



SUPERSIZING PHILANTHROPIC LEADERSHIP

The Case of the Salvation Army Ray and Joan Kroc Center

—PATRICIA PHILLIPS AND THERESA RICKE-KIELY

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP: LEADERSHIP CHOICES FOR THE GREATER GOOD

Nationally, minority- and women-owned businesses suffer inequity in the construction marketplace (Blanchflower 2008; Bloch 2003). In a world where the “good old boys” network can dominate the bidding and awarding of contracts, it may seem overwhelming for a small, private, faith-based nonprofit to seriously consider making an impact on the contract-awarding process. After an analysis of this case study using Spear’s (2004) servant-leadership framework, we conclude that the Salvation Army created an impact, with millions in contract dollars going to unlikely candidates to serve its mission and promote community transformation.

The Salvation Army in St. Joseph County, Indiana, a small (pregrant) yet conscientious organization, sought to make a positive difference for its community with a portion of Joan Kroc’s \$1.8 billion bequest. The Salvation Army pursued its mission through innovative and purposeful community service to dramatically redefine and challenge locally accepted paradigms in the bidding and awarding of high-dollar construction contracts. Their aggressive yet socially progressive decision provided a template to enhance job creation and business capacity development for local minority- and women-owned businesses. Their methodology upset the status quo by including minority populations that were not typically perceived as bringing value to large-scale construction projects. The Army’s commitment to servant-leadership led the organization to implement community change from the time they received the first cent of this philanthropic windfall.



BACKGROUND

“The Salvation Army is an international organization, serving in 124 countries and speaking to people in 175 languages. The Salvation Army is an integral part of the Christian Church, although distinctive in government and practice. The Army’s doctrine follows the mainstream of Christian articles of faith that emphasize God’s saving purposes. [The organization’s] objectives are the advancement of the Christian faith in the practical form of education, relief of poverty, and other charitable objectives beneficial to society or the community of mankind as a whole” (The Salvation Army National, n.d.). Regardless of geography, the Army demonstrates this philosophy of service even in a small community in northern Indiana.

Prior to the Kroc bequest, the Salvation Army maintained two operating units in St. Joseph County, Indiana, for over a hundred years. Given the prospect of a Kroc Corps Community Center, the two units merged into one in 2004. A small three-person staff utilized an annual operating budget of approximately \$300,000 to maintain a church, youth programs, a food pantry, and a social service program.

Preceding the Kroc gift, the national leadership of the Salvation Army diligently evaluated its capacity not only to accept, but to properly steward the gift and its intended purposes for generations to come. Mrs. Kroc, heir to her husband’s McDonald’s conglomerate, courted the Army for eighteen months to assess their ability to fulfill the gift’s intention. The Army considered its capacity, readiness, and mission alignment. Mrs. Kroc left \$1.8 billion to the Salvation Army in a scant four double-spaced pages in her last will and testament.

Joan Kroc wanted to create a sense of belonging that would transform hearts and minds. She believed that being a part of something bigger than oneself created a feeling of purpose and self-worth. She often said it was through someone teaching her to ice skate that she began to connect with her potential. As a youngster in Minnesota, Joan’s family received assistance from the Salvation Army at Christmas. Because of her empathy in understanding those in need from her own experience, she wanted to influence others as the Army had influenced her. Through her deep commitment to others and with vast resources, the dream became a reality. Joan Kroc passed away in October 2003, leaving the largest charitable gift ever received by the Army, and at the time, the largest single gift given to any charity for work in the United States. Not since the great philanthropic gift of Andrew Carnegie has a gift of this size been given for the benefit of American communities. The money was designated to build state-of-the-art



Ray and Joan Kroc Corps Community Centers nationwide, patterned after the flagship Kroc Center in San Diego. Kroc Centers are comprehensive community centers where children and families enjoy recreational, educational, and artistic activities that would otherwise be beyond their reach.

The Salvation Army, with its iconic Christmas kettles, is well known for its work and commitment to the poor. It was awestruck by Joan Kroc's generous and faithful act. In accepting the gift, the Army also deepened its commitment to transparency and accountability in serving the chosen communities with careful stewardship. For the Salvation Army in South Bend, Indiana, this would occur not just when the building opened, but throughout the entire process, including the awarding of construction bids.

The Salvation Army decided to innovate and redefine a complacent and inequitable labor construction process. In a county with a modest population of 250,000, the intentional use of the Army's philanthropic windfall could provide lifelong changes in supporting minority contractors. This initiative and strategy also met the heart of the mission of the Salvation Army to educate, serve, and benefit the community. And as "builders of community [the Salvation Army] understand[s] that we each build for all" (Lopez 1995, 157).

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

Greenleaf (2002) states that conceptual leadership "sees the whole in the perspective of history—past and future. It states and adjusts goals, analyzes and evaluates operating performance, and foresees contingencies a long way ahead" (79). These leaders are also "effective persuaders and relation builders" (79). As the situation unfolded, the Army needed to better understand the local landscape and embraced the necessity of nurturing local partnerships.

The organization's vision to engage, empower, and most importantly include all stakeholders was not completely embraced by the local community. Some trusted, well-informed community leaders and advisers felt the goal was too lofty and were concerned about failure and embarrassment. A number of donors and other nonprofits were concerned that the required fundraising match would appropriate too many resources from other projects and programs, thus hurting the overall community. A handful of minority activists made it clear that true equity would ensure that a portion of the construction dollars to be spent would go directly to minority-owned businesses and laborers who reflected the community in which the center was built.



Fears abounded about the promise to serve the minority community for whom the Center was conceived as the benefactors. Even after the announcement of the mandated minority participation in both contracts and workers, minority-run activist groups campaigned against the center, citing general past disappointments with such promises and a general lack of confidence that the Salvation Army would actually follow through on its stated plans. Given the racial dynamics in the city, it was easier and certainly safer for some to publicly criticize something that seemed so unlikely, rather than support it and then suffer the assured embarrassment when failure ensued. The city council member from the Center's own district was the single "no" vote received on any city council measure related to the Center throughout the eight-year development process. Many viewed the project as impossible, too risky to come to fruition. Fear not only eroded community confidence, but became a leading factor in the level of cooperation the Salvation Army received. This was the case until positive outcomes began to manifest and could be quantified by hard data collected through intensive monitoring of the project's construction. As the project also received new market tax credits, the regulation and tracking of all information pertaining to construction was intensive and available for the Army to use for demonstrative purposes.

The construction industry's doubts also permeated the community attitude. This initial tension came from a long-held practice of utilizing the same few companies and nonlocal labor and contractors on large construction projects. A criticism of the Salvation Army early on was that there was no possibility of achieving the mandated percentages based on the number of minority- and women-owned businesses in the county. The Salvation Army held a different view and was true to the vision to be inclusive in the planning and construction of the project and the distribution of philanthropic resources.

A Minority Outreach Program was created, providing requisites to all contractors on the Kroc Center project. The condition was two-pronged. Any prime contractor was mandated to subcontract a minimum of 18 percent of the work to a minority- or women-owned business. Additionally, if a contractor had four workers on site, one had to be selected from the Salvation Army's Minority Outreach Program. This program targeted unskilled workers, many without high school diplomas, some with felony records, and most who were un- or underemployed. Committed to their servant-leadership values, the Army hired a local diversity compliance manager with the knowledge to bring the goal to fruition. The Army understood



that without an objective third party, the program would probably fail. The Army's foresight promulgated a message of hope and a plan of action for overall success.

St. Joseph County's record of contract awards to woman- and minority-owned business enterprises (W/MBEs) for construction projects was known to be typically in the 3 to 4 percent range prior to 2011. According to a Disparity Study in the state of Indiana dated 12/31/2010, statewide utilization of W/MBE firms in state and state educational institutional construction projects was between 3.3 and 3.8 percent (Indiana Disparity Study Final Report, 12/31/10). In an attempt to move beyond this standard, the Army's visionary leadership committed to enhance the bidding awards to minority groups to the mandated minimum percentage. Each contractor was required to demonstrate that a minimum of 18 percent of their subcontracted value and 18 percent of their workforce were either minority or women, even if the company was minority- or women-owned. The Army unofficially targeted 15 percent minority, 3 percent women as the standard for the Kroc project. Additionally, the Army maintained a commitment that wherever possible, work would be completed by local contractors, thus significantly impacting South Bend by keeping dollars in the community.

PERSUASION: CONVINCING LEADERS TO DO RIGHT

Cronin and Genovese (2012), in their discussion of how prescriptive road maps to leadership are less helpful than savvy questions, say, "A leader is constantly wrestling with critical ends and means considerations. What are the best paths, the best strategies, the best teams to get an organization to achieve its purpose? What are our nonnegotiable values? What are our ethical principles?" (311). The Army had to answer these questions to be an effective and ethical leader in this project and persuade local stakeholders that this endeavor would be beneficial and was indeed possible.

"Meaningful dialogue gives rise to the forces that unhinge the way we harm each other, opening us toward a more accepting and empathic understanding of one another" (Ferch 2003, 10). After listening to the concerns of advisers and weighing the risk and reward, the Salvation Army forged ahead. The organization utilized the power of its relationships to assure that the right people were around the table.

With a committed construction manager, a committed diversity compliance manager, the necessary monetary resources, and the opportunity



on the table, the self-imposed mandate set the bar. The effort started with community outreach and recruitment initiatives designed to assist W/MBE contractors with the various areas known to create barriers for them. To ensure that the Army's W/MBE contracting goals were met, strategies were developed to help local contractors qualify to bid on work. The diversity compliance manager developed a protégé mentoring program that walked W/MBEs through meetings with bankers, materials suppliers, and the Indiana State certification process. In addition to networking sessions with primary contractors, W/MBE companies were given project management and estimating support. Established majority companies were matched with minority- or women-owned companies to partner with for overall success. This allowed the majority company to meet the diversity requirements and assisted the W/MBE in maintaining and growing capacity for competitive strength.

The construction management firm agreed to conduct, free of charge to the participant, a ten-week Construction Management School for any W/MBE interested in learning how to be more competitive in the marketplace. This school met once per week for ten weeks, and participants were taught by various representatives from the construction management firm, one of the largest builders in the world. The construction management firm was so committed to diversity that they had recently lost bids to the very minority companies they had previously mentored. To them, this was a win, for which they felt pride, as it strengthened the community overall.

A total of twenty-four W/MBEs attended these various outreach events. The Army's confidence in the availability of local W/MBEs that were eager for opportunity grew exponentially.

For the Salvation Army, the Kroc Center provoked a myriad of responses from the community. Many stakeholders were positive and enthusiastic about the dream of this community center becoming more tangible. But skeptics continued to revisit the promises of the past that had been made to this west-side community, and to recall how pledges fell short. Minority groups wanted more than access and affordability of these new services; they wanted to see faces of color on the job that accurately reflected the community in which the Center was being built.

Despite community reluctance, the Salvation Army leaders remained steadfast in their commitment to serve. This allowed their partners to do the same. This was not a statement of strength, but of faith and commitment, a foundation of the servant-leadership model. This style of leadership develops from a deep reservoir of commitment and responsibility. The Army



never has believed that the Kroc gift was theirs, but rather that it was theirs to steward for the benefit of the community.

THE SERVANT AS LEADER: A COMMITMENT TO ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING

“Servant leadership remains distinct from other forms of leadership, focusing on the betterment of followers, organizations, and society” (Christensen, Mackey, and Whetten 2014, 174). We propose that the Salvation Army used servant-leadership (Greenleaf 1970) principles as adapted by Spears (2004), who concluded there were ten characteristics of servant-leadership: foresight, conceptualization, commitment to the growth of people, persuasion, healing, awareness, stewardship, building community, listening, and empathy (7). These characteristics were used to move the Army’s aggressive initiative into reality. The opportunity was clear: to provide jobs to people who needed them and work to companies who others generally overlooked. The Army used the construction and labor awarding process as a tool for social justice.

After listening intently (a key servant-leadership principle) to the local minority community and with an understanding of some of the existing barriers to employment, the Army chose to be more inclusive of the community in which the Kroc Center would be built and operate. For example, flanked on either side by the Housing Authority housing of South Bend, the new Kroc Center is located on a site named for a beloved previous Housing Authority director, Alonzo Watson, Jr., known for his commitment to learning, self-sufficiency, and opportunity for all people. Although this strategy of minority employment goals is based in values and social justice, it also demonstrates high ethical values and a commitment to the community that it serves.

Greenleaf (1970) defined a servant-leader this way: “The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (7). Servant-leaders are those who put the needs, dreams, and aspirations of others in front of their own. Their main role is to establish a sustainable strategic vision for the organization or community. Furthermore, servant leaders must then model the vision through actions and behaviors, both personally and professionally (Banutu-Gomez 2004).

It is no surprise that the Salvation Army embraces this style of leadership. They intended to serve. An analysis of the case follows, using Spear’s (2004) servant-leadership framework, which demonstrates how the Army implemented servant-leadership in the initiative.



- **Listening.** The Army listened carefully to the concerns brought forward by members of the minority community and involved stakeholders. Meetings and discussions ensued month after month. After purposeful attention to the community, the Salvation Army responded by enacting what they felt was an ethical and equitable plan for construction.
- **Empathy and Healing.** Would the Salvation Army understand the injustice of the community favoring nonminority labor? Leaders listened, observed, and formulated a vision to correct this inequality. The Salvation Army set out to understand the community issues, and empowered the community to move forward with this new plan. These efforts proved to be healing.
- **Awareness.** As Greenleaf (1991) states, “Awareness is not a giver of peace; it is a disturber, an awakener” (20). Certainly, awareness and agreement with the issue at hand created a more challenging operation. The Salvation Army’s commitments were more costly and asked for increased diligence, because opposition existed from many angles. Awareness, through constant listening, questioning, reflection, and communication with stakeholders, helped the Army navigate and implement this plan despite negative interpretations and fears from the community.
- **Persuasion.** The Salvation Army legislated an environment in which change could take place. By understanding stakeholder perspectives, the leadership articulated a vision to persuade the community of its ethical responsibility and its commitment to those who needed to be served.
- **Conceptualization.** The Army dreamed a great dream. To achieve 18 percent minority and women participation in labor and building, the vision needed to be appealing not just for the Kroc Center, but for the city of South Bend. The articulation of this vision offered the community an opportunity to be better and to expend its resources more effectively, thus benefiting families and individuals throughout the community.
- **Foresight.** The Army had foresight that this aggressive plan would work. In the face of naysayers, faith in the process provided not only confidence but also allowed leaders to understand that their perseverance could move the project forward.
- **Stewardship.** The mission of the Salvation Army demonstrates a foundation in Christian stewardship. With this gift came even greater



responsibility to serve the needs of others. To operate in any other way with the significant resources of the Kroc gift would be unconscionable, and counterintuitive for the organization. The Army assured good stewardship by serving the underprivileged throughout the process but also teaching those with power and means the lessons of stewardship and responsibility of power.

- Commitment to the growth of people. The capacity-building nature of the diversity program created great opportunities for business owners to grow, learn, and develop. From the construction management school, to construction estimation, to matching W/MBEs with a protégé company, many opportunities for experience and growth existed within the Army's program.
- Building community. Through the diversity outreach program, many construction workers who were not previously able or welcomed to compete for opportunities now received phone calls soliciting their participation in construction bidding. Many individuals were enrolled in union apprenticeship programs and made their way to becoming skilled journeymen in a specific trade. This created economic opportunity, stability, and trust.

IMPACTS

What vision would capture the imagination of a weary and divided community, unable to rise above its differences? The Army coupled its vision with contractual strings; it put forward a mandate with teeth. If companies did not comply, the Army delineated a process to fine the offenders, as a legal part of the contract. Although no company received a fine, all parties certainly understood that the Army was prepared to take action if necessary. Regulation is not the usual answer when talking about servant-leadership. But in this case, the Army preserved its integrity by instituting this process as a formal part of the construction contract.

At its completion in 2012, the project achieved an overall average of 26 percent minority and women workers and 28 percent minority- and women-owned businesses (18 percent MBEs and 10 percent WBEs) at work on the Kroc Center. This equated to over \$5.2 million in construction bid awards to W/MBEs, 74 percent of which was to local companies. Compare this to local demographic information, which indicates that 51 percent of the population in St. Joseph County is female, 13 percent



black, 7.5 percent Hispanic, 2.5 percent two or more races, and 2 percent Asian. As for the profile of the business community: there are a total of 20,374 businesses in the community, of which 6.5 percent are African-American-owned, 1.7 percent Asian-owned, 1.9 percent Hispanic-owned and over a quarter (26.7 percent) women-owned (2010 U.S. Census). In addition, the dollars spent for the diversity compliance officer directly benefited companies since they assisted in certifying eleven businesses within the state of Indiana as W/MBEs.

The workforce diversity program created 419 construction jobs: 17 percent went to black males; 7 percent went to Hispanic males; 2 percent went to white females, and 2 percent went to Asians, Indians, or other minority groups. Of these numbers, several workers were made union apprentices and continue to work with the electrical and carpenter's unions as of the date of this writing. The Salvation Army's workforce diversity program designed a process to challenge the community to maintain a workforce that aptly reflected diversity. Over the eighteen months of construction activity, the project maintained a diverse workforce with a monthly average of 20 percent. Of the nearly \$18.5 million spent on construction contracts for the Kroc Center, over \$14.8 million (75 percent) was awarded to local companies. This provided a boost to the economy by keeping these dollars close to home. The only contracts not awarded to local businesses were for elevators, flooring, ornamental metals, and structural steel, as there were no local contractors in these trades.

The partnerships that made this vision a reality are a testament to the power of collaboration. Local government worked tirelessly alongside the Army to assist with a planned unit development, water retention, curb cuts, and improvements to the intersections. Local government also assisted by allowing the Army to purchase the land for one dollar. The former mayor of South Bend was a major champion of the neighborhood and the Kroc Center, helping the Army bring the vision to fruition. Local trade unions worked with The Salvation Army to reduce barriers to employment, including subsidizing union dues and opening up apprenticeship opportunities for program participants.

A typical challenge in the construction industry is cash flow, often making it challenging for smaller contractors to stay afloat and be competitive on large projects (Bates and Robb 2013). A prominent local bank developed a new department specifically to loan Community Reinvestment Act capital to small, minority businesses to help them get started and prepare to handle the



long delays in payments for general construction work. These loans provided the much-needed cushion for these companies to stay fluid when payment applications would take time to be approved and payment returned to the company. At first, many of the players went through the motions of the diversity program, but when the project ended, real partnership and collaboration emerged. These collaborations made a substantial difference in the project and provided a stage to demonstrate servant-leadership in its fullness

CONCLUSION

“Envisioning a world of new possibilities means finding synergies, forging partnerships, and occasionally venturing into the unknown” (Osula and Ng 2014, 100). When the Salvation Army set its path to listen to all voices in the philanthropic planning community, there were many unknowns. The vision to serve nontraditional workforces was a paradigm that was initially questioned and in some cases even belittled. By analyzing the process and outcomes of events, we propose that the leaders in the Salvation Army were indeed servant-leaders. They captured the quintessential spirit of Spears’s (2004) servant-leader framework, and the community benefitted from their untiring vision to share the wealth.

We hope this case adds to the scant studies (as suggested by Parris and Peachy 2013) regarding servant-leadership in organizations, specifically as it relates to the nonprofit sector and its ethical responsibilities to advocate for those with no voice. Although scholars provide a wealth of information on W/MBEs and servant-leadership, the two are rarely merged in the literature, especially in the context of nonprofit leadership or community development. The literature is replete with examples where W/MBEs face blatant discrimination (Bates 2006; Bates & Robb 2013; Blanchflower 2008; Dainty et al. 2004), yet there are seemingly few studies that show the commitment of leaders and effective methods to engage the minority workforce. The Army went beyond the status quo, and despite the initial push-back of pessimists, banked on the higher value of building community and stewardship. In the end partners were persuaded to invest in the minority community as viable participants in large-scale, high-profile local business activity.

The Salvation Army chose to make a bold and ethical statement about the use of its resources according to its mission. Its success provided many examples of how to effectively create a strategy that offers a long-term impact in a community. In the wake of this social change, lives changed.



Only time will tell if the intentions of this servant-leader organization will have a rippling and long-lasting effect within the St. Joseph County community. There is a great confluence of intention between the Salvation Army and Joan Kroc, demonstrating what is possible with great philanthropy. Many refer to Joan Kroc as St. Joan of the Arches. She herself was quoted as saying, “I am a maverick Salvationist” (as cited in Montgomery 2004). A former San Diego Padre, Tony Gwynn, said of Joan, “Sadly, in her passing, people will really find out for the first time how much she meant, not only to this community, but to the world. She did things her way, not for recognition or other considerations, but because it was the right thing to do” (as cited in Williams 2003). Joan Kroc gave from her heart, and she desired to create places of equity and justice for all kids, all families, where discrimination could not be detected and all children experience the opportunity to discover and develop their dreams. We suggest that Joan Kroc lived the values of a servant and provided true leadership, epitomizing the servant-leader model.

Morino (2011) suggests that it takes courageous leaders to foster a performance culture (35). Keith (2008) asserts that servant-leadership is about a creating a better world. “One reason the world suffers is because of the lack of a service model of leadership and a dependence on a power-based model of leadership” (p. ix). Joan Kroc began this undertaking by imagining how her donation could be impactful on society. She was not after power or glory. She wanted to serve. The Salvation Army understood her dream, provided concrete intentions, and implemented her will. We tell the story of the very beginning: before one child was served, before one program was offered, and before one brick was purchased. We don’t know if Joan Kroc thought about the laborers; we don’t know if she thought about the impact of process. We do know that she wanted to make a difference, and in the development of the Salvation Army Kroc Center in South Bend, Indiana, servant-leaders in action took her intentions for equity and justice into every facet and element of the project, creating a manifest change in equitable access to opportunity.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Patricia Phillips has been in the nonprofit sector for over twenty-five years. She was the vice president of strategic new initiatives and training at Hmong American Partnership in St. Paul, MN, the largest refugee-led service agency in the world. In addition to her work with HAP, she is president and owner of the Match Factory, a coaching and consulting business focusing on nonprofit and entrepreneurial or third-sector enterprise. She is also a health and wellness coach, helping the helpers live well and stay strong. She is a member of the Lakeshore Players Theater Board of Directors in White Bear Lake, MN. *Patti is a community capacity builder and trainer and has served as a board member and volunteer throughout the sector.*

Theresa Ricke-Kiely has served in nonprofit organizations throughout her entire career. She is Associate Director of Administration for the Kroc Institute of International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. In



addition to teaching leadership to peace studies students, she also teaches in the Nonprofit Professional Development program and is concurrent professor of management in the Mendoza College of Business. She was founding president of Silver Fox Advising, a consulting practice serving nonprofit organizations. Her work focuses on organizational leadership and development for NGO and nonprofit professionals. With a strong background in human services, she has served in an array of positions including director, volunteer, and board member.