

A magnifying glass is held over an open dictionary. The lens is focused on the entry for 'leadership', which is printed in a serif font. The word is broken into syllables: 'lead·er·ship'. The definition includes 'being the leader of a group or organization' and 'over the leadership of'. The background text is blurred, showing other dictionary entries like 'LINE' and 'short piece of'.

SERVICE

Lead·er·ship:

A piece of white paper with a torn, ragged edge is shown. The text 'THE TIME IS NOW!' is printed in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The paper is slightly angled and has some faint, illegible text visible on the reverse side.

THE TIME IS NOW!

by Peter J. McGarahan

what were they think·ing? /

I am sure that I am not the only one slightly discouraged by the lack of leadership in America today. In my travels, I have had many discussions with business executives, support managers, and customers on this very topic. In most cases, the sense of frustration centers around leadership without the vision, purpose, care, and the moral fiber to do what's right for the customers they serve and the people they lead. This is evident in the recent headlines where major companies and government entities have made decisions and taken courses of action that leave the rest of us saying, "What were they thinking?" I have to assume that the executives and government officials making these decisions are certainly capable, so why are we left feeling amazed, disengaged, and disappointed?

everyday lead·ers /

In my many leadership positions and interactions with support professionals around the world, effective leadership comes down to one thing: people care when they know that you care! In recent Gallup polls regarding the state of the U.S. worker, it is shocking and disappointing to see how many people are truly disengaged in the workplace. In support organizations, the biggest differentiator between organizations that excel at service delivery, customer service, and delivering business value and the ones that always struggle is *leadership*. Leaders who approach their responsibilities with energy, passion, and intelligence will always make a difference in people's lives. These leaders never forget:

- Where they came from,
- What it took to get where they are, and
- The important lessons they learned along the way.

They are particularly resourceful and utilize trusted, experienced mentors for advice, direction, and support. What's even more interesting is the fact that these leaders—successful, happy people—are humble! They never let their egos convince them that they are the smartest people in the room, and they never let arrogance stand in the way of being a good listener and a continuous learner.

service lead·er·ship /

Service leadership is about making fact-based decisions and doing the right things for the right reasons. It's about challenging conventional wisdom and having the backbone to stand up for doing the right thing for the customers and the people that serve them. Service leadership is a servant role that looks at the business of service and support creatively and innovatively, building on a foundation of industry best practices. They strongly believe that delivering exceptional customer service is not difficult as long as you stand by the customer service principle of treating every customer like they were your only customer. They know that the difficult part of delivering consistent service is in meeting their customer's expectations and ensuring that the rest of the organization doesn't erect barriers that make it hard to do business with them. I challenge all service leaders to set the bar high for their teams, constantly measure and continuously improve, create a culture of encouragement, and reward exceptional performance.

I have broken service leadership down into the following five areas:

1. Leadership

- Create the service strategy and vision
- Establish a service culture
- Set the example

2. Customer Advocacy

- Be the voice of the customer
- Listen, listen, listen
- Always market, communicate, and build lasting customer relationships

3. Business Savvy

- Solve the business problem
- Be relevant to the business (i.e., find ways to increase bottom-line profitability)
- Be adaptive, flexible, and responsive to business priorities

4. "Get It Done"

- Remove barriers for the frontline
- Deliver quantifiable results
- Hold your team accountable and practice total contact ownership

5. Ambassadors

- Work with other teams to deliver transparent, relevant IT and business services
- Be easy to do business with
- Work with a sense of urgency and be passionate about what you do

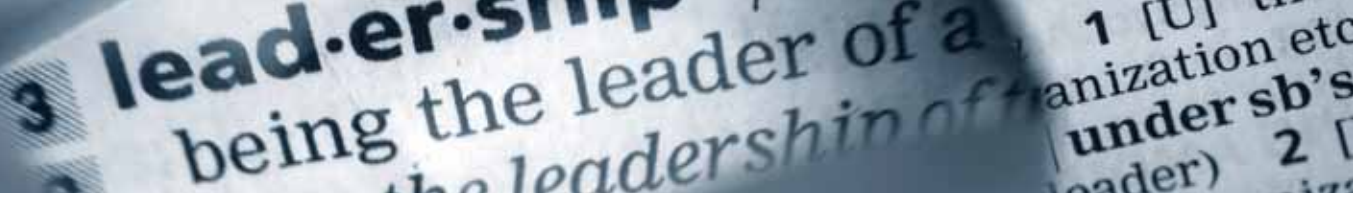
Service leadership takes courage. It can guide your decisions and your day-to-day interactions with customers, team, peers, and management. It's time for a change in the way we lead and the time is now! We need to re-engage our teams and our customers, giving them hope, purpose, and the security of knowing that their needs come before ours. They need to know and see that they are the central focus when decisions are made. Great leaders know that, at the end of the day, their customers are the only reason they are in business and that their people are the business.

an informal gath·er·ing /

At a recent service and support industry event, I had the opportunity to spend some time networking with several old friends and colleagues. I really enjoy the opportunity to share old war stories and learn about what's new in their personal and work lives. As the conversation continued, I reflected on all the conversations we had over the years and how this group truly embodied service leadership. These service leaders shared:

- A passion for delivering quality customer service,
- An attention to and understanding of the many intricate and interrelated details of service and support, and
- A positive energy for creating a service culture by empowering individuals to work as teams.

I admire this group for many reasons, but what I appreciate most is that they all did their jobs. They have first-hand experience. They excelled by taking calculated risks aimed at proving conventional wisdom wrong. In the end, they were right to believe in total contact ownership and the value of investing in level 1 support, which resulted in increased first contact resolution, greater customer satisfaction, and lower resolution costs. This brings us back to the initial question: what does it take to be a service leader?



details, details, de-tails /

I always remember being challenged when trying to communicate the impact of any upgrade, update, rollout, download, release, or change gone bad to management. I clearly recall the frustration of the steady-state call-volume spike and trying to get the project management team's attention when they had already claimed victory and were celebrating their success. I felt like an idiot when management challenged my initial report of the impact: what caused it, what types of calls we were receiving, and what were we doing to handle it, both reactively and proactively. *You know, Pete, the change was not intended to impact that area of the customer's functionality. You must be mistaken.*

It's always important to know what you plan to do about a crisis or incident before you engage management. In fact, your credibility relies on your ability to communicate the essential details of anything you do to redress the situation. If you talk to any service leader, they will share with you the following five ways you can positively impact the business:

1. Minimizing the impact of any change, rollout, or upgrade by working closely with the project team to ensure the quality in testing, documentation, communication, knowledge, and escalation/resolution.
2. Working with level 2 management to minimize escalations by focusing on what your team can resolve at level 1 and what knowledge, training, documentation, and tools you need to make that happen.
3. Reporting aging tickets and linking the follow-up, status, and resolution to the total contact ownership philosophy that has guided many best-in-class service and support organizations.
4. Holding your team accountable for mastering their roles as service and support professionals. Industry best practices range from attitude and 100% incident tracking to validating resolution and anticipating the customer's needs to proactively identifying trends and quality ticket documentation. These are the best practices that all support professionals should practice on a daily basis
5. Creating an IT culture where everyone works for the service desk, and where the service desk is seen and treated as the "voice of the customer" (customer advocate). They are given the benefit of the doubt and treated with respect when making a case for immediate corrective action.

deliver tactical re-sults /

As I struggled to find my "voice" in the organization, one of my mentors reminded me that my audience would only take us seriously if we had a proven track record of results. He called it "credibility with the organization" and told me something I've never forgotten: "They won't listen to you strategically unless you can deliver tactically." That single piece of advice changed my day-to-day operational focus. I built a foundation based on help desk basics, metrics, and best practices, by the book. I established standard operational procedures, configured tools of the trade to support best practice processes, trained the team on how and why these daily practices were critical to our success, and held each of them accountable for meeting performance targets.

it all makes a diff-er-ence! /

From the way you configure ACD menu options to the way you staff your desk and ensure individual adherence, from your consistent customer greeting to the way you manage call-volume spikes and track every call/issue/request, from quality ticket documentation to total contact ownership (status, follow-up, and validation of satisfaction/resolution), and, finally, from creating operating level agreements (OLAs) with peers to letting customer satisfaction be your guide—you are doing all the right things. Once you are doing the job consistently and you confidently (and you know you are because you see it, measure it, report on it, and live each day by the numbers), it's time to hand day-to-day operations over to your team. It's time to take on the role you were meant to play, the role of:

- Customer advocate
- Problem solver
- Voice
- Ambassador
- Communicator

Arise, ye service leader! The time is now! 🌐



About the Author

Peter J. McGarahan is the founder and president of McGarahan & Associates. His value to the service and support industry and business is his thought-leadership. For over twenty-five years, as a practitioner, product manager, and support industry analyst and expert, Pete has influenced the maturity of the service and support industry.

IT Support News named him one of the "Top 25 Professionals in the Service and Support Industry" in 1999, and support professionals voted McGarahan "The Legend of the Year" in 2002 and again in 2004 at the Help Desk Professionals Conference for his endless energy, mentoring, and coaching and his valuable contribution to the support industry and community.