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**Building a legacy of volunteers through servant leadership:
A case study of a cause-related sporting event**

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Building a legacy of volunteers through servant leadership: A case study of a cause-related sporting event

For Peer Review

Abstract

This study explored the leadership style of the founder of a cause-related sporting event and investigated the effects of this leadership style on motivating volunteers. The National Kidney Foundation (NKF) Surf Festival, which began over 25 years ago to benefit people with kidney disease, was selected as an extreme case because of the longevity and success of the event. Data were collected through semi-structured personal interviews, document analysis, and personal observation. Results indicated that the founder is a servant leader. Three key themes of servant leadership emerged from the data, which influenced volunteer motivation. These were generating a shared vision dedicated to helping others, building a caring and loving community, and creating the freedom and resources for followers to become servants themselves. Our findings also indicated that the spiritual and moral tenets of servant leadership are applicable to secular NPOs. This study contributes to the development of leadership theory as one of the first analyses of servant leadership in a sport context. We conclude by offering suggestions for future research and practice.

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4 *Non-profit organizations* (NPOs) have used cause-related sporting events to connect with
5 consumers and create social capital by linking the company to a relevant social issue (Pope,
6 Isely, and Asamoah-Tutu, 2009; Principle and Thompson, 1999). These events have the
7 multifaceted ability to promote social inclusion, engage a diverse audience, and contribute to
8 wellness (Sherry, 2010). The growth in cause-related events is a consequence of the explosion of
9 NPOs; from 1981 to 2009 the number of NPOs in the U.S. increased 4.7 times reaching over 1.9
10 million (IRS, 2009). Cause-related sporting events have the explicit goal to generate net profit;
11 however, at the core of these events is the intangible goal of creating positive social change. To
12 make these events successful NPOs need leaders and volunteers who build a legacy of service.
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15 A legacy of dedicated volunteers requires more than hosting a cause-related sporting
16 event. The leaders and the people of an organization, rather than the structure, are the
17 fundamental determinants of organizational behavior (Schneider, 1987). Organizational cultures
18 are created by passing down the founder's values, goals, practices, and behaviors that followers
19 learn over time and then apply to organizational decision-making processes (Schein, 1990). Key
20 to understanding the success of a cause-related sporting event and volunteer motivation is to
21 study the leadership style of the founder. However, there remains little discourse on motivations
22 of stakeholders and the leadership style contributing to the success of these events.
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25 Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore the founder's leadership style of a cause-
26 related sporting event and investigate the effects of this leadership style on motivating
27 volunteers. This investigation focused on the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) Surf Festival,
28 which has achieved a worldwide audience while simultaneously cultivating community-level
29 engagement. Our research questions framing this study were: (a) what is the founder's leadership
30 style; and (b) how has the founder's leadership style contributed to motivating core volunteers
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3 for over 25 years? By establishing how leadership style influences and motivates volunteers in a
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5 cause-related sporting event, we address a significant gap in the leadership literature, and we
6
7 contribute to the theoretical development of leadership in the NPO sector.
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10 **Theoretical Framework**

11 **Leadership Theory**

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15 Two leadership models that have received substantial attention are Bass's (1985)
16
17 transformational leadership and Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership frameworks. To
18
19 understand the differences between these leadership models it is important to discuss two distinct
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21 paradigms of leadership, which are distinguished by how the leader views him or herself; as a
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23 leader first or as a servant first. A leader first will serve others only after leadership has been
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25 established because of a need to fulfill his or her own personal interests (Greenleaf, 1977). The
26
27 reverse is true for a servant first. Greenleaf described the servant leader as one who is by nature a
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29 servant, "the real man, not bestowed, not assumed, and not to be taken away" (Greenleaf, 1977,
30
31 p. 21). These leadership paradigms are polar opposites and in-between them is an endless variety
32
33 of human nature (Greenleaf, 1977). Central to this study are servant leadership and
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35 transformational leadership – the commonalities and distinctions between their theoretical
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37 assumptions have been discussed since the early 1990s.
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44 Transformational leadership was first mentioned by Downton (1973), introduced in a
45
46 political context by Burns (1978), and proposed as an organizational theory by Bass (1985).
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48 Transformational leaders go beyond the exchange of resources, or transactional leadership, by
49
50 appealing to followers' psychological needs (Bryman, 1992). Transactional leaders manage by
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52 contract and reward, focusing on tasks and procedures over personal relationships or building a
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54 united vision (Bass, 1990). By contrast, transformational leadership is the process of influencing
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3 organizational members to change their attitudes and assumptions by building commitment to the
4 organization (Yukl, 1998). Avolio, Waldman, and Yammarino (1991) defined four
5 characteristics of transformational leadership: (a) idealized influence – models vision and
6 mission, imparts trust, pride, and respect; (b) inspirational motivation – communicates high
7 expectations; (c) intellectual stimulation –promotes vigilant, intelligent, rational problem
8 solving; and (d) individualized consideration – mentors followers giving individual attention.
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10 The idealized influence characteristic was originally defined by Bass (1985, 1990) as charisma –
11 motivates followers through personal identification (Yukl, 2010).
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22 Unlike transformational leadership, to date few empirical studies have been conducted
23 using servant leadership. Writing on servant leadership has streamed from Greenleaf's (1977)
24 foundational texts and consists mostly of anecdotal examples (Bowman, 1997; Northouse, 1997).
25 Greenleaf (1977) conceptualized servant leadership as a way of life rather than as a management
26 technique. Servant leadership is distinguished by its primary motivation to serve (what the
27 servant leader does) and self-construction (who the servant leader is), and then from this
28 conscious choice of 'doing' and 'being' one aspires to lead (Sendjaya and Sarros, 2002).
29
30 Greenleaf admitted servant leadership would be difficult to operationalize and apply. A servant
31 leader's highest priority is serving the least privileged by building an institution that places
32 people first. Trust is developed by the leader selflessly serving others while helping followers
33 grow, which inspires followers to become servants themselves (Greenleaf, 1977).
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48 Although many writers have decoded Greenleaf's work into conventional bullet point lists
49 of attributes and conceptual models, none of them fully capture the essence of Greenleaf's
50 conceptualization of the servant leader (Spears, 1998; Patterson, 2003; Prosser, 2010). Thus, the
51 data in this study will be discussed in relation to Greenleaf's work and Laub's (1999)
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3 Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA). The OLA operationalized servant leadership as
4 the following: a) values people – believing, serving, and non-judgmental listening to others; b)
5 develops people – providing learning, growth, encouragement and affirmation; c) builds
6 community – developing strong collaborative and personal relationships; d) displays authenticity
7 – being open, accountable, and willing to learn from others; e) provides leadership – foreseeing
8 the future, taking initiative, and establishing goals; and f) shares leadership – facilitating and
9 sharing power. The willingness to serve others is a common theme infusing all models of servant
10 leadership (Sendjaya, Sarros, and Santora, 2008).
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22 Stone, Russell, and Patterson's (2004) comparison of servant and transformational
23 leadership revealed these styles share attributes of influence, vision, trust, respect, risk sharing,
24 integrity, and modeling; however, the primary difference between them is the leader's focus.
25 According to Stone et al., servant leaders focus more on the people of the organization while
26 transformational leaders focus more on organizational objectives. Both styles stress individual
27 consideration and appreciation of followers, but servant leadership gives greater prominence to
28 serving followers (Stone et al., 2004). In contrast, transformational leaders' primary focus is on
29 building organizational objectives, with the development of followers as the secondary focus
30 (Yukl, 1998). Another distinction is how these leaders influence followers. A servant leader
31 gains influence through servanthood, whereas the transformational leader relies on charisma,
32 enthusiasm, expertise, and strength of relationships (Bass, 1990; Stone et al., 2004).
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48 Additionally, empirical studies have confirmed that servant and transformational
49 leadership are distinct constructs (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson, 2008; Parolini,
50 Patterson, and Winston, 2009). Parolini et al.'s (2009) discriminant analysis revealed the
51 following distinct characteristics, with the first focal point of each characteristic linked to servant
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3 leadership and second to transformational: a) moral distinction (separate values versus collective
4 values), b) focus distinction (individual versus organization), c) developmental distinction (serve
5 versus lead), and d) influence distinction (freedom versus control). Scholars stress the morality
6 of servant leadership and the absence of morality of Bass's (1985) conceptualization of
7 transformational leadership (Parolini et al., 2009). Graham (1991) argued transformational
8 leaders are not concerned with the moral development of followers. Giampetro-Meyer, Brown,
9 Browne, and Kubasek (1998) highlighted that transformational leaders' focus on aligning their
10 needs with the good of the organization may result in narcissism. In contrast, servant leadership
11 is grounded in the values of humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, and unconditional
12 love, where service as well as power is a gift (Van Dierendonck, 2011). The difference between
13 these leadership styles is a function of the organizational context and the leader's personal values
14 (Stone et al., 2004).

31 **Volunteer Motivation**

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34 Volunteer participation is essential for NPOs to offer services (Fisher and Ackerman,
35 1998). Research regarding volunteer motivation centers on individual socioeconomic and
36 psychological traits ignoring social and organizational contexts (Smith, 1994). Dimensional
37 models are used to explain the helping behaviors of volunteers. First, two-dimensional models
38 use egoistic (motivated to gain benefits or to fulfill social pressures) or altruistic (genuinely care
39 about others) motivations in explaining volunteer motivation (Bendapudi, Singh, and Bendapudi,
40 1996). Second, three-dimensional models define motivations as altruistic, material, and social
41 (Taylor, 1995). Finally, Monga (2006) employed a five-dimensional model examining altruistic,
42 material, social, affiliation, and egoistic motivations, finding the strongest motive for
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3 volunteering at special events was affiliation (i.e., passion and attachment to the event and
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5 attraction of the ambience of the event).
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8 Individuals are social beings whose interaction with their surroundings shape their values,
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10 social constructs, and world view (Mead, 1934). Research shows group affiliation is the catalyst
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12 for volunteering (Haski-Leventhal and Cnaan, 2010; Wilson, 2000). However, minimal research
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14 exists addressing the effects of leaders on volunteer motivation. In addition, limited research has
15
16 examined the mechanisms of servant leadership that lead to organizational outcomes; however,
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18 Ebener and O'Connell (2010) identified culture building and structural initiatives used by servant
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20 leaders' as important in fostering organizational citizenship.
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24 **NKF Surf Festival**

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27 Our research was set in the context of the NKF Surf Festival, a project of Richard Salick,
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29 a professional surfer, and his twin brother Philip, who donated a kidney to save Salick's life. In
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31 1973, after qualifying for the World Championships, Salick's health declined and he was faced
32
33 with dialysis treatments. His physicians said he would never surf again; however, after a kidney
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35 transplant in 1977, he re-entered competition (NKF, 2010). To improve the lives of people with
36
37 kidney disease, the Salicks created a surf tournament to raise money and awareness. Their first
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39 event raised \$125 for the local dialysis center. The event has grown to the largest charity surfing
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41 competition in the world involving over 300 volunteers and raising more than \$4 million to help
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43 people with kidney disease.
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48 **Method**

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50 We used qualitative case study methodology to analyze the founder's leadership style and
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52 its effects on volunteer motivation. As our aim was to elaborate leadership theory, we searched
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54 for an extreme case (Pratt, Rockman, and Kaufman, 2006). We selected the NKF Surf Festival
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3 because the founder's and core volunteers' dedication for over 25 years is an anomaly in the
4 nonprofit sector, which faces high volunteer and staff turnover (Eisner, Grimm, Maynard, and
5 Washburn, 2009; Tierney, 2006). In addition, a surf contest is a unique sport setting in the
6 nonprofit sector (Edwards and Kreshel, 2008), where little discourse has occurred on cause-
7 related action sporting events which target subcultures. Built around the surfing culture, the
8 event has been 14 times more financially successful than the average cause-related sporting event
9 (Higgins and Lauzon, 2003). These factors contributed to our selecting the Surf Festival as an
10 extreme case. The first author has also volunteered with the NKF for five years, building trust
11 with the organization.
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24 **Data Collection**

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26 Data were collected through: a) semi-structured personal interviews, b) document
27 analysis of public materials pertaining to the event, and c) personal observations (Lincoln and
28 Guba, 1985). We conducted 19 interviews, which included the founders, the CEO, board
29 members, employees, sponsors, competitors, and volunteers. Purposive sampling was used to
30 select participants based on their involvement with the event to ensure individuals displaying
31 certain attributes were included in the study (Berg, 2001). Based on the guidelines of Lincoln
32 and Guba (1985), interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format – an interview guide
33 provided structure while questions were allowed to emerge over the course of the interview.
34 Interviews were conducted by the first author in a private setting, lasted between 40-90 minutes,
35 were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The first author documented personal observations in a
36 reflective journal to extend the understanding of the social dynamics (Glense, 2006).
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52 **Data Analysis**

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55 Open, axial, and selective coding was used to analyze the data and to form conceptual
56 codes (Creswell, 1998; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). During the initial stage of analysis, open
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3 coding was utilized to condense data into preliminary categories. For example, several open
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5 codes encompassed: a desire to serve (moral calling); the leader as facilitator (sharing power and
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7 serving other's needs before one's own); personally committed spiritually liberated (dedicated to
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9 the mission, but free to leave); develops people (through encouragement and affirmation); builds
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11 community (creating a community of leaders); provides leadership (generates shared vision), and
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13 volunteer motivation (service to others, affiliation, and shared ownership). In congruence with
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15 Miles and Huberman (1994), some codes were assigned based on leadership theory (i.e.,
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17 Greenleaf, 1977; Laub, 1999) while others emerged from the data. Next, we organized the open
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19 codes into axial codes (the themes presented in the findings and discussion section), by
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21 clustering the codes together to discover analytic categories (Neuman, 2006). Finally, selective
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23 coding was employed to integrate the data to support the emerging conceptual codes (Creswell,
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25 1998).

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32 Trustworthiness is defined as "how accurately the account represents participants'
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34 realities" (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p. 124). A study has trustworthiness if the investigation has
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36 credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Schwandt, 2007). Credibility
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38 (similar to internal validity) was established by using triangulation and by conducting member
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40 checks with participants, where they reviewed transcripts, interpretations, and provided feedback
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42 (Janesick, 1994). Transferability (similar to external validity) was achieved by the first author
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44 keeping a reflective journal that provided a contextual narrative (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In
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46 order to improve dependability (similar to reliability) and confirmability (similar to objectivity),
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48 the second author, who was not involved in data collection, served as an auditor and reviewed all
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50 codes, analyses, and interpretations (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen, 1993).
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55 **Findings and Discussion**

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The Founder as a Servant Leader

Our first research question sought to discover the founder's leadership style. Findings indicated that the founder is a servant leader as a result of meeting Greenleaf's (1977) and Laub's (1999) conceptualization of servant leadership. As such, the founder (a) is a servant first; (b) displays unconditional love and a moral calling to serve; (c) inspires others to serve through his love; and (d) is committed to helping others, not to the organization, while having a positive impact on the least privileged in society.

Leader as servant first. Salick is a servant leader because his leadership materialized from his desire to serve. Transformational and transactional leadership are defined by what the leader does, whereas servant leadership is distinguished by both its primary motivation to serve (what leaders do) and self-concept (who leaders are) (Sendjaya and Sarros, 2002). Faced with the adversity of having kidney disease, Salick turned his transplant success and his knowledge of the surf industry into an event to help others.

Salick was first a servant and then he made the conscious choice to lead. When asked to describe his job, Salick revealed how helping others led to self-fulfillment:

I have been doing this for 37 years in one way or another since the first transplant. I just sit and wonder, 'God what I am going to do . . . for a career.' I have been sitting in my career for a lot of years

It is important to note that "servant leadership is not about self-sacrifice or self-denial. It is about self-fulfillment" (Keith, 2008, p. 68). Since his first transplant, loving and helping others is what Salick and his followers do, and it is who they are. Being a servant leader is a way of being that is part of one's psyche, as it goes beyond knowledge and skills and requires an internal transformation (a paradigm shift) and the will (a choice) to make life better for others, rather than

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2
3 for one's self (Greenleaf, 1977). Above all other attributes, the primary focus on service
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5 distinguishes servant leadership from other leadership theories (Prosser, 2010), which Salick
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7 exemplified here.
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10 **Displays unconditional love and a moral calling to serve.** Salick's service begins with
11 his love for people and a moral calling to help, which are essential attributes of servant leaders
12 (Keith, 2008). Greenleaf (1977) argued serving others requires unconditional love and a
13 community. All study participants emphasized the founder's love for others, using words such as
14 love, kindness, empathy, compassion, consideration, and care. A NKF staff member's quote is
15 representative of many participants' comments regarding Salick: "he's the kind of person that
16 has compassion for everybody, not just people with kidney disease." When asked why people
17 volunteer at this event, one volunteer affirmed that "I think that in this group of people [long
18 pause . . . started crying] . . . they love Richard [Salick]." The leaders' and followers' *agapaó*
19 (love) for others was expressed by participants, including the founder, not just in their words but
20 also in their tears and actions. Our findings parallel Patterson's (2003) leader-to-follower and
21 Wintson's (2003) follower-to-leader servant leadership models, which start with a person's
22 *agapaó* for others and end with service. The leader makes the conscious choice to value others
23 first and models this by behaving humbly and altruistically (Laub, 1999; Winston, 2004). In
24 contrast, transformational leaders focus on the organization and influence through charisma and
25 control (Parolini et al., 2009).
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48 **Inspires others to serve through love.** Salick is a servant leader because his love
49 inspires others to serve. Servant leaders model the axiom 'love is as love does' (Russell and
50 Stone, 2002). For example, a volunteer of 12 years said that Salick is "a leader of a different
51 kind. . . . People feel very honored to watch this man in action, because . . . he walks the talk." If
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3 one is tired, as a volunteer of 37 years pointed out, all one needs to do is find Salick, because
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5 despite having had three transplants, “he actually physically does the work . . . he is the ox
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7 underneath the cart that carries all the weight.” All participants provided examples of how
8
9 Salick's servanthood influenced them by displaying authenticity and valuing people (Laub,
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11 1999). Participants acknowledged, although with less emphasis, his charismatic abilities,
12
13 enthusiasm, and strength of relationships, which are transformational leadership qualities (Bass,
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15 1990). However, Salick's inspiration comes from serving others, and this became evident after
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17 participants told their stories of how his service to them and others helped them see how they
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19 could serve, too.
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25 Servant leadership is contagious and has a transforming influence (Farling, Stone, and
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27 Winston, 1999; Sendjaya et al., 2008). The comments of a young volunteer with kidney disease
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29 represent what it is like to be around the founding brothers: “they’re always having fun and it’s
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31 just contagious.” In support of Winston (2004), we found that Salick’s *agapaó* and service
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33 inspired followers’ to become servants. For instance, immediately prior to the event Salick was
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35 hospitalized for 14 days, and referring to the volunteers, he said “those guys just took over.” All
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37 of the original volunteers have become servant leaders, adopting the mission of the founder and
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39 championing it.
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44 **Committed to helping others, not the organization, while having a positive impact**
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46 **on the least privileged in society.** Servant leaders’ mission is to help others, and organizations
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48 are great places to do that; however, organizations do not own them (Greenleaf, 1977). This is
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50 distinct from transformational leadership that focus more on organizational objectives (Stone et
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52 al., 2004). Although the Surf Festival is hosted with the NKF, direct patient aid is not a mission
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54 of the NKF. Salick, with conviction, stated “I will be the first one out of this organization if we
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3 drop our patient aid.” While Salick does not believe the organization is essential, he does believe
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5 community is necessary for making a difference. To illustrate this point, the first author observed
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7 the volunteers gathering throughout the year to plan, to fundraise, share stories and support each
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9 other through weddings, cancer, and funerals. Participants told stories describing the
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11 transforming effect of how giving a \$75 gift card for groceries enables a person on dialysis to
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13 keep fighting, and the first author has accompanied the founder to purchase groceries for those in
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15 need. Thus, two noteworthy outcomes of the founder’s servant leadership are his *agapaó* for
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17 others has inspired followers to be servant leaders, and together as servants they have had a
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19 positive effect on the least privileged in society (Greenleaf, 1977).
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24 **Building Volunteer Motivation**

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27 Our second research question explored how the founder’s leadership style contributed to
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29 motivating core volunteers for over 25 years. Salick, a servant leader, motivated his volunteers
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31 by (a) generating a shared vision dedicated to helping others, (b) building a caring and loving
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33 community, and (c) creating the freedom and resources for followers to become servants
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35 themselves. Understanding the mechanisms of how servant leaders foster volunteer motivation
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37 can help NPOs grow and develop a volunteer base, create servant-led events and improve overall
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39 organizational performance.
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44 **Generating a shared vision dedicated to helping others.** Servant leadership is based on
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46 a commitment to love and serve others, which becomes the mission of the leader and followers
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48 (Greenleaf, 1977). All study participants embraced a common mission, as stated by a volunteer
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50 of 25 years: “It’s all for raising funds for patient services. It’s mostly helping the patients.” The
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52 vision of a servant leader is not based on egocentric ambition; it is driven by a virtuous calling to
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54 help others (Lanctot and Irving, 2010; Sendjaya et al., 2008). Each study participant explained
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3 they volunteered for philanthropic reasons, which supports the volunteer literature that suggests
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5 altruistic motivations are prominent for volunteers (Monga, 2006).
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8 Salick encouraged his followers to embrace a service orientation. A long-time sponsor
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10 and volunteer articulated the shared calling:

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12 We all have a common goal and it's not for a self-profit. It's to help other people. And
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14 when you get a group of people . . . whose heart is in the same place, I think you have a
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16 lot more in common than you would, say in a workplace.
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20 The association with others who choose to serve first helps form an attachment to the event and
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22 an attraction to the culture created by this servant volunteer community. This supports findings
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24 that affiliation is a strong motivator in volunteering at special events (Haski-Leventhal and
25
26 Cnaan, 2010; Monga, 2006; Wilson, 2000). The motivation of serving others illustrates the
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28 distinguishing attribute of servant leadership (Russell and Stone, 2002).
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32 Serving others has become a way of life for the volunteers. The event is an integral part
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34 of their lives, as illustrated by a sponsor and volunteer for over 25 years, who said "it has been
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36 something that you just in your mind could never imagine Labor Day without this particular
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38 event." Every study participant spoke about planning vacations around the event and how they
39
40 have become an extended family. This festival, as one volunteer of 12 years stated, is "a labor of
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42 love." Through the founder's service, those served become more likely to become servants
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44 (Greenleaf, 1977). This is demonstrated by a young volunteer, who when asked about the future
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46 of the event, said "I will put everything that I can towards making it last. And do my best to
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48 bring in . . . more volunteers." All study participants indicated their commitment to continue the
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50 mission of the event while expressing a will to carry on as servant leaders.
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3 **Building a caring and loving community.** Although the event is held once a year, the
4 founder and followers are servant leaders year around, which has fostered a loving and caring
5 community. A volunteer for 37 years, who has taken ownership of various parts of the event,
6 pointed out that at “different times we will meet for beer at the surf shop or . . . dinner at
7 Norman’s . . . you do end up with a . . . fellowship that is shared.” The volunteers and founder
8 are an extended community whose ties are as strong as a family. When the first author’s mother
9 suddenly passed away, the Surf Festival community pulled together and provided emotional,
10 logistical, and daily needs assistance. As a member of the NKF staff said, “they’ll do anything in
11 the world for you if you ask.” Greenleaf (1977) argued “the only sound basis for trust is for
12 people to have the solid experience of being served by their institutions” (p. 83). One long-time
13 volunteer tells with tears in his eyes about when he was in a coma, “those guys came every day.
14 . . . I did not know that they had a birthday party for me . . . they were pulling for me.” This
15 personal touch creates a relationship based on love and trust that increases the likelihood of
16 organizational citizenship behavior (Ebener and O’Connell, 2010).

17
18 Notable to this community is the multi-generational make-up of the volunteers. This is
19 highlighted by an original volunteer, who said “our long-time volunteers have their kids involved
20 now.” Another volunteer, who has started her own NPO, stated “I’ve seen kids as young as four
21 helping out . . . if you get the parents involved . . . you can get the kids involved.” Salick has
22 built a community of people of all ages, where volunteering for the Surf Festival is an integral
23 part of their social surroundings that shapes their behaviors, perspectives, and values
24 (Mannheim, 1936; Mead, 1934). This multi-generational, volunteer- driven event supports
25 Haski-Leventhal and Cnann's (2010) claim that social and community norms affect an
26 individual's tendency to volunteer. Built around the surfing culture, the founder along with his
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3 volunteers has created a loving community that shows multiple generations the powerful gift of
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5 service.
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8 **Creating the freedom and resources for followers to become servants themselves.**
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10 Servant leaders motivate followers by serving them, which entails asking them what are their
11 needs, hopes, and dreams (Greenleaf, 1977). The founding brothers stated that they want
12
13 volunteers to do what they do best. For example, Salick's brother said "we just ask them. What
14
15 do you want to do? What would make you happy?" All study participants spoke enthusiastically
16
17 about the ownership and freedom they are entrusted with to perform multiple roles at the event.
18
19 The four-day event includes a silent auction, a professional and amateur surfing contest, a VIP
20
21 party, a press party, a bikini contest, exhibitions, and any big idea that a volunteer wants to try to
22
23 make the event better. An example of Salick calling forth volunteer talents is when the leader of
24
25 the silent auction, who works in computer technology, identified the difficulty of tracking
26
27 auction items and preparing thank you notes. Salick gave her the ownership of the auction, which
28
29 enabled her to take initiative and design a computer program to automate this process. Also, the
30
31 leader of beach volunteers revealed the event "has been successful . . . because . . . they [the
32
33 volunteers] really take ownership. . . . they divide their tasks and there's a leader . . . of the
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35 volunteers, there's a leader at the wine tasting, there's a leader . . . in the beach area."
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43 The greatest example of ownership is seen in a lifelong volunteer who recently passed
44
45 away, as recalled by another volunteer; "when you made eye contact . . . or hollered his name . . .
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47 he was there. . . . whatever you needed . . . he improved it and no matter what" (16th Street,
48
49 2010). As Greenleaf (1977) emphasized, a servant leader is *primus inter pares* (first among
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51 equals), and leadership is not limited to authority figures. This servant-led event has not only
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53 empowered its volunteers to take ownership but has given them the freedom and resources to
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2
3 become leaders. For over 25 years, Salick's servant leadership has resulted in a core group of
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6 volunteers who pass these social and community norms to their children, which is unique in the
7
8 nonprofit sector that struggles with high volunteer and leadership attrition rates (Eisner et al.,
9
10 2008; Tierney, 2006). Thus, our findings support Haski-Leventha and Cnaan's (2010) claim that
11
12 group affiliations influence volunteerism. Through a core group of volunteers, the NKF of
13
14 Florida has raised millions of dollars, which would not be possible without the long-term support
15
16 of a multi-generational volunteer base.
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19 20 **Limitations**

21
22 A limitation of this study is these results are based on one individual and the findings
23
24 may not be generalizable. Even though results revealed a positive link between Salick's servant
25
26 leadership and volunteer motivation, this does not indicate that servant leadership will be
27
28 effective in all NPOs. Since the data represent the experiences, knowledge, and opinions of the
29
30 interviewees, this brings the possibility of biases (Miles and Huberman, 1994). By the first
31
32 author conducting personal observations, document analyses, and the second author reviewing
33
34 codes and interpretations, we mitigated bias and assisted in providing insight about the
35
36 organization (Erlandson et al., 1993). Additionally, we tested conclusions with study
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38 participants, who confirmed the findings reflected the founder's leadership style and the culture
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40 of the event (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).
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46 47 **Implications and Future Research Directions**

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49 From a theoretical standpoint, we provide an empirical example of servant leadership by
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51 showing how it can lead to the development of long-term volunteers who then become servant
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53 leaders. Our study contributes to the development of leadership theory by providing evidence of
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55 the applicability of servant leadership in a NPO sport context. Our work extends previous studies
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3 in the sport industry which have shown servant leadership to be an effective coach behavior, as
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5 athletes being coached by these leaders had an increase in motivation, mental acuity, satisfaction,
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7 and performed better than those led by a non-servant leader (Hammermeister et al., 2008; Rieke,
8
9 et al., 2008; Taylor, 2008; Westre, 2003). In addition, while servant leadership has been
10
11 associated with religious teachings (Winston, 2004; Ebener and O'Connell, 2010), our results
12
13 show that the tenets of servant leadership are applicable to a secular organization.
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17 In terms of practical implications, Haski-Leventhal and Cnaan (2010) highlight the
18
19 importance for NPOs to find new resources for volunteers and to investigate the role of groups in
20
21 enhancing pro-social volunteer behavior. Our study identifies three leadership mechanisms that
22
23 NPOs can tap to cultivate long-term volunteer motivation. If servant leadership enhances
24
25 volunteer motivation, as our findings suggest, NPOs hosting cause-related sporting events should
26
27 strive to incorporate servant leadership models.
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31 Several intriguing directions for future research emerged from our study. First,
32
33 researchers can explore how a sporting event can be designed to encourage servant leadership.
34
35 Second, there is need to investigate how a NPO can create a personal connection with
36
37 stakeholders to foster a caring and loving community that includes multiple generations. Last,
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39 researchers can examine how these events serve as resource tools to empower others to make a
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41 difference.
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