

Servant Leadership is a leadership philosophy in which the primary goal of the leader is to serve others rather than to accumulate power or control. The invitation here is to consider how to cultivate servant leadership as an Accessible Forest Practitioner. How can we lead by placing the well-being, growth, and autonomy of others at the center. How can we walk alongside, not in front of, those we guide—and to honor the forest as a co-guide.

The concept of Servant Leadership was popularized by Robert K. Greenleaf in his 1970 essay, "The Servant as Leader." Greenleaf argued that "The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first."

The key characteristics of servant leadership include:

- **Putting others first** prioritizing their needs for growth and wellbeing, empathy.
- **Empathy** by deeply understanding and sharing the feelings of others, actively listening without judgment.
- **Listening more** than speaking, seeking to understand before being understood.

- **Stewardship** by acting as a steward or caretaker of the group.
- **Commitment to the Growth of People** by actively investing in others' personal development.
- **Community Building** by creating a sense of belonging and unity, fostering collaboration
- **Persuasion over Authority** by using influence and encouragement to guide participants rather than using formal authority methods.
- **Awareness** by maintaining a strong self-awareness and situational awareness to make balanced, ethical decisions.

IMPORTANT CRITERIA TO REFLECT ON:

Who am I serving in this moment?

The participants, my community at large, the forest, the guiding profession?

Am I listening more than I'm directing?

Am I able to offer space for others' experiences to unfold naturally and beyond my influence and control? Are my actions hindering the possibility for participants to have their own unique experiences?

How do I respond to needs without controlling the outcome?

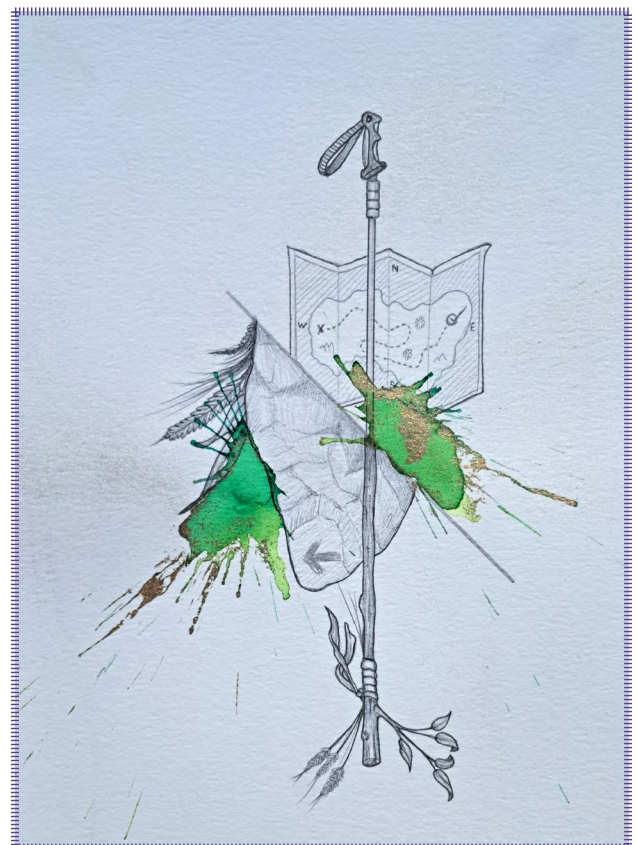
What type of language am I using that might support participants to feel that they have autonomy and agency?

Am I modeling presence, humility, and reciprocity?

What can I do to be more present and to reflect on what I am receiving from this practice of guiding and how to offer those qualities back to the participants and to the forest?

How do I foster belonging and connection—for all beings?

How is my own personal practice of nature connection unfolding and how is it influencing how I am building the containers for connection and belonging in the participants?



SOME PRACTICAL TIPS:

Start with service: Prepare your walks with the mindset of service—not performance.

Offer, don't impose: Invite, don't instruct. Let invitations remain gentle openings. Offer space, not solutions.

Step back when appropriate: Trust the group and the forest to lead when possible. Let participants feel their own agency, not dependence on you.

Model slowness: Your pace can give permission to others.

Cultivate resilience: Serve with boundaries and grace—rest is part of service.

Be transparent: Acknowledge moments of not knowing or being unsure.

EXPLORE:

Reflective journaling: After each walk, ask: “How did I serve today?”

Sit Spot practice: Let nature be the teacher—notice how the forest leads without domination.

Mentorship reflection: Who served me in my journey—and how do I carry that forward?

Professional Circle inquiry: Explore with fellow practitioners: What does it mean to lead invisibly?

REFLECT:

- When did I feel most aligned with service today?
- Was there a moment I let go of control and trusted the process?
- How did I respond when someone needed support?
- Did I serve from a grounded place—or from obligation?
- What did the forest teach me about leadership today?
- What am I learning about humility and presence in my role?

