



One Legitimate Use of Power, by Keshavan Nair

Gandhi never held any official position in government, he had no wealth, he commanded no armies -- but he could mobilize millions. People were willing to serve with him and for him because his life was devoted to serving them.

Many of us have come to believe that leadership is the attainment of power. But as long as power dominates our thinking about leadership, we cannot move toward a higher standard of leadership. We must place service at the core; for even though power will always be associated with leadership, it has only one legitimate use: service.

The importance of service to leadership has a long history. Ancient monarchs acknowledged that they were in the service of their country and their people -- even if their actions were not consistent with this. Modern coronation ceremonies and inaugurations of heads of state all involve the acknowledgement of service to God, country, and the people. Politicians define their role in terms of public service. And service has always been at the core of leadership in the spiritual arena, symbolized at the highest level by Christ washing the feet of His disciples.

Service exists in the context of a relationship. In politics, it is between elected officials and their constituents, in academia between teachers and their students, in religion between priests and their congregations, and in interpersonal relationships between loved ones. In business it is between companies and their customers, shareholders, management and their employees.

The ideal of selfless service -- you see everybody as yourself and expect no reward. But if you wait until you can serve without any selfish motive, you may wait forever. Gandhi insisted that the best way to attain the ideal was to start on the journey: "If we all refuse to serve, until we attain perfection, there will be no service. The fact is that perfection is attained through service."

--Keshavan Nair, in *_A Higher Standard of Leadership_*