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## Leading Through a Crisis: The Application of Servant Leadership During COVID-19

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# Leading Through a Crisis:

The Application of Servant Leadership During COVID-19

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## ABSTRACT

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Lamar Soutter Library was faced with moving off campus and into a remote work environment. As the crisis unfolded, it was critical for staff to experience a unified leadership team that was dedicated to their well-being, empathetic to the unprecedented situation, and committed to providing exceptional service. At that time, library leaders made a conscious decision to apply the principles of servant leadership as the framework for how, as a team, the library would see its way through the pandemic. What follows is a case study in the application of servant leadership in an academic health sciences library during the COVID-19 crisis.

Keywords: Health Sciences Libraries, Leadership Theory, Crisis Management, Change Management, Robert Greenleaf, University of Massachusetts Medical School, Shared Vision, Remote Work, Staff Engagement

## INTRODUCTION

The Lamar Soutter Library (LSL) at the University of Massachusetts Medical School (The University) is a medium-sized academic health sciences library located in Worcester, Massachusetts, USA. The Library serves approximately 1,200 students in three professional schools (School of Medicine, Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, and Graduate School of Nursing) and 5,000 researchers, faculty, and staff. In addition, the Library provides services to

the University's clinical partner, the UMass Memorial Health Care System (UMMHC), which consists of an additional 14,000 physicians, nurses, and staff.

Including grant-funded positions, the Library has 32 FTE and a budget in the range of \$8 million (USD) annually. Core services include educational and clinical outreach, research and scholarly communication support, in-person library assistance, interlibrary loan functions, and archive and institutional repository services, as well as support for a series of regional and national outreach grants. The Library is at the heart of student life on campus, averaging 850 walk-in visits daily. Students visit the Library to meet friends, collaborate on projects, use specialized software, socialize, and find quiet study space. Conversely, researchers and clinicians often visit the Library through virtual means, preferring to access the Library's extensive electronic collection of journals, books, and databases.

In early February 2020, like many academic health centers in the United States, the University was closely monitoring the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) and the potential impact on the delivery of educational programming and clinical care. In the Library, managers were monitoring staff who had upcoming travel and conference commitments and questioning whether staff would be permitted to attend. Staff were advised to consider bringing laptops and critical files back and forth with them on their work commutes as the situation was changing rapidly. This was the extent of the Library's preparedness when the University issued a work from home (WFH) order beginning March 14, 2020 with no specified return date.

As the numbers of COVID-19 cases began to rise, Library staff members faced many challenges. There were concerns for their individual safety and that of family members, friends, and work colleagues. Although many staff anticipated being sent home, no one was prepared for what this would mean in practice or in the long term. Besides the basic issues of food and safety concerns, there were issues of childcare, computer hardware and software needs, limited Internet access, having an appropriate place to work, serving users from a distance, and the need for information on what was happening in the present and what would occur in the future.

The Library's mission is to be "an essential partner exercising creative leadership to provide equitable service to all in teaching, learning, and accessing information in support of education, research, and healthcare" (Lamar Soutter Library, 2020). Like other health sciences libraries during the emerging pandemic, Library staff felt they had a critical role in providing accurate and timely information to the clinical system and research community, as both sought to bring the pandemic to an end as soon as possible. Also, the Library was called on for additional support to fulfill the curricular and research needs of students who were mid-semester in their studies. Most importantly, the demand for online clinical resources to support clinical education was mounting, and the Library was key in locating, vetting, and providing access to these specialized resources and providing literature searching to inform the rapidly evolving clinical policies.

The Library Management Team (Director, Associate Director, and Financial Officer), along with the Supervisors Team (six Department Heads), met to discuss the situation and assess staff's ability to work remotely. At that time, making a conscious decision, the principles of servant leadership became the framework for how, as a team, the Library would see its way through the pandemic.

Servant leadership emphasizes that leaders are attentive to the concerns of their followers and empathize with them (Northouse, 2019). The theory states that a person emerges as a leader by first becoming a servant. The focus is less on institutional or position power, but rather, authority is shifted to those who are being led. Servant leadership values everyone's involvement in the community, because it is within the community that one experiences and builds respect, trust, and individual strength (Greenleaf, 1977).

This chapter discusses servant leadership in the context of the management and leadership issues and outcomes associated with managing a health sciences library staff and services remotely through the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020 - September 2020).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The term servant leadership was first proposed by Robert K. Greenleaf (1970, 1977). Servant leadership emphasizes increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, building a sense of community, and sharing the power in decision making (Spears, 2002). Most recently, Eva et al. (2018) proposed the following definition:

*Servant leadership is an (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower individual needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community. (p. 114)*

Greenleaf's leadership model has since been refined by Spears (1995), Laub (1999), Russell and Stone (2002), Patterson (2003), and van Dierendonck (2011) and applied in a wide variety of settings: healthcare (Garber et al., 2009), tourism (Tuan, 2020), academia (Buchen, 1998), athletics (Burton and Peachey, 2013), fire and emergency services (Lindquist and Russell, 2019), and legal studies (Sampayo and Maranga, 2019), to name a few. The leadership theory first appeared in the library literature in 2003 (Doncevic).

Various elements of servant leadership have been proposed over time (van Dierendonck, 2011; Sun and Wang, 2009; Barbuto and Wheeler, 2006; Beck, 2014). For the purpose of this

discussion, the original characteristics as proposed by Greenleaf (1977) and refined by Spears (2004) will be used.

- 10 Principles of Servant Leadership

1. **Listening:** Ability to learn and receive insights from their team
2. **Empathy:** Ability to recognize and understand feelings and emotions that are experienced by their team
3. **Awareness:** Confident in facing the unknown
4. **Healing:** Understands the need to search for wholeness as an individual and a team
5. **Conceptualization:** Articulates a clear vision
6. **Persuasive:** Gently convinces staff that change has advantages
7. **Stewardship:** Taking responsibility for the actions and performance of your team
8. **Foresight:** Learning from past experiences, identifying what's happening now, and understanding the consequences of decisions
9. **Commitment to the Growth of People:** Committed to the personal and professional development of everyone on the team
10. **Building Community:** Providing opportunities for people to interact with one another

## Servant Leadership in Libraries

Servant leadership theory appears in library literature in three distinct ways. The first way is as a call to action. In 2003 John Doncevic writing in *Catholic Library World* proposed the application of servant leadership as a means to embrace staff, improve outcomes, and rejuvenate the life of the library. Doncevic (2003) called for a “radical change” (p. 177) in which leadership shifts from the top to the center, and all staff members take part in leading. It took three years before the topic of servant leadership occurred again in the library literature. Heaphey (2006) offered two possible reasons for this: 1) the amount of resources needed to invest in the futures of staff (commitment to the growth of people), and 2) the hesitancy to adopt a leadership model by a public entity (writing specifically in the context of public libraries) that has “philosophical ties to Christianity” (see Potter, 2015; Olson, 2010; and Frey, 2017) and centered around the concept of being a servant (p. 24). Heaphey (2006) went on to cite instances in the library literature where leadership examples are discussed that overlap with the principles of servant leadership, but at that time were not named or attributed to the theory. He called for a conscious effort to adopt the servant leadership model in order to establish “institutional stability” (p. 25). Germano (2014) agreed with Heaphey (2006) but focused on the positive attributes associated with the service nature of libraries.

Anzalone (2007), Gavillet (2012), Podell (2012), Yarnetsky (2013), and Katopol (2015) continued to advocate the theory of servant leadership and called for library administrators to embrace the model. Podell built his case by describing a famous example of leadership from history (Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton) which he believed library administrators in the

present day could learn from. Counterintuitive to many library training programs, Gavillet argued that effective customer service required placing the employee offering the services first. Anzalone, using the specific case of law libraries, outlined numerous opportunities in which the principles of servant leadership can be applied. Similarly, Katopol put forth a fictitious case study in mentoring to demonstrate the servant leader's interests in the welfare and development of staff. All four argued that the application of servant leadership can help strengthen the institution and bind staff together. In contrast, Richmond (2017), whose commentary is bracketed at the beginning and end with links to librarianship, but little in between, viewed servant leadership as potentially furthering "gender inequality" (p. 61) for women seeking leadership roles.

The second application of servant leadership in the library literature takes the form of identifying characteristics of successful leaders (Lo et al., 2020) or reviewing an event (Hines, 2020) and then overlaying the principles of servant leadership to the findings/outcome. There was no direct intention to apply the framework of servant leadership to the situation at the beginning of the process; its relevance came about in hindsight. This is distinct from the third type of writing appearing in the library literature - the case study. Specific examples of servant leadership theory intentionally being applied in library management situations appear in the writings of Halaychik (2014) and Ellero and Beh (2017). In both situations library leaders sought to bring about a change (at the organization or department level) and consciously chose to use servant leadership principles to bring about the desired results. In addition, Barrett (2017) developed a case study of public library Chief Executive Officers to determine if organizational culture and servant leadership practices could be linked to employee success and overall performance. Although this study took place in the library setting, it neglected to place the findings in the larger library context and compare the outcomes to other leadership studies occurring in libraries.

## **The Use of Servant Leadership in Times of Crisis**

Doraiswamy (2012) made the case that in times of crisis, the application of servant leadership principles can be used to motivate, engage, and empower employees. There are few documented examples of servant leadership being utilized during a crisis. In 2014, Christ wrote a brief article reflecting on the closing of an automotive plant in 2008 and leadership's efforts to put employees first as a way to introduce the topic of using servant leadership in a crisis. As well, James (2015-2017) wrote retrospectively of the evacuation of a school caught in the crossfire of a civil war (no doubt a crisis situation) in Cote d'Ivoire and the actions of the school's director as examples of servant leadership. Jackson and Lee (2019) took a different approach to crisis management and the use of servant leadership. Working with the Southeastern Virginia Police Department (a profession in which every situation has the possibility to turn into a crisis), three leaders (Chiefs) were interviewed to see if they exhibited the characteristics of servant leaders. Jackson and Lee's findings (2019) indicated a strong commitment to employee development and embracing the mandate to "serve and protect" (p. 31).

Interestingly, outside of the few case studies mentioned above, there is little written in the peer reviewed literature about utilizing servant leadership in a time of crisis. Yet, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, academic leaders (Fernandez and Shaw, 2020; Laezzo, 2020) and popular trade publications (Paladin, 2020) identified servant leadership as a necessity to manage the turbulent times and the impact on employees and customers. For the Lamar Soutter Library, the principles of servant leadership guided library leaders' thinking and were utilized throughout the decision-making process during the pandemic.

## **APPLICATION OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES**

### **Listening**

Active listening is the first area of expertise that a leader needs to utilize daily, and especially so during times of crisis and unpredictability. The COVID-19 pandemic proved to be a time when listening was the primary mode of communication for Library leadership throughout all phases of the pandemic response (pre-pandemic, initial weeks, new reality, return to work). On day one of the emerging crisis, Library leadership had to listen actively: opening hearts and minds to fully understand and embrace the staff's needs, questions, and fears. Library leaders also listened actively to University leadership to gain a better understanding of their pandemic reaction and future directions. This was key to advancing empathetic responses and solutions.

During the initial weeks of the pandemic while staff were transitioning to working remotely, all staff were invited to attend two hour-long meetings each week. This served as an opportunity to inform staff of the policies and procedures that the University was putting into place and plans on how the Library would continue to offer services remotely. Staff were encouraged to ask questions, share concerns, receive support from colleagues, and notify Library leaders of any issues they were having. Smaller, department-based meetings were also being held on a weekly basis, as well as University "Town Halls". Library leadership listened actively and closely to the information being shared. Staff often asked follow-up questions to clarify what they had heard, provided opinions, and discussed the impact on Library services as the University communicated revised policies and directions.

Staff appreciated the opportunities provided to express their concerns, share their personal situations, and be heard. Some issues raised such as technology and the working environment could be easily surmounted. But other issues such as work-life balance and isolation necessitated close, active listening in order to provide staff with customized solutions. Using active listening enabled Library leadership to build staff confidence in continuing their service remotely to the community, knowing that they were being supported and had leaders to turn to when necessary.

## **Empathy**

During times of high stress, empathy, the ability to recognize and understand feelings and emotions that are experienced by their team (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears 2004), is often overshadowed by the need for self-preservation. This reaction is easily understood; when someone is personally stressed from the pressures of either internal or external factors, the need to protect oneself is important for future survival. When the COVID-19 pandemic materialized, anxiety increased; disbelief, denial, anger, discouragement, and fear were among some of the strong feelings encountered and experienced world-wide.

In the early days of the pandemic, information was changing hourly and there were many unknowns. Multiple priority areas appeared all at once and because of its affiliation with a major medical center, the Library staff was aware of the unprecedented situation the University was facing. Knowing that staff were experiencing a wide range of emotions, Library administrators engaged with staff using the principles of empathy and encouraged the staff to be empathetic with one another. Library leaders ensured that all staff had access to a mask during shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE), and during the height of the COVID-19 response, the Library donated food to the hospital's emergency department.

Two especially difficult situations occurred early in the pandemic. One, some members of the staff and their family members were thought to have or were diagnosed with COVID-19, and two, the University initiated various forms of furloughs, such as loss of vacation time and a temporary reduction in workforce. Library leadership knew both these situations brought additional emotional and psychological stress to the Library staff. The Library Director communicated the furlough decisions to staff and explained the decision-making process and the type of assistance the University would be providing to furloughed staff. All Library administrators and supervisors were available to listen, answer questions, and empathize with staff who were angry, worried about furloughed colleagues, and concerned over the future of their jobs.

Servant leadership recognizes that being empathetic is to be accepting of others and who they are, and especially how they respond during times of crisis. Empathy is not being feeble in response to adversity, nor is it a lack of following through in managerial duties. Over the course of seven months, normal work responsibilities such as performance evaluations, providing constructive feedback, issuing corrective measures, and budget planning continued.

## **Awareness**

A crisis is often defined by having to face the unknown. It is in moments of uncertainty that a servant leader must be aware of one's self, the situation, the needs and concerns of others, and provide options for action. In doing so, the servant leader holds shared values first and foremost while making decisions. In times of crisis, the normal practice of analyzing, assessing, planning, and implementing a strategy are accelerated. Awareness allows for all factors of the crisis and the needs of the organization to be taken into account.

For Library administrators it was evident that the presence of the virus, the closing down of everyday operations (at work, in the community, and across the state), and the need to isolate from one another had a tremendous impact on Library staff. Staff were asked to transition to work remotely, and although the message was supportive and encouraging, it was accepted that work was not a priority at that moment in time. Staff were dealing with childcare issues, caring for elderly parents, health concerns, technology problems, supply shortages, and overall uncertainty. Library leaders worked with staff to assess and understand individual circumstances. In addition, information needs associated with the transition of the University's curriculum to online only, the urgency of researchers working to understand how the virus was transmitted, and the need for evidenced-based clinical care guidelines all flowed into the Library. This caused a spike in reference questions and literature searches, and an increased demand for online instruction. Department Heads and Library administrators were in constant discussion about the workload and distribution.

The leadership team had to anticipate, and then work to resolve difficult questions from the staff, and leadership needed to have created a culture in which difficult questions were encouraged and respected. Similarly, leadership in the Library were willing and able to ask difficult questions of University administration and share that information back with all staff, offering solutions for both the University and for the Library.

To build awareness, Library leaders relied on professional networks to give and receive advice while facing the unknown. Learning from others and understanding different situations and solutions helped put the issues facing the Library into perspective and often shed light on previously unseen needs and remedies.

## **Healing**

Healing, in the context of servant leadership, is ensuring the wholeness of the individual and the team. The well-being of employees in the workplace will depend on how its leaders build relationships and address staff concerns. Being aware of the overall emotional toll that an ever-changing environment brings allows for the building of support systems necessary to facilitate healing. With social norms being skewed due to COVID-19, servant leaders provide an

environment for staff where they are comfortable seeking psychological, social, and cultural healing.

The notion that working from home is easy or non-productive is far from true. Working remotely can lead to isolation, depression, and frustration. In the case of COVID-19, multiple family members/generations living and working in shared spaces proved to be difficult for many. Staff were working outside of traditional business hours and/or additional hours to manage the work-life imbalance. Library staff were encouraged to remain in communication with their manager and take time off as needed. This flexibility, whether it was a full or a partial day, allowed staff to de-stress and have some control over the ever-changing situation. It created a safe environment where staff knew that they could take breaks without feeling guilty.

Knowing that staff were working under extreme pressure, Library administrators sent handwritten thank you cards to each staff member. The notes were intended to acknowledge staff dedication and assure individuals that they are valued and the work they do is appreciated. Children of staff, who often appeared onscreen, were sent “craft boxes” as a thank you for being an important part of the Library team.

Library staff are adept at seeking information and resources, and they were doing this for various entities in the University community during the pandemic and assisting others with the move to working remotely and delivering online classes. Library leadership knew it was important to keep the staff informed on current University COVID-19 policies and procedures and to provide links to professional development and personal resources. Library leadership enlisted two staff to develop a list of professional development activities and workshops, as well as links to physical and emotional support resources, parents’ resources, “Fun Stuff”, and the link to the University’s COVID-19 Information for Employees. Doing this provided a curated, quick guide to help staff take care of themselves, their families and friends, and professional development.

## **Stewardship**

For a leader stewardship is more than managing staff and influencing institutional outcomes. Stewardship centers on building relationships with staff by focusing on shared goals and ideals, empowerment, respect, caring, and advocacy (Anzalone, 2007). It is crucial for both leaders and staff to recognize the relationship between accountability and empowerment. In times of crisis, servant leadership will be open to, and at times, insistent that current policies and procedures be revised, or placed aside in favor of ensuring their staff’s ability to flourish in an ever-changing environment. These types of actions/inactions will empower staff to provide services and assistance outside of established procedures. Servant leaders will understand the importance of accountability for themselves and staff, and even during unstable times will set high standards for themselves and others.

Building representation in an academic institution can be daunting due to the numerous constituencies involved. The Library is known for its strong work ethic and accountability when working in a critical team environment. With the University working remotely it was important for Library staff and leadership to continue their University committee and team responsibilities, as well as accept positions on new teams and committees formed in response to COVID-19. The Library Director was invited to sit on the Emergency Planning group, and the Associate Director was invited to attend the weekly Department Head meetings with the Director. This enabled Library leadership to give a voice to staff needs, opinions, and concerns at an institutional level. Although the Library had an emergency continuation of services plan, it was dated and could not be relied on. As an alternative, each manager met with their department to decide which services were critical to continue and identify services that would be paused because these required a physical presence in the Library. During these discussions it was determined that there were opportunities to launch new or enhanced services that would meet the unique needs of the University during COVID-19. Staff were assigned to projects, given deadlines, and encouraged to utilize the new collaboration tools the University was offering.

The continuation of services, the ability of staff to meet deadlines and maintain commitments, and the critical contributions of Library staff to the University were possible due to the Library managers being in constant communication with staff and advocating for their needs.

## **Conceptualization**

Having a clear understanding of the future, being able to conceptualize a vision, communicating that vision to others, and including other voices in the formation of that vision is a major responsibility of the servant leader. As staff see themselves in the vision, they are able to follow through with promoting and acting upon the vision. This type of vision is flexible, resilient, and moves in different directions when necessary. The servant leader recognizes when the vision needs to be adapted in unanticipated situations and communicates this to the staff.

Leading up to the pandemic, the Library was concluding a successful strategic plan that was integrated into all aspects of services, as well as preparing for a space refresh that included new carpeting, paint, and furniture along with updated electrical and wireless capabilities. There was momentum among the staff and excitement for what the future could look like from both a physical and strategic perspective. A professional development series had provided new knowledge and skills in emerging areas of librarianship that could be used to shape the Library's future.

As the pandemic hit, the staff momentum collided with immediate fears of the unknown associated with the virus. Through leadership's empathy and strong communication, staff were reassured of the Library's core mission and future vision. Even in times of uncertainty, the Library team provided essential services to the University and its clinical partner. At the weekly

meetings, staff were encouraged to share positive feedback that they received and discussed interesting projects. As praise from University partners flowed in, the sharing of the positive work propelled and refocused staff energy on the new ways they could provide core services and support patrons in a time of uncertainty.

As staff adjusted to the new normal, Library leaders assured staff of the Library's place in the University and reaffirmed the Library's mission. At the same time, it was acknowledged that the Library was experiencing a profound change that would have long-term implications on how the mission would be implemented, and that it would take time for Library leadership to reflect on and assess the changed environment and communicate a revised vision. In response to these changes, staff expressed confidence that they were directly contributing to the goals of the Library and the University. Staff demonstrated creativity in adapting services to remote delivery only, as well as developing new partnerships throughout the University community.

## **Persuasive**

The servant leader will make time to engage with staff and to discuss work responsibilities and important issues in order to guide staff through times of stability and of great change. Open and heartfelt discussion will help staff recognize that while change can be frightening, it often reveals new institutional and personal opportunities. Leaders who use coercion or manipulation to effect change in an organization will find that staff will neither embrace nor promote the mission, and likely harbor feelings of mistrust and of being undervalued. Leaders using data, metrics, and new or established assessment tools will be able to better engage staff and offer new ways to discuss the library's mission and goals with institutional collaborators.

Information and guidance rapidly changed throughout the early phase of the pandemic, resulting in uncertainty. Leadership recognized that many of the Library's functions would be performed in an entirely different way. Leadership and departments discussed how the pandemic was impacting department priorities and work; connecting to share ideas, challenges, and successes. This provided the opportunity to reflect on the Library's mission and reimagine how to deliver core services while strengthening established relationships and building new relationships.

As the pandemic progressed, many of the initial challenges were now being welcomed and even viewed as new and exciting opportunities. Staff were encouraged to remain connected by participating in library "happy hours", virtual conferences, and classes offered through professional organizations and consortiums to share ideas. Carving out time to participate in such meetings was gratifying for staff. Through the fresh lens of COVID, new ideas were brought to Library leadership, and the Library had the opportunity to experiment and implement change in a safe and supported way.

Tapping into this creativity, practical projects were identified and prioritized. While recognizing that change is difficult, there was enthusiasm for implementing change in a manageable way. Working from a project list, new cross-departmental teams were created that brought a fresh perspective. This provided the opportunity for staff to refine existing talents and develop new skills, as well as work with colleagues from different areas of the library.

## **Foresight**

Foresight is a necessary characteristic helping leaders learn from the past, be mindful of the present, and plan for the future by understanding the consequences of decisions. Practicing foresight and incorporating it into daily decisions creates more intuitive decision making and planning, which are crucial in the fast-paced uncertainty of a crisis. A servant leader cannot simply react but must use intuition stemming from experience honed through evaluation, reflection, and feedback. Foresight then allows this intuition to be applied to the needs of the present and planning for the future.

COVID-19 presented a unique challenge, one that had never been seen or experienced by those leading and working in the Library. Initially this made it difficult to predict what would happen from one day to the next. Yet for Library leadership it presented the opportunity for quick learning and iteration. By gathering information, working with University leadership, and practicing active listening skills, Library leadership was able to understand how the University was responding and align the Library with that process. How the Library managed the pandemic was constantly evaluated and adjusted. This was necessary because of the changes facing Library staff in how they completed work, but also because of constantly changing institutional guidelines and procedures.

Mid-COVID-19 shutdown, the Library's renovation project was resumed, and Library leadership knew that changes to the physical environment would warrant a re-evaluation of how the Library was going to be used when it reopened. Library leadership had the foresight to know that existing staffing models would look different during COVID-19. Leadership worked with managers to identify which staff would be required to return to work onsite and those who could continue working remotely. This hybrid staffing model was challenging but proved to be effective in being able to continue to meet the needs of the University and its clinical partner, while ensuring compliance with COVID-19 social distancing policies.

## **Commitment to Growth**

In his book *Winning*, Jack Welch wrote, "Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others." (Welch and Welch, 2005, p. 45) People are the most important component of any organization. A servant leader needs to value and support the personal and professional development of everyone on the team,

and help people reach their full potential. This is especially important during a crisis, as everyone is learning and adjusting to unique, challenging, and changing circumstances. People need skills and knowledge to do their jobs in the best of times. In a long-term crisis, new skills need to be identified and developed. Often this is necessitated by the additional work and responsibilities that arise. The servant leader has the responsibility to provide formal and informal professional development opportunities for staff. Through all training and growth, a servant leader will support people becoming more confident, independent, and capable of taking on new roles and tasks. Employees are more motivated when they experience the commitment of a leader who believes in their development.

Due to the pandemic, University-sponsored travel was prohibited. This situation gave Library Leadership an opportunity to support professional development in different ways. To help identify professional development opportunities, two staff were charged with gathering the latest professional development offerings and building a staff resource guide. Library management worked with staff to identify which new and/or existing skills and tools were important for the staff to learn or refresh their knowledge. Staff were routinely encouraged to seek out development opportunities and then given explicit time and space to participate. Library leadership invested in professional development knowing that committing to and investing in staff's continual learning and skill building led to increased staff commitment to education and customer service.

Beyond professional development, Library leaders took the personal health and development of staff into consideration. Staff were encouraged to take time off and time to reflect and restore. This was done formally as a team, by asking people to reflect, and then share their own learning and experiences with the entire staff. Also, staff needed to be given the time and space to do solitary reflection and recovery. Library leaders encouraged and granted this time and space as needed by an employee. Crises such as the pandemic add greatly to the stress of an individual. Regardless of being directly or personally affected, people can become traumatized, desensitized, or otherwise impacted by all facets of a crisis. Helping others develop ways of addressing the negative ramifications of a crisis ultimately lead to more confident, present, and productive employees.

## **Building Community**

A servant leader understands that a community cannot exist without trust and open and honest communication where staff feel safe and valued. Just as in the principle of commitment, where a person's whole self should be recognized and developed, a person's whole work and life should be incorporated into a community-building process. Servant leaders are active relationship builders, providing opportunities for staff to interact and work with each other, and building toward a common understanding of a shared vision.

The Library staff have always been very close with one another, taking the time to celebrate life events together and supporting each other in their personal lives outside of the Library. Building community is crucial during a crisis and Library managers saw maintaining the comradery that existed between staff as paramount. Library staff were working in new and challenging conditions, often feeling stressed and disconnected from work and colleagues. Staff were also juggling multiple personal responsibilities, such as home-schooling children, poor network connections, and caring for family members. Library managers helped to identify staff's "pain points" and worked with Library leadership to provide services and tools to solve issues. Providing upgraded technology and software, and encouraging use of University productivity tools, helped solve technology-based issues and enabled staff to maintain a virtual connection. To help staff overcome issues of stress, Library leadership arranged for team building activities during the twice-weekly all-staff meetings and Library staff met at off-times for planned activities such as "Lunch and Craft". It was important that the Library continue to recognize "life events". Working with the Library's Social Committee, events such as new positions, weddings, and deaths in the family were acknowledged.

Creating community can be one of the most interesting and fun parts of a leader's work with their team. Despite the remote environment, Library leaders were able to use open and honest communication effectively to build a community that embraced change and helped one another through a challenging time.

## **OUTCOMES**

Servant leadership has provided Library leaders a framework from which to support and lead Library staff through the initial phases of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, Library staff have remained fully engaged, highly productive, and supportive of one another. In addition, Library leaders have forged closer bonds, both work and personal, and moved closer towards a shared vision for the Library. A willingness to experiment, constant communication, and a strong desire to see staff excel in their roles were crucial elements to the overall success of the Library during the crisis. Table 1 is the application of the principles of servant leadership in the Lamar Soutter Library.

Table 1. Application of servant leadership in the Lamar Soutter Library

Principle	Application
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Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Acknowledged uncertainty, fear, and stress staff were experiencing</li> <li>· Provided opportunities for open dialogue and anonymous feedback</li> <li>· Showed patience and offered, or provided, support (one on one and group)</li> <li>· Mapped out goals, provided opportunities for “quick wins”</li> <li>· Explained imposed institutional policies and changes (e.g. furloughs, travel restrictions, COVID-19 testing)</li> <li>· Worked with staff to identify and resolve “pain points” for students, faculty, and staff trying to access Library resources</li> </ul>
Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Listened to the team rather than to outside influences</li> <li>· Used insights to delegate problem-solving</li> <li>· Building staff confidence</li> <li>· Sought understanding through the gathering of staff input/ideas/suggestions</li> </ul>
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Anticipated difficult questions from the staff</li> <li>· Asked difficult questions of institutional leadership</li> <li>· Prepared self to disagree with institutional leadership while seeking and offering solutions</li> <li>· Sought information from other health sciences libraries’ leadership</li> </ul>
Healing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Encouraged staff to take time off as needed</li> <li>· Dedicated time for individual and group discussions</li> <li>· Fostered a safe and stable environment</li> <li>· Communicated institutional programs and services</li> </ul>
Conceptualization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Refocused staff on the Library mission</li> <li>· Identified new opportunities for user engagement</li> <li>· Envisioned new delivery forms for services</li> <li>· Encouraged staff to remain flexible and adapt to the changing environment</li> </ul>
Persuasive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Motivated staff, ensuring staff are engaged</li> <li>· Encouraged staff to share success stories</li> <li>· Shared productivity metrics</li> <li>· Encouraged use of new, collaborative tools</li> </ul>
Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Represented Library staff needs in institutional level meetings</li> <li>· Assured and provided valued services</li> <li>· Assigned projects and project deadlines</li> <li>· Explained imposed institutional policies and changes (e.g. furloughs, travel restrictions, COVID-19 testing)</li> </ul>

- Foresight
  - Re-evaluated pre-COVID-19 services and adjusted services to current/future institutional guidelines
  - Aligned Library services with University policies and guidelines
  - Close environmental monitoring
  - Drew upon the collective experiences of Library leaders
- Commitment to Growth
  - Organized professional development opportunities for staff
  - Encouraged staff to take on higher-level projects and leadership roles
  - Utilized and acknowledged staff members' hidden talents and skills
  - Encouraged staff to take time off to reflect and restore their physical and mental health
- Building Community
  - Used open and honest communication
  - Arranged virtual team building activities and events (Picture Game, Goat-to-Meeting, "What the Heck", "Close Up", Trivia, "We are Still Here" video, Lunch and Craft)
  - Welcomed upbeat daily message sent by a staff person in recognition of national calendar events
  - Ensured staff had the necessary tools to work remotely
  - Acknowledged staff life events through virtual celebrations
  - Sent thank you notes and small gifts to staff

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated Library management to examine the leadership and management practices in place. Elements of servant leadership had been utilized to varying degrees, yet it took a crisis situation for Library leaders to embrace the entirety of the servant leadership philosophy. As the crisis unfolded, it was critical for staff to experience a unified leadership team that was dedicated to their well-being, empathetic to the unprecedented situation, and committed to providing exceptional service.

Recognizing that the pandemic situation continues to evolve, Library leadership continues to practice servant leadership. Knowing they will be tested by internal and external factors in efforts to maintain the standards that have been set, the leadership is committed to engaging staff, sharing decision making, and acknowledging and addressing stressors and challenges caused by the remote environment.

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## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Close Up:** A variation of the Picture Game where the photo taken is a close-up of an item, or a small portion of that item, and staff are asked to identify the object.

**Goat-to-Meeting:** A special staff meeting was scheduled in which a representative from Sweet Farms in Half Moon Bay, CA provided a virtual site visit of the farm and farm animals (<https://www.sweetfarm.org/goat-2-meeting>).

**Lunch and Craft:** Library staff are invited to spend their lunch break together and work on a craft-based project and discuss anything and everything. Crafting not required. Meetings are held once a month.

**Picture Game:** Staff are encouraged to take a photo of something in their house, yard, or neighborhood and submit it to be included in a short game played at the end of each staff meeting where their fellow staff members are asked to guess who took the photo. The owner of the item then explains the history of the item and any special significance.

**Trivia:** When there was a shortage of photos available to play the Picture Game, trivia questions were utilized. Questions were on a wide range of topics.

**We Are Here Video:** Library staff lent their voices to a short video to be distributed in the University community to remind faculty, staff, and students that the Library staff were available to support their information needs during the pandemic (<https://library.umassmed.edu/news-events/lsl-now/we-are-still-here-for-you>).

**What the Heck:** Another variation of the Picture Game where unusual or antique items are shared, and staff are asked to identify the object and its purpose.