Servant Leadership Profile of Martin Luther King Jr.

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Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr was born on 15th January 1929 and assassinated in 4th April 1968. King was born in a family where his father was the pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. King was a bright student, and hence he graduated high school at the age of fifteen years and enrolled in Morehouse College for a Bachelor of Arts degree. King joined Crozer Theological Seminary to study Bachelor of Divinity in order to follow in his father's footsteps in becoming a pastor. King topped the class which was filled with White students (Reddick, 2018). King married Coretta Scott who was a singer in 1953, and they settled in Montgomery where King decided to pastor Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. Mr. King and his wife had four children, that is, Yolanda Denise King, Martin Luther King III, Dexter Scott King, and Bernice Albertine King.

King’s journey into activism started in 1955 when he was chosen as a spokesman for a bus boycott that was taking place. The bus boycott has been caused by Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat to a white passenger hence getting arrested. The African Americans decided to boycott the buses for 381 days which caused economic strain in the transport systems. Mr. King aimed at leading nonviolent protests against any adoption of unequal civil rights (Reddick, 2018). The latter put him in danger together with his family as their home was bombed that January during the bus boycott.

In 1957, King in collaboration with fellow religious leaders decided to form the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The group was committed to achieving equality amongst the African Americans by advocating for nonviolent protest. The motto of the group was ‘not one hair of one head of one person should be harmed.' The latter shows the groups commitment to ensure that no one was killed during protests, but rather they needed peace to prevail during such times. King main goal was to spread equality amongst the citizens of America. He wrote a letter while in jail titles "Letter from Birmingham Jail" which highlighted the wrongful doings of the clergymen that felt that he was taking unnecessary risks while fighting for equality.

Mr. King was willing to give up everything to ensure that Americans and African Americans were treated equally. He supported peace in all political areas and urged the government to include voting rights of the African Americans in the constitution (Reddick, 2018). King was assassinated in 1968 because of his stand for equality and upholding peace in all his activities. Martin Luther King Day is celebrated in the United States in every third Monday of January as a sign of honoring a servant leader who lost his life while fighting for his countries peace.

I choose Mr. King as my example of a servant leader as he is one person who defined and helped in changing the whole history of the United States of America. Mr. King did view himself as inferior because he was an African American, but rather he saw it as an opportunity to make people realize that equality was needed for the country to progress. I also choose Mr. King because of the valuable lessons he teaches leaders. The lessons include;

* Leaders should always be prepared for all situations- Mr. King was appointed as the spokesman of the bus boycott in Montgomery as the people believed that he was a man of character and he would not let them down. The people of Montgomery had seen King’s leadership skills in the church, and hence they knew that he would ensure that Rosa Parks was realized. Moreover, King's famous speech ‘I have a Dream' was not pre-written as Mahalia beckoned him to tell the people who had gathered the dream he had received. The speech was eloquent and appealed to many as it was delivered spontaneously and captured the needs of the people at the time. A leader should always handle situations as they arise and not give excuses when things go wrong.
* Leaders should be willing to collaborate at all times- Mr. King efforts were successful because he always confided in the people he trusted. King's family offered him great support and consoled him when things did not work. King collaborated with Rosa Parks in advocating for equality in America as Parks would report King's meetings in the Newspaper where she was the secretary. In Birmingham when every plan seemed not to work when they wanted to eliminate segregation King received certain advice. The advice was they incorporate children in protests in order to arouse empathy from around the world. When the protests were aired, and people saw children getting hurt the world felt sorrowful. Segregation was abolished in Birmingham shortly after the protests.
* Leaders should be servant Leaders- A servant leader is the one upholds the needs of the people above their own. A servant leader is willing to give up self-comfort in order for the people they are leading can gain comfort (Collins, 2011). Mr. King was a servant leader as he continually traveled around the country with minimum security while spreading the message of equality. King was willing to take up responsibilities that most people scorned so that he could lead the people to victory. During his assassination, King was living poor class hotel in Memphis where he had traveled to support the sanitation workers who were on strike. Mr. King is called a dreamer who lost his life while fighting for the poor people of America.

According to Greenleaf (2016), the servant leadership principles exhibited by Martin Luther King Jr are;

* Listening

Servant leaders identify with the skill of listening to the people they lead keenly. This enables them to identify the needs of the people and find ways to fulfill them. Martin Luther King Jr was appointed as a spokesman during the boycott for he could easily articulate the needs of the African Americans at the time. King was always receiving people’s desires and then looking for ways to solve. King was a good listener that is why his work in activism was successful.

* Empathy

Servant leaders should be able to identify and understand the needs of others. Empathy means feeling a person's pain and ensuring that you help them to overcome it. Mr. King was advocating for equality of the African Americans for he empathized with the people who were mistreated. King was assassinated in Memphis where he had gone to help the sanitization workers' protest.

* Healing

Servant leaders are called to bring wholesomeness amongst the people they lead. This is achieved by the leader understanding that all people commit mistakes however unity should be upheld (Drago-Severson, 2014). Mr. King advocated for peaceful and nonviolent protests. This was due to the fact he did not want any person to be hurt nor disrupt the peace of the country. King had brought unity amongst the African Americans and the Whites for the peaceful acts of activism he had advocated.

* Awareness

This is whereby the servant leader is fully aware of themselves and have a great sense of inner security. Mr. King understood that his major role was to bring peace to the American community. Despite all the threats King received he continued advocating for equality.

* Persuasion

Servant leaders persuade people to follow particular instruction and do not coerce them. Mr. King actions always persuaded people to attend all the meetings he held. King’s ‘I have a dream’ speech was listened by more than 200,000 people at that time and made African Americans fight for freedom aggressively.

* Conceptualization

Servant leaders bring a solution to problems by thinking ‘out of the box,' and they are long lasting for they foresee what they need in the future. Mr. King was fighting for African American equality for he knew that equality would improve the nature of the American community. Currently, United States of America is called a ‘superpower' because of the booming economy and the freedom that exists.

* Foresight

Servant leaders should be careful not to repeat the mistakes of the past and understand what particular action is likely to affect the future. Mr. King knew that violent demonstrations would lead to the loss of lives and cause pain amongst the Blacks. Hence King advocated for a peaceful demonstration to make the government understand that they were willing to hold talks and this later led to the inclusion of African American been allowed to vote.

* Stewardship

This is whereby the servant leader trains the people that he is leading to be honest and possess integrity. Mr. King worked with several religious leaders who helped in the creation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). King knew that the people he formed the group with were reliable and had the same goal as him.

* Commitment to the Growth of People

Servant leaders ensure that people they are leading growth in various ways; professionally, spiritually and personally. Mr. King was a pastor during his activism days which means that he guided his followers to grow spiritually in their daily walk. Moreover, King would collaborate with young people who had the same vision has him and taught them how to hold nonviolent protests.

* Building Community

A servant leader always ensures that the community they dwell in is improved in every aspect. During his stay in Montgomery, Mr. King accepted the responsibility of becoming a spokesperson because he wanted to ensure that his fellow community member Rosa Parks was safe. Nevertheless, in Birmingham, he helped in abolishing segregation due to the pain it caused to African Americans.

References

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