly, research administrators have critically important managerial roles to ensure that research activities are conducted successfully, comply with the wide and expansive requirements of research sponsors, are performed in ways that respect the resource requirements of the institution and related entities, and become a leverage for the development of future opportunities in light of the performing institution's mission. Yet given the reflections in the preceding sections, there is much more to the role and practice of leadership in the research milieu. In essence, research administration is not just a practical and practicable function. It is also a form of service that is meant to assist, aid, and deepen the very purposes for which the research itself was sponsored, funded, awarded, and is being performed, namely the advancement of knowledge and the betterment of the human condition. Such a wider expanse demands more and more in the leadership role of research administrators. In short, as stated previously, research administrators have an important role of service not just to the management of research activities but also to the importance of the mission of the institution for the Greater Good. This is what is called "servant leadership."

This concept and practice of servant leadership is far from easy. It demands that research administrators are able to integrate successfully their needed role in the daily oversight of research regulatory/legal requirements and support services with the practice of a style of leadership that serves rather than dictates, that promotes pride-in-mission rather than mere job obligation, and that prevents the worst by promoting the best. Such postures require mature self-reflection on one's professional and personal identity and the development of character traits and goals that become powerful sources of enrichment in the research context. Let us take time then to turn to what are suggested below as three fundamental paradigm shifts and several key character traits central to the development of servant leadership for research administrators.

### *Three Paradigm Shifts in the Practice of Servant Leadership*

Thomas Kuhn is very famous in our scientific communities for his development of the concept of paradigm shift. Kuhn detailed how important knowledge discoveries and scientific explorations changed the very way that human beings think, live, and exist. Paradigm shifts are not easy changes. They are deeper challenges that alter the very foundations upon which life is lived and the ways in which we human beings conceive of others, the world, and ourselves. The development of servant leadership constitutes a change in the way leadership is conceived and practiced. In research administration, the practice of servant leadership is an invitation to a deeper identity and richly productive form of authentic and meaningful service. However, it calls for true paradigm shifts in the way that we understand our role and our identity, and how we carry them out in service of the public trust and the common good of our institutions. The following seem to be three important paradigm shifts that servant leadership poses in research administration and management.

#### *From hierarchy to history*

All institutions, by their nature, have some type of structure and organization. This is as true for individual families as it is for universities and corporations. With structure, there is a

need for what the armed forces call the “chain of command.” To meet a mission effectively and efficiently, any human organization needs a competent and effective structure for daily living as well as important decisional moments. As history demonstrates, the development of such structures creates hierarchies. There is nothing unusual or problematic per se about this. Many times, such as in the family experience, hierarchical roles and responsibilities are laid out and completed almost subconsciously. On the other hand, large organizations develop, maintain, and practice hierarchies with far greater and more visible complexity. In government, hierarchy is met with organized patterns of behavior that express meaning (cf. the definition of ritual). Such patterns express and ensure the continuation of the government itself as well as each part of its mission. When hierarchy is made so complex, it can begin to become an end in itself. The maintenance of the hierarchy can become more important than the mission the hierarchy is meant to serve. Power, as discussed previously, is always a temptation.

For servant leadership in any organization, there is a need for the individual leader to become conscious of the temptation to power and self-contained hierarchy. Servant leaders consciously and deliberately move away from any and all patterns that make their leadership a source of self-aggrandizement and status. Servant leadership requires an individual to become committed to a shift from hierarchy to embracing the “history” of the professional community that makes up the organization. History, in this context, is not the study of past events. History, in the sense of narrative studies, means the identity and lived experience of the women and men who make up the organization, institution, or community. Servant leaders focus not on status or rank. They are not centered upon the needs of those in charge. Rather, they focus on the needs of the women and men who make up the rank and file of the institution and work daily to carry out its mission as a type of lived historical experience.

In research organizations, this is critical. While sponsored research has its goals and its requirements, research administrators practice authentic servant leadership when they immerse themselves into the life of the organization and into the professional contributions of the women and men who are engaged in all aspects of the research being conducted. By becoming more deeply aware of the mission of the organization and the gifts/needs of its members, research administrators are more able to assist the institution’s leaders in the development of the organization’s mission and its ability to be poised for future opportunities.

### *From obligation to ownership*

For many, a job is simply that --- a job. Especially in times of economic challenge, the ability to find employment is predicated upon two overarching and extremely valid concerns for oneself and one’s family: financial benefit and healthcare coverage. Much as in Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, citizens understandably look to employment for survival. However, beyond that, there is something more.

As we mature and develop as persons, we come to discover our talents and gifts. As we do, we are encouraged by family and mentors to conceive of ways in which our talents and gifts can engage us in future careers that are highly fulfilling as well as productive. Certainly, not all of our dreams can be fulfilled. In some cases, because of a wide variety of factors, what we thought were dreams can turn into nightmares. Yet the process here is what is important. At our best, we hope that the careers upon which we embark will bring to each of us a sense of personal fulfillment. Yet often, we are confronted in the workplace with a more rudimentary sense of “just getting the

job done” --- in other words, a callow sense of being obliged to complete assigned tasks without any appreciation of perhaps their greater purpose.

Despite this inevitability, there always remains inside the human animal the desire for “something more.” There is a hunger and a thirst for meaningfulness. This is as true for human organizations as it is for human individuals. It is very true for research organizations.

It is possible that research administrators can perform their service as a type of elementary obligation alone. Research administration, after all, is a “job.” When overseeing and/or assisting the conduct of research, one is immediately confronted by regulatory requirements from sponsors and the institution that can be overwhelming. There is an understandable sense of obligation to fulfill requirements. Such requirements lead to a concentration on compliance.

Yet the nature of research itself, as already discussed, is something far greater. While faithfully leading and assisting requirements and obligations, the service of research leaders today is met with an invitation to develop and mature a sense of “ownership” of mission. It is not enough simply to fulfill one’s role out of a sense of obligation or compliance. It is not enough simply to meet the minimum standard. There is a need to practice and engender in others a sense of ownership of who the institution is, what the organization does, and how the mission of the research institution is of benefit to others both within the institution itself as well as without. Research administrators become servant leaders when they move from performing their works away from rudimentary obligation toward an ownership of mission that is imbued with pride and possibilities.

### *From prevention to promotion*

In the areas of research ethics, regulatory affairs, and research law, research leaders and related experts are extremely aware of the profound proliferation of regulatory requirements for the ethical conduct of research. Sometimes even the most cursory review of these requirements is startling. However, they are clearly understandable. To understand why so many regulations have come to exist, one need only remember the horrors of the Holocaust, eugenics, the tragic USPHS syphilis study perpetrated on the men of Tuskegee, the abuse of animals in various experiments, the misuse of appropriations, or the falsification/fabrication of data for personal prestige or power that come with the notoriety of publication. There is no question as to why sponsored research comes with so many complex regulatory requirements. However, there is a danger.

The human being, understandably, can approach requirements from an isolated sense of prevention. Rightly so, it is important to prevent harm and protect against all misdeeds or dangers. Such is the critically important and central reason that our cities and societies have robust law enforcement agencies and experts. Yet we realize that the good order of society is not met only by enforcement and protection against or prevention of crime. To concentrate on the one prevents the worst assuredly. But there is something more.

In research administration, the proliferation of complex regulations to prevent unethical or inappropriate conduct can lead to, and is often evidenced in, a type of inquisitorial form of enforcement. One need only ask investigators or staff how they feel after having encountered: “*this committee*” or “*that regulatory affairs specialist*.” Sometimes the reaction can be quite

surprising or alarming. Sometimes investigators do not feel helped but hindered. They come to resent requirements and look for ways around the system's directions.

Besides the dynamics of individual cases of the professional interactions between research staff and research administrators in regulatory affairs, there is a deeper and more positive opportunity here. There is an invitation to a third paradigm shift, namely to prevent the worst by promoting the best. Without question, research administrators must ensure that the goals and requirements of regulatory compliance are achieved in all aspects. Concomitantly, though, research administrators practice servant leadership when they interact with investigators and develop in their institutions programs of educational enrichment that look to make others aware of the high goals and ends of regulations themselves. The success of such initiatives, however, is not just about styles of communication or the invention of workshops. Most deeply, research administrators as servant leaders must learn to embody within themselves new and more positive attitudes of promotion. While definitively ensuring that all staff members understand requirements and regulatory directives, such are communicated and engendered best in others when the research administrator understands and embodies their positive aspects and end-points or goals. Servant leadership in research administration truly succeeds when one integrates the goals of preventing the worst with those of promoting the best.

### *Character Formation for Servant Leaders*

Change is never easy. Paradigm shifts are even more demanding. The change in one's fundamental horizons and behaviors demands deep and abiding changes within one's psychology and one's outlook. Engaging in such changes requires the development of deliberate postures that themselves also require the hard work of personal and professional development and maturation. To put into action the paradigm shifts discussed above, it seems worthwhile to suggest a series of traits that are important for becoming servant leaders. Such traits are not aimed only at elemental changes in the way one communicates or behaviorally is observed. Such traits must be rooted deeply within the personhood of the individual servant leader. They are therefore part of one's ethos per its original definition, namely the fundamental character of individuals or institutions. The following are five traits that are indicative of and essential to the development of authentic servant leadership. They have special importance and impact in the professional identity and contributions of research administrators and managers.

#### *Conscious*

Research administrators as servant leaders must be conscious. This may seem like an obvious statement. It is not. In the context of these reflections, by "conscious" is meant total awareness. The first step in becoming a servant leader is to become most deeply self-aware and aware of those around one. While this may seem or sound easy, it is not. Self-awareness requires a sense of personal honesty that is, at times, even brutal.

To be self-aware and therefore self-conscious, one must be open to who one really is. Gaining such knowledge requires intense personal reflection and also the humility to ask for, listen, hear, and weigh carefully how one is perceived, experienced and known by others. As any of us realizes, such self-honesty is never easy. In fact, it can be difficult and even painful even if it is about accepting one's gifts and positive attributes. Its pain comes not in what we discover about ourselves. Rather, the pain comes in learning to accept precisely who we are with our

positive attributes as well as our limitations and our defects of character. Learning to accept ourselves as the gifted yet fragile and limited human beings that we are is the most fundamental step in becoming a leader.

The second step is similar, namely to be conscious and aware of those around us. As we learn not to judge ourselves, we learn also not to judge those who are around us. That also takes an extraordinary sense of honesty. Who is it with whom we share our lives and daily work? How do we perceive them? How do they perceive us? What are our feelings about them? How perhaps do we judge them? Why do we have the judgments about them that we do? Are those judgments and feelings on target or appropriate? Why or why not? In short, servant leaders are truly conscious, aware, accepting, and humble about one's own self and about all the other "selves" with whom we share the pathways of our profession.

### *Connected*

Servant leaders in research administration, as well as in other professions, must be connected. Again, this character trait may seem obvious or easy to understand and to effect. Like being conscious, it is not. We humans are contingent beings. We are always "in relation to" others and to the self. Conscious as we are of self and others, there is a need for us to understand that we are fundamentally relational. Yet our society, especially in the West, has for decades and centuries long been influenced by the powerful impact of utilitarian individualism. We are individuals clearly. Yet we are also clearly always in relationship to self and others. Hence, this means that the human person is ever in a state of ontic tension. Our very ontology, i.e. our being, is caught up in a type of creative tension between being the internally unique individuated selves that we are, while concomitantly being externally connected with all the other unique selves with whom we share life and work.

Yet there is always the temptation to avoid the connectedness that is essentially ours as human beings and is required for being servant leaders. Fear and power, as previously discussed, can enter into the workplace or into the family such that we distance ourselves from those with whom we share our daily pathways. Whether for purposes of self-preservation or other felt needs, there is the temptation to distance the self and disconnect from others. For those in the highest levels of authority such as in research institutions, this is clearly dangerous.

Each research institution's mission is tied to social, cultural and human needs as well as needs arising from the goals of enterprise success. Each institution also has a unique history and present conditions regarding values, goals, resources, and opportunities as well as limitations and restrictions. Servant leaders in research institutions must be well connected to all of the facets of the organization's history, origins, mission, goals, and external collaborators as well as sponsors. Without a healthy sense of clear connectivity and the tending of those connections, including among staff and investigators, the success of the organization and the life of the workplace are endangered. Therefore, servant leaders must be committed in an ongoing fashion to remaining connected and developing healthy and productive relationships both within and without the organization such that the mission of the group grows and develops to success. This trait of connection is especially important for research administrators if, as servant leaders, they are to assist investigators, staff, and executives to advance and develop the potential for positive impact on the public trust to which all are committed.

### *Competent*

All of us in research administration realize that in our profession we must always strive to be competent. Competence is a never-ending task that requires continuing education in all of its forms. In research administration being competent has particular meaning. In the history of the profession, research administration began as a necessity to ensure that research grants and contracts were fulfilled in accordance with the terms and conditions of each sponsor. There was, therefore, a particularly strong emphasis on the necessity of research administration as a practical reality with practical and practicable methods and outcomes. Yet as the years unfolded, research administration has become more and more intrinsic to the research enterprise such that it is more than just a practice. It is a processive profession in and of itself.

Remaining competent is itself also a process. The process of competence involves three distinct areas. First, the research administrator must be about the continual acquisition of knowledge concerning research, the specific disciplines so engaged, the laws and regulations that govern research and its administration, and the importance of the particular institution's specific research mission and its unfolding history. Second, research administrators must deepen their skills and abilities to engage, lead, and serve the members of the institution in pre-award processes, post-award requirements, and transformation or transition of present engagements for future opportunities and challenges. Finally, research administrators must ensure the depth of their competence through the processes of ethical formation both on the personal and professional levels such as have already been described in the preceding paragraphs and sections.

Yet the competence of research administrators as servant leaders has yet another dimension. The acquisition of knowledge, the continuing improvement of skills, and ethical formation only come to fruition when such competence is disposed not at the service of the self but at the service of the community and the public trust. The term "competence" has its origins in words such as "power." Yet we have already discussed how alluringly dangerous power is. The truly competent servant leader and research administrator is one who acquires all one needs to be excellent not because one wishes to be powerful, but rather to be empowered within the self and to empower those that we serve in the research community. Real competence leads to selfless service of others.

### *Committed*

Professional leadership requires commitment. Yet commitment is not a static reality. It has levels and degrees. In our human development, we make a wide variety of commitments over time. These commitments themselves change and evolve. Sometimes they dissipate. Other times, they grow slowly or minimally. And at still other times, the commitments we make in life deepen in vast and unforeseen ways.

In general, whether it is in the relationships we make or in the professions we embrace, there seem to be what could be termed three levels of types of commitment: commitments of the head, commitments of the hands, and commitments of the spirit or heart.

In professional life, there is obviously a first commitment of the head. We need to be employed. We look for those positions that we believe tap into our talents and are consistent

with our personal goals. We seek for and accept a position. We realize our occupational needs and capacities. We become a member of “the team.” Immediately, however, our professional commitments engage more deeply in the second level, a commitment of “the hands” that work and labor. We perform our tasks with varying degrees of investment for a wide variety of reasons. Most successful professionals faithfully and firmly engage their occupations and institutions with clear commitments of head and hands. However, in the course of one’s professional career, very often there is an invitation, albeit undetectable in many ways, wherein we become committed to our profession and/or our institution and colleagues more personally, more deeply, and with ultimate value. We enter into this third level of commitment when we align our values and even our dreams with those of the mission and institution we serve. This is when we move from having a job to having a career or even a vocation.

For research administrators, the development of one’s servant leadership requires an eventual entry into all three of the above levels of commitment, especially the last. We become engaged in the management of research and realize that our talents and gifts make an impact. As we become more invested in the various facets of research administration, we find ourselves invited into greater responsibilities. We become committed to put our hands to the plough to take on more duties even at the expense of our personal schedules and wishes. However, research administration becomes servant leadership when the individual begins to become truly dedicated to the mission of the organization as a system of valued, selfless giving. One begins to align one’s professional goals with the service of the organization so as to serve those the organization benefits. Such a sense of commitment calls upon the individual to seek the common good of the organization, the benefit of one’s colleagues, and the continual growth and development of the mission and horizons of opportunity that beckon the research organization into the future. In short, this involves a deep and expansive sense of being committed. To enter into the processes of this level of commitment is characteristic of the servant leader in any profession.

### *Catapulted*

In the final analysis, all of the formational characteristics of servant leaders are not static realities. They are processes. In research administration, given the vast and dizzying complexities that arise from the management of discovery and innovation, there is always within one’s professional service an overwhelming sense of movement. In some ways, these movements and activities seem entirely unique and different. We might, however, wish to consider that the complexities of the daily life of research administrators as servant leaders can actually be understood as three forms of being “catapulted.”

In the first instance, the research administrator as servant leader is catapulted into the self. The daily blur of complex and innumerable responsibilities ultimately makes one ask why one has even decided to remain in research administration. The labors expended, the struggles one meets, the challenges from peers, and the seemingly never ending revisions of requirements demand the development of a sense of internal self-reflection to discover talents and strengths to endure the pressures of the moment and bring about success. This sense of catapulting is a discovery of self that, if authentically engaged, results in the development of new and unforeseen potentials for one’s personal growth, positive professional contributions, and the enrichment of one’s colleagues.

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In a second instance, the research administrator as servant leader is catapulted into controversy and challenge. Servant leaders are able to confront potential problems and also to battle those realities that could undermine the mission of the moment. Research itself is a challenging process of discovery, innovation, invention, and application. Experiments are predicated upon the potential for the problematic and even for failure. To confront these requires a level of courage that does not shrink in the face of the problematic. Research administrators, consistent with the nature of research itself, become servant leaders when they allow themselves to be catapulted to meet the possible problems of the moment and can draw upon their ingenuity to discover new means, as discussed previously, to prevent the worst and promote the best.

However, there is a third form of catapulting that is intrinsic to servant leadership for research administrators. No institution can survive unless it stands ready to be catapulted into unforeseen horizons of opportunity that will change, deepen, or even open the institution to the potential of a quantum leap in its mission. Servant leaders develop the courage to stand ready to face unforeseen potentials and possibilities for mission and opportunity. In research administration, this may call the individual to consider alternative methodologies for a wide variety of support services. It may call the members of the research administration department to be prepared to explore new means by which to serve the needs of individual investigators or the institution as a whole to meet requirements or the professional development of one's colleagues. It may mean that research administrators become partnered with investigators and leadership to seek out new and unprecedented opportunities for new research investigations and endeavors.

In short, the ultimate form of catapulting occurs when the individual research administrator becomes a servant enough to lead and set forth an example of courage to face the unforeseen future and to be ready to realign and deepen one's professional commitments to meet the challenges and invitations of professional life that may be breaking open. Research administrators truly become servant leaders when they throw themselves into the experience of being multi-dimensionally catapulted.

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The character traits and paradigm shifts explored above seem to bring us to yet something perhaps even more profoundly enduring to consider. When we amass all of the shifts and traits together, perhaps we become faced with the birth of a new and encompassing identity for the research administrator as servant leader.

Indeed, while we have reflected above on the performative actions of the research administrator (in other words our "doing"), the real question comes as to the ultimate identity that we are being moved to embrace as servant leaders.

In other words: "*Who is it that we be?*"

## The Challenge of LeaderBeing: The Consummate Experience

*"Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race."*

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Chapter 5  
----James Joyce

Ultimately, we must come to understand that servant leadership is a "*being*" not just a doing. This is applicable for leadership in any and all of the professions including research administration. As mentioned briefly at the end of the previous section, we can become caught up in the performative. This is one of the psychosocial aspects of Western culture that has developed for centuries. We are creatures who look to measure quality oftentimes, perhaps too often, by quantity. We look to someone's "doing" to measure the value of her or his "being" within the professional community. Without question, substantive work demands substantive performance and outcomes. Yet there is a balance that has to be respected in this. Servant leadership in any profession is not ordered only to the performance of various activities. It has its ultimate foundations and its "end-point," or as the Greeks would term it - "*telos*," in the actual being and meaning that is bound up in the flesh and blood and spirit of servant leaders. Hence, servant leadership involves most powerfully the never-ending process of "becoming a leader as person." We term this here: "*LeaderBeing*."

In discussions we have had on this topic, there is a curious observation. Individuals who have reflected on the concept of LeaderBeing keep asking questions as if there is a final end-point to a person's becoming such. This is a curious tendency on the part of a social enterprise context that, as stated previously, persistently tries to define value as a quantitative experience rather than a qualitative one. LeaderBeing is a qualitative metaphor, if you will, that seeks to open up an experience that is itself never ending. One enters into the process of LeaderBeing as an act of Becoming for one's lifetime. It never ends. Indeed, process philosophy has much to teach us all. Like the stages of human development, LeaderBeing is a never ending, lifetime process. It never rests. Those who begin the pathway to LeaderBeing enter into a process of deepening, of change, of maturity, and of development. It is an ongoing reality exactly the same as the process of human maturation. Yet would there be a marker of some type that can affirm the presence, the processes, and the emerging potency of LeaderBeing among professionals?

In language, the terms "consummate" or "consummation" are, like many other linguistic morphemes, many-meaninged. They are, as scholars tell us, polyvalent terms. They are not defined. Rather, the terms are a kind of doorway to an ongoing experience. One does not learn the terms. One "enters into" them to discover their unfathomable nature. Consummate moments seem to be those that capture the brilliance or essence of some human experience. The consummation of a human activity seems to be the end-result of some arduous labor. Yet both terms also do not always indicate an end point. They also can point toward beginnings. At the end her life on the way to her tragic execution, Mary, Queen of Scots, is quoted as having said, "In my end is my beginning." In a certain respect this one quotation at a tragic moment of death points toward the deep and abiding understanding of all consummate experiences both the tragic and the exhilarating. Consummations do not necessarily bring something to an end. Rather, consummations are existential moments when an atom is split, energies explode, births occur, and new forms of life and reality can be freed up into history.

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LeaderBeing is therefore understood best as a consummation. First, it is not a thing. It is a process within the person of the servant leader. By entering into the maturing growth that is LeaderBeing, the servant leader gives flesh to the processes of real human leadership that makes a difference. And as others observe the servant leader so involved, they also are moved to change and grow and develop. Indeed, the consummation of real LeaderBeing in those who would dare truly to be servant leaders gives birth to something new and unforeseen among one's peers, within one's organization, and outwardly toward those the organization is called to serve.

LeaderBeing as a consummate experience is a serious but needed challenge in today's professions. It is a brilliant flame that should attract the moth within each of us. Indeed, when we come close we will be marked by the flame. When we are so caught up in assisting our institutions' missions by LeaderBeing, we might seem to be in danger of losing something within the self. Perhaps, though, we will not really lose at all. Perhaps we will gain new forms of potential service, however small or tall, that can crack open something, somewhere in our institutions to see and embrace horizons of renewal and recommitment. Perhaps the energy and enthusiasm that comes with our sense of servant leadership can move, even in the smallest of ways, all those around us to a sense of re-dedication to innovation, invention, discovery, and experimentation that will result in an increase of knowledge, new therapies that will improve health, new processes to save lives, or new opportunities where battling forces might be moved to put down weapons and search for justice and peace.

One never knows what magic can happen when you enter into the consummate experience of LeaderBeing. Perhaps Forrest Gump was right all along. *"Life is like a box 'a chocolates. Ya never know what you're gonna get!"*

But the first step is opening the box and entering into the experience of it all in the first place!

### Conclusion

In 2001, Peter Jackson thrilled the world's imagination with the start of his now famous film adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's trilogy, "Lord of the Rings." Born of the pages of Tolkien's work, Jackson shaped characters with powerful personalities. The characters in the film trilogy captured so well the images we citizens have of the central characterizations of human living itself. Indeed, each of them lives in each of us to some degree. Inside we are all a heroic Frodo, a dedicated Sam, a wise Gandalf, and others. But also inside us is the potential for being a Gollum.

Gollum is a fascinating character. If we think for a moment who or what he represents we might be truly startled. To summarize his importance briefly, we know that in our world we have today many therapies for all forms of addiction that inflict so many of our friends and colleagues. It seems, in a certain sense, we have developed in today's world 12 Step Programs for each. Perhaps, however, there is one that is missing --- the one that is the groundswell of all the rest --- the addiction to power and domination.

Addiction is an interesting word. One might understand its meaning in a Latin phrase, "*ad dicere*." We might translate that as "to speak unto." Alternatively, we might rephrase it as "that to which I give my word, my oath." Gollum, having experienced the allure of the One Ring To Rule Them All, gives himself over to its power. He becomes addicted to it. He is changed from being

himself a Hobbit into a horribly hateful creature with a dual personality, who vacillates from fear to rage, and who in the end has one and only one end, namely his tragic death and complete termination in the fires of Mount Doom. He perishes into nothingness with his “precious.”

This image of the One Ring To Rule Them All is most powerful. In a certain respect, Tolkien perhaps captured in his time some of the subliminal cultural misgivings of the Industrial Revolution and the advancing of the modern business world at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He clearly captured the character of the disease of addiction itself. Perhaps today he also gives to us one half of a mirror-image in which we are asked to consider who we are as servant leaders in the culture of research that is engaged in each of our institutions or agencies. Is our role really only about power and prestige, product and purse strings? Is it really only “all about the money?”

Perhaps there is another mirror image that helps us balance out what the culture of research really is and therefore points to how we can provide the substance of LeaderBeing as research executives, administrators, and managers. Perhaps there is another image of “The Ring” that is the other side of the mirror in which we can ask ourselves: “Whom do we choose to be?”

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a group of women in Dublin, Ireland took a chance. In the spirit of their leader at that time, they came together to meet dire social needs in their country. In the alleyways, women and men and children were dying of cholera. No one would take them in. They suffered alone until dead, and then their bodies rotted in the shadows. At the same time, young women in factories suffered horrific abuse at the hands of owners and those in power. Other similarly inhuman situations were in evidence in their times. These women decided for various reasons to take a chance and do something about it. Their common dedication ultimately changed them as people and opened up unforeseen futures.

Interestingly enough, they suffered at the hands of those in their time who were upset that “these women” were doing things that men alone should have been doing! Indeed, for whatever reasons, they upset the expected hierarchies of their times with a day-to-day carrying out of social justice services for the poor and the underserved. In time, these women decided to cut their expenses by dressing in common. They cared for each other deeply like members of a family. Eventually, they even came to wear a sign of their commitment to the poor --- a simple, silver unadorned ring. Some of them came to America. They landed in Pittsburgh unrecognizable, yet wearing their rings of service, and founded hospitals and schools and soup kitchens all over the country.

Forced by the powers of their time to settle down into something “acceptable,” the world eventually came to know them as the Sisters of Mercy. They continue today to carry out the meaning of their ring of service that ties them to the poor and the dispossessed. Their ring became not an object to be worn, but a series of never ending bands of relationships with themselves and with those they serve.

This symbol of the ring of service is very powerful. Not necessarily tied to the Sisters of Mercy, there is a story about a group of sisters who had a curious ritual practice when one of their members would approach her golden jubilee of membership. When a younger sister would make her final vows to serve others, she would choose a motto of some type that was engraved on the inside of her profession ring. Over the years, the engraving would understandably dim.

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When that young sister grew older and became a golden jubilarian, she would meet with her superior. Her superior would ask her in ritual fashion if she would like to have her motto re-engraved into her ring. It was the practice of that community that the sister would respond likewise in ritual fashion: “Reverend Mother, that is most kind and generous; but, no thank you. I appreciate the offer. But there is no reason to engrave again my motto into my ring. My motto is engraved by now into my heart.”

Research administrators have a dynamic and pulsing call as servant leaders within our respective institutions. Within our particular universities and agencies as well as within the culture of research itself, we are called to enter into the never-ending experience of LeaderBeing. Such an entrance will demand paradigm shifts within the self and the deepening of our personal and professional character. But as we gaze into the mirror, we must ask: Who shall we become? Gollum or the jubilarian? Do we wear the ring whose self-centered endpoint can only lead to Mount Doom? Or will we don the One Ring To Serve Them All?

*What ring will we choose to wear?*



Erik Stein

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