

2019-2020 CSI & CACREP Leadership Essay Contest

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Roots of Wellness



I am at the midpoint of my CACREP-accredited counselor education program. Behind me are the last of my core classes, and in front of me, my practicum and internship experiences. Throughout my program I have heard: meet people where they're at; get on a person's level; and meet the need of the person. These are iterations of servant leadership, where the aim is to serve and meet the needs of others (Russell & Stone, 2002). By incorporating the ten tenets of servant leadership, counselors and counselors-in-training can serve as the catalyst for change in the promotion and encouragement of wellness.

Jack Welch, former CEO and Chairman of General Electric, said, "Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself." Regarding promoting wellness for our clients, we must be servants to ourselves before we can ever lead them to the goal of wellness. We are so used to putting others before our own needs. Throughout my program, there has been a constant theme of health and wellness. For example, eating well, exercising, and connecting with peers, colleagues, friends, and family. We know how to take care of ourselves, but are we taking care of ourselves? The real challenge lies in balancing our own needs with those of our clients. Once our wellness is taken care of, then we can start to promote wellness in our clients.

Servant leadership "begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first" (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 27). Servant leadership and counseling are not mutually exclusive concepts. Several of the tenets of servant leadership align with the work counselors do; such as: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of people, and building community (Spears, 2005). Therefore, in the spirit of servant leadership, which is more of a philosophy of life, rather than a theory of leadership (Beazley, 2003), Kouzes and Posner (2003) posit five ways we can implement this philosophy of life. The integration of servant leadership tenets with the five practices of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2003) can lead the way for counselors and counselor educators alike to motivate, guide, and provide hope to individuals (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002). As counselors, we can apply the tenets of servant leadership with our own skill sets to aid in the modeling and promotion of wellness.

Counselors can model the way, which entails finding a person's "voice and setting an example" (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p. 1). Giving voice to a client is a gift and can be done by applying the servant leadership tenets of listening, empathy, and awareness. When we listen to our clients, we identify what is most important to our clients. Then we can empathize with them by accepting our clients for who they are and how they present to us. Moreover, as a counselor, we raise our client's awareness to their self-care needs, because we put them first. As Jack Welch said, "When you become a leader, success is all about growing others" and counselors can grow others by ethically and competently modeling the way (Sweeney, 2012).

Counselors can inspire a shared vision, which calls for the envisioning of the future and enlisting others toward a common vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). Servant leaders provide vision (Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999) and stewardship (Spears, 2005). Together we can empower our clients to take on their own challenges related to wellness. As counselors, we make commitments to our clients to serve their needs - their vision for themselves. Additionally, counselors can challenge the process (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). Counselors create opportunities where clients can take healthy risks. The servant leadership tenet of awareness resonates with this idea of challenging the process. Counselors raise client awareness of areas for growth and obstacles. We make a commitment to help people be whole again (Spears, 2005) by refocusing challenges and obstacles.

Counselors can enable others to act (Kouze & Posner, 2003), which means, "fostering collaboration and strengthening others" (p. 5). Servant leaders earn trust from their followers and then can influence others (Farling et al., 1999) through persuasion (i.e., consensus building), a commitment to growth, and building community (Spears, 2005). Counselors foster collaboration with their clients so that they can work together toward client wellness. And finally, counselors can encourage the heart, which is "recognizing contributions and celebrating values and victories" (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p. 6). With the risks and challenges that come with personal wellness, it would be remiss of counselors to not celebrate the milestones, both big and small. This leads to true healing, where we see the potential of one's growth and combine it with the intrinsic value each human possesses.

CSI chapters and CACREP-accredited counselor education programs act as stewards of servant leadership. Stewardship is a tenet of servant leadership (Spears, 2005) where we make a commitment to serve the needs of others through openness and building consensus through building community. When we serve the needs of others, we face several challenges, one of which is burnout. The high level of involvement with future clients has the potential to lead to burnout (Lim, Kim, Kim, Yang, & Lee, 2010), which affects nearly 67% of mental health professionals (Morse, Salyers, Rollins, Monroe-DeVita, & Pfahler, 2012). Unfortunately, we sometimes sacrifice our own wellness when servicing clients (Sangganjanavanich & Balkin, 2013).

Thus, my CSI chapter and CACREP-accredited counselor education program have highlighted ways to prepare and overcome this obstacle. They have challenged what self-care looks like through critical reflection and class discussions. They have also

provided a safe arena to practice and implement techniques that will alleviate the consequences of burnout. These lessons extend to beyond chapters and programs. We act as liaisons of wellness to businesses, community organizations, and other organization partners. Think of chapters and counselor education programs as trees. The members serve as roots. They not only plant and cultivate roots of wellness within a local community, but the roots branch out to other far-flung communities as well. And the result is a forest of wellness.

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