

Chris Metcalf
Professor Stiles
Quest for Meaning
November 30th, 2010

This I Believe: Servant Leadership

In light of the recent accreditation process of Eckerd College, every student was responsible for knowing the answer to the question, “What is your Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)?” Most every Eckerd student could tell you that our QEP is a three step process that involves serving the community. As Eckerd students we were told to respond to this question by saying, “Serve, reflect, and learn.” We could all recite these three simple words very easily, but I am sure every student would interpret the meaning of the QEP in a slightly different manner. My understanding is that, first one must go out into the community and perform a service intended to aid the greater good. Second, one must ask a series of thought provoking questions that reflect on one’s experience. What was the purpose of the organization I was serving? How was my contribution helpful? Did I truly make a difference in someone’s life by performing my service? These three questions are just a few examples of possible questions a student might ask during the reflection process. Lastly, one is expected to have learned something from having completed a required number of hours with a single organization. I believe that through my own service reflection, and using the examples of others’ service, I can prove that servant leadership is a vital part to the success of the world for future generations.

The idea of Servant Leadership was first created in 1970 by Robert Greenleaf in his essay, *The Servant as Leader*. As defined by Greenleaf, Servant Leadership is:

[A] servant-leader *is* servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is *leader* first; perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions... The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.

Serving the community is something that is often overlooked in society. It takes a special type of person to give their time and efforts to help a good cause. Given the opportunity to do service, some might say that they are too busy to help. In reality, all it takes for me to make a difference is three short hours every Saturday morning.

For my service learning project in my Quest for Meaning (QFM) class, I have chosen to serve at The First Tee Program of Saint Petersburg, Florida. The First Tee is a nationwide program that seeks to instill the nine core values associated with golf in a young child, in an effort to see these qualities performed both on and off the golf course. These nine core values are: honesty, integrity, sportsmanship, respect, confidence, responsibility, perseverance, courtesy, and judgment. The program focuses on less well-to-do areas of cities and enables children from all socio-economic backgrounds to not only experience golf, but also learn and grow from the game. By acquiring the nine core values it is intended that the kids in the program will hopefully choose to use these qualities in an everyday situation.

In the time I have spent volunteering with The First Tee program, I have grown attached to many of the kids. I work with kids between the ages of 8 and 18, covering all levels of golfing experience. I have worked with kids who have never picked up a golf club in their life before, and I have played an eighteen-hole round of golf with a fifteen year-old kid who tied me with a final score of 74. That is saying something because I am a 21 year-old senior collegiate golfer. It is amazing to see that some have such passion that has yet to be harnessed into anything positive.

One day when I was volunteering, Coach Rick Waltman, the Executive Director of the First Tee St. Petersburg, was playing a game called 'rules master' with the kids. For 'rules master,' everyone lines up around in a circle, and Rick asks a question regarding a rule about the game of golf. If they get it correct they stay on the circle; however, if they are wrong they must step off the circle. When only one is still remaining, he or she wins a small prize. While Coach Rick was conducting the game, I was off to the side talking with another coach, Coach Bill. We began talking about how crucial the rules are to the game of golf, and how integrity is really the key to golf being a successful sport. How many other games can you think of where a player is left in charge of keeping his or her own score? Coach Bill went on to say that by teaching these rules, we are not only helping them become better golfers, but we are contributing to the betterment of the St. Petersburg community. We are developing young kids into responsible, self-reliant people. I had to take a second to think about this, because it was such a powerful statement. As coaches we are responsible for teaching kids the game of golf, and the rules associated with the complicated game. The only thing that keeps these kids coming back week in and week out is their passion for golf. Each and every one of

them has a dream to get better. Some even consider golf their only hope of ever going to college.

The one true reason I have a passion for The First Tee program is because golf was what I did with my life every day after school until the sun went down. I had the dream of taking the game to the professional level. All throughout high school and into the first year of college I had every intention of going professional post graduation. By the time my sophomore year rolled around, I had burnt myself out, without realizing it. I continued to struggle with the game, and for nearly two years I could not find a way to score like I needed to in order to consider professional golf an option. It was only about eight months ago, in the middle of my junior year, that I had truly come to terms with the fact that I will not be a professional golfer. Now I have accepted this as my fate, however, initially it was difficult to accept. The beauty of The First Tee program is that my passion for golf can be lived through the passion of the kids in the program.

When I first began volunteering at Twin Brooks Golf Course, I was thinking as most seniors in QFM do, asking myself the question, how can I get my hours done quickly and forget about it? It took me only one week to realize that this was not something that I was going to be a part of for a strict forty hours. I saw true passion and potential in some of the kids, specifically one. One of the first times I was volunteering, Coach Rick asked me to play along with the kids, and that I better watch out because one kid, Robbie, might give me a run for my money. Rick pointed to Robbie, and I was thinking how can this sub five-foot tall kid who might weigh eighty pounds with soaked clothes and a frying pan hanging around his neck, give me a run for my money? I understand that Twin Brooks is a very short course, but I was very intrigued to see how

good he really was. Apparently, Robbie had shot 30 the week before which was a very commendable score, because even par was 27. We went around the front nine holes and Robbie had a less than stellar day resulting in a score of 34. I played pretty well and came out on top with a score of 28. It was this round of golf where I really was able to see that Robbie had potential, and if he could understand how to play the game intelligently, he could really make something of himself.

Robbie's biggest problem is that he always relies on the "flop shot" as his go to shot around the green. The flop shot is a shot where the player intentionally hits the ball very high and tries to get it to land soft, and not roll out after its initial landing spot. In the weeks since, I have really tried to get Robbie to see that he needs to consider all types of shots before making a decision on which type of shot to hit. One round in particular, he hit three flop shots in the first five holes. All three of these shots came up short of the green, and required him to hit another chip shot. After he missed the green on the third shot, I asked to see his wedge, the most lofted club in his bag. I told him that for the rest of the round I was going to keep his wedge, because he needed to learn how to play other types of shots. Understandably, Robbie was extremely frustrated with me and could not see how I was actually helping him. By forcing him to think about a different type of shot I was able to open his imagination, and view other shot alternatives before going immediately to the flop shot. I can only hope that Robbie will eventually make it to the light at the end of the tunnel, and see that golf takes a very imaginative mind, especially in close proximity to the green. By helping Robbie understand that there is never one way to hit any shot, I am helping him become a better golfer and hopefully a better person.

Servant Leadership is something I use every single time I go to help the kids in The First Tee program. I am always a servant first. I do my very best to use my skill and knowledge of the game to help the kids. I want them to be able to benefit from my experience, and to harness their imagination, and full potential. When I need to be ‘Coach Chris’ and lead the group in a specific exercise, I am able to lead. I now understand the difference between the times where I need to be a servant to the kids and help them grow through golf, and times where I need to be a leader, and run a section of the program when Coach Rick is busy with another group. The idea I have grasped most is that there is more than one way to help others. Serving and leading others are two completely separate, yet interrelated ideas that one can incorporate into everyday life, to make small but beneficial changes.

I think back to the lecture we heard from Professor Hamilton, and the story that he told about his son in San Francisco. It was mid-day during low tide at the beach. His son was walking in one direction, noticing that because of the low tide, many starfish had become exposed from the water. He looked in the distance as another man was walking towards him. Every now and then this man would bend down, pick up another starfish and hurl it back into the ocean. Finally Professor Hamilton’s son and this man met up, and the son asked, “Why are you throwing starfish back in? You can’t possibly throw all of the starfish back. What difference are you making?” The man silently bent down, grabbed another starfish and tossed it back into the ocean. He looked at Professor Hamilton’s son and simply said, “I made a difference there.”

I love this story because it shows that the small petty things that we do, can truly make a difference in the world. If everyone picked up one piece of trash from the side of

the road, our world would be a cleaner and more enjoyable place to live. If we could educate the world in this manner, think how things would be different. Take charge of something in your life, and lead by serving the human species as a whole.

The book, *Three Cups of Tea*, by Greg Mortenson, is about how one man's journey through life led him in a completely different direction than he had intended. Greg Mortenson was in Pakistan with the goal of climbing the second tallest mountain in the world, K2. After failing to reach the summit, he stumbled off the mountain into a village, where he saw the need for change. He could see that none of the kids had a regular education. The teacher only came a couple times a week, because it was too expensive to hire a full time teacher in the village. The other days of the week, the children were all gathered together drawing with sticks in the sand, trying to learn what they could with practically nothing. Mortenson, or Dr. Greg as he is referred to in the book, sees an opportunity to make a big difference in the lives of the Korphe village people. He makes a promise that he will return to the village and build a school.

After returning from some time back home in America, which he spent trying to find funding for his project, he fulfilled his promise. Dr. Greg created the Central Asia Institute (CAI), "a non-profit organization with the mission to promote and support community-based education, especially for girls, in remote regions of northern Pakistan and Afghanistan" (CAI Home). Upon his return, Dr. Greg realized that this one school was not going to suit the needs of the education problem, or lack there of. Eventually through his dream of educating the people in the northern regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan, he saw that there was a need for many schools, not just one school in a remote village. Dr. Greg never intended on stopping his goal of educating this region of

the world after fulfilling his promise to build the one school. He planned to build many schools and do so as quickly as possible. “‘So Dr. Greg,’ Ghulam Parvi said, his pen tip tapping at the tablet where he’d been taking notes. ‘Which school will we build this year?’”

“All of them, Inshallah,” Dr. Greg said (Mortenson, 189-90).

Inshallah simply means, ‘if Allah wills it’ (Grapeshisha), or translated into English, ‘God willing.’ Dr. Greg was not willing to make a decision about building just one school. He wanted to make the biggest impact on the region he could. He wholeheartedly wanted to make a significant difference to the people of Pakistan and Afghanistan, so he decided that he would build all the schools that he could.

Dr. Greg is the epitome of a servant leader. He wanted to help the people of the Himalayan region become a more educated people, which in time would benefit the whole world. As of December 21, 2009, the CAI has now built 131 schools, and has absolutely no intention of stopping there. Another recent accomplishment the CAI is extremely proud of is the graduation of 22 year-old female, Shakila Kahn, from the Hushe School, south of the village of Korphe. What makes this a significant accomplishment is that she is now the first locally educated female physician in an area that is home to over 300,000 people (Gardner).

I believe that we were all put on this earth for a purpose. I believe that we have the choice to make light of this purpose to better the population, or not. We all have the choice to become a servant-leader or not. The beauty of life is that we have the opportunity to make choices. The downside is that these choices are not limited to good for the world. Everyone has the option to choose right from wrong, to do good from bad.

My mother always says, “Character is not simply determining the difference between right and wrong. It is being able to choose right over wrong.” We can take the world in a positive direction, by serving and leading the community. I am a servant leader, and I certainly see the need for servant leadership to make this world a better place. So I leave you with a quote to consider, “There is a candle in your heart, ready to be kindled. There is a void in your soul, ready to be filled. You feel it, don’t you?” (Mortenson 125).

Become a leader by serving those around you. Make a difference by helping the local community prosper.