

Juliana Abelow, Tristar

I grew up with the idea that only adults can be leaders. The books, tv shows and school curriculum I engaged with supported that stereotype. I was constantly told to listen to the adults in my life. They knew best. They would help me get where I wanted to go.

Then, on Valentine's day of my freshman year of high school, seventeen high school students in Florida were murdered in their classrooms at Parkland Public High School. A day on which I usually celebrated my friends and loved ones became nightmarish. Two months later, students around the country- myself included- still rattled by the chilling attack that had occurred in a high school like our own, walked out of our classes. I, along with my peers, marched to Tennessee's capital to demand stricter gun laws.

I gave a speech that day describing America's first major high school shooting at Columbine high school in 1999. My message of hope wasn't lost on the crowd. The sense of urgency that day cannot be replicated. If every activist has a core experience that changes the way they think about leadership, this is one of mine.

I realized then that the adults had failed us. Children dead in their classrooms is a failure, one that will never be forgiven. Millions of innocent people in prison cells, children in cages, a raging pandemic, a dying planet- these are all failures. But more importantly, I realized that the desperation and energy I felt at that walkout could be channeled to create something amazing: change. I've seen this in every YIG conference I've attended. It's impossible to ignore the promise of change while standing in a room full of young people ready to spend their time making it happen.

I am a servant leader because I believe in my peers. I know that change isn't easy. I know that it won't come from a resolution passed in a youth legislature. But I also know that people only start believing in themselves once they see that someone else believes in them. I believe in YIG. I believe in our ability to grow. As governor I will give back to a conference that has given me so much: a voice, confidence, leadership skills, self motivation, and a love for civic engagement. I want to instill in someone else the love for learning and civic engagement that it has shown me. I hope I can.

Ethan Beque, Tristar

Servant leadership is leadership that works to benefit the lives of the people. Ideally, every leader should be a servant leader. However, a servant leader must know how to benefit the lives of the people. Servant leaders must seek out information to better understand how to serve the people. Servant leaders must make sure they listen, as you can't work for the people without listening to them.

In a democracy, a leader who works for the people is expected. Leaders in America, such as governors, are elected by the people, therefore governors should make sure they are acting to benefit the people. In the case people disagree, governors have to make calls on which people to side with. Making tough calls is what being in elected office entails. If you feel being in public office is easy, you are clearly doing something very wrong. Governors must sit down with everyday citizens and community leaders to talk about the issues that are affecting their communities and how to solve them. Governors also act to protect the most vulnerable. Once in office, a governor must meet with leaders to identify areas where discrimination is prominent, and figure out how implement reforms to eliminate discrimination.

A leader can only truly serve their people, however, if they surround themselves with experts who can understand how to best serve the people. It is a false idea that one individual can be the greatest mind of agricultural policy and the greatest mind of educational policy. That is why governors have cabinets, and why they (hypothetically) should pick only the most qualified individuals to be in their cabinet, and listen to them. A great leader must not be afraid to show that they do not know everything, and must make the choice to listen to experts. Right now, we need medical experts to tell us how to handle our coronavirus response. Without qualified experts who understand the field of medicine, we are just making up plans that could potentially fail and lead to the deaths of many. In the wake of the horrific killing of George Floyd, a murder at the hands of a system that discriminates against people of color, we need to listen to people of color to help us devise plans and reforms to end systematic racism. As the people who best understand what systematic racism looks like are people of color, we must make sure we reach out to them and listen to their advice.

Leaders can only succeed if they aren't alone. While great leadership takes on many forms, but the best form of leadership is leadership that understands that they don't hold the key to solving every problem. The best leaders are those who search out others who do. A great leader should be a great listener, and a great listener should be a great questioner. A leader who doesn't ask questions is a failing one, and fails in effective servant leadership.

Simra Kazmi, Tristar

Servant Leadership derives in many forms, whether it be large acts that impact communities on a grand scale, or minute facets that do something as simple as bring a smile to one's face. However, while servant leadership comes in many ways, its varieties all share one thing in common: putting others first. Servant leadership upholds the idea that no matter where you are, under whatever circumstances you are put through, you still strive to help others. As a muslim and first generation American, I have witnessed and embodied what it means to be a servant leader. Being able to grow up as an Indian American with immense opportunities and a stable financial life is something I am so grateful for, but it has made me realize that there are many others that are unable to live as fortunate of a life as I have. I have seen families struggling to achieve their American Dream here, and young children struggling to get 3 daily meals back in India. Through my religion, which identifies serving others as one of its core values, I have truly been able to manifest the meaning of servant leadership. From serving food at my mosque during our holy month of Ramadan, to traveling to Haiti with my peers to deliver medical emergency bags to local villagers, I have wholeheartedly embraced the varieties of servant leadership in my life. And it doesn't stop there. Servant leadership has become such an integral part of who I am. It brings me so much satisfaction and purpose knowing that the things that I can do for others, whether they are small or big actions, have such a positive impact on their lives. Serving as Governor for the next Tri-Star conference, I know I can further find my purpose in servant leadership and continue to honor and embrace its values. All my platforms for running greatly incorporate servant leadership. Fighting for the underprivileged, implementing an education system that creates strong leaders that contribute back to the community, and going greener to create a healthy environment are all ways that I as governor hope to pursue servant leadership. Aside from that, the conference itself is such a huge reminder of what it means to be a servant leader. Being a part of the conference as governor, I will often spend time working with my cabinet. When working with them, being attentive of what all they have to say and acting as more of a facilitator rather than a boss will be the only way I fulfill my role as governor, because servant leadership relies on cooperation. Furthermore, I promise to use my position to help all delegates have an amazing and impactful time. I want to make sure they are able to participate in a safe and positive environment that inspires them to be servant leaders themselves.

Solmin Kim, Tristar

A leader has a vision and a map. They are at the front and center guiding people through twisted roads, mountains, and peaceful valleys. Leaders are courageous and resilient. They motivate and inspire their followers to push through. However, what makes a leader different from a servant leader? In rudimentary terms, a traditional leader is like the line leader from elementary school while a servant leader is the caboose. Servant leaders lead from the "bottom." Servant leaders recognize the value of people and have humility. They lead by putting and lifting others before themselves. Instead of just influencing their peers, servant leaders recognize the potential in them. Servant leaders observe their teammates, taking note of their strengths and weaknesses. This enables servant leaders to let their members shine on their own, enhance their existing characteristics, and guide them to grow as people and as leaders. While helping their team grow, the leaders themselves also reflect, improve, and grow with them. Servant leaders take value in listening to their peers and have the ability to see through and understand several perspectives. Most importantly, servant leaders take their own medicine; they do what they advise. There is a story where a little boy has a sugar addiction. His worried mother takes him to Gandhi for advice. Once meeting Gandhi, the mother expresses her concern. Gandhi listens but does not give any words of wisdom. Instead, he tells them to come back in a couple of weeks. The mother obeys and leaves. When the pair returns, Gandhi now tells the son to stop eating sugar. The mother curiously asks why it took weeks for Gandhi to tell her son those words; Gandhi explains that when they first arrived he too was eating sugar. Servant leadership is a two way street. To tell one to stop eating sugar, they too must stop eating sugar.

As governor, I would first self reflect. I need to note my own weaknesses and strengths to become a strong foundation for the other delegates to depend and grow on. I will constantly be listening and understanding their perspectives. Learning and unlearning will become second nature. When mistakes are made on my part, I will reflect and acknowledge them. In all honesty, running for governor was quite a push for me, but I was inspired to run after meeting and seeing so many passionate young people. It would be an honor for me to serve them. I want to be able to mirror them; when people see me as their Governor, I want them to see more than the title. I want people to see a reflection of the delegates. When times call to be fun and uplifting, I'll become the delegates cheerleader and number one fan, but when the delegates are in need of guidance, I will become a mentor that will help them walk each step. As governor, I will be the feet, ears, eyes, and most importantly, the bridge that the delegates can run across.

Holden Korbey, Tristar

Leading the Hillsboro MUN and YIG delegations this year gave me great insight into what it means to be a servant leader, and I learned in this experience that being a servant leader means going the extra mile to create opportunities for others to succeed, and helping those who are new above all else. My goals in reshaping the Hillsboro Youth in Government club came from my experiences in the two conferences I attended in my freshman year, where a lack of guidance and explicit explanation on the basics of writing legislation left me with a lingering fear of talking on the debate floor and two poorly conceived bills that flopped in component. At the end of that year, I contemplated giving up, since my projects in both the fall and the spring conferences ended up collapsing. Nevertheless, I came away from that experience believing that my failures could guide me to reshape the Hillsboro delegation as a whole, and from then on, I was determined to lead the club into a new chapter, and ensure that new members got the instruction and guidance they needed to become good debaters and confident writers. In my sophomore year, I taught myself how to write a bill, and in junior year, I took the reins to lead the Hillsboro delegation, with a vision of restructuring our organization to help out beginners and new people. For the preparation regarding the Youth in Government conference, I decided to set up meetings in our advisor's classroom during lunch that served as bill workshopping sessions, I reshaped our instruction materials to be geared toward helping participants of all experience levels, and I reviewed each bill personally before a group sent it to be submitted. My main takeaway from these initiatives was that donating my time to help my peers in one-on-one situations or small groups had a tremendous impact on the quality of their work and their understanding of the legislative process. I would carry this same attitude toward servant leadership as the governor in the YIG conference, and I would make it a top priority to donate my time and effort to solving problems on a small scale, as well as passing bills and negotiating budgets. As your governor, I would have the responsibility to enact reforms to improve our state, and as a servant leader, I would have an obligation to make this experience fun and welcoming for both first-time participants and debate veterans to encourage delegates to come back to this program year after year.

Ansley Skipper, Tristar

A servant leader leads by example; she models the behavior she seeks in others. I don't believe a leader can expect those she's leading to be held to a higher standard than she holds herself. For example, if I want the delegates I'm leading to maintain decorum, I should model what decorum looks like. I will remain quiet, respectful, attentive, and even-tempered — even when I and the rest of the delegates are tired, restless, or engaged in heated debate. I will expect my fellow delegates to exhibit the YMCA values of honesty, integrity, kindness, and respect, so I will expect myself to first model what those principles look like in action. I will attentively listen to all of my fellow delegates, I will ask questions and debate respectfully, and I will conduct myself in line with the rules of the conference, as well as parliamentary procedure.

A servant leader does the hard work that takes place behind the scenes, working to make the visible result possible while remaining herself invisible, seeking no praise or recognition for her work. I will do the "grunt" work and, proverbially, get my hands dirty as your governor. No task will be beneath me. Being governor brings the responsibility of making the state and the conference run smoothly. This will require hard, thankless work. I am prepared and eager to do that work.

A servant leader guides and inspires, rather than restricting and decreeing. A servant leader gives others the tools they need to be successful; she empowers them and encourages them. As the editor of my school newspaper, I get the privilege to edit the writing of the reporters on my staff. Rather than telling my reporters what to write or writing their articles for them, I get to enhance their work, encourage their own voices, and improve their own writing skills. Similarly, I love leading brainstorming sessions. Rather than repress less-than-practical ideas, I enjoy collecting all of the thoughts of the group and then trying to find the most practical way to execute them or at least capture the sentiment of what makes them good ideas. As governor, any delegate in the conference can and should come to me to express her ideas. I will empower my cabinet and all delegates and offer my help to make sure that their ideas come to fruition. While my core policy principles will guide my agenda, I also view my role as that of a shepherd, working with and influencing legislators, not dictating to them. Legislators will have a voice in my executive policies, encouraging cooperation between the branches of government.

My administration will not focus on me. It will not be an opportunity for me to advance myself or my ideology. My administration will be one of servant leadership, working behind the scenes to make next year's conference (whether it be in person or virtual) the best it can be for each and every delegate.