

The Servant-Athlete: Examining Servant-Leadership in Sport

by

Richard Primrose  
B.Ed. University of Victoria, 2005

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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## Abstract

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This qualitative case study explored the philosophy of servant-leadership in the context of sport, specifically from the perspective of an athletic leader, or servant-athlete. The primary purpose of the research was to identify traits of a servant-athlete—who for the purpose of this case study was Canadian professional basketball player Steve Nash—with the secondary purpose being to look at some formative childhood experiences, which may have shaped the servant-athlete’s leadership style. The primary method of data collection was an academic interview, with other sources of media being used to triangulate the findings. Findings suggested that the servant-athlete would be a team player, who leads by building relationships, practicing compassion, empathy, and self-awareness, and ultimately serving the needs of his teammates. It was found that childhood experiences with service—particularly related to the parents—played a large role in influencing the servant-athlete’s leadership philosophy. Rich commentary from the academic interview spoke to the themes identified, and provided evidence of servant-leadership being a viable leadership philosophy in sport.

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To Steve Nash, I am grateful for being so extremely generous with his time, genuinely embracing the servant-leadership philosophy, and for being a true servant-athlete. I must also thank Jenny Miller, who helped arrange the academic interview and the subsequent tasks involved, as well as my good friend Ian Hyde-Lay, who put me in touch with Nash himself.

I owe a debt of gratitude to St. Michaels University School for supporting my graduate studies, and providing me with a dream career in sport, working with kids.

## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandma, Mary Thomson, who loved basketball, and was a huge fan of Steve Nash. She would have been thrilled about the work I am doing, and loved the way Nash played the game and conducted himself, both on and off the court.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Background

Sport is widely regarded as an arena in which athletes can be taught character, learn life lessons, and grow as people (Holt, Tink, Mandingo & Fox, 2008; Shogun, 2007). However, it is incorrect to assume that this happens automatically. Sport is a vehicle to teach values, character, morals and life-lessons only if they are taught purposely, and with care (Brown, 2003; Shogun, 2007). If this is not the case, sport can in fact do nothing to advance the character of those involved, or even worse, can contribute to teaching poor sportsmanship, and unethical behaviours (Brown, 2003; Kavussanu & Boardley, 2009; Kavussanu & Roberts, 2001; Shogun, 2007).

One needs to look no further than the newspaper, television or internet to see negative types of behaviours being perpetrated by athletes. On the adverse side of the spectrum, athletes can be observed being selfish, by chasing big money contracts, or superstars colluding together on one team, to win a championship; being guilty of infidelity or gambling. Athletes can be seen being embroiled in domestic abuse, being charged with weapons-related offences, and taking performance enhancing drugs.

At the other end of the continuum, there are numerous stories of athletes showing admirable character traits, and serving as positive role-models for others. The list of athletes and teams doing good in their respective communities eclipses the indiscretions and wrongdoings. Most major sport leagues have service programmes where teams give back to the community (nba.com, nfl.com, nhl.com), and many athletes are known for their pet causes, in areas ranging from helping underprivileged kids, or raising the profile of human issues, or environmental concerns.

My own personal experience as a youth involved in competitive sport including baseball, basketball, and soccer, among others, helped me to develop many positive qualities such as resilience, perseverance, commitment and compassion. My continuing involvement with sport in my career as a physical education teacher, head of physical education, basketball coach and other similar leadership positions has borne out the possibility for sport to build character, and effect positive growth and development. The opposite can be true as well. Character must be nurtured purposely and carefully.

As I embarked on my graduate level studies in the area of leadership studies, it continued to strike me that there is great possibility in sport to teach character, and that educators, coaches and athletes alike are not fully tapping into this latent potential. It was an introductory course with Dr. Carolyn Crippen, entitled Servant-Leadership, which provided me with a moment of clarity, and opened up a world of possibility, in merging this exciting leadership philosophy with sport.

### **Servant-Leadership**

Servant-Leadership was introduced by Robert Kiefner Greenleaf, in his seminal work entitled *The Servant as Leader* (2008) which he penned at the age of 66. Greenleaf spent his career working at AT&T, first as a linesman, and later moving into organizational management. He went on to lecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dartmouth, and the Harvard Business School (Crippen, 2005).

In *The Servant As Leader* (2008), Greenleaf explains that the idea of servant-leadership was born from reading Herman Hesse's novel *Journey to the East*. Hesse writes of a group of men on a mythical journey of discovery, who are accompanied by a

servant named Leo. Leo performs the menial chores for the group, but also keeps their morale high with his spirit, song and extraordinary presence (Greenleaf, 2008). The story takes a turn when Leo disappears, and the group falls apart, leading to the eventual abandonment of the journey. Without Leo's spirit, the group could not function.

Years later, the narrator, who is one of the men on the journey, crosses paths with Leo, and is taken into the Order that sponsored the journey. It is here that the narrator discovers that Leo is actually the "titular head of the Order, its guiding spirit, a great and noble *leader*." (Greenleaf, 2008, p. 9). While Leo was actually the leader of the Order, by nature, he was servant-first. His desire was to attend to the basic needs of others, at which point leadership was bestowed upon him by the group he served (Crippen, 2005).

It was this story, in conjunction with the leadership troubles of the current time—a leadership crisis, as Greenleaf described it—which led him to write *The Servant as Leader* (Greenleaf, 2008). Crippen (2010) writes that his goal was "to develop strong, effective, caring communities in all segments of society." (p. 29) In this work he describes the servant-leader clearly and succinctly in the following passage:

The servant-leader *is* servant first...It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then, conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead...The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will he benefit, or, at least, will he not be further deprived? (Greenleaf, 2008, p. 15).

*The Servant as Leader* (Greenleaf, 2008) comprises a series of essays, using tangible examples to describe the character traits the true servant-leader would possess. The basic qualities underpinning this leadership philosophy, as outlined by Greenleaf, include listening and understanding, withdrawal, acceptance and empathy, foresight, awareness and perception, persuasion, conceptualization, healing and serving, and community (Greenleaf, 2008). As the essay is aimed at motivating those to act, he finishes by identifying the enemy of great leadership as those who have the necessary tools to be servant-leaders, but who fail to act (Greenleaf, 2008, p. 46).

Much has been written and presented on Greenleaf's servant-leadership philosophy since the original essay was published, and it has been used extensively in a wide range of organizations, most notably in public service, business and education (Chung, Jung, Kyle & Petrick, 2010; Cummins & Collins, 2008; Crippen, 2005, 2010; DeGraaf, Tilley & Neal, 2001; Mayer, Bardes & Piccolo, 2008; Nakai, 2008; Polleys, 2008; Powers & Moore, 2004; Sarros, 2002; Sipe & Frick, 2009; Takamine & Ishida, 2008; Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson & Jinks, 2007; Van Dierendonck, 2010). Many different authors have attempted to define servant-leadership, or develop frameworks to identify the characteristics. Van Dierendonck (2010) believes that Greenleaf's lack of an accurate definition has led to such a wide interpretation, and many different models.

Larry Spears (1998a, 1998b, 2004) identified ten characteristics of servant-leadership, which is one of the most widely recognized frameworks for the philosophy (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; DeGraaf et al., 2001; Van Dierendonck, 2010). Spears's ten characteristics include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and

building community. When Spears speaks, he often mentions that while all of the characteristics are important, one stands out as being the most important: listening (Spears, 2010). In their article breaking Spears's characteristics down into detail, Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) offer an eleventh characteristic: calling.

Sipe and Frick (2009) use seven-pillars to help elucidate the servant-leadership philosophy. Using stories and metaphors, they explore servant-leadership under the seven themes of: person of character; puts people first; skilled communicator; compassionate collaborator; foresight; systems thinker; and moral authority.

With the purpose of establishing “an overall framework highlighting the most important antecedents, underlying processes and consequence”, Van Dierendonck identifies six key characteristics of servant-leadership behaviour: empower and develop people; show humility; authentic; accept people for who they are; provide direction; and stewards who work for the good of the whole (2010, p. 2).

## **Problem Statement**

Building on the notion that sport can be an effective vehicle to develop and teach character (Brown, 2003; Holt, Tink, Mandingo & Fox, 2008), and keeping in mind the core tenets of servant-leadership, as outlined by Greenleaf (2008), Spears (2004) and Sipe and Frick (2009), the idea of merging servant-leadership and sport is one worth exploring. In the context of sport, putting one's teammates' basic needs first would appear to be the central theme of the servant-athlete.

There is, however, a lack of focused research looking at servant-leadership in sport, with only three papers being readily accessible, and each looking at sport from the perspective of the coach (Rieke, Hammermeister & Chase, 2008; Hammermeister, Chase,

Burton, Westre, Pickering & Baldwin, 2008; Westre, 2008). A clear deficiency in the past literature is its failure to look at servant-leadership from the athlete's perspective, or servant-athletes. The term servant-athlete is one which I will use throughout the study, in order to describe an athlete who espouses the traits of a servant-leaders. There is a precedent for such a term, as Powers & Moore introduced the term *servant-teacher*, to refer to teachers who are servant-leaders (Powers & Moore, 2004).

While it is accepted that sport can develop character (Brown, 2003, Shogun, 2007), there is ample evidence—as the examples earlier in the introduction illustrate—that this is not always the case, and that a new leadership paradigm is needed in sport.

### **Steve Nash**

In examining the relationship between servant-leadership and sport, and attempting to identify potential servant-athletes, one individual immediately stood out: professional basketball player Steve Nash. Nash has built a reputation through his work with underprivileged youth at the Steve Nash Foundation ([www.stevenash.org](http://www.stevenash.org)), and his actions on and off the court as a truly ethical leader and human being (Rudd, 1996, 2006). His style of play epitomizes what a true team player should be, always looking to make his teammates better, and leading with a caring ethos (Rudd, 1996, 2006).

It is important to note that having ease of access to a major NBA player, who I believed to potentially be a servant-leader, played a large role in my decision to use Nash as the subject of my case study. I also considered Nash's high profile status, and its potential for drawing other people to the idea of servant-leadership in sport.

Since I work at the high school from which Nash graduated, and am close friends with his former high school coach, Ian Hyde-Lay, I was able to draw on my friendship with Ian Hyde-Lay to contact Nash and inquire if he would allow me to interview him for the purpose of examining his leadership in the context of servant-leadership.

Consistent with the notion that Nash may be a servant-leader, he was willing to give me his time, and months later, after the culmination of much hard work and research, I had the opportunity to interview Nash in Sacramento, California. Accordingly, this study will be framed as a case-study on a potential servant-athlete: Steve Nash.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to examine servant-leadership in the context of sport, using Greenleaf's pivotal work, *The Servant as Leader* (2008), and Spears's ten characteristics of servant-leadership, as the framework. Of specific interest was the role of athletes as leaders, and how servant-leadership behaviours and traits fit into leadership in competitive sport. The study used a qualitative interview with National Basketball Association player Steve Nash, of the Los Angeles Lakers (formerly Phoenix Suns and Dallas Mavericks), a former NBA Most Valuable Player and multi-time all-star, and potential servant-athlete.

### **Research Questions**

The research study asks the following questions:

- Question 1: What character traits and behaviours would the potential servant-athlete exhibit, consistent with Greenleaf's philosophy, Spears's ten characteristics of servant-leaders, and Sipe and Frick's seven pillars of servant-leadership?

- Question 2: How did Nash's upbringing and childhood influence his leadership style, and its relationship to servant-leadership?

### Definition of Terms

The following terms are used for the purpose of this thesis:

- **Servant-leader:** "The Servant-leader is servant first...It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead." (Greenleaf, 2008, p. 15)
- **Servant-athlete:** An athlete whose leadership is consistent with Greenleaf's servant-leadership philosophy. He or she is a relationship builder who leads with empathy and compassion, and puts the needs of teammates first (Greenleaf, 2008).
- **Empathy:** "The act of seeking to understand the feelings of others in a given circumstance." (Powers & Moore, 2004, p. 15)
- **Persuasion:** "Change by conviction rather than coercion" (Greenleaf, 2008, p. 31)
- **Healing:** Operating under the assumptions that many people have broken spirits, and emotional challenges, healing is the act of helping make whole. (Spears, 2004, p. 8)
- **Foresight:** Anticipating consequences and challenges, and then choosing the best course of action. (DeGraaf et al., 2001, p. 15)
- **Awareness:** General awareness, self-awareness and awareness of one's surroundings (Crippen, 2005).

- **Stewardship:** “The willingness to be accountable for the well-being of the larger community by operating in the service of those around us. (Block in Sarros, 2002, p. 60; Block, 1993).

### **Assumptions**

1. It is assumed that Steve Nash is an elite athlete, and widely accepted as a leader in the context of athletics, through his career accomplishments in the National Collegiate Athletics Association, the National Basketball Association and with Team Canada.
2. It is assumed, based on my prior knowledge of Nash as well as the literature on him, that he is a potential servant-athlete.
3. It is assumed that sport has benefits and qualities that extend beyond the game itself, and that it has the capacity to act as a metaphor for life which presents participants with experiences and decisions which have a moral or ethical underpinning.
4. It is assumed that studying the leadership of a basketball player can produce observations that can be generalized to team-sports, and that the behaviours and character traits of the potential servant-athlete being examined may transcend basketball.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of the study include its narrow scope in terms of the sport it is examining (i.e. basketball); the elite demographic the study is examining (i.e. a professional athlete); and the challenge of entering into a specific field of study with no previous research to which to refer on servant-athletes.

**Delineations**

It is important to recognize that there are some issues which I chose not to look at, in order to keep the focus of the study on its intended research questions. They include: the role of race and ethnicity in servant-leadership in sport; how geography and socioeconomic factors could influence servant-leadership in sport; and how celebrity could influence servant-leadership in sport.

**Significance of Study**

This study will introduce the idea of the servant-athlete, and begin to build a profile of how servant-leadership fits into sport, and the types of behaviours and character traits the servant-athlete may exhibit. If Steve Nash is found to possess the character traits of a servant-athlete, and exhibit the behaviours of a servant-athlete, servant-leadership scholars will have a model to which to look to further inform the field of study. Additionally, if servant-leadership is found to be an effective leadership philosophy in sport, athletes may begin to study the literature, and be more cognizant of the leadership style they choose to employ themselves, or choose to follow within the context of a team.

This first chapter has provided an introduction to this study, including background, introduction to the literature, problem and purpose statements, research objectives, research questions, and assumptions and limitations of the study. The second chapter reviews a wide body of relevant literature on servant-leadership, athletic leadership, as well as the small amount of research that has merged the two.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will examine the literature that is pertinent to this study, and will be divided into four separate sections: historical leadership overview, servant-leadership, athletic leadership, and servant leadership in sport.

### Historical Leadership Overview

In order to understand servant-leadership on a deeper level, it is important to put it in context by looking at some of the historical perspectives on modern leadership. Polleys (2002) writes that there were three separate and distinct models and periods of leadership in the twentieth century: The first theory, which was popular from 1910 to World War II, espoused the notion of the Great Man, in which leadership is based on personal character traits with which one is born. Bass (1981) went on to explain that the history of the world was written by these so-called ‘great men’, and that their leadership enabled societal progress. The ‘great man’ was purported to have a series of character traits that were innate and often hereditary, which made him a great leader by default (Bass, 1981, Polleys, 2002, Prosser, 2010). Great leaders were believed to be born, and not made, with one’s lineage and pedigree fundamentally influencing their hierarchical position (Crippen, 2005).

Following this period, leadership scholars began to look at what the leader does, or behavioural theory. It was postulated that behaviours which were tangible, and could be observed, formed the basis for leadership models (Polleys, 2002). According to Bass (in Polleys, 2002), the leader’s job was “to modify the organization in order to provide freedom for the individual to realize his potential for fulfilling his own needs and at the same time contributing toward accomplishing organizational goals.” (p. 122).

McGregor (1966) built on this idea, and postulated leadership could be based on two premises: Theory X contended that people were inherently indolent and unintelligent, leaving leaders with the task of controlling and motivating them. Theory Y was based on the premise that people innately possessed motivation, and were intelligent and creative. Accordingly, the leader's role was to set the conditions for people to experience success, while involving them in the process (Polleys, 2002).

The third period of leadership identified by Polleys (2002), which took root in the late 1960s, and is still prominent today, focused on where leadership takes place, taking into account the situational or cultural context. This notion is closely aligned with situational leadership, which sees the leader adjusting his or her leadership style depending on the developmental level of the people they are leading (Blanchard, 2008).

Building on this third model of leadership, looking at where the leadership takes place, is the concept of transformational leadership. Originally posited by James MacGregor Burns (1978), this type of leadership is described as having a leader who inspires the followers toward a shared vision, through intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and individual consideration (Bass, 1998; Chin & Smith, 2006; Smith, Montagno & Kuzmenko, 2004). Transformational leadership uses intellectual stimulation to encourage followers' creativity, and stimulate innovative thinking (Smith et al., 2004, p. 81), and one of the positive outcomes of this type of leadership can be the transformation of followers to leaders (Goddard, 2002). Transformational leadership shares much in common with servant-leadership, and the two have been compared in several studies (Chin & Smith, 2006; Smith et al., 2004), which will be addressed later in this chapter.

## **Servant-Leadership**

The idea of leaders serving their followers is far from a novel one, with historical roots dating as far back as early civilizations (Chin & Smith, 2006; Greenleaf, 1998, 2002; Reinke, 2004; Sipe & Frick, 2009). Chin and Smith (2006) write of ancient Egypt, and Moses choosing to renounce his opulent life, and vast wealth, to serve the slaves, and lead them out of slavery. Greenleaf (1998, 2002) mentions Jesus Christ as a servant leader, and points to many attributes and actions which confirm his belief—although he is careful not to align servant-leadership with any particular set of beliefs, keeping it inclusive and accessible. He also writes of Machiavelli having the traits of a servant-leader, and uses historical examples of American Quaker John Woolman, who helped rid the Society of Friends (Quakers) of slaves, and Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig, the Dane who helped establish Danish Folk High School, to further illustrate examples of servant-leadership (Greenleaf, 1998).

Greenleaf's (1998) motivation in writing on servant-leadership is clearly articulated in his works: it was a direct response to the immense challenges facing the world in his time—a leadership crisis, rife with tension and conflict—and the need for natural servants to have the courage to come forward and lead. According to Greenleaf, the servant-leader is “*primus inter pares*”, or first amongst equals (Greenleaf, 1998; Van Dierendonck, 2010). As evident in Greenleaf's best test quotation (see p.4), central to his definition of servant-leadership—though never presented as a definition—is the concept of putting the basic needs of one's followers first, from a place of genuine care and concern for the followers' needs (DeGraaf et al., 2001; Greenleaf, 1998; Powes & Moore; 2004).

As pointed out by Reinke (2004), Greenleaf wrote to the general populous, and did not clearly define the philosophy of servant-leadership, distinguish it from other leadership philosophies or theories, or explain how it could improve the performance of organizations (p. 30). This may at least partially explain why so many different theorists have attempted to define servant-leadership, create conceptual frameworks, or test it as a theory.

Laub (1999) defines servant-leadership as:

An understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader. Servant-leadership promotes the valuing and development of people; the building of community; the practice of authenticity; the providing of leadership for the good of those led; the sharing of power and status for the common good of each individual, the organization as a whole and those served by the organization. (p. 25)

Former executive director of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center Larry Spears's (Crippen, 2010) ten characteristics of servant-leaders is one of the most widely referenced frameworks on the philosophy, and uses Greenleaf's writings to identify the most salient characteristics (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Crippen, 2005, 2010; DeGraaf et al., 2004; Powers & Moore, 2004; Reinke, 2004; Sipe & Frick, 2009; Spears, 1998b; Van Dierendonck, 2010). The ten characteristics are summarized below:

### *Listening*

Greenleaf once wrote "only a true natural servant automatically responds to any problem by listening first" (2008, p. 45). By listening, Spears (2004) believes that servant-leaders identify and clarify the will of a group. Listening needs to be about

hearing what others say, and also about one's own internal voice, which leads to "a mindset that fosters such characteristics as empathy, awareness, foresight, and commitment to others" (DeGraaf, 2001, p.3).

Sipe and Frick (2009) discuss the idea of active listening, which goes beyond simply listening to words, and picks up on non-verbal cues, checking for understanding of the speaker's message, and giving the overall impression that the speaker's message is being heard (p. 60). In a famous best test quote, Greenleaf (2008) wrote:

The best test of whether we are communicating at this depth is to ask ourselves, first, are we really listening? Are we listening to the one we want to communicate to? Is our basic attitude, as we approach the confrontation, one of wanting to understand? (p. 19)

### *Empathy*

"The servant-leader strives to understand and empathize with others" (Spears, 2004, p. 8). Powers and Moore (2004) define empathy as "the act of seeking to understand the feelings of others in a given circumstance." (p. 15). Sipe and Frick (2009) define empathy as "being keenly aware of another's thoughts, feelings, and needs associated with an experience, and explicitly expressing to them a deep and caring understanding of their experience." (p. 54). Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) describe empathy as "the ability to appreciate the circumstances that others face" (p. 306). Servant-leaders who practice empathy "demonstrate a level of caring and appreciation that unconditionally affirms others; whoever they are, whatever their circumstances, allowing each person to feel understood and appreciated." (Sipe & Frick, 2009, p. 53).

Greenleaf (2008) eloquently explains that “the servant always accepts and empathizes, never rejects. The servant as leader always empathizes, always accepts the person but sometimes refuses to accept some of the person’s effort and performance as good enough.” (p. 21), and Crippen (2010) adds that “a good servant-leader strives to understand and empathize with others.” (p. 30).

### *Healing*

Spears (2004) argues that “one of the great strengths of servant-leadership is the potential for healing oneself and others.” (p. 8). Healing is predicated on the belief that “many people have broken spirits, and have suffered from a variety of emotional hurts.” (p. 9). Greenleaf recognized that the emotional wounds people experience become intertwined with the organizations or groups to which they belong (Powers & Moore, 2004, p. 18), and are unequivocal in the motive for helping others heal: for one’s own healing (Greenleaf, 1998, p. 38). Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) regarded healing as “an ability to recognize when and how to foster the healing process” (p. 24).

### *Awareness*

Spears (2004) observes that:

General awareness, and especially self-awareness, strengthens the servant-leader...Awareness also aides one in understanding issues involving ethics and values. It lends itself to being able to view most situations from a more integrated, holistic position. (p. 9).

Greenleaf (2008) writes:

The opening of awareness stocks both the conscious and unconscious minds with a richness of resources for future need. But it does more than that: it is value building

and value clarifying and it armors one to meet the stress of life by helping build serenity in the face of stress and uncertainty. (p. 29)

Covey (1989) touches on awareness when he discusses beginning with the end in mind, asking that his readers frame every decision and every moment with an awareness of how it will impact their final destination. Crippen (2010) writes that:

Servant leaders develop general awareness, especially self-awareness, through self-reflection, by listening to what others say about him, by being continually open to learning, and by making the connection between what they know and believe and what they say or do. (p. 31)

To further clarify the concept, Greenleaf (2008) famously wrote “awareness is *not* a giver of solace—it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed.” (p. 29).

Closely aligned with the notion of awareness is what Greenleaf (2008) terms withdrawal, which is described as “the ability to withdraw and reorient oneself, if only for a moment” (p. 20) He further writes that withdrawal:

Presumes that one has learned the art of systematic neglect, to sort out the more important from the less important—and the important from the urgent—and attend to the more important even though there may be penalties and censure for the neglect of something else...Pacing oneself by appropriate withdrawal is one of the best approaches to making optimal use of one’s resources. The servant-as-leader must constantly ask himself, how can I use my self to serve best? (pp. 20-21).

### *Persuasion*

Servant-leaders seek to make decisions based on persuasion, not by using their positional authority or inherent power (DeGraaf et al., 2001; Spears, 2004). Persuasion is sought by attempting to convince others, and build consensus, rather than by using coercion to force compliance (Crippen, 2010). Barbuto and Wheeler define persuasion as “an ability to influence others by means outside of formal authority” (p. 25). This method of arriving at decisions involves the sharing of power, and open and honest dialogue (DeGraaf et al., 2001). Greenleaf (2008) believed that “leadership by persuasion has the virtue of change by convincement rather than coercion. Its advantages are obvious.” (p. 31).

### *Conceptualization*

Spears (2004) describes conceptualization as being able to look beyond the day-to-day realities, which requires discipline and practice, and the ability to dream great dreams (p. 9). Greenleaf describes the traits of a conceptualizer as:

The ability to see the whole in the perspective of history—past and future—to state and adjust goals, to evaluate, to analyze, and to foresee contingencies a long way ahead. Leadership, in the sense of going out ahead to show the way, is more conceptual than operating. The conceptualizer, at his or her best, is a persuader and a relation builder.” (cited in Frick & Spears, 1996, p. 217)

Crippen (2010) further adds to the conversation, identifying conceptualization as having “a big picture perspective.” (p. 32). DeGraaf et al., (2001) believe that conceptualization requires life-long learning, and that:

Leaders must be able to focus this learning into specific priorities. If we have too many priorities, we can be paralyzed rather than empowered. Prioritizing the objectives for an organization demands that we conceptualize where we want to go to do our best. (p. 14)

### *Foresight*

Foresight is “the ability to foresee or know the likely outcome of a situation” (Crippen, 2005, p. 8). According to Spears (2004 ):

Foresight is a characteristic that enables the servant-leader to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future. It is also deeply rooted within the intuitive mind. (p. 9)

Greenleaf’s (1998) thoughts on foresight are profound and enlightening:

The prudent man is he who constantly thinks of “now” as the moving concept in which past, present moment, and future are one organic unity. And this requires living by a sort of rhythm that encourages a high level of intuitive insight about the whole gamut of events from the indefinite past, through the present moment, to the indefinite future. One is at once, in every moment of time, historian, contemporary analyst, and prophet—not three separate roles. This is what the practicing leader is, every day of his life. (p. 26)

Greenleaf further underscores the importance of foresight by stating that “foresight is the ‘lead’ that the leader has. Once he loses this lead and events start to force his hand, he is leader in name only.” (p. 27). Sipe and Frick (2009) also write extensively on the importance and value of foresight, and offer that “foresight is a practical strategy for making decisions and leading” (p. 106) and add that “knowing how to access intuition is

a prerequisite for developing foresight and, for that matter, fully understanding Servant Leadership” (p. 106).

### *Stewardship*

The notion of stewardship is one that runs throughout *The Servant as Leader* (Greenleaf, 1998), although it is not directly labeled so. Greenleaf prefers the term trustee, and defines it simply as “a person in whom ultimate trust is placed” (p. 41). He further explains that the trustee stands at a distance from the day-to-day operations of an organization—he describes this as a level of detachment—and oversees the organization’s active leaders (p. 41).

Reinke (2004) sees stewardship as integrally linked to the definition of servant-leadership, and writes:

The servant-leader is a steward who holds the organization in trust to the public it serves, while remaining intimately attuned to the needs and situations of those who work in the organization and sincerely committed to empowering others to succeed professionally and personally.” (p. 31).

According to Powers and Moore (2004), the steward “guards or protects something of great value” (p. 24), and must foster “a shared sense of community and culture committed to the growth of each individual” (p. 24). They also believe that the steward must be “responsible for nurturing a culture of personal responsibility and accountability” (p. 25), and, perhaps most importantly, lead by example through their conduct (p. 25). Leading by example is also something that is tacit throughout Greenleaf’s writing (Greenleaf, 1998, 2002).

Sipe and Frick's (2009) first pillar of servant-leadership (refer to explanation in chapter 1) is *person of character*, which emphasizes the importance of servant-leaders being honest, trustworthy and humble, and leading with conscience, rather than ego (p. 15). This set of criteria seems closely aligned with leading by example, and ultimately, stewardship.

#### *Commitment to the growth of people*

Spears (2004) writes that “servant-leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As a result, the servant-leader is deeply committed to the growth of each and every individual within the institution” (p. 9). Crippen (2005) adds to this thought, by stating that servant-leaders will “do everything they can to nurture others” (p. 9). DeGraaf et al. (2001) explains that “servant-leaders believe that people have intrinsic value and as much must be as deeply committed to the growth of the individual as they are to the collective” (p. 6).

Sipe and Frick (2009) identify *puts people first* as their second pillar of servant leadership, and believe that the servant-leader must lead in a manner that allows those who they serve to grow (p. 34), and that the servant-leader's self-interest must be closely connected to the needs and interests of others (p. 34). They further explain “when we act as *servant* to others, we are concerned with the full range of *their* knowledge, skills, emotional and behavioral dynamics” (p. 36).

#### *Building Community*

Greenleaf's (2008) writings express a deep concern for the loss of community, and he gives examples such as families and communities no longer caring less for the old, and instead putting them into institutions; and hospital care being set-up for convenience

and economics, rather than based on love and a sense of community, helping the sick get better (p. 38). He believes that love is the foundation that holds such communities together, and observes:

Where there is not community, trust, respect, ethical behaviour are difficult for the young to learn and for the old to maintain. Living in a community as one's basic involvement will generate an exportable surplus of love which the individual may carry into his many involvements with institutions which are usually not communities: businesses, churches, governments, schools. (p. 40)

Spears (2004) sums up Greenleaf's thoughts in the following way:

The servant-leader senses that much has been lost in recent human history as a result of the shift from local communities to large institutions as the primary shaper of human lives...servant-leadership suggests that true community can be created among those who work in businesses and other institutions. (p. 10)

DeGraaf et al. (2001) write that "a community is a sum of its parts, so a good community must be made up of virtuous citizens" (p. 23), and that "we must provide opportunities to develop a variety of virtues, such as empathy, stewardship, patience, humility, awareness, and diligence within our organizations" (p. 24). Sipe and Frick (2009) write of servant-leaders being compassionate collaborators, who strive to build "caring, collaborative teams and communities" (p. 77).

In their integrative framework for looking at servant-leadership, Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) use Spears' ten characteristics, and also add *calling* to the list. Citing Greenleaf's belief that "the motivation of leaders must begin with the conscious choice to serve others" (p. 304), and Bass's assertion that servant-leaders are more likely to have

their objective as selfless, compared to other leadership styles (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006, p. 304), Barbuto and Wheeler define calling as “a desire to serve and willingness to sacrifice self-interest for the benefit of others” (p. 305).

With Greenleaf (2002, 2008) anchoring the body of literature, and Spears’ (1998a, 1998b, 2004) ten characteristics widely used to further inform the philosophy, there are many other papers and studies which have examined servant-leadership from different perspectives. While those closest to Greenleaf’s writings refer to servant-leadership as a philosophy (Prosser, 2010), there is a growing body of research which attempts to empirically examine servant-leadership. Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) sought to quantitatively examine the philosophy, using Spears’s ten characteristics, as well as their eleventh characteristic of calling. They further distilled the eleven characteristics down to five: altruistic calling, emotional healing, wisdom, persuasive mapping and organizational stewardship. They concluded that servant-leadership created stronger relationships with followers than transformational leadership, and also produced strong relationships with employee satisfaction, employee effort and perceptions of organizational effectiveness (p. 322).

Horsman (2008) examined the relationship between servant-leadership and spirit within organizations, using Greenleaf’s definition of spirit as “the animating force that disposes persons to be servants of others” (p. 83). The study looked at several components of the link between servant-leadership and spirit, including the perceived extent of servant-leadership characteristics in a variety of organizations; whether there was a perceived link between servant-leadership and organizational spirit; and the congruity between personal dimensions of spirit and work life. The study found a

statistically significant relationship between servant-leadership, and personal dimensions of spirit, and concluded that “greater levels of servant-leadership may reflect higher levels of personal dimensions of spirit, and vice-versa” (p. 94).

Van Dierendonck (2010) set out to examine the current servant-leadership literature, and establish “an overall framework highlighting the most important antecedents, underlying processes and consequence” (p. 2). Building on his assertion that “servant-leaders empower and develop people; they show humility, are authentic, accept people for who they are, provide direction, and are stewards who work for the good of the whole” (p. 5), he identifies six key characteristics of servant-leader behavior: empower and develop people, show humility, are authentic, accept people for who they are, provide direction, and are stewards who work for the good of the whole (p. 5). Van Dierendonck (2010) uses this framework to compare and contrast servant-leadership with seven other prominent theories of leadership: transformational leadership, authentic leadership, ethical leadership, Jim Collins’ level 5 leadership, empowering leadership, spiritual leadership and self-sacrificing leadership (p. 8). He discovered that all seven leadership theories share *some* of the servant-leadership characteristics, but that none shared all six, putting servant-leadership in a unique position (p. 11).

The article also looks at the consequences of servant-leadership, under the categories of: the motivation to become a servant-leader; individual characteristics; culture; relationships between the servant-leader and follower; the psychological climate; follower outcomes of servant-leadership; organizational outcomes; and the reciprocal nature of the leader-follower relationship (pp. 16-23). Using the best research available

on servant-leadership, Van Dierendonck discusses the consequences at length, and finds many positive outcomes under each under each of the categories.

Van Dierendonck (2010) concludes that servant-leadership holds much promise in the context of organizations, and states that it comes close to the style of leadership which Plato described in *The Republic* (p. 27).

Reinke (2004) examines the interplay between servant-leadership and trust, and how this relationship impacts the level of trust within organizations. The author believes servant-leadership is an appealing idea to the general public, as it emphasizes the virtues of “principled, open, caring leadership” (p. 30). However, she believes that “servant-leadership as currently articulated is an idealistic vision” (p. 30), and expresses concern for the lack of a concise definition. Her paper goes on to break servant-leader traits down to three broad categories: openness, vision and stewardship. She writes that these categories “build the community of trust that improves organizational performance” (p. 35).

The study is conducted on a sample of public-sector employees from a suburban county in Georgia (U.S.A), using a survey-type instrument. The results supported Greenleaf’s belief that “a leader who is open to communication with subordinates, possesses a vision for the organization, and behaves as an ethical steward can improve the level of trust within an organization” (cited in Reinke, 2004, p. 37), and also found that the most powerful predictor of the level of trust in an organization was leaders who put their employees’ needs before their own (p. 38).

Smith et al. (2004) compared servant-leadership to transformational leadership, identifying areas of overlap, and suggesting the types of organizational climates which

would be best suited for each type of leadership. As discussed earlier, transformational leadership is described as having a leader who inspires followers through a shared vision, through intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and individual consideration (Smith et al., 2004; Bass, 1998). They proposed servant-leadership would lead to a “spiritual generative culture while transformational leadership would lead to an empowered dynamic culture (Smith et al., 2004, p. 84). They define a spiritual generative culture as “one in which the members are focused on the personal growth of themselves and others, and the organizational systems that facilitate that growth” and further describe the servant-leader’s role as “to facilitate the emergence of a community within an organization” (p. 84). Smith et al. (2004) come to the conclusion that servant-leadership is best suited for static environments, while transformational leadership is more appropriate for dynamic environments that are high pressure, and constantly changing (p. 85). The crux of this argument is that servant-leadership is built on persuasion and consensus building, which takes more time than is available in a rapidly changing environment.

McClellan (2008) refutes the claims of Smith et al. citing an “over simplified of understanding of Greenleaf’s work on servant-leadership” (p. 293), taking specific aim at the claims of Smith et al. that the literature on servant-leadership doesn’t advocate for risk taking or innovation (Smith et al. cited in McClellan, 2008, p. 293), which is backed by multiple authors (Greenleaf, 2002, 2008; Sipe & Frick, 2009). To provide further evidence, Sipe and Frick (2009) examine several servant-led companies, many of which are listed among *Fortune* magazine’s “Top 100 Companies to Work For in America”. The end result was that many of these companies experienced more success than non-

servant led companies, such as The Container Store, Starbucks and Southwest Airlines (p. 2). McClellan further takes aim at some of the criticisms of servant-leadership, such as that it is soft, too touchy feely, has religious overtones, or is not appropriate for struggling companies, or during times of stress (Showkeir as cited in McClellan, 2008, p. 293). He writes that his claim “overlooks the emphasis on tough minded leadership that demands that people and institutions perform to high standards” (p. 293). McClellan (2008) adds that Greenleaf believed leaders must be “self-driven and confident, provide ideas, take risks, provide vision, articulate and achieve goals, expect people to do their best, and lead the way” (p. 288), and also:

Be concerned with the personal and emotional growth of others, be humble, be open and receptive, recognize great ideas, act with responsibility and unlimited liability, identify and follow a vision, listen to and learn from others, and accept failure. (p. 289)

Greenleaf (2008) further dispels the notion of servant-leadership being soft by explaining:

Stress is a condition of most of modern life, and if one is a servant-leader and carrying the burdens of other people—going out ahead to show the way, one takes the rough and tumble (and it really is rough and tumble in some leader roles), one takes this in the belief that, if one enters a situation prepared with the necessary experience and knowledge at the conscious level, *in the situation* the intuitive insight necessary for one’s optimal performance will be forthcoming. (p. 26)

Chin and Smith (2006) further inform the comparison between transformational leadership and servant-leadership by pointing out that the two separate types of

leadership share some parallels in the values of justice, equity and human rights (p. 8). They also note that servant-leadership “transcends these values by serving others as the highest priority, motivated by their spiritual beliefs” (p. 8).

In the face of a growing tendency to measure servant-leadership empirically, through quantitative research (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006; Chung et al., 2010; Hammermeister et al, 2008; Horsman, 2008; Mayer et al., 2008; Reinke, 2004, Sun & Wang, 2009; Taylor et al., 2007; Van Dierendonck, 2010; Washington, Sutton & Field, 2006), it is worth looking at whether servant-leadership is best viewed as a theory of leadership, or a philosophy of leadership. In Prosser’s (2010) booklet *Servant Leadership: More Philosophy, Less Theory*, he probes into this contentious argument with great depth. He begins by citing prominent leadership scholars Ken Blanchard, Steven Covey, Peter Senge and Margaret Wheatley, as well as servant-leadership scholars Larry Spears and Kent Keith, and how their views on servant-leadership are more consistent with a philosophy than a theory (p. 8).

Prosser (2010) further presents six reasons why he views servant-leadership as a philosophy:

1. The evidence from the ‘great to the good’: referring to the wide array of leadership scholars who support the idea of servant-leadership as a philosophy.
2. The principal focus is on being a servant: a servant who leads, not on being a leader: The fundamental underpinning of servant-leadership is leaders who choose to first serve, with the focus of the philosophy being on the interplay of the two terms. Prosser argues that it is this principle that makes it difficult to simply label it a leadership theory.

3. If there is a theory of anything, it should be a theory of servanthood: given the focus on the principles of service and being a servant, which predicates all other ideas behind servant-leadership, Prosser argues that a theory of servanthood is more appropriate.
4. Effective servant-leaders adopt various styles of leadership: Prosser writes of how servant-leaders can use many different styles of leadership, and still be “faithful to the principles and practice of servant-leadership” (p. 35).
5. Greenleaf’s career saw him move from ‘theory’ to ‘philosophy’: Greenleaf’s career at AT&T saw him oversee leadership projects that were more theory in nature, and are a stark contrast to his second career as a writer and lecturer.
6. To see servant-leadership as only a leadership theory risks missing the depth of Greenleaf’s thinking: Prosser writes that to view servant-leadership as a theory would devalue the “philosophical, moral, spiritual, historical, cultural and intellectual fascination inherent with his work” (p. 41).

### **Athletic Leadership Literature**

While there is a paucity of literature focusing on servant-leadership in sport, there is considerably more written on the general principles of athletic leadership.

Aoyagi, Cox and McGuire (2008) used a concept known as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and examined its link to leadership, cohesion and satisfaction. Organ (1998) defines OCB as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal rewards system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (p. 4). For the purpose of the study, the authors broke OCB down into five categories: helping, conscientiousness,

sportsmanship, courtesy, and civic virtue. The study used a sample of 281 American student-athletes, from a large Division I university, and a smaller Division III school, with participants voluntarily responding to a series of questions, using a Likert-style response system (Aoyagi et al., 2008).

The study found an association between leadership and cohesion; an association between satisfaction and OCB; and an association between satisfaction and cohesion (Aoyagi et al., 2008). It also found that OCB is a valid measure of team effectiveness in sport, and “demonstrated significant correlations in the hypothesized direction with team cohesion, athlete satisfaction, and the training and instruction and positive feedback aspects of leadership behavior” (p. 37).

One of the more salient points of this study is that it indicates a link between team cohesion and team performance, which is well documented in the sport psychology literature (Brown, 2003; Mullen & Cooper, 1994). Team cohesion would appear to be related to the servant-leadership traits of building community, and more specifically, building relationships.

Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur and Hardy (2009) examined transformational leadership behaviours, and their relationship with cohesion. The study found that “fostering acceptance of group goals and promoting teamwork, high performance expectation, and individual consideration predicted task cohesion.” (Callow et al., 2009, p. 407).

Kavussanu and Roberts (2001) examined task-orientation and ego-orientation in sport, using the achievement goal perspective in which it is assumed that athletes’ motivation is the demonstration of competence in achievement situations (p. 38). They

challenge the notion that sport is a vehicle to teach fair play, courage and the virtues of fairness, kindness and sportsmanship, and postulate that:

When ego orientation prevails, the athlete is motivated to demonstrate superiority, usually in the form of winning. When winning is at stake, the ego-oriented athlete will be tempted to choose between a behavior that helps accomplish this goal, even if the behavior is not congruent with his or her moral ideals.(Kavussanu & Roberts, 2001, p. 39)

Conversely, when task-orientation is observed, they expected sport could be used as a vehicle to teach sportsmanship and good citizenship. The results were somewhat surprising, with athletes scoring high on task orientation, moderately high in ego orientation, yet strongly rejecting notions of unsportsmanlike or unethical behavior (Kavussanu & Roberts, 2001). The ideas put forth on the task-orientation side of the spectrum, with athletes eschewing unethical behavior to get ahead of competitors, seem consistent with the servant-leadership philosophy.

Kavussanu and Boardley (2009) looked at moral behavior in sport, and specifically pro-social and anti-social behavior, using the variables of empathy, task orientation and ego orientation. The study revealed more pro-social behaviours than anti-social, which was inconsistent with previous studies on moral behavior in sport (Kavussanu and Boardley, 2009). Empathy was positively related to pro-social opponent behavior, and negatively to anti-social behavior. A small correlation was found between task orientation and pro-social teammate behavior, and ego-orientation showed small to moderate correlations with anti-social behavior (p. 114).

Loughead and Hardy (2005) used a study on 238 Canadian athletes to investigate the nature of coach and peer leadership behavior in sport. They used a tool called the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS), which breaks leadership behavior down into five dimensions: training and instruction, democratic behavior, autocratic behavior, social support, and positive feedback. The results indicated that:

Coaches were perceived by athletes as exhibiting greater amounts of training and instruction, and autocratic behavior than peer leaders. Conversely, peer leaders were perceived by athletes to display the leadership behaviours of social support, positive feedback, and democratic decision making behaviours to a greater extent than coaches. (p. 310)

This study also indicated that athletes, on average, perceive close to one quarter of their peers to be a source of peer-leadership—a number which clearly extends beyond the formal leadership roles of captains (Loughead & Hardy, 2005). This article provides important evidence that athletes perceive their peer leaders to be exhibiting behaviours consistent with servant-leadership. Social support is tantamount to healing, empathy and relationship building, and democratic decision making involves consensus building and decision making by persuasion.

Loughead, Hardy and Eys (2006) examined team dynamics, and the nature of player leadership within different teams, and broke down team leadership into two categories: team leaders, who influence a large number of players on the team, and player leaders, who influence fewer players on the team. The authors looked at these two types of team leaders and their relationship to three different types of leadership behaviours; task leadership (leading the group through its task objectives), social leadership

(attending to the needs of team members), and external leadership (adapting and coping to matters external to the team) (Loughead et al., 2006, p. 144-145).

The study looks at many of the intricacies of team leadership, including the formal vs. informal leadership positions, team seniority, skill level, and whether a player is a starter. The results indicated that team leaders often hold formal leadership positions on a team—such as a team captain or co-captain—are usually starters, and are usually more senior members of a team (p. 150). This finding is consistent with those of a frequently cited study conducted by Yukelson, Weinbert, Richardson and Jackson (1983).

Sullivan and Gee (2007) use a quantitative approach to look at the relationship between athletic satisfaction and intra-team communication, looking at the variables of performance, leadership, the team, the organization, and the individual athlete. The authors point out the documented link between communication and team cohesion (p. 108), and that both athlete satisfaction and intra-team communication can influence team performance (p. 115). The results clearly indicated a link between intra-team communication and athletic satisfaction on teams. Among the components of intra-team communication looked at (acceptance of teammates, distinctiveness of the team, positive conflict between teammates and negative conflicts within the team), acceptance of teammates was found to be the most important, impacting the greatest number of outcomes (p. 114).

### **Servant-Leadership in Sport**

In examining the literature on athletic leadership, it can be seen that there is significant crossover between athletic leadership and servant-leadership, most notably in the themes of building relationships, building community, empathy, and caring for the

needs of others. A search of major academic databases reveals only three current studies that specifically examine servant-leadership in the context of sport, with all three looking at the coach's perspective, and none looking at the player's perspective.

Westre's (2008) qualitative study examines athletic coaches through the lens of servant-leadership, and uses anecdotal evidence gathered from American Division III football coaches. The author cites Chelladurai's research as seminal in this field, identifying two salient trends in the coaching literature: 1.) Athletes prefer coaches who are democratic in their decision making process, as opposed to autocratic, and 2.) Coaches who placed the highest priority on athletes' feelings and need are the most effective (p. 124).

The study identifies six key themes from the data analysis:

1. *A different perspective on winning and success:* For the coaches in this study, a greater emphasis was placed on the process of competing, rather than exclusively the outcome. They measured success in terms of athlete development, as opposed to wins and losses.
2. *Empowerment of athletes through the establishment of ownership in the program:* The coaches all valued the genuine contribution from athletes, and pointed out a difference between "real empowerment and perfunctory delegation of leadership responsibilities" (p. 131). The coaches noted that such real involvement and empowerment of the athletes improved the overall productivity of the team.
3. *Team cohesion and relationships among members:* The coaches all spoke of the value in creating strong bonds and relationships between the players, and between players and coaches. The author believed that such relationships would help

create a team culture of players being more likely to serve one another, and used intentional strategies to help foster such bonds.

4. *Motivational techniques*: “Each coach felt that love as a motivational technique, based on sincere caring and compassion, would generate the highest commitment from the athletes” (p. 132). The coaches used internal motivational systems, and often used guided-discovery and dialogue.
5. *Risk Taking and Innovation*: The coaches noted that using the servant-leadership philosophy, in a sport traditionally run by tough, autocratic coaches, has its inherent risks. It is a philosophy that is relatively unestablished in sport, and the coaches reported using innovative strategies to help build the culture they wanted, which also carried a level of risk.
6. *The cost of being a servant-leader coach*: Implementing the servant-leadership philosophy can be accompanied by challenges, particularly when following the path of a leader who used a more autocratic style of leadership. Westre talked about tremendous sacrifices of time, causing strain on personal relationships with family and friends, as being a major cost. Another potential cost, once the servant-leadership model has been established and the players buy into it, is access to a great deal of power and influence which the servant-leader may not be used to or initially comfortable with.

This study provides insight into the athletics coach as a servant-leader, and the behaviours and qualities such an individual might demonstrate. This study also shows that servant-leadership can be implemented in an athletic environment with some degree

of success. Westre (2008) points out that servant-leadership is not a panacea however, and that it can be challenging to implement.

Hammermeister et al. (2008) add to the body of servant-leadership literature looking at coaching, with their quantitative study examining how coaches' behaviours impact collegiate athletes' intrinsic motivation, sport satisfaction and athletic coping skills. They used a sample of 251 college athletes from two American universities, and utilized seven different quantitative data instruments. The authors hypothesized that servant-leadership, with its emphasis on serving the needs of others, would result in more satisfied athletes.

Hammermeister et al. (2008) confirmed that servant-leader coached players demonstrated higher levels of satisfaction with their personal performance, and were more personally dedicated to their sport and teams than their counterparts led by non-servant-leader coaches (p. 202). Athletes led by servant-leader coaches also “experienced less pressure and tension than did their counterparts who played for benevolent dictators” (p. 202). Additionally, servant-leader coached athletes were better at coping with adversity, worried less, scored significantly higher in areas of self-confidence, and were more coachable than athletes coached by non-servant-leaders (pp. 202-203). The data also indicated that servant-leader coaches produced more intrinsically motivated athletes; produced athletes with a stronger task orientation, due to their “emphasis on process goals related to trust, humility, and service” (p. 207); and “produced athletes who demonstrated stronger athletic coping skills and more self-confidence” (p. 208).

The authors suggest that “truly effective and legitimate leaders place service to others ahead of personal power and control” (p. 204).

Reinke, Hammermeister and Chase (2008) conducted a similar study, examining the hypothesis that athletes who perceived their coach as a servant-leader would “demonstrate more satisfaction with their sport experience, have better use and understanding of mental skills, and display more intrinsically motivated behavior than their peers who are not coached by servant-leaders” (p. 229). Additionally, Reinke et al. examine how servant-leader coaches influenced the performance of high school basketball players, by looking at athletes’ personal expectations and teams’ win-loss records, and whether athletes preferred the servant-leader coaching model.

They used a sample group of 195 male high-school varsity players, who played for 20 separate teams in a summer sport camp at an American university, and used six separate instruments to generate the quantitative data. The results showed that athletes coached by servant-leaders displayed “higher intrinsic motivation, were more task-oriented, were more satisfied, were ‘mentally tougher’, and performed better than athletes coached by non-servant leaders” (p. 227). The results also indicated that athletes coached by servant-leaders preferred this style of coaching to more traditional types of coaching. Perhaps most interestingly, upon analysis of athletes’ perceived team performance expectations and actual number of team wins, the authors concluded that “quite simply...servant-leader coaches win more often than their non-servant-leader counterparts” (p. 236).

The three papers that do address servant-leadership in the context of sport, though they examine the role of the coach and not the athlete, indicate that servant-leadership in the context of sport is a pairing with much promise, which has already been implemented successfully. The review of servant-leadership and athletic leadership literature reveals

many similarities and much crossover between the two areas, which also supports the belief this is an idea worth exploring.

### **Value Transmission**

In order to help inform Research Questions #2 (See Chapter 1), it is necessary to briefly examine the literature surrounding value transmission, with a specific emphasis on how experiences in childhood impact values and character later in life.

Padilla-Walker (2007) found that children are particularly vulnerable to messages surrounding values during the adolescent period of their lives. Barni, Ranieri, Scabini and Rosnati (2011) supported Padilla-Walker's findings, adding that adolescence is the time for identity development. Knafo and Schwartz's (2009) research on parent-adolescent value transmission found that children's accuracy of perception of parents' values, as well as acceptance of those values, were predictors of parent-child value congruence.

Rohan and Zanna's (1996) research also confirmed a link between parents and value transmission, with a specific emphasis on how parental characteristics influence the transmission of values, and children's likelihood of adopting similar values to their parents. It was found that parent responsiveness (trustworthiness, fairness and lack of hypocrisy) was linked to value transmission, with responsive parents more likely to successfully transmit values, and adult children with positive opinions of their parents being more likely to use them as models.

### **Steve Nash**

Steve Nash is a South African born, Canadian professional basketball player, currently playing for the Los Angeles Lakers, of the National Basketball Association (NBA) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve\\_Nash](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve_Nash))—the largest, most prominent

professional basketball league in the world (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nba>). Raised in Victoria, British Columbia, Nash grew up playing a multitude of sports, including baseball, lacrosse, soccer and ice hockey, but it was basketball that would prove to be his true talent (Rudd, 1996, 2006). Raised by his parents, John and Ann Nash, Nash learned the value of hard-work, and developed a solid work ethic from an early age (Rudd, 2006). It also became evident at an early age that he was a caring, compassionate player, who always put the needs of his teammates before his own (Rudd, 1996, 2006).

Nash plays the position of point-guard, which brings the ball up the court, is responsible for organizing plays on the court, and is a natural leadership position. In his grade eleven year he made the difficult and controversial choice, to transfer from his public high school to a nearby independent school, St. Michaels University School (Rudd, 1996, 2006). Due to eligibility rules, he had to sit-out his grade eleven year, but would go on to lead St. Michaels University School to the 1992 British Columbia AAA High School Basketball Championship, also picking up tournament most valuable player honours (Rudd, 1996, 2006). He battled against improbable odds to attend Division I American College, Santa Clara, despite a lack of exposure to U.S. talent scouts, and being told many times his goal of playing college basketball was unrealistic (Rudd, 1996, 2006). In his storied four year career with Santa Clara, he led the Broncos to three NCAA Tournament appearances, and was twice named the West Coast Conference Player of the Year (Rudd, 1996, 2006). He would go on to graduate as Santa Clara's all-time assist leader, and enter the NBA Draft in 1996. He was selected 15<sup>th</sup> overall by the Phoenix Suns, and would go on to make 8 NBA All-Star Appearance, as a Phoenix Sun and

Dallas Maverick, and win two NBA Most Valuable Player Awards, becoming the first Canadian player to win the prestigious award (Rudd, 2006).

During his tenure with the Dallas Mavericks, Nash's tendency towards unselfish play actually caused conflict with his then coach, Don Nelson, who struggled to persuade Nash to play more selfishly, and to shoot the ball more, and pass the ball less (Hoffer, 2001). Fellow Maverick teammate, Michael Finley was quoted as saying "his first objective is keeping everyone else in the game" (Hoffer 2001, p. 103). Nash was eventually able to adjust his style of play to strike a balance between passing and scoring, and became the acknowledged leader of the Dallas Mavericks (Hoffer, 2001).

As a Dallas Maverick, Nash was selected to participate in the 2003 All-Star Game, in Atlanta, Georgia. During this time, the United States was engaged in a controversial military conflict in Iraq, which Nash felt was in opposition to his personal beliefs and values. During a pre-game press-conference, Nash wore a t-shirt that said 'No War: Shoot for Peace', which stirred up a flurry of controversy in the state of Texas, with some fans even threatening to cancel their season tickets package (Deacon, 2003).

Speaking in response to the situation, Nash explained:

I don't want to single out the United States, because we're not perfect in Canada either. I think war is wrong. You'd think we'd have evolved to the point where we'd stop shooting one another. Maybe that's just wishful thinking, but that's what I hope...It was a risk I was willing to take, because I feel it's a time when all of us need to take more of a role in things. (Deacon, 2003, p. 51)

Nash also had an integral role in Canada's National Team, playing in multiple tournaments over the years, and captaining the team in the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

Hoffer writes that Nash enjoyed the democratic basketball that was played in the Olympics, where all players are treated equal (2001). Nash did everything with the team, eschewing the opportunity to fly first class while the rest of the team was in coach, and refusing to eat alone or have his own room to himself (Hoffer, 2001).

One of the most famous stories of Nash's selfless, team-first ethos came from the Sydney Olympics, and was told by Coach Jay Triano. Nash asked Triano to distribute \$25000 equally to his teammates who did not make the high NBA salaries he and another teammate were fortunate to receive; and he was clear that he did not want his teammates to know it had come from him (Hoffer, 2001).

Nash's charitable work is extensive, with his Steve Nash Foundation helping kids affected by poverty, neglect, abuse and illness, through empowerment and education ([www.stevenash.org](http://www.stevenash.org)). When the Vancouver Grizzlies left Vancouver, and also left the six-figure tab for a local basketball program, Nash was quick to pick it up, ensuring the program continued to run (Hoffer, 2001). He also has a tendency to insist many of his charitable contributions remain anonymous, as he does not wish to seek credit for them (Deacon, 2003).

His teammates and coaches speak very highly of him, and provide even more insight into his character. Former coach Del Harris describes him as a quality person, who is very intelligent and mature, and "always thinks before he speaks" (Deacon, 2003, p. 49). Former coach Steve Kerr describes him as having a creative mind, while former teammate A'mare Stoudemire describes him as having an interest in different sports and different cultures (Pierce, 2010). Deacon writes that Nash is uncomfortable with being singled out while his teammates are not there (2003).

Nash has many interests beyond sport, which show the depth and breadth of his character. His politics are, self-admittedly, left of centre, and he talks of interests in health care and human rights (Pierce, 2010). Though considered by most to be a major celebrity, his thoughts on celebrity are a refreshing departure, and he describes it as “a pain in the ass, and it is to be wary of” (Pierce, 2010, p. 59). “What is celebrity anyway? I’ve seen how it works in my own life, and with other celebrities, and it’s a horribly distorted view of the world. These are normal people.” (Deacon 2003, p. 51).

He has a particular interest in filmmaking, and produced a film for ESPN’s popular Thirty for Thirty Series, on Canadian icon, Terry Fox, who attempted to run across Canada on a prosthetic leg, before succumbing to cancer before his journey was finished. His everyday life is replete with examples of his character and beliefs, such as his high profile stance on environmental issues—he drives a hybrid car, sat on the Phoenix Suns’ Green Committee, and even wears environmentally friendly shoes (Nash & McCallum, 2008).

The literature on Nash is plentiful and wide-ranging, and points to an exceptional athlete, recognized leader, and man with moral character extending well-beyond basketball.

In chapter 2 I reviewed the relevant literature, under five separate categories: servant-leadership, athletic leadership, servant-leadership in sport, values transmission and Steve Nash. There are many themes that run throughout both the servant-leadership literature and athletic leadership literature, though the terminology used is not always the same. While the research that has examined servant-leadership in sport looks at coaches, it is promising, and provides evidence that the philosophy is compatible with sport and

athletes, and is currently being implemented in many athletic programs in North America.

Chapter 3 presents the methods which were used in this study.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The method for this study is informed by qualitative research methods, and uses the strategy of a case study, with the specific approach of a qualitative research interview. the strategy of a case study, with specific emphasis on a qualitative research interview. Creswell (2009) writes that “qualitative inquiry employs different philosophical assumptions; strategies of inquiry; and methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation” (p. 173). “Qualitative research is interpretative research, with the inquirer typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants” (p. 177). Qualitative methods were not always widely accepted in the academic community, and there was a time when such methods were viewed as un-scholarly and lacking legitimacy (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2012). In recent years qualitative inquiry has become more widely accepted, and a clear consensus has been built around what qualitative inquiry should look like (Creswell, 2009).

In order to help clarify the nature of qualitative research, Creswell (2009) offers the following list of characteristics:

- *Natural setting*: Researchers collect data “at the site where the participants experience the issue or problem under study” (p. 175). The natural setting often involves speaking directly to people, and seeing them behave in a natural environment (p. 175).
- *Researcher as key instrument*: Qualitative researchers gather the data themselves, as opposed to relying on others. The data collection may involve examining documents, observing behaviour, or interviewing participants, but rarely uses questionnaires or other instruments (p. 175).

- *Multiple sources of data:* Qualitative researchers tend to utilize multiple sources of data, as opposed to relying on a single source (p. 175).
- *Inductive data analysis:* “Qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories and themes from the bottom up, by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information” (p. 175). The emphasis is on the interplay between the themes and the database, with the themes evolving and changing as the study progresses (p. 175).
- *Participants’ meanings:* The researcher must keep the focus on the meaning that participants ascribe to the research problem, and not the meaning that the researcher brings to the particular topic (p. 175).
- *Emergent design:* The initial plan for the research should be flexible, with the researcher open to change after data collection has begun. This may involve changes in the questions posed, the individuals studied, or the forms of data collected (p. 176).
- *Theoretical lens:* The qualitative researcher may use lens to view their studies, such as “identifying the social, political, or historical context of the problem under study” (p. 176).
- *Interpretive:* “Qualitative research is a form of interpretive inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand” (p. 176). It is recognized that researchers’ interpretations are influenced by their own personal experiences, backgrounds and context, and that the reader of a given study will also make interpretations with the same biases (p. 176).

- *Holistic account*: The qualitative researcher attempts to present a thorough and complex account of the issue being studied. “This involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges (p. 176).

### **The Case Study**

Under the umbrella of qualitative research methods, there are more specific strategies of inquiry which can be used, dealing with data collection, analysis and writing (Creswell, 2009). Case studies are “a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals” (Creswell, p. 13). Yin (2009) defines case studies as “an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a “case”), set within its real-world context—especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Case studies are intended to produce a deep understanding of a particular case, “hopefully resulting in new learning about real-world behaviour and its meaning” (Yin, 2012, p. 4).

Yin (2012) explains three sets of circumstances in which case studies are an appropriate research method: 1.) The research “addresses either a *descriptive* question—“What is happening or has happened?”—or an *explanatory* question—“How or why did something happen?” (p. 5). 2.) It is desirable to collect data on a particular phenomenon in the real-world context, or natural setting (p. 5.). 3.) Case studies have been documented to be an effective means of conducting evaluations. (p. 5)

Rowley (2002) notes that “case studies have often been viewed as a useful tool for the preliminary, exploratory stage of a research project, as a basis for the development of

the ‘more structured’ tools that are necessary in surveys and experiments” (p. 16).

Eisenhardt (1989) adds that case studies are:

Particularly well suited to new research areas or research areas for which existing theory seems inadequate. This type of work is highly complementary to incremental theory building from normal science research. The former is useful in early stages of research on a topic or when a fresh perspective is needed, whilst the latter is useful in later stages of knowledge (pp. 548-449).

Yin (2012) believes that the notion of case studies being best suited for exploratory research is actually one of the common criticisms and misconceptions surrounding case studies, and has led some to believe that case studies are less rigorous than other methods, and are a last resort (p. 5). He emphatically refutes this assertion, and writes that “case study research goes well beyond exploratory functions. In other words, all the methods can cover the entire range of situations, from initial exploration to the completion of full and final authoritative studies, without calling on any other methods” (pp. 5-6).

Case studies have also been criticized for a perceived “lack of trust in the credibility of a case study researcher’s procedures” (p. 6), with particular concern towards a researcher’s personal biases leading to them finding what they set out to find (p. 6). Yin (2012) addresses these concerns by explaining that:

Contemporary case study research calls for meeting these challenges by using more systematic procedures...case study research involves systematic data collection and analysis procedures, and case study findings can be generalized to other situations through analytic (not statistical) generalization. (p. 6).

## **Role of the Researcher**

As discussed earlier, the nature of qualitative research is interpretive, and in order to maintain the integrity of the study, it is necessary for the researcher to “explicitly identify reflexively their biases, values, and personal background, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status that may shape their interpretations formed during a study” (Creswell, 2009, p. 177).

Accordingly, I am a white male in my early thirties, who was born and raised in a small suburb outside of Victoria, British Columbia. I was raised in a middle-class home, with both parents and a younger sister. Throughout my childhood, I was a happy, well cared-for child. I attended public school, and played a variety of sports as a youth, including soccer, baseball, basketball, track and field and badminton. I played baseball and basketball at a high level (regional representative teams which comprised the top players from the league or region), but never played competitively beyond high school. I went on to complete my undergraduate degree at the University of Victoria, and have worked a variety of jobs, and held a several different leadership positions. I am currently employed at an independent school in Victoria, and have worked as a senior school physical education teacher, department head, academic advisor, director of athletics, boarding house-parent, strength training coach, basketball coach and rugby coach. I have a strong value system, rooted in compassion and caring for others, and have no religious affiliation. I have no vested interest, or outside ties to servant-leadership, other than the fact that I have presented at two international conferences on the philosophy; taken two graduate level courses on it; and believe it is an inherently good type of leadership.

The idea to examine servant-leadership in sport came to me as I was taking Dr. Carolyn Crippen’s graduate level servant-leadership course entitled *Servant Leadership*,

in July of 2010. As a former athlete, current coach, and sport enthusiast, it struck me as a philosophy that could hold potential in the context of sport. A cursory search of the literature revealed there was no focused research on servant-leadership in sport, and as I thought about the pairing, it occurred to me that National Basketball Association (NBA) player Steve Nash could be a potential example of a servant-leader.

I work at the school that Nash attended in grades eleven and twelve, and a personal friend of mine, Mr. Ian Hyde-Lay, was his coach, and is still a close friend of his. I met with Hyde-Lay, and explained my idea to explore the notion of Nash as a potential servant-leader in the context of sport and mentioned the possibility of interviewing him. Hyde-Lay agreed to speak with Nash about the possibility, and contacted him via phone soon after. On August 4, 2010, I received an e-mail from Hyde-Lay, saying that Nash had agreed to do the interview—which was to be two hours in duration—and passed along Nash’s confidential e-mail address. I e-mailed Nash, and received word back from him the next day, that he would be happy to do the interview with me.

I spent the next year preparing for the interview, researching servant-leadership, taking a course on Advanced Theories in Servant Leadership, and formulating questions for the interview (See Appendix D). I also completed a directed-studies course: *The Servant-Athlete: Current Readings*.

In July, 2011, I applied to the Human Research Ethics Board, for ethical approval to conduct my research. According to the University of Victoria website “the Human Research Ethics Board ensures that UVic research and research occurring in academic courses involving human participants or human biological materials meets the ethical

standards required by Canadian universities and national regulatory bodies”

(<http://www.uvic.ca/research/conduct/home/regapproval/humanethics/index.php>).

The Application for Ethics Approval for Human Participant Research is a detailed document that the prospective researcher must fill out in order to obtain ethical approval for a given study. It collects detailed information about the researcher, supervisor, purpose of the study, level of risk involved, methods used for recruitment, data collection, how participant consent will be obtained, compensation, issues of anonymity and confidentiality, and the participant(s)’ right to withdraw from the study.

As I applied for consent, I began to realize that the way in which I had proceeded in recruiting my participant was not consistent with standard research protocol. The correct protocol would have been to apply for research ethics before contacting Nash; however I had been unaware of this, and had contacted Nash several months before. I proceeded to fill out the application (See Appendix B), explaining the unique nature of my situation (e.g. dealing with a tremendously busy professional athlete, and the need to get in contact with him as soon as practical).

I submitted my first application on July 13, 2011, and received correspondence from the Human Research Ethics Board on July 22, 2011, requesting I make the following changes:

1. Explain when signed consent will be obtained from the participant.
2. Provide information about how ongoing consent will be obtained for the transcript review phase.
3. Obtain permission to disseminate results beyond the thesis (i.e. for academic journals).

4. A comment was made about the recruitment process, and how it was not consistent with protocol. The Human Research Ethics Board recognized the unique situation I was in, but also asked me to follow proper protocol in future academic research. I proceeded to make the required changes to the application, and specifically to the Participant Consent Form (See Appendix A), which was submitted on August 2, 2011. On August 8, 2011, I received an e-mail from Human Research Ethics letting me know that my application had been approved, and that I would be receiving my Certificate of Approval (See Appendix B) shortly in the mail. The certificate would be in effect for one year, with the necessity to renew it at that time if the research were not yet completed. I received the Certificate of Approval in late August.

The next step was contacting Jenny Miller, Steve Nash's personal assistant, to set up a time for the interview. In November of 2011, I had the opportunity to meet Nash at a school function, and talked to him for approximately fifteen minutes. He recalled our e-mail conversations, and mentioned that he was looking forward to the interview. I expressed my appreciation for his willingness to give me his time, but did not discuss the topic of servant-leadership, as to not influence the interview in any way. On January 27, 2012, Miller contacted me, and informed me that the interview would be on Friday, February 10, 2012, in Sacramento, California, at the Hyatt Regency hotel.

I flew to Sacramento on Thursday, February 9, 2012. At 5:00 pm the next evening, I met Nash in the lobby, and he and I proceeded up to my room to begin the interview. We chatted briefly in the elevator, before the interview started. I offered him water or a snack (he declined). The interview lasted 71 minutes and 43 seconds, with Nash taking his time to thoughtfully answer each of the questions.

## Data Collection Procedures

Creswell (2009) writes that “the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites (or documents or visual materials) that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (p. 178). Nash was chosen as the subject of the case study based on my knowledge of his career and leadership attributes, and the promise he showed as potentially being a servant-athlete. The documents used in this study about Nash comprise newspaper articles, magazine articles and books written about him, which provide supporting evidence of his behaviours, leadership style, and career accomplishments.

The primary data collection technique used in this study is a face-to-face, one-on-one qualitative interview. (See Appendix D). The format for the interview is semi-structured, which is “organized around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee” (DiCiccio-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 314) Yin (2012) writes that qualitative interviews:

Can offer richer and more extensive material than data from surveys or even the open-ended portion of survey instruments...the flexible format permits open-ended interviews, if properly done, to reveal how case study participants construct reality and think about situations, not just to provide the answers to a researcher’s specific questions and own implicit construction of reality. In qualitative interviews, the interviewer must be prepared to make changes, and adapt questions depending on how the interviewee responds. (p. 12)

The iterative nature of the qualitative research process in which preliminary data analysis coincides with data collection often results in altering questions as the investigators learn more about the subject. Questions that are not effective at eliciting the

necessary information can be dropped and new ones added. Furthermore, the interviewer should be prepared to depart from the planned itinerary during the interview because digressions can be very productive as they follow the interviewee's interest and knowledge" (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 316)

It is important for the interviewer to work to develop a rapport with the interviewee, which "involves trust and respect for the interviewee and the information he or she shares. It is also the means of establishing a safe and comfortable environment for sharing the interviewee's personal experiences and attitudes as they actually occurred" (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 316). The design of the questions can also help to develop rapport, with the first question being broad, open-ended and non-threatening (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

The structure of the interview is such that "the interviewer maintains control over the interaction with the interviewee's co-operation. Accordingly, the roles assigned by the interview structure pre-empt the roles the interviewer and interviewee have in their social worlds outside the interview event" (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 317).

The interview data was recorded using a Sony high-definition recording device, as well as an I-Pod Touch as a back-up. Nash had not seen the interview questions prior to the interview, as it was desirable to elicit the most natural, honest responses possible, and to not have him overthinking the responses, or developing any preconceived beliefs about servant-leadership.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

According to Creswell (2009), data analysis:

Involves making sense out of text and image data. It involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting the different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data...representing data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data” (p. 183).

Creswell (2009) adds that for case study research, it is important to include “a detailed description of the setting or individuals, followed by analysis of the data for themes or issues” (Creswell, 2009, p. 184).

Rowley (2002) writes that “data analysis of this rich resource is based on examining, categorizing and tabulating evidence to assess whether the evidence supports or otherwise the initial propositions of the study” (p. 24), and breaks case study analysis down into four parts:

- 1.) The analysis makes use of all the relevant evidence
- 2.) The analysis considers all of the major rival interpretations, and explores them each in turn
- 3.) The analysis should address the most significant aspect of the case study
- 4.) The analysis should draw on the researchers’ prior expert knowledge in the area of the case study, but in an unbiased and objective manner (p. 24)

The first step in data analysis for a case study involving a qualitative interview is to transcribe the interview, and read it over meticulously to ensure for accuracy (Creswell, 2009). From here, the data should be further reviewed, to “obtain a *general sense* of the information and try to reflect on its overall meaning” (p. 185). The next step is to begin analyzing the data, and coding it into themes. For this study, codes were developed from emerging information collected from the participant (p. 187). Creswell recommends

further breaking down the coding into sections based on codes that the researcher expected to find; codes that were surprising and unanticipated; unusual codes of conceptual interest to the reader; and codes that inform a particular theoretical perspective (p. 187).

The researcher now uses the coding to develop a description of the setting or participant(s), which, according to Creswell (2009) “involves a detailed rendering of information about people, places, or events in a setting” (p. 189). The codes are then used to generate a small number of themes, which are central to the major findings of the study (p. 189). The themes are then discussed in more detail, helping advance the description of the theme, and further illuminate the findings of the analysis (p. 189). The final step in the analysis is making an interpretation or meaning of the data. This can reflect the researcher’s unique perspective on the topic, vis-à-vis the literature and data collected, or serve as a direct comparison between the findings and the information extracted from the literature on the topic (p.189).

### **Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability**

Reliability in qualitative studies indicates that the researcher’s approach to the study is consistent with different researchers and different studies (Creswell, 2009, p. 190). Several measures were taken in this study to ensure reliability, including a meticulous review of the transcripts to ensure accuracy, a fastidious approach to coding that involved constantly comparing coding data, and a second researcher checking codes for accuracy and consistency.

Validity refers to the accuracy of the research findings, and according to Creswell (2009), is a strength of qualitative research. Triangulation was one of the primary validity

strategies used in this research. It is important to triangulate data, by providing multiple sources of data to point to the “same set of events, facts, or interpretations” (Yin, 2012, p. 13). This establishes converging lines of evidence, and makes the data as rich and robust as possible (Yin, 2012, p 13). This study used a wide range of documents, such as books, news articles and magazine articles to support data gathered in the qualitative interview.

Creswell (2009) writes of the importance of clarifying the bias the researcher brings to the study, and writes that “this self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers” (p. 192). This is clarified in the “Role of the Researcher” section. Peer debriefing was also employed to further ensure validity, with a colleague reviewing and asking questions about the study, and providing an interpretation beyond that of the researcher (Creswell, 2009).

Qualitative generalization relies on “the particular description and themes developed *in context* of a specific site” (Creswell, 2009, p. 193), and relies on *particularity* rather than *generalizability* (Greene & Caracelli in Creswell, 2009). Yin (2012) points out that generalization in case studies relies on *analytic generalizations*, which “depend on using a study’s theoretical framework to establish a logic that might be applicable to other situations” (p. 18), as opposed to *statistical generalizations*.

Chapter 3 has provided an overview of the research methods used to conduct this study. Chapter 4 will present the results of the study.

## Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter will begin by describing, in detail, the circumstance surrounding the one-on-one in person interview with Nash, including the setting, as well as Nash's appearance, tone and decorum throughout the interview. The interview data will be categorized into five major themes, and provide answers to the research questions.

### Demographics

On February 10, 2012, I met Steve Nash in the lobby of the Hyatt Regency Hotel, in Sacramento, California, at 5:00 pm. As I sat in the lobby anticipating Nash's arrival, he got off the elevator at 4:58 pm. I stood up, and Nash immediately made eye contact, and smiled. He was dressed casually, wearing Nike cross-trainer shoes, black Nike shorts, a blue Nike warm-up jacket, and a grey Nike t-shirt. He had his trademark shaggy hair, and walked with confidence. Nash stands virtually the same height as me—I am 6'2"—with a lean, athletic build. He had a small hand-held machine in his hand, with electrodes attached to his leg, to help with recovery between games (as he explained later).

Nash and I greeted each other, and he said “great to see you”, putting me at ease. I asked if he was comfortable being interviewed in my hotel room, which was a suite with a separate living area, ideal for the conversation, and he was fine with this arrangement. As we went up to my room in the elevator, we chatted about Sacramento, the game ahead, and what it's like playing on the road. As we entered the room, Nash immediately sat down, and had an observable confidence and ease about him.

As described in Chapter 3, I used two separate recording devices for the interview, in case one malfunctioned. The first was a Sony high definition audio recorder, and the second was an iPod Touch with recording capabilities.

I noted that Nash's body language indicated that he was very engaged, and he seemed genuinely interested in our conversation, with his use of direct eye contact and positive head nods. His responses were well thought out and articulate, and he often took time to ponder the question before responding, or add more information after his initial response. His voice often became animated throughout the course of the interview, with his passion and enthusiasm for the subject matter being evident.

I had a copy of my interview script in front of me (See Appendix C), and Nash had his own copy as well, in order to clarify any questions I asked, and follow-along as desired. He had not viewed the interview questions prior to the interview. I followed the script, with the exception of a few follow-up questions, or prompts during responses.

Upon conclusion of the interview, Nash and I chatted for a few more minutes about our mutual friends, the school (St. Michaels University School), and future possibilities in servant-leadership in sport. I presented Nash with a small gift (a book by Kent Keith on servant-leadership), and had my picture taken with him to include in the thesis (See Appendix E). Throughout the course of our time together, I got the strong sense that Nash had allotted as much time as needed to help me with my research, and that he genuinely cared about our conversation. In his closing comments, he stated:

I think it's great. I think it's great that you recognize the opportunity to do this, and not with me, but just to follow up on this in sport, because I mean, I know we talk about it a lot, but I think it could be developed further. ....So kudos to you for recognizing that. And seeing where you can take it. It's an area that some literature could really be great. You could have a huge impact. It might not be

thirty years till we're flooded with literature on the subject, but we need to start getting there. (See Appendix F, p. 147)

Upon concluding, I shook his hand, and we bid each other farewell.

### **Themes from the Data**

The data analysis of the interview revealed several themes that were woven throughout the dialogue. After multiple readings, and different ways of coding the data, it was eventually broken down into five salient themes: character, team, building relationships/serving others, compassion/empathy, and awareness. From within these themes, sub-themes were also identified, which will be discussed below. A brief explanation of each of the themes will be provided.

### **Character**

The theme of character refers to the deeply rooted beliefs and values the individual holds, and the character traits through which they are manifested. This is closely linked to Sipe and Frick's (2009) idea of *person of character*, which is explained in greater detail in the review of the literature in Chapter 2. Some of the sub-themes that emerged from the data were trust/honesty, courage, facing adversity, standing up for personal beliefs, admitting and overcoming mistakes, and the belief in something bigger than sport.

In response to Question #1, on childhood experiences, (See Appendix D) Nash touched upon facing adversity, and the way one carries themselves, stating:

You have to work hard and carry yourself in a certain manner. I think it starts there, and then, when situations arise you see the way he handled adversity, or he handled a tough situation and you learn from them; you watch them. Not just the

lessons they teach you, but the lessons they show you indirectly.” (See Appendix F, p. 118)

He returns to the theme of facing challenges when speaking of his difficult decision to transfer to St. Michaels University School from Mt. Douglas, which also touches on the idea of courage:

The choice to go to St. Michaels was a big moment, and I think there is something to that because, on the one hand it's a failure in a way, to leave something you started. At the same time I knew that it was going to be a challenge, and knew that it would be a topic, and I knew that also academically it challenged. (See Appendix F, p. 120)

Closely linked to overcoming challenges is the leader's ability to admit and overcome mistakes. In response to Question #16, on how leaders overcome their mistakes, (See Appendix D), relating to this theme, Nash comments at length, and further touches on the themes of honesty and motives:

I think it goes along the same lines of being able to laugh at yourself. You're not perfect; you don't have to be perfect to anybody. I'd let it go; it's an insecurity, right? You don't want people to see you fail. You feel like you just told on yourself, or the secret's out; now everyone will know I'm not perfect. Nobody's perfect. Just let go of that and just be willing to say, “I can see how I made a mistake there.” Honesty is huge. And you don't have to be honest with just your words, because we don't speak as much in sports. And so, we notice when someone makes a mistake, but they hustle the next play. They make up for it. There's an honesty there, right? If that person's giving an honest effort, they made

a mistake, and they know they made a mistake, and they're going to make up for it with their effort, or try to do everything they can to show their teammates "I'm sorry, I'm 100% in, and my motives are here, and I want to do well." It's a non-verbal communication. There's an apology, an acceptance, and admission, all going on there, in a player. (See Appendix F, p. 135)

Nash further touches on the themes of bravery and courage when talking about overcoming personal struggles within the game of basketball:

You can't make excuses, you can't pout, or you can't feel sorry for yourself, you know there comes a time we all do it. Success or fail, my attitude has to be absolutely brave today. And if I'm not, if it's a shooting slump, not one time and I going to complain about the ball going in or out, I'm just going to play the game like every shot goes in. That's a microcosm for whatever struggle that empathy is needed for. (See Appendix F, p. 142)

Macleans (2003) reported that when Nash played in the 2003 All-Star Game, while he was a Dallas Maverick, he decided to wear a t-shirt during the all-star press session that read "NO WAR: Shoot for Peace". His comments below, in response to Question #7, on professional athletes' responsibilities as role models (See Appendix D), help illuminate his motives, and touch upon his courage in coming forward with his views, particularly in the very conservative, republican state of Texas. Nash's remarks indicate that he stands up for that in which he believes:

I don't want to overcomplicate it by trying to think of myself as a brand, or have a strategy there. The few times that I've really stood up, and I knew I would take heat, it just came down to something that I believed in. I didn't really think about

how it would look. I felt it was wrong, and felt compelled to say something. With the war, the whole thing seemed very fishy, and didn't align with my sensibilities or beliefs.....So I decided to say something. It was really exclusive of my career or image; it was something that I felt as a person I had to do, whether I worked at Starbucks, or played in the NBA. (See Appendix F, p. 125)

This stance is congruent with Nash's comments on morals, in response to Question #21, on Greenleaf's 'best test' quotation (See Appendix D), and there being something bigger and more important than sport:

So there's the leader and there's the servant. Is one better than the other? I would say the servant is, because there's at least a moral high ground that's reached.

That supersedes.....winning, or production, let's say...Obviously I like the servant-leader because it supersedes whatever the group is doing.....It supersedes sport. There's an idea that's higher than sport, and bigger than sport. Whereas the leader, it seems like it's all about sport. It's all about production. It's all about a means to an end. Which is great, whereas I think the servant-leader, by nature, wants the same success, but realizes there's a higher calling to this, and you can get the same success through this route. (See Appendix F, p. 143).

Nash talks about the importance of sport to teach life lessons, and keeping things in perspective; that there are many things in life that are more important than sport, in response to Question #22, on advice for young athletes (See Appendix D).

I think my point is.....to teach kids that.....sport is just one small part of life, so when you're doing it and when it seems most important, really, it isn't.....When I think of my experience, when I'm playing out there it probably looks like this is

life or death, you know, when we're in the playoffs, it's like life or death, and there's nothing else that matters, nothing else that exists. But, that's really the furthest from my reality.....If they blew the whistle and brought a marching band in and said the game's over, you know, I wouldn't kill myself. It's just a game. And, it really is just a game, but you get lost in it. And you should. You should enjoy it, but you should also know that it's just a game. (See Appendix F, p.144)

Further touching on life lessons taught through sport, Nash says with regard to advising younger athletes:

These themes that keep coming up as we talk about sport, that are going to inevitably help you when you're dealing with a mother in law. A boss, you know. A child. Um, a neighbour, a police officer... whoever it is, if you learn these lessons through sport, which is in a situation where it's emotional, it's high pressure. Where else do you get that?" (See Appendix F, p. 145).

In response to Question #17 (See Appendix D) about spirituality, Nash further outlines some of his personal beliefs, saying of that his value system:

I don't really have a spiritual piece, in a really direct, or illustrated viewpoint. But, I imagine if somebody told me their spiritual piece, there would be major commonality, or the same thing in my belief, my feelings about how to react and handle situations. I think if you started putting up words, or ideas, and said "does this relate to spirituality?" Like unselfishness, or selfless, or service, or commitment, belief. I would probably have a similar list to the person who would say, "Yes, I'm spiritual, this is my spirituality." Whether it comes from a religious

sense, or just a belief in what they're doing. I would imagine it's up there with the most spiritual, but I don't necessarily title it that way. (See Appendix E, p. 138)

This comment supports much of what is found in the literature, with Rudd (1996, 2006) describing Nash as a caring, compassionate player, who always puts his teammates first, and former coach Del Harris calling him a mature, intelligent, quality person who “always thinks before he speaks” (Deacon, 2003, p. 49)

Indirectly through his statements in response to Question #10, on sport teaching character (See Appendix D), glimpses of humility can be seen in Nash’s words:

As somebody who excelled, I never looked at myself as better than my teammates. As a performer I felt like I could do a lot of great things, but I never felt like that made me more important than the next person on the team. We were all equal. Some athletes can’t quite understand that. They always have a chip on their shoulder, they always are trying to put themselves ahead of the team, and they never really become a winner so to speak. You have to teach kids it's not all about you, you have to learn to win and to lose. Humility is imperative, for sports to be worth a damn. (See Appendix F, p. 128)

Evidence of this is found in the literature, when during the Olympics, Nash insisted on travelling, eating, and doing everything with his teammates, even though he could have afforded a higher level of luxury and comfort (Hoffer, 2001). Further evidence of his character in action came when Nash anonymously donated \$25000 to his Olympic teammates who did not have lucrative NBA contracts, to help improve their experience at the games (Hoffer, 2001).

When Nash won his first NBA Most Valuable Player (MVP) award, he did something unprecedented, and invited his teammates to come up and receive the award with him (Rudd, 2006). In discussing this action, in response to Question #11, which referred to Nash bringing his teammates up to receive his MVP award (See Appendix D) the theme of humility also emerges:

I think in particular for me, it's my personality, but it's also the way I play. I'm not a guy who's trying to score 20, 30 points every night; I'm trying to make it all work. I'm trying to bring everyone together. I think I was given the MVP because I did that successfully. I brought a team together that lost most of their games the year before, and then won most of their games, and we did so because of that idea. Let's try to make this work together; let's try to be unselfish; let's try to make the game easy for each other. And so when I was rewarded for it, I felt like my teammates bought into that, and were a part of that. And whether it was my lead or not, they followed, or they took part, and it just made sense that we would all join in this together, because that's why we're here today. (See Appendix F, p. 129)

This response is also consistent with the theme of Team, as he puts his individual achievement directly in the context of team.

Nash goes on to discuss winning his second MVP award, and provides further evidence of a humble approach:

A lot of me winning those two awards was timing. And, not to discredit, in fact I really think I was one of the best players in the game those years. It's just that there are other players that were better one-on-one players, who scored more. I

feel like it was timing. I went to the right team that needed me, and I fit well with them. They bought into it. They were younger, I was older. They bought into the fact that I knew more than them. They kind of followed me, and had respect. They deserve a lot of credit for that. (See Appendix F, p. 130)

When discussing his awareness of his teammates' feelings, in response to Question #12 (See Appendix D), he states "I think I'm lucky that's just the way I'm wired, and I deserve no credit for that. I was born that way, and I think about other people's feelings, what's going on in their head" (See Appendix F, p. 130). This further resonates with the sub-theme of humility.

The sub-theme of being encouraging/supportive also emerges several times in the data. In describing his own personal leadership style, in response to Question #15 on balancing caring leadership with dealing with challenging situations (See Appendix D), Nash states "there are all variables and combinations and permutations of soft to hard leadership, from the stare, to being an encourager. I'm definitely on the end of encouraging, and to a fault." (See Appendix F, p. 133) In reflecting on one of his coaches' words, he self-critically states:

I'm to a fault encouraging, instead of 'you're not doing your job'. And I don't know if it's because I don't have the energy to take on the responsibilities I do have and constantly get in people's faces. You don't have to get in their faces, you can go calmly. People say the leaders have to be able to give you that stare. I think it's overrated (See Appendix F, p. 133)

Nash's attitude towards referees in basketball further provides a window into his character, and deeply held beliefs. He discusses the importance of not talking negatively

to the referees—which is something very common in the league—and how the game is not about the referees, and their decisions shouldn't be perceived as personal. Nash believes players' energy should not be wasted on the referees.

Nash's strong value system is supported in the literature, as he promotes environmental issues, drives an environmentally friendly car, and wears environmentally friendly shoes (Nash & McCallum, 2008). He is politically aware, and has interests in health care and human rights (Pierce, 2010), which further speaks to Sipe and Frick's (2009) *person of character*.

## **Team**

The theme of team refers simply to the importance of being a team in the context of sport, and all of the related elements that support this idea. Some the sub-themes that emerged from the data were commitment, coming together for a common purpose, trusting each other, and the group's best interest.

Nash makes several references to the value of commitment, which fits with the idea of team. In reference to one of the values taught by his father, in response to Question #1 on childhood experiences (See Appendix D), he comments:

It wasn't a fastest-way-to-the-top type parenting strategy, or a push-your-kids strategy. He expected, and taught us what the deal is when you sign up to play for a team, and the commitment you make. Anything outside of that was up to you.  
(See Appendix F, p. 119)

This response also speaks to Research Question #2, indicating that his father's parenting strategy influenced his own perceptions of commitment, and what it means to be a part of a team. (See Appendix F, p. 119)

Building on this idea of commitment, in response to Question #3 (See Appendix D) directly on the core values instilled in him during his childhood Nash responds “I think, commitment to what you sign up for.” (See Appendix F, p.120)

In response to Question #13 (See Appendix D) about what a leader’s responsibilities to his teammates are, Nash states “there's an obligation to be accountable and be committed. The biggest thing is to come in everyday and be a pro. My dad when I was six or seven was like, “go to practice, and work your socks off.” (See Appendix F, p. 133)

This is another concrete example of Nash evoking his dad’s teachings, vis-à-vis his own perceptions on team, and further evidence of how his childhood influenced his modern day leadership practice, which speaks to Research Question #2.

Closely linked to the idea of commitment, is the theme of coming together for a common purpose, and working towards shared goals. In response to Question #22 (See Appendix D) about the words of advice he would give young athletes, Nash introduces this idea, and links it to commitment:

There's nothing like being a part of a team, and being able to work well with people, so, understand what it means to commit to a group, to work hard, to be able to make mistakes and hold your hand up and say sorry, and work hard...for the betterment of the team. (See Appendix F, p. 145)

Earlier in the interview, in response to Question #6 on relationship building (See Appendix D) he introduces the idea of team and outlines some of the strengths of being a team:

I think the bottom line is the team. It's about coming together and being greater than the sum of your parts. Why sign up for something if you're not going to make the most of it, and making the most of it is being better than the sum of your parts. It's such a joy and a pleasure to be a part of a group of people that are working together, pushing forward in the same direction. That's when it's the most fun. That's when the special things happen, you get the most success, and win or lose you walk away with a great feeling, and a sense of reward, vindication, justification. Everyone walks away feeling proud of what they did....I always feel like you should try to make a team of it, cause it's the way to do it. It's the right thing to do. It's the most rewarding, and it's the most fun. The rewards are great, even if it's just the feeling like you're all pulling in the same direction. (See Appendix F, p. 122)

In response to Question #8 (See Appendix D) about the benefits of service work, Nash is quick to extoll the value of team: "I think it's great. The team building, the learning, the chemistry, and importance of being a unit" (Appendix F, p.128)

In the context of discussing the myriad benefits of participation in sport, Question #22 (See Appendix D), Nash touches on some of the life skills that can come from being a part of a team:

I think there's something in sports even, that's hard to match. All the different things that are going on. Especially when it's really competitive. It's fine when it's not. There are still lessons to be had: participation is number one. But, when it's a team of six year-olds that's really trying their best, if they learn to do it for the

right reasons, and as a group...the lessons will last, those are those building blocks. Those guys will always be able to fit into a team. (See Appendix F, p.147)

He further describes the profound impact being a part of a team can have on individuals:

I think we worry so much about the individual, the idea of group, and how to elevate a group. You know, right now, because it's easier to be accountable to an individual, we worry about performance, and the individual basis, nine times out of ten. But to work on that team dynamic, it's exponentially great because the individual grows, the group grows (See Appendix F, p.148)

Nash provides a deeper level of insight into team, and touches on the idea of group success, stating “We see people who are unable to—and you can put it a lot of different ways—unable to relinquish that need for self-interest. And realize that their self-interest is in the group.” (See Appendix F, p.132).

Nash’s unselfish play is observed in the literature, which details struggles he had with former coach Don Nelson, who believed Nash played too unselfish, to the detriment of his team (Hoffer, 2001).

In response to Question #17 on being a role model (See Appendix D) he speaks to the idea of one’s motives being for the team’s best interest when discussing being critical of teammates:

If I ever catch myself, in that moment, saying “he's not doing this”, or “he's not doing that”, it’s okay to say those things, to be honest about a group, but only if it's with the motive of the group getting better, not to deflect fault or blame from yourself. (See Appendix F, p.139)

In a telling moment in the interview, Nash says, in response to Question #10 on teaching character through sport (See Appendix D), when describing his experiences as a standout athlete in his youth, and how he viewed himself and his teammates:

I feel like that was a huge part of my development, as an athlete, because as somebody who excelled, I never looked at myself as better than my teammates.

As a performer I felt like I could do a lot of great things, but I never felt like that made me more important than the next person on the team. We were all equal.

Some athletes can't quite understand that. (See Appendix F, p.128)

Evidence of this team first attitude is found in the literature, with former teammate Michael Finley explaining "his first objective is keeping everyone else in the game." (cited in Hoffer, 2001, p. 103). Deacon (2003) provides further support for this ethos, describing Nash as a player who is uncomfortable being singled out while his teammates are not there.

### **Building Relationships/Serving Others**

The theme of building relationships/serving others refers to the purposeful actions, and time invested, to make relationships stronger. For the purpose of this research, this was almost exclusively related to the team; however the relationship building stood out as distinct from the theme of team. Some of the sub-themes that emerged from the data were trust, humour, caring for others, serving others, and challenging others. It is important to note that serving others, in this context, refers to serving the needs of teammates, or those whom one is leading. The theme of service in the more traditional sense is explored in compassion/empathy.

In response to Question #6 on relationship building (See Appendix D), Nash first discusses the theme of relationship building in the context of team, and how to go about building a team. With an emphasis on the sub-themes of trust and openness, he explains:

For me the way that that happens is to be personable, let people in, and make them feel like they can trust you. Not to want anything, need anything, or protect anything from people. Because people feel when someone's guarded, or they're closed. (See Appendix F, p. 123)

He provides a broader picture of his views on relationship building, and the roles that openness, trust and humour play, when he discusses the importance of building relationships on a team:

One of the great parts of team sports is the banter, which largely means giving each other a hard time. If the whole room is able to take it, you've got a chance to win, because nobody's insecure or guarded. They're open and willing to see the humour in their own short comings or behaviour. I think it allows people to believe in each other, and trust their motives. For me it's about making a connection with people; having an interest without being invasive of their background and history, and desires. (See Appendix F, p. 123)

He builds on the themes of humour and trust, in discussing some humorous videos the Phoenix Suns made one year on the team plane. While Nash recognizes that this doesn't necessarily make a great team, it was the fact that everyone wanted to do it, and it built team trust.

In response to Question #15 (See Appendix D) comparing hard leadership to a more caring type of leadership, Nash makes many references to relationship building, and touches on the sub-themes of trust, the leader's motives, effort and commitment:

I think to be honest, and to be trustworthy is as good as a stare any day of the week. And that's lasting. Somebody can put the fear in his teammates, somebody can give the stare, but if that person doesn't live by the same code, the stare doesn't mean anything for long. If your teammates see you, and trust in you, and watch you every day do the same things, and try, have the same effort, same commitment, the same motives, they believe you. Sometimes you don't need to look at them, they see you trying, and they feel bad if they're not trying. (See Appendix F, p. 133)

The idea of caring for others, and helping serve their needs, is a central tenet of servant-leadership (Greenleaf, 2008). Nash begins to touch on this in his response to Question #12 (See Appendix D) regarding his awareness of his teammates' general affect, and how it influences his on-court decision making:

Let's put it this way, it does cross my mind. Sometimes it might influence me, sometimes I might directly follow that, but most of the time it is in my mind. But everything's happening so fast that you can't always live by that. I'm cognizant of it. And I think I'm lucky that's just the way I'm wired, and I deserve no credit for that. I was born that way, and I think about other people's feelings, what's going on in their head. I think some people are probably semi-oblivious to others' body language, whereas I'm kind of taking it all in, subconsciously—I can't help it. As a point guard, it's a good fit. (See Appendix F, p. 130)

In response to Question #19 (See Appendix D), on the traits of listening, empathy and healing, and how they fit into athletic leadership, Nash is quick to point out the importance of relationship building, stating “I think it comes down to going back to having interpersonal relationships.” (See Appendix F, p. 140) He goes on to give a clear example of what serving teammates’ needs looks like to him:

My teammate's really struggling. Look, he's over there, he's almost in tears”, instead of turning your back on him, helping him. There's nothing better than.....seeing someone struggle, feeling bad for them, helping them, support them, turning it around.....it's better than you getting a hat trick. You feel so good that that person feels good, and you had a small part in it. (See Appendix F, p. 146)

Somewhat paradoxically, in response to a statement on his work ethic, and his tendency to play hard against his teammates during practice, Nash talks about serving his teammates by challenging them:

I think that just comes from competitiveness, you just want the team to do well. Instead of being frustrated, or confrontational, that's your outlet: to challenge them. In the context of playing, it actually may or may not be more effective than directly discussing it. (See Appendix F, p. 134)

### **Compassion/Empathy**

The terms compassion and empathy are very closely related, and seemed a natural pairing when coding the data. Powers and Moore (2004) define empathy as “The act of seeking to understand the feelings of others in a given circumstance.” (p. 15), while compassion is defined as “a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is

stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering.” (www.dictionary.com). Some of the sub-themes that were identified from the data include motives, life lessons, helping others, and service.

In response to Question #1(See Appendix D) on childhood experiences, Nash immediately evokes his father, stating “my dad (who coached us in sports) was very compassionate and tried to be fair. ....he was always compassionate about other people, whether it be as a coach, or as a co-worker, friend.” (See Appendix F, p. 119)

He goes on to describe his father’s experience working with Operation Track Shoes—a Victoria sport festival for people with developmental disabilities (www.trackshoes.ca) –and how it proved to be a pivotal childhood moment for him:

I remember my dad used to volunteer at Operation Track Shoes, the Special Olympics, I remember him coming home, and telling us that he cleaned some unfortunate kid’s bum all day, and that's thought provoking for a young kid. Why would you do that? You think about it, and my dad said "well that poor kid can't do it himself. The only thing worse than cleaning the kid’s bum is having no one to clean the kid's bum.” It is a compassionate lesson, and I think he—you know my mom too—but he definitely shared those things with us. (See Appendix F, p. 119)

Operation Track Shoes also fits into the theme of service, which Nash alludes to when he mentions his family’s support of The Terry Fox Run (See Appendix F, p. 120). He further reflects on the lessons of compassion and empathy his parents taught him in response to Question #1 (See Appendix D), explaining:

I think they also taught us to have compassion, to think about the inequality in the world, and those less fortunate. To understand that not everyone is afforded the relative ease, and so when we're complaining about being bored, it's your fault. It's up to you to find something to do, and keep yourself busy. If you're worried about things like boredom, instead of hunger, health and safety—then they taught that world is full of people worse off. (See Appendix F, p. 120)

This section of very rich data also further informs Research Question #2 and directly links Nash's present attitudes towards service, as well as his compassionate disposition, to his childhood experiences.

Nash's compassion and worldly perspective is evidenced in the literature, with former coach Steve Kerr characterizing him as having a creative mind, and former teammate A'mare Stoudemire citing his interests, different sports and different cultures (Pierce, 2010).

In response to Question #19 (See Appendix D) on the traits of listening, empathy and healing, Nash articulates his thoughts on compassion, and describes the concept of empathy:

I think it comes down to going back to having interpersonal relationships, having compassion for what people are going through. If someone's doing really well, be happy for them. If someone's not doing really well, hurt for them, and be able to try to show compassion, show them that you feel their pain and you want them to do better. And you support them, and you're going to be there to help them, and it's okay that they're not doing well right now. (See Appendix F, p. 140)

He further goes on to demonstrate his own capacity for empathy, when responding to Question #5 regarding difficult choices in a team context (See Appendix D), he discusses the NBA's reputation for its players looking out for their own personal interests, and not always putting the team first. He is quick to point out that he has not experienced this first hand, but talks about how some players may put career security, and their families' well-being ahead of the team. Nash believes this is misguided, but understands players could be looking out for their families

In his response to Question #8 (See Appendix D) Nash goes on to talk at length about charity and service work, and shares his thoughts on people's motives behind such work as well as the true benefits:

I think that there are a lot of great hearted people out there; there are a lot of people who are fortunate, and help others. At the same time, there's no question that a lot of charity work is for image, and to improve a brand, whether it's a professional franchise, or an individual.....There's no question that sometimes it is a big photo op, but for me it's never that. Going back to my dad and my mom, teaching me about the inequality in the world, about people who are less fortunate, always struck a chord with me. I always felt a little bit of an obligation to be involved, and to do something. And that's it.....It doesn't make me feel good to hear people say "oh, he's charitable", you know, it makes me feel good when somebody who has either helped us help someone, or somebody benefitted from our help, is happy, is smiling. (See Appendix F, p. 126)

To wrap up his commentary on service, he addresses the conflict surrounding people's motives to do charity, and states "The image is not what's important: it's the action." (See Appendix F, p. 126)

In responding to Question #9 (See Appendix D) which inquires about the value of doing service with younger aged sports teams, Nash points to the value of doing service:

I think it's great: the team-building, the learning, the chemistry, and importance of being a unit. It something that you can't do at practice; but, you can highlight, augment, grow to something different. I think we get used to the dynamics of a training session, and sometimes it's good to move that group to a different setting, particularly for service, because you're all doing something selfless for somebody else. (See Appendix F, p. 126)

He goes on to describe in great detail his experience as a child watching Terry Fox—the one-legged Canadian cancer survivor, who attempted to run across Canada. This example tends to support compassion and empathy, and ties in the sub-theme of service.

For me, my experience that relates to that is Terry Fox. As a six year old, watching him run across the country, and turning on the TV every morning that summer, it posed a lot of questions: "why is he doing this?", "Why does he have one leg?", "He has cancer.", "Why is that?", "It's a potentially terminal illness and they had to cut off his leg so he could survive.", "Okay, so why is he running across Canada?", "Well, to tell people about cancer and teach them.", "Okay, why?", "So we can raise money, because it costs money to learn more about the disease." So you're asking the person all these questions, that at that age, are

going to form a lot of their compassion, their will, their characteristics and, it's like one of those building blocks that's going to form other things. It will impact the way they interact with people, the way they approach their job, the way they take responsibility. If you realized through Terry Fox, or through the team going to the Mustard Seed, there are those that are really struggling, that are less fortunate, or get terminal illness, that's always the seed in the back of your head—have compassion. (See Appendix F, p. 127)

This childhood experience had a clear impact on Nash' perceptions of compassion, and helping others, and provides more data for looking at Research Question #2.

Nash goes on to link service and compassion with life lessons, and how one conducts themselves during challenging everyday situations, which speaks to compassion and empathy:

If someone cuts you off in line, instead of saying “do you want to fight?” the chance can be to say “who am I to judge?” I don't know what this person's situation is. I could confront them politely, or I could just go and chalk it up to “that's life”, and be peaceful. I feel like it's a really important building block, until you build this person that is either a critical thinker, and able to adjust on the fly to life around them, or somebody who, without those building blocks is maybe unable to think critically, or for themselves, on the fly, or under pressure. I think these are really important lessons, not only in the team sense, but in an individual sense, that are taught through a team, and at a young age. (See Appendix F, p. 127)

There has been much writing in the media about Nash's service work, which includes the Steven Nash Foundation, helping support a local Vancouver basketball program, as well as his ESPN 30 for 30 documentary on Terry Fox, 'Into the Wind', in which he profiled Terry Fox's attempt to run across Canada to raise money for cancer research.

### **Awareness**

The theme of awareness refers to awareness of the self; awareness of one's surroundings; and awareness of others. Some of the sub-themes that were identified from the data were ego, humility, self-reflection, and withdrawal

In response to Question #6 on relationship building (See Appendix D), Nash shows glimpses of his self-awareness when referring to some advice he received from a veteran player (Joe Klein), to be self-deprecating:

When I was a rookie, Joe Klein, who was a veteran centre, told me his one piece of advice was to be able to laugh at yourself, and you'll get through this pretty well. It's a simple but great way to look at it. If people see you willing to laugh at yourself, or be self-deprecating, it definitely brings everyone's guard down a notch. (See Appendix F, p. 123)

Closely linked to self-deprecation is the sub-theme of humility, which Nash discusses in response to Question #10 (See Appendix D) directly in the context of winning and losing: "You have to teach kids it's not all about you, you have to learn to win and to lose. Humility is imperative, for sports to be worth a damn." (See Appendix F, p. 128)

Nash shows further awareness when discussing ego and how it is linked to people's deepest needs:

I think human beings innately are out to survive; out to see themselves survive and succeed, and feel good. I don't think it's natural for us to realize we can feel good by coming second, and helping somebody else. That's not always natural.

For some people it is to a fault. Maybe you want those people to have a bit more of an ego, and try to push. (See Appendix F, p. 128)

Nash further discusses ego, and uses the language of awareness in his response to Question #14 (See Appendix D) on ethical leadership:

I think there's a place for ego, but I just think you have to aware of your ego, you have to be aware of when it's getting too big, when it's crossing the line.....We're not all the Dalai Lama. Because we don't all say, "this work is for the common good, this work is for the common good", it's hard for people to have that mantra every day. So there is a balance to it, but the key is just to be aware of your own ego, and what it's saying to you, and how you respond. (See Appendix F, p. 132)

In response to Question #15 (See Appendix D), self-reflection—and even being self-critical—emerges as a sub-theme, as Nash discusses his own leadership style, and considers areas where there is room for growth, he observes:

There are all variables and combinations and permutations of soft to hard leadership, from the stare, to being an encourager. I'm definitely on the end of encouraging, and to a fault. Sometimes I should probably be much more confrontational. And it's something that I still probably need to work on; sometimes being more willing to stop worrying about what my responsibilities are

going forward, and just stop and have a moment with somebody. Even if it's myself. I think constantly I have the moment with myself. I'm always self-critical, but to have that moment with someone else is important, and your teammates really will only allow you to have that moment with them if they think you're having that moment with yourself. If they watch you taking short-cuts, they won't buy in. But if you're doing it every day, and then you have that moment with them, they're going to be willing to listen, I think. (See Appendix F, p.134)

Nash further discusses his leadership style, using more language of self-reflection and self-criticism:

And I think coaching is even harder than playing. In that respect, when a coach really has to walk the fine line of being a supporter, and a confidante, and being disciplinarian, and policeman. And so that's a different type of leadership, and maybe if I were better at finding that line, I'd be a better leader, if I could be more of a policeman at times. (See Appendix F, p. 135)

In response to Question #16 on admitting and overcoming mistakes (See Appendix D), Nash discusses decision making in the sport environment, and alludes to self-awareness: "Sport is emotional, it's stressful, it's instantaneous. And so, being able to make decisions on the fly, and being able to constantly not only make decisions of performance, but decisions of emotion—to be self-critical, judge, admit, apologize—all in literally a nanosecond. (See Appendix F, p. 136)

In discussing similarities between his leadership style and what some people would term spirituality, Nash returns to the theme of ego, and continues to be reflective, and at times self-critical:

This year's a good example. It's difficult not to get selfish, and I don't mean like I'm going to shoot, because I don't get off on that. It's the perception of it being my fault. Is it my fault? It's something you have to deal with every day when things aren't going well, people want to know why, or from the front office to the media, to the fans, "well it's not my fault." That's something you really have to guard against. And the reason I guard against it, besides the fact that it's not positive to the group, is that it makes you feel like shit. But we have that instinct as human beings, to protect ourselves. Or deflect harm to our ego or our securities. At the same time, you feel worse when you don't accept responsibility; when you deflect it all. (See Appendix F, p. 139)

In discussing the trait of courage, Nash discusses self-honesty, consistent with the theme of awareness: "I mean, it's not war. But there's still courage, right? The biggest thing, I think is being honest with ourselves" (See Appendix F, p. 143)

In response to Question #18 (See Appendix D) Nash discusses setting aside time for reflection, and his description of some of the emotions involved resonate with Greenleaf's idea of healing (see Chapter 2):

It could be anywhere. It could be walking to the elevator, and taking a ride downstairs, "I really should have handled this better", or "I'm not doing a good job of this." I think it's a constant thing in sport. I know for me, like the battle of insecurity, fear of failure, of overcompensating, self-loathing, self-praise, there's this big pendulum of emotions that you constantly have to control, and put into perspective, and sell. And I think that's one reason that motivates me to practice and train hard, is because it takes a lot of that out. You've put that insecurity, or

that fear of failure, or whatever pain you are suffering that you are trying to hide, into work which is in effect a service. You're serving the betterment of your team by serving yourself. And so, by doing the work it eliminates a lot of that talk. All that stuff going on, it's like "hey, it's right there, I put in my hour of shooting, and I got my sleep, and I prepared". So now like there's more of a peace when you go out there, and there's less voices, and fewer things going on, and you're able to perform better, consistently. (See Appendix F, p.139)

As he talks further about his personal ideas on reflection, his words are consistent with Greenleaf's idea of withdrawal (see Chapter 2):

And if you're not calm—and for me, a big part of this stage in my career (and I hope this doesn't sound arrogant), everywhere you go people want to talk to you, and every day an endless amount of people on the street, or fans, or e-mails or texts, or social media, sponsors, the team, the Foundation, it's so overwhelming, that for me a lot of times I just want to get in a cocoon and just turn a movie on and not think. And I need that so that when I get back out in the world, or I'm on the floor, I'm freer and I'm more peaceful. And I can go and do and not be on the edge because I didn't decompress. It's really important for me because if I don't do that I won't be any good to anyone else; I'll be on edge and I won't react well to certain situations. (See Appendix F, p. 140)

The final type of awareness Nash speaks of resonates with Greenleaf's best test (see chapter 1), and whether you are indeed benefitting the people you are intending to serve:

When being a servant....having that intuition to [know] when are you serving someone's betterment, or when are you enabling someone [to] be useless. When are they given a fish instead of taught to fish? (See Appendix F, p. 143)

### **Parental Influence**

In addition to the five major themes identified, and the sub-themes they encompass, the idea of parental influence ran throughout the fabric of the interview. Nash refers directly to the influence his parents had on him throughout his childhood a total of seven separate times, with the influence his dad had on him featuring most prominently.

In response to Question #1 on childhood experiences (See Appendix D) Nash talks about some of the core values his parents, and in particular his father, instilled in him as a youth:

I think it's difficult for me on the spot to relay exact events, but I definitely feel like my parents, and in particular my dad (who coached us in sports) was very compassionate and always tried to be fair. It wasn't a fastest-way-to-the-top type parenting strategy, or a push-your-kids strategy. He expected, and taught us what the deal is when you sign up to play for a team, and the commitment you make. Anything outside of that was up to you. Driving yourself to be better. But while you're there you know you have work hard and carry yourself in a certain manner. I think it starts there, and then, when situations arise you see the way he handled adversity, or he handled a tough situation and you learn from them; you watch them. Not just the lessons they teach you, but the lessons they show you indirectly. He was always compassionate about other people, whether it be as a coach, or as a co-worker, friend. (See Appendix F, p. 119)

Building on this idea, in response to Question #2 on service activities his family was involved in (See Appendix D), Nash discusses, as mentioned earlier, his father's experience working with Operation Track Shoes, a not-for-profit event which allows disabled

I remember my dad used to volunteer at Operation Track Shoes, the Special Olympics, I remember him coming home, and telling us that he cleaned some unfortunate kid's bum all day, and that's thought provoking for a young kid. Why would you do that? You think about it, and my dad said "well that poor kid can't do it himself. The only thing worse than cleaning the kid's bum is having no one to clean the kid's bum." It is a compassionate lesson, and I think he—you know my mom too—but he definitely shared those things with us. But as a family we.....supported things, the Terry Fox Runs, and things like that, but we didn't necessarily have a particular cause that as kids we were involved with. (See Appendix F, p. 119)

This quotation further confirms the influence his parents, and in particular, his father's actions, had on his leadership philosophy.

## **Summary**

The Nash interview touched on many themes related to servant-leadership, with the most prominent being: character, team, building relationships/serving others, compassion/empathy, and awareness. Myriad sub-themes also emerged as a result of the data analysis. Chapter four has identified the findings of the research. Chapter five will provide a discussion of the results.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This thesis has introduced the idea of servant-leadership in sport, introduced a new term to describe an athlete who is a servant-leader—the servant-athlete—and set the stage for the research at hand. Chapter 2 reviewed literature on leadership, servant-leadership, athletic leadership, servant-leadership in sport, value transmissions and the literature available on Steve Nash. Chapter 3 examined the methods used for this research: a qualitative study, using the case study methodology. The case looked at Canadian professional basketball player Steve Nash, with an academic interview providing primary research data. This was triangulated using media sources on Nash. Chapter 4 presented the findings of the study, identifying five themes from the data; identifying several sub-themes; and presenting quotations from the interview to provide evidence.

This chapter will discuss the findings of the research, and interpret the data. Consistent with Creswell’s writing on discussions for qualitative studies, the discussion will take into account this researcher’s personal experiences and history in sport, and also include “meaning derived from a comparison of the findings with information gleaned from the literature or theories” (Creswell, 2009, p. 189). Creswell (2009) writes that qualitative studies may “confirm past information, or diverge from it” (p. 189), and that the author may “suggest new questions that need to be asked—questions raised by the data and analysis that the inquirer had not foreseen earlier in the study” (pp. 189-190).

The research questions will be addressed individually, discussing the findings and the themes identified. Recommendations for practice and for future research will be presented.

Finally Steve Nash as a servant-athlete is discussed and concluding remarks complete the study.

### **Research Questions**

As presented in Chapter 1, the research questions are:

- Question 1: What character traits and behaviours would the potential servant-athlete exhibit, consistent with Greenleaf's philosophy, Spears's ten characteristics of servant-leaders, and Sipe and Frick's seven pillars of servant-leadership?
- Question 2: How did Nash's upbringing and childhood influence his leadership style, and its relationship to servant-leadership?

### **Research Question #1**

The idea that the servant-athlete is a person with strong character was consistent throughout the interview data, as well as the literature, and this resonates with Sipe and Frick's (2009) notion of *person of character*. According to Sipe and Frick (2009) traits of honesty, humility, trustworthiness, and leading with conscience (p.15) are all observed in the person of character. There is ample data showing Nash has a strong character, and leads accordingly. One important characteristic of the servant-athlete is the belief that sport supersedes the game itself. That Nash has a strong character and has the belief that sport supersedes the game is supported by his own words. (See Appendix F, p. 128 & p.142).

The servant-athlete also has strong morals, and has the courage to stand up for that in which he or she believes. The research supports this with Nash, with his views on politics and taking a stand for what he believes (p. 61-62), as well as his documented

passion for environmental causes (p. 42). A crucial character trait for the servant-athlete is honesty, about which Nash talks at length, both in reference to his teammates, and being honest with oneself (p. 60). The servant-athlete is humble, quick to praise teammates, and acknowledge that everyone on the team is equally important, regardless of skill level (p. 64).

Character is a theme that runs throughout Greenleaf's works, and Powers and Moore (2004) discuss the importance of leaders leading by example with their conduct (p. 25). The servant-athlete, above all else, leads with character. This is evident in the values and morals he or she espouses, which is easily observed by teammates and coaches. The servant-athlete has the courage to up for what he or she believes is right, even when this involves taking a risk. This can be seen throughout in many comments presented from Nash's interview, in particular the quote regarding his wearing of the T-shirt with the words "NO WAR: Shoot for Peace".

The theme of team is closely aligned with Spears's (2004) idea of *building community*, which is frequently discussed in the servant-leadership literature. In Greenleaf's, *The Servant as Leader* (2008), he writes about the importance of community, how they foster connections and love, and ultimately export this love beyond the community at hand. This is consistent with the idea that the value of sport extends beyond the court or playing field, and into other areas of life. Looking to the athletic leadership literature, the finding that team cohesion is linked to team performance (Aoyagi et al., 2008; Brown, 2003; Mullen & Cooper, 1994) further emphasizes the importance of making team a priority. The servant-athlete recognizes this, and lets the team's best interest shape all his or her decisions and actions.

Nash talks about the importance of being committed and accountable to the team (p. 68), and the need to put the group's interest ahead of individual interest (p. 70). He discusses the myriad benefits of doing things as a team, including the pure joy and rewards of working together, as well as the effectiveness in working towards goals as a group (p. 68). This supports the concept of the servant-athlete being committed to the team and seeking, through words and actions, to work closely together as a team and shows how Nash fits the definition of the servant-athlete in this regard.

The servant-athlete is a relationship builder, and always looks to serve the needs of his or her teammates first. Nash does this by building trust, and opening up to his teammates—he speaks of the importance of being completely honest, and not guarded (p. 71). He speaks of genuinely caring about his teammates, and having a desire to make connections with people, and the importance of humour in building relationships (p. 71). As the servant-athlete is completely committed to the team; he or she models effort, commitment and pure motives, which further builds, trust amongst teammates (p. 72). Consistent with the idea that servant-leadership is not a soft type of leadership—and counter to the common criticism cited in Chapter 2—the servant-athlete sometimes serves his or her teammates by being tough, challenging them, or having difficult conversations with them (p. 74). All of these behaviours are guided and influenced by a genuine caring for the teammates, and the well-being of the team as a whole.

The idea of serving others is perhaps *the* central tenet of servant-leadership, as Greenleaf (2008) articulates in his famous best test quotation (p.4). The notion of putting teammates' needs first is a seamless fit with servant-leadership. Nash touches on the tremendous satisfaction he receives from supporting a teammate during a time of

struggle; helping them through it, and then seeing them succeed (p. 73). This is consistent with healing, which both Spears and Greenleaf write about extensively, with Greenleaf stating that the motive for healing others is healing one's self (p.38).

Spears (2004) identifies *commitment to the growth of people* as a key theme in Greenleaf's work, with the servant-leader doing everything he or she can to care for and nurture individuals (Crippen, 2005). Sipe and Frick (2009) describe this as *puts people first*, with the overarching motive of helping those they serve to grow (p. 34).

Relationship building is addressed in Loughead and Hardy's (2005) study, where they found that peer leaders in sport were perceived by teammates to display leadership behaviours consistent with relationship building, such as social support, positive feedback and democratic decision making. Nash discusses his role as an encourager (p. 66), which is consistent with these findings. In Westre's (2008) study looking at servant-leader coaches, one of the themes identified was that of *team cohesion and relationship among members*. The study makes explicit mention of facilitating strong relationships amongst players, and between players and coaches, with the objective of fostering a culture of service (Westre, 2008). The literature supports the finding that the servant-athlete is a relationship builder who puts the needs of his or her teammates first.

Nash's language shows compassion and empathy, and he speaks directly to both in relation to teammates, as well as anyone who may be struggling, or less fortunate (p. 75-76), supporting the notion of his acting as servant-athlete, leading with compassion and empathy, towards his teammates, as well as opponents, referees and coaches, and indeed the greater community. His words on his personal beliefs on compassion and empathy demonstrate his servant-leadership qualities in this area:

It comes down to having interpersonal relationships, having compassion for what people are going through. If someone's doing really well, be happy for them. If someone's not doing really well, hurt for them, and be able to try to show compassion, show them that you feel their pain and you want them to do better.

(p. 75)

The servant-athlete's actions also show compassion and empathy, which extend beyond their respective sport. In Nash's case, his involvement in his own charity, The Steve Nash Foundation, as well as his contributions to local basketball in Vancouver, and even the simple act of anonymously donating money to his less well-off teammates demonstrate this value seen in servant-athlete's actions.

The story of Terry Fox had a profound impact on Nash as a child, and shaped his perspective on compassion and empathy, which he talks at length about (p. 78). He would go on to create a documentary on Terry Fox, to help deliver the inspirational message of courage and hope. There is ample evidence in the literature of Nash's compassion, including biographical accounts (Rudd, 1996, 2006), and the words of former coach Del Harris (Deacon, 2003). The servant-athlete participates in service initiatives, and ideally helps get the team involved as well, knowing that it is the right thing to do, helps individuals heal, and leads to team growth that cannot be accomplished anywhere else. Servant-athletes are motivated because of the joy they get in helping others, and not for less altruistic motives such as image or ego. The research shows, by looking at Nash's charitable works, his service initiatives, that he has these characteristics of a servant-athlete.

Empathy is a prominent theme in Greenleaf's writings, and one of Spears's (2004) ten characteristics, described as "the act of seeking to understand the feelings of others in a given circumstance." (p. 15). Greenleaf (2008) believed "the servant always accepts and empathizes, never rejects." (p. 21), with Crippen (2010), Powers and Moore (2004) and Sipe and Frick (2009) also citing empathy as a key ingredient of servant-leadership. Westre (2008) identifies compassion as one of the motivational techniques employed by coaches who are servant-leaders, and Kavussanu & Boardley (2009) found empathy to be positively related to pro-social opponent behaviour, and negatively related to anti-social behaviour.

The servant-athlete practices awareness, in relation to surroundings, his or her teammates and how his or her actions are impacting them, and perhaps most importantly, the servant-athlete is self-aware. Nash discusses his own leadership with a level of awareness and self-reflection that indicates a self-critical approach, balanced with maintaining a positive outlook, and preserving confidence. He is philosophical about his leadership skills, and discusses the importance of intuition, and knowing whether you are serving someone or enabling them (p. 84). His position as point guard indicates he is naturally aware of his surroundings, but he is also very aware of his teammates, and their different needs.

Nash indicates that he sets aside time for self-reflection, and in describing this, evokes Greenleaf's idea of healing, touching upon "insecurity, fear of failure, of overcompensating, self-loathing, self-praise" (p. 83). His self-awareness extends to recognizing the need for self-care, and making time for quiet and calm—consistent with

what Greenleaf terms withdrawal—which helps him decompress, makes him freer and more peaceful, and allows him to enjoy what he does, and be his most effective (p. 84).

Spears (2004) identifies awareness as one of the ten characteristics of servant-leadership, and believes it strengthens the servant-leader (p.3). Greenleaf (2008) writes that awareness “stocks both the conscious and unconscious minds with a richness of resources for future need.....helping build serenity in the face of stress and uncertainty.” (p. 29), with Covey (1989) and Crippen (2010) also indicating the importance of awareness in servant-leadership. The servant-athlete practices awareness, in relation to teammates and surroundings, and most importantly, self-awareness, building in time for self-reflection and withdrawal when needed.

## **Research Question #2**

Nash makes reference to his childhood several times throughout the interview, with specific reference to his father’s values and actions, as well as childhood experiences that shaped him. Some of the values Nash credits his parents with instilling in him include commitment, hard work, compassion, and empathy,

Nash talks about the experience as a six year old, watching Terry Fox run across the country, and how that helped him form compassion, and put in place the building blocks for how he interacts with people, approaches his job, and how he takes responsibility (p. 78).

Consistent with the research on value transmission, which indicates values can be passed on from parents to children during the formative years (Barni et al., 2011; Knafo & Schwartz, 2009; Padilla-Walker, 2007; Rohan & Zanna, 1996), Nash’s present day value system was influenced by his parents—in particular, his father—in the way they

raised him, their actions, and the purposefully taught values. Additionally, Nash's keen interest in the story of Terry Fox, and following it on television and in the media, also made a strong impression, and helped influence his modern values and leadership practice. The nature of the influence, vis-à-vis the traits of commitment, hard work, compassion and empathy, was consistent with Greenleaf's philosophy of servant-leadership, and likely played an important role in Nash becoming a servant-athlete.

### **Defining the Servant-Athlete**

Based on information gathered in this study, with Greenleaf's servant-leadership philosophy as an overarching framework, the research suggests that the servant-athlete would have the following core attributes:

- A person of strong character, exemplifying the qualities of honesty, humility and trustworthiness, through actions easily observable to coaches and teammates alike. The servant-athlete has a strong, principled set of beliefs, for which he or she has the courage to stand up;
- A believer that sport transcends the game itself, offers lessons that extend to all areas of life, and is a vehicle to help athletes heal themselves and others;
- Completely committed and accountable to the team, and believes the individual's interest should be that of the team. The servant-athlete finds joy in working as a team, and strives to perpetually strengthen team culture.
- Builds relationships based on trust, openness, and a genuine caring for teammates, and seeks to serve his or her teammates' needs first.

- Leads with compassion and empathy, the servant-athlete is inspired to help teammates heal, and participate in service beyond sport, that contributes to the greater good of those being served.
- Practices awareness, self-reflection, and self-care in the form of withdrawal. The servant-athlete is acutely aware of the environment, teammates' needs and challenges, and their own fears, challenges, strengths and shortcomings.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Using the research as a framework, the following are recommendations on how to put this information into practice:

- Recommendation #1: Athletes should be exposed at young age to the values of compassion, empathy, commitment and teamwork. This should be done in a family setting, as well as in an athletic setting, from an early age.
- Recommendation #2: Servant-leadership should be further embraced as an effective leadership philosophy in sport, with players pursuing further study and practicing the basic tenets of the servant-athlete, and coaches and parents encouraging and facilitating this leadership development.
- Recommendation #3: Steve Nash should be used as evidence that servant-leadership is an effective leadership philosophy in sport, and as the model for servant-athlete, for the values he espouses; the purposeful actions he engages in, both in and out of sport; and the philosophy with which he approaches sport, and the notion of team.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Using this study as a framework, the following are recommendations on how to use this information for future research:

- Recommendation #1: Further research should be done into the effectiveness of servant-leadership in sport, how servant-athletes are best developed, and how servant-athletes influence their teammates, and in the case of higher profile athletes, their fans.

## **Steve Nash as a Servant-Athlete**

In Chapter 1, an assumption was identified that Steve Nash may be a servant-athlete. After meticulous research, an academic interview, and the subsequent data analysis, this study has indicated that Nash is a servant-athlete. His character, values, philosophy on leadership and actions all confirm this. Additionally, throughout the course of the academic interview, he appears to embrace the philosophy of servant-leadership, and even goes on to state

So there's the leader and there's the servant. Is one better than the other? I would say the servant is, because there's at least a moral high ground that's reached. That supersedes.....winning, or production, let's say.....Obviously I like the servant-leader because it supersedes whatever the group is doing.....It supersedes sport. There's an idea that's higher than sport, and bigger than sport. (See Appendix F, p.144).

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has explored the idea of looking at servant-leadership in sport—an idea that, from the outset, seemed to hold great potential. Using the expansive body of servant-leadership literature, as well as current athletic-leadership literature, and the small

number of studies looking at servant-leader coaches, this study has used a case study of professional basketball player Steve Nash to look at servant-leader athletes, or servant-athletes.

The research shows, drawing upon the rich data from the academic interview with Steve Nash, as well as the abundance of information existing on his career, leadership style and character, that he is indeed a servant-athlete, and that he provides evidence that servant-leadership is an effective form of leadership in sport, which is currently being practiced. This study has identified a number of themes from the academic interview, triangulated the findings with other sources from books and popular media, and ultimately, identified a set of six core attributes of the servant-athlete. The thesis concludes with four recommendations moving forward, three for practice and one for research, and a promising new outlook on athletic leadership, which looks to servant-athletes to emerge and further evolve the world of athletic leadership, and indeed the entire athletic world.

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## Appendix A: Ethics Certificate



**Human Research Ethics Board**  
 Office of Research Services  
 Administrative Services Building  
 PO Box 1700 STN CSC  
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### Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: <b>Richard Primrose</b>	<b>ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER</b>	<b>11-313</b>
UVic STATUS: <b>Master's Student UVic</b>	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE:	08-Aug-11
DEPARTMENT: <b>EPLS</b>	APPROVED ON:	08-Aug-11
SUPERVISOR: <b>Carolyn Crippen</b>	APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE:	07-Aug-12
PROJECT TITLE: <b>The Servant-Athlete: Examining servant-leadership in the context of sport</b>		
RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS: None		
DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: <b>None</b>		
<b>CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL</b>		
<p>This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.</p> <p><b>Modifications</b>          To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.</p> <p><b>Renewals</b>          Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.</p> <p><b>Project Closures</b>          When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.</p>		
<b>Certification</b>		

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.



Dr. Rachael Scarth  
Associate Vice-President, Research

Certificate Issued On: 19-Jul-13

Steve Narn  
Name of Participant



Signature

2/10/12  
Date

*A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.*

### Appendix C: Interview questions script

1. What experiences can you recall from your childhood of serving others, or showing compassion for others?
2. Can you talk about some of the values that your parents and family instilled in you when you were growing up? How did they go about teaching you these values?
3. Joseph Badaracco talks about something called a defining moment, in which a person's true character and values are tested, and they have to make a difficult decision, or take a difficult course of action. Sometimes this involves choosing between two things which are *both* right, revealing the true character of a leader (as cited in Sipe & Frick, 2009, p. 21). Can you think of any defining moments from your childhood? Your youth? Your university and professional career?
4. Ian Hyde-lay has relayed stories of you working to build relationships with your teammates, and foster a positive team climate. He even tells stories of you helping mediate conflicts amongst your teammates. Can you talk about your thoughts on an athletes' role in building team cohesion?
5. Much has been made in the media of you being a professional athlete with strong moral character. Stories have been written talking about how you have never abandoned your principles, with the "Shoot for Peace" shirt at the all-star game being a case-in-point. How do you view your responsibilities as a role model, and what are your thoughts on the importance of your actions?
6. Jay Triano talked about you having him distribute \$20 000 of your money to your Olympic teammates, to make their experience more comfortable—anonously at that. This is a fine example of a leader putting his teammates' needs before his own, and genuinely caring about them; this is also *the* central idea behind servant-

leadership. Can you talk about your thoughts on what a leader's responsibilities are to his teammates?

7. How does a leader admit and overcome his mistakes, and help his teammates admit and overcome mistakes?
8. How does an athlete use mind, body and spirit to the full extent to lead his teammates?
9. What do you think is the greatest asset that a leader can have in sport?
10. Servant-leadership places value on the skills or traits of listening, empathy and healing. These might not be qualities that come to mind when most people talk about strong athlete leaders. How do you think they fit into athletic leadership, and your particular leadership style?
11. How does an athlete who is such an intense competitor, with such a strong drive to win—which I know from watching you, talking to your past coach and teammates, and hearing interviews—reconcile this quality, and manage to lead with such a strong sense of morality, and a caring ethic?
12. In 1970, Robert Greenleaf wrote an essay called *The Servant as Leader*. This is regarded as the seminal work in servant-leadership, and is viewed by scholars as every bit as important today as it was when he wrote it. The most famous quote from Greenleaf is as follows:

The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?

(Greenleaf, 2008, p. 15)

Can you discuss your impression of this quote?

The servant-leader *is* servant first...It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then, conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead...The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will he benefit, or, at least, will he not be further deprived? (Greenleaf, 2008, p. 15).

## **Appendix D: Interview questions**

Question #1: The first question is, what experiences can you recall from your childhood of serving others, or showing compassion for others?

Question #2: Where there any service activities your family ever did?

Question #3: So building on that, what were some of the core values they instilled in you?

Question #4: Joseph Badaraco talks about something called a defining moment, in which a person's true character and values are tested. And they have to make a difficult decision, or take a difficult course of action. Sometimes this involves choosing between two things that are both right, revealing the true character of the leader. Can you think of any defining moments from your childhood or youth?

Question #5: Now what about in terms of actually leading teams, whether it's professionally, or in college, or the Olympics. Have you ever had any really difficult choices to make, or difficult conversations to have with teammates, where you felt like it was the right thing to do for the team to address an issue?

Question #6: A big piece of servant-leadership is relationship building, and servant-leaders make it a priority. In talking to Ian Hyde-Lay (Steve's high school coach at SMUS), I know that you've always really valued building relationships with teammates. And he's even told stories of when you would mediate conflicts, or try and help teammates come together when there had been problems. Can you talk about the importance of building relationships amongst the team?

Question #7: Much has been made in the media about you being a professional athlete with a strong moral character, and always making decisions on what you believe is best. I know that you've said that you try to only represent brands that you feel are ethical and

socially responsible, and one example I have here that I really admire is when you went to the All-Star game, and wore the 'Shoot for Peace' shirt, because of your beliefs (NOTE: the shirt referred to the US military action in Iraq). You probably knew you would take some heat, and that it might not be the easiest road to go, but you thought it was important to. How do you view your responsibilities as a role model and to use your celebrity and your status to put out certain messages that you believe in?

Question #8: Obviously the name servant-leadership implies that service is a big aspect of it, and I know your work with the Steve Nash Foundation, you obviously value charity work, and service work. Can you talk about your beliefs in the role of service in sport?

Question #9: One of my interests is in younger aged sports teams doing service. I've always taken my basketball teams to do service, and I think it's valuable team-building. We talk about teaching character through sport, it's a great in that respect. What do you think about younger sports teams doing service, and the value of it?

Question #10: People talk a lot about how sport is a vehicle to teach character, and teach life values, and I think everyone agrees that it can be. But it's not automatic. In fact, sometimes it can teach the opposite. What are your thoughts on that, and how we can ensure that sport is teaching life lessons, and teaching character, and teaching the right sorts of values?

Question #11: I really liked when you won your first MVP award, and immediately invited your teammates up to accept it with you. And you're always very quick to deflect any praise to your teammates; can you talk about that a bit?

Question #12: Do you ever take into consideration what your teammates' general affect is when they're playing. For example, if you know a guy's having a rough go of it, are you inclined to maybe give him the open shot ahead of someone else?

Question #13: It's interesting, this book (The Servant as Leader, Greenleaf), the seminal work on servant-leadership, talks about awareness, which is exactly what you just described. Servant-leaders have that intangible awareness, that you almost can't teach, and it talks about intuition as well, which is foreseeing things, and knowing the unknowable. One story I like, and tell my students, is when you went to the Olympics, and I think it was Jay Triano who relayed this story, you didn't even bring it out. You asked the coach to distribute \$25000 equally between the teammates, who weren't professionals, and didn't have much cash. You wanted to improve their experience, but you didn't want them to know it was from you. Genuinely caring about your teammates, and meeting their needs, is pretty much the central idea behind servant-leadership. What are a leader's responsibilities to his teammates?

Question #14: Now, without naming names, do you see basketball players, or even other leaders, who probably need more of this kind of ethical leadership, and maybe less of what they have; less self-centred leadership? Is that something you see on a regular basis?

Question #15: Sometimes people read about servant-leadership, or they hear about it, and they label it a soft leadership, which it's not. Part of being a servant-leader is having courage to have difficult conversations, and tackle problems, when you know it's in the best interest of everyone to tackle them, but it would be easier to ignore them. How does an athlete, like yourself, who is such an intense competitor, with a strong drive to win,

reconcile that quality and manage to lead with such a strong sense of morality, and a caring ethic?

Question #16: How does a leader admit and overcome his mistakes, and help his teammates admit, and overcome mistakes?

Question #17: This next question was suggested to me by a gentleman named Shann Ferch, who used to play NCAA basketball, and is big in the leadership world now. How does an athlete use mind, body and spirit to the full extent to lead his teammates? Do you have a spiritual piece, or something that you draw motivation from, or draw inspiration from?

Question #18: Do you set time aside for reflection, or is it an ongoing process?

Question #19: Servant-leadership places value on the skills or traits of listening, empathy and healing. I know you talked a bit about healing there. These might not be qualities that come to mind when most people talk about strong athlete leaders. How do you think they fit into athletic leadership, and your particular leadership style?

Question #20: Do you find that a lot of athletic leaders have these traits, or not enough, or?

Question #21: This is probably the most famous quotation from this Robert Greenleaf book, and I just want you to read it, and just share your impressions on it. So it's just these two paragraphs I've indicated there. (Nash reads Greenleaf's 'best test' quotation referenced in Chapter 1, p. 4).

Question #22: I'm interested in teaching character through sport, and life lessons, and all those things. So what words of advice would you give to young athletes about their own personal athletic experience, and how it will contribute to character development and

their lives beyond sports? What would you say to them, again exactly what we're talking about, trying to get more out of sport than just the game itself?

**Appendix E: Picture of Richard Primrose and Steve Nash**



## Appendix F: Interview transcript

Ritch: The first question is, what experiences can you recall from your childhood of serving others, or showing compassion for others?

Steve: I think it's difficult for me on the spot to relay exact events, but I definitely feel like my parents, and in particular my dad (who coached us in sports) was very compassionate and always tried to be fair. It wasn't a fastest-way-to-the-top type parenting strategy, or a push-your-kids strategy. He expected, and taught us what the deal is when you sign up to play for a team, and the commitment you make. Anything outside of that was up to you. Driving yourself to be better. But while you're there you know you have work hard and carry yourself in a certain manner. I think it starts there, and then, when situations arise you see the way he handled adversity, or he handled a tough situation and you learn from them; you watch them. Not just the lessons they teach you, but the lessons they show you indirectly. He was always compassionate about other people, whether it be as a coach, or as a co-worker, friend.

Ritch: Where there any service activities your family ever did?

Steve: Not really. I remember my dad used to volunteer at Operation Track Shoes, the Special Olympics, I remember him coming home, and telling us that he cleaned some unfortunate kid's bum all day, and that's thought provoking for a young kid. Why would you do that? You think about it, and my dad said "well that poor kid can't do it himself. The only thing worse than cleaning the kid's bum is having no one to clean the kid's bum." It is a compassionate lesson, and I think he—you know my mom too—but he definitely shared those things with us. But as a family we didn't necessarily, I mean we supported things, the Terry Fox Runs, and things like that, but we didn't necessarily have a particular cause that as kids we were involved with.

Ritch: So building on that, what were some of the core values they instilled in you?

Steve: I think, commitment to what you sign up for. I think they also taught us to have compassion, to think about the inequality in the world, and those less fortunate. To understand that not everyone is afforded the relative ease, and so when we're complaining about being bored, it's your fault. It's up to you to find something to do, and keep yourself busy. If you're worried about things like boredom, instead of hunger, health and safety—then they taught that world is full of people worse off.

Ritch: Joseph Badaraco talks about something called a defining moment, in which a person's true character and values are tested. And they have to make a difficult decision, or take a difficult course of action. Sometimes this involves choosing between two things that are both right, revealing the true character of the leader. Can you think of any defining moments from your childhood or youth?

Steve: I'm trying to think maybe of the big moments, ahh, childhood was long time ago. I remember the decision to go to St. Mikes was a big decision. In my experience, Mt. Doug had a very relaxed attitude on attendance, and as an eleventh grader who loved sports, I didn't thrive in that setting. I wanted to be in the gym, or I'd be playing sports instead of being in class all the time, or I'd, not so much that I was skipping a lot of class, but it was up to you, instead of the teacher pushing it on you. I didn't do well in that just 'cause I was so interested in sports. It dominated all of my motives, so you know the choice to go to St. Mikes was a big moment, and I think there is something to that because, on the one hand it's a failure in a way, to leave something you started. At the same time I knew that it was going to be a challenge, and knew that it would be a topic, and I knew that also academically it challenged. We went from a calendar system

academically to semesters, so St. Mikes had finished by the time Christmas rolled around, and we transferred. Jamie [Miller, my teammate at Arbutus and then Mt. Doug] and I, we had to catch up on three or four months, or a whole semester over the Christmas break, so it was a challenge. You talk about a quarter of your class load. In some ways, I always felt bad for quitting in one respect, on the other hand I wasn't quitting to take the easy route, so I realized that it was going to be a big challenge, and a big opportunity for me. You know, the challenge, academically, athletically, testing my character, and at the same time test myself. Having the character to uphold my end of the academic deal, athletic deal, but also to face the adversity that would come with it. I don't know if that's a great example, but that was a big decision.

Ritch: Now what about in terms of actually leading teams, whether it's professionally, or in college, or the Olympics. Have you ever had any really difficult choices to make, or difficult conversations to have with teammates, where you felt like it was the right thing to do for the team to address an issue?

Steve: You know I've been lucky, I haven't had a lot of those where it fell to a player level. I really haven't had any situations like that. My college teammates were all great. We never really had a problem. The NBA has a reputation for people looking out for themselves. And it is a business, it is their livelihood, their family's livelihood, so sometimes it's difficult for individuals—and not wrong for individuals to put their own interests ahead of the team. If it's not in the best interest of the team, but it's in the best interest of you having a successful 5 or 10 or 15 year career, you know, that helps your family—security and longevity and sustainability—it's hard to knock that person looking out for their family, even if it's misguided. But I haven't had many of those where people

really crossed the line. There are definitely times where you see people, and you have a feeling like, the motive isn't congruent with the rest of the room.

Ritch: Yeah.

Steve: But not one where it was so bad that you had to make a tough decision like that. So, I don't have an example.

Ritch: A big piece of servant-leadership is relationship building, and servant-leaders make it a priority. In talking to Ian Hyde-Lay (Steve's high school coach at SMUS), I know that you've always really valued building relationships with teammates. And he's even told stories of when you would mediate conflicts, or try and help teammates come together when there had been problems. Can you talk about the importance of building relationships amongst the team?

Steve: I think the bottom line is the team. It's about coming together and being greater than the sum of your parts. Why sign up for something if you're not going to make the most of it, and making the most of it is being better than the sum of your parts. It's such a joy and a pleasure to be a part of a group of people that are working together, pushing forward in the same direction. That's when it's the most fun. That's when the special things happen, you get the most success, and win or lose you walk away with a great feeling, and a sense of reward, vindication, justification. Everyone walks away feeling proud of what they did. How many times in life do you get to have a brotherhood, or a family situation? You have one family, so outside of that where else can you find a place where you can say "let's come together, in the name of commonality, and try to do something great"? What's better than that? There aren't a lot of things that are more worthwhile or rewarding than that. I always feel like you should try to make a team of it,

cause it's the way to do it. It's the right thing to do. It's the most rewarding, and it's the most fun. The rewards are great, even if it's just the feeling like you're all pulling in the same direction. For me the way that that happens is to be personable, let people in, and make them feel like they can trust you. Not to want anything, need anything, or protect anything from people. Because people feel when someone's guarded, or they're closed. When I was a rookie, Joe Klein, who was a veteran centre, told me his one piece of advice was to be able to laugh at yourself, and you'll get through this pretty well. It's a simple but great way to look at it. If people see you willing to laugh at yourself, or be self-deprecating, it definitely brings everyone's guard down a notch. One of the great parts of team sports is the banter, which largely means giving each other a hard time. If the whole room is able to take it, you've got a chance to win, because nobody's insecure or guarded. They're open and willing to see the humour in their own short comings or behaviour. I think it allows people to believe in each other, and trust their motives. For me it's about making a connection with people; having an interest without being invasive of their background and history, and desires.

Ritch: I'm glad you brought humour up, that was a question I had, and I've watched some of your Meathawk stuff, and your vitamin water stuff, and it's hilarious. It's good that you bring in that element. I think it's a key to building relationships, so you really have that.

Steve: Yeah, I mean, it's funny, one year we made a few videos on the plane.

Ritch: I've seen those, yeah.

Steve: And we had a great year. I think the guys all wanted to do it, they thought it was funny, and wanted to be involved. And it's not that making videos make you a great team,

but the fact that everyone was willing to do stuff together, and not be protected, or too cool. It's great, and it shows that there's trust there.

Ritch: It's true the best teams have cohesion, right, and I won't speculate about what happened last year in the finals, but I suspect the Mavericks had a very cohesive team that got along well, looked out for each other, and I don't know about the Heat, but...

Steve: Yeah, I don't think it's that the Heat weren't... I just think the Heat were new. The Mavs had been together a while, they'd been through those situations, where you're in tough when you look around the room and you know what to expect from the other guys, where the Heat, that's the first time they'd been in that situation.

Ritch: Much has been made in the media about you being a professional athlete with a strong moral character, and always making decisions on what you believe is best. I know that you've said that you try to only represent brands that you feel are ethical and socially responsible, and one example I have here that I really admire is when you went to the All-Star game, and wore the 'Shoot for Peace' shirt, because of your beliefs (NOTE: the shirt referred to the US military action in Iraq). You probably knew you would take some heat, and that it might not be the easiest road to go, but you thought it was important to. How do you view your responsibilities as a role model and to use your celebrity and your status to put out certain messages that you believe in?

Steve: I don't want to overcomplicate it by trying to think of myself as a brand, or have a strategy there. The few times that I've really stood up, and I knew I would take heat, it just came down to something that I believed in. I didn't really think about how it would look. I felt it was wrong, and felt compelled to say something. With the war, the whole thing seemed very fishy, and didn't align with my sensibilities or beliefs, and it was

actually a very close classmate of mine from St. Mikes who had become an activist, and I asked her to walk me through it, and find the actual facts. When she gave me a briefing, so to speak, on it, I felt more comfortable that my instincts were right, and that it just didn't align with what I thought was right. So I decided to say something. It was really exclusive of my career or image; it was something that I felt as a person I had to do, whether I worked at Starbucks, or played in the NBA.

Ritch: Obviously the name servant-leadership implies that service is a big aspect of it, and I know your work with the Steve Nash Foundation, you obviously value charity work, and service work. Can you talk about your beliefs in the role of service in sport?

Steve: I think that there are a lot of great hearted people out there; there are a lot of people who are fortunate, and help others. At the same time, there's no question that a lot of charity work is for image, and to improve a brand, whether it's a professional franchise, or an individual. There are some varying degrees of the relationship there; between charity and the individual and their service, or a group and their service. There's no question that sometimes it is a big photo op, but for me it's never that. Going back to my dad and my mom, teaching me about the inequality in the world, about people who are less fortunate, always struck a chord with me. I always felt a little bit of an obligation to be involved, and to do something. And that's it. What it becomes is what it becomes, but just the seed of inside you, feeling like "I really should try to do something to help somebody". I think once you decide to do something, that's great. You can't judge people on how much they do, or what they're doing. It's just the fact that they decided they're on that side of the fence, and to take a step and do something. For me it's become something that—and I hate to use that word, like brand, or image—but people really associate with

me (with service), as a part of my brand, but it never was an intention for it to be that. It doesn't make me feel good to hear people say "oh, he's charitable", you know, it makes me feel good when somebody who has either helped us help someone, or somebody benefitted from our help, is happy, is smiling. That feels good, and in a way, it feels good like a relief. It's almost like it's bordering or leaning towards guilt for all the great things that have happened to me. I feel a sense of obligation to try to do something for somebody. That's it. Whatever happens, happens. If the Foundation goes on for two hundred years, and has a billion dollar endowment one day, that doesn't matter; or if I'm just cleaning up after a natural disaster. The image is not what's important: it's the action.

Ritch: One of my interests is in younger aged sports teams doing service. I've always taken my basketball teams to do service, and I think it's valuable team-building. We talk about teaching character through sport, it's a great in that respect. What do you think about younger sports teams doing service, and the value of it?

Steve: I think it's great: the team-building, the learning, the chemistry, and importance of being a unit. It something that you can't do at practice; but, you can highlight, augment, grow to something different. I think we get used to the dynamics of a training session, and sometimes it's good to move that group to a different setting, particularly for service, because you're all doing something selfless for somebody else. For me, my experience that relates to that is Terry Fox. As a six year old, watching him run across the country, and turning on the TV every morning that summer, it posed a lot of questions: "why is he doing this?", "Why does he have one leg?", "He has cancer.", "Why is that?", "It's a potentially terminal illness and they had to cut off his leg so he could survive.", "Okay, so why is he running across Canada?", "Well, to tell people about cancer and teach

them.”, “Okay, why?”, “So we can raise money, because it costs money to learn more about the disease.” So you're asking the person all these questions, that at that age, are going to form a lot of their compassion, their will, their characteristics and, it's like one of those building blocks that's going to form other things. It will impact the way they interact with people, the way they approach their job, the way they take responsibility. If you realized through Terry Fox, or through the team going to the Mustard Seed, there are those that are really struggling, that are less fortunate, or get terminal illness, that's always the seed in the back of your head—have compassion. If someone cuts you off in line, instead of saying “do you want to fight?”, the chance can be to say “who am I to judge?”. I don't know what this person's situation is. I could confront them politely, or I could just go and chalk it up to “that's life”, and be peaceful. I feel like it's a really important building block, until you build this person that is either a critical thinker, and able to adjust on the fly to life around them, or somebody who, without those building blocks is maybe unable to think critically, or for themselves, on the fly, or under pressure. I think these are really important lessons, not only in the team sense, but in an individual sense, that are taught through a team, and at a young age.

Ritch: People talk a lot about how sport is a vehicle to teach character, and teach life values, and I think everyone agrees that it can be. But it's not automatic. In fact, sometimes it can teach the opposite. What are your thoughts on that, and how we can ensure that sport is teaching life lessons, and teaching character, and teaching the right sorts of values?

Steve: I think it's completely true. I think human beings innately are out to survive; out to see themselves survive and succeed, and feel good. I don't think it's natural for us to

realize we can feel good by coming second, and helping somebody else. That's not always natural. For some people it is to a fault. Maybe you want those people to have a bit more of an ego, and try to push. I think sometimes we see kids in sports not being taught about being able to win, and being able to lose, and realizing the humility in sport, and in that it becomes one of those founding blocks, that goes for the rest of their lives, that they never broke through, so when they get into the workplace, or they get into family dynamics, and there's conflict, they're ill-equipped to deal with it, or have the skills to resolve situations like that. Growing up in British Columbia, hockey and soccer were big sports. I think in both locker rooms, no one is bigger than the team. They're both banter sports, where if somebody is too big for their britches, everyone lets them know. I feel like that was a huge part of my development, as an athlete, because as somebody who excelled, I never looked at myself as better than my teammates. As a performer I felt like I could do a lot of great things, but I never felt like that made me more important than the next person on the team. We were all equal. Some athletes can't quite understand that. They always have a chip on their shoulder, they always are trying to put themselves ahead of the team, and they never really become a winner so to speak. You have to teach kids it's not all about you, you have to learn to win and to lose. Humility is imperative, for sports to be worth a damn.

Ritch: I really liked when you won your first MVP award, and immediately invited your teammates up to accept it with you. And you're always very quick to deflect any praise to your teammates; can you talk about that a bit?

Steve: I think in particular for me, it's my personality, but it's also the way I play. I'm not a guy who's trying to score 20, 30 points every night, I'm trying to make it all work. I'm

trying to bring everyone together. I think I was given the MVP because I did that successfully. I brought a team together that lost most of their games the year before, and then won most of their games, and we did so because of that idea. Let's try to make this work together, let's try to be unselfish, let's try to make the game easy for each other. And so when I was rewarded for it, I felt like my teammates bought into that, and were a part of that. And whether it was my lead or not, they followed, or they took part, and it just made sense that we would all join in this together, because that's why we're here today.

Ritch: Yeah, and it's pretty unique to have an MVP get the MVP because he's getting assists ahead of points, which is kind of neat, because that fits the servant-leader philosophy.

Steve: Yeah, for sure. It's rare, and I think probably a lot of people have a problem with it. They think it's got to be somebody who's just dominant, an athlete-slash-scorer—and I get that to an extent. A lot of me winning those two awards was timing. And, not to discredit, in fact I really think I was one of the best players in the game those years. It's just that there are other players that were better one-on-one players, who scored more. I feel like it was timing. I went to the right team that needed me, and I fit well with them. They bought into it. They were younger, I was older. They bought into the fact that I knew more than them. They kind of followed me, and had respect. They deserve a lot of credit for that. You don't have to.

Ritch: Do you ever take into consideration what your teammates' general affect is when they're playing. For example, if you know a guy's having a rough go of it, are you inclined to maybe give him the open shot ahead of someone else?

Steve: Let's put it this way, it does cross my mind. Sometimes it might influence me, sometimes I might directly follow that, but most of the time it is in my mind. But everything's happening so fast that you can't always live by that. I'm cognizant of it. And I think I'm lucky that's just the way I'm wired, and I deserve no credit for that. I was born that way, and I think about other people's feelings, what's going on in their head. I think some people are probably semi-oblivious to others' body language, whereas I'm kind of taking it all in, subconsciously—I can't help it. As a point guard, it's a good fit.

Ritch: It's interesting, this book (*The Servant as Leader*, Greenleaf), the seminal work on servant-leadership, talks about awareness, which is exactly what you just described.

Servant-leaders have that intangible awareness, that you almost can't teach, and it talks about intuition as well, which is foreseeing things, and knowing the unknowable. One story I like, and tell my students, is when you went to the Olympics, and I think it was Jay Triano who relayed this story, you didn't even bring it out. You asked the coach to distribute \$25000 equally between the teammates, who weren't professionals, and didn't have much cash. You wanted to improve their experience, but you didn't want them to know it was from you. Genuinely caring about your teammates, and meeting their needs, is pretty much the central idea behind servant-leadership. What are a leader's responsibilities to his teammates?

Steve: In sport, you can't go too far. I think you can go to the wall for your teammates, to death. Or you can just go to what the responsibility is, and think “the obligation's not there to go all the way to the wall”, but there's an obligation to be accountable and be committed. The biggest thing is to come in everyday and be a pro. My dad when I was six or seven was like, “go to practice, and work your socks off. And encourage your

teammates, and don't be a jackass, and be a positive force, be a positive influence, work hard, do as the coach says, and be a part of the game, and the team, being better or positive.” So there's the energy and effort and commitment, and there's the motive: to have the motive being for the greater good. Of wanting to see your teammates succeed, because it will help the group succeed. And that's it. From there, there are the decisions you have to make daily, for the betterment of the group.

Ritch: Now, without naming names, do you see basketball players, or even other leaders, who probably need more of this kind of ethical leadership, and maybe less of what they have; less self-centred leadership? Is that something you see on a regular basis?

Steve: Well sure, but we see it everywhere, it's not just sports or politics, it's in every office, school, every group dynamic. You're going to see the whole gamut of it. And unfortunately profession sports and politics get a bad rap, because they're under the microscope, but it's probably the same everywhere. Every school you've probably got a teacher, or faculty member, who has their own motive, or is insecure, or untrustworthy, or won't trust others. I won't say it's cancerous, but it stops progress. I think we see it all the time. We see people who are unable to—and you can put it a lot of different ways—unable to relinquish that need for self-interest. And realize that their self-interest is in the group. That's what it's really about, and I almost don't even think that people have to totally relinquish their self-interest. I think it's healthy to have an ego, to want to do well, but to have it in control, and say “I really want to do well”, and “my job for this team is to score x amount of points.” Some people say, “oh that's selfish”, no, it's “this team needs me to be an efficient scorer”. So I think there's a place for ego, but I just think you have to aware of your ego, you have to be aware of when it's getting too big, when it's

crossing the line, and sometimes when it's not. Like, "I need to really push to be better individually because it will help the team." We're not all the Dalai Lama. Because we don't all say, "this work is for the common good, this work is for the common good", it's hard for people to have that mantra every day. So there is a balance to it, but the key is just to be aware of your own ego, and what it's saying to you, and how you respond.

Ritch: Sometimes people read about servant-leadership, or they hear about it, and they label it a soft leadership, which it's not. Part of being a servant-leader is having courage to have difficult conversations, and tackle problems, when you know it's in the best interest of everyone to tackle them, but it would be easier to ignore them. How does an athlete, like yourself, who is such an intense competitor, with a strong drive to win, reconcile that quality and manage to lead with such a strong sense of morality, and a caring ethic?

Steve: It's probably a long, broad answer, but it starts with my dad, at a young age. If I ever took a win or a loss, a success or a fail, a goal or a non-goal, or you know, a teammate failing me, to heart, that perspective was just offside. So, being taught those lessons at a young age, that other kids may not have had—maybe their parents didn't play sports, didn't know what to look for—my dad was like "no, absolutely not". And so it almost made me flip the other way, to be overly encouraging and supportive, and unselfish. I feel like I'm not a confrontational person, to a fault. This morning we were watching film, and we had a bad loss last night. And out of fifty minutes of film, two things stood out. First, we were a little lazy, we cut corners, we didn't execute our, mostly defence and rebounding. We took short steps, we took the lazy route too many times. And whether you're tired or not, it's there. We didn't work hard enough. The other one

was Dan Majerle, one of our assistant coaches, said “I've never been on a team where the players don't hold each other accountable, and I don't see that on this team”, and he's right. And as much as I didn't like the feeling, I was looking at myself when he said that. I'm to a fault encouraging, instead of, “you're not doing your job.” And I don't know if it's because I don't have the energy to take on the responsibilities I do have and constantly get in people's faces. You don't have to get in their faces, you can go calmly. People say the leaders have to be able to give you that stare. I think it's overrated. I think to be honest, and to be trustworthy is as good as a stare any day of the week. And that's lasting. Somebody can put the fear in his teammates, somebody can give the stare, but if that person doesn't live by the same code, the stare doesn't mean anything for long. If your teammates see you, and trust in you, and watch you every day do the same things, and try, have the same effort, same commitment, the same motives, they believe you. Sometimes you don't need to look at them, they see you trying, and they feel bad if they're not trying. They're like, “ah man, you know, look at the effort he's giving day in day out, and I'm not.” There are all variables and combinations and permutations of soft to hard leadership, from the stare, to being an encourager. I'm definitely on the end of encouraging, and to a fault. Sometimes I should probably be much more confrontational. And it's something that I still probably need to work on; sometimes being more willing to stop worrying about what my responsibilities are going forward, and just stop and have a moment with somebody. Even if it's myself. I think constantly I have the moment with myself. I'm always self-critical, but to have that moment with someone else is important, and your teammates really will only allow you to have that moment with them if they think you're having that moment with yourself. If they watch you taking short-cuts, they

won't buy in. But if you're doing it every day, and then you have that moment with them, they're going to be willing to listen, I think.

Ritch: Ian Hyde-Lay always talks about how you'd never cut corners, you're always the hardest worker, and I really believe the team's leader must be its hardest worker, so I like that you mentioned that. And he also talked about how sometimes you'd be the guy who—you're non-confrontational—but if there was a big, tough guy on the team who was getting lazy, you would just relish playing the toughest defence possible on that player, and elevating his game.

Steve: I think that just comes from competitiveness, you just want the team to do well. Instead of being frustrated, or confrontational, that's your outlet: to challenge them. In the context of playing, it actually may or may not be more effective than directly discussing it.

Ritch: I agree. I can relate to what you're talking about, because as a coach, I'm definitely way more on the side of being supportive, and being positive.

Steve: And I think coaching is even harder than playing. In that respect, when a coach really had to walk the fine line of being a supporter, and a confidante, and being disciplinarian, and policeman. And so that's a different type of leadership, and maybe if I were better at finding that line, I'd be a better leader, if I could be more of a policeman at times.

Ritch: How does a leader admit and overcome his mistakes, and help his teammates admit, and overcome mistakes?

Steve: I think it goes along the same lines of being able to laugh at yourself. You're not perfect, you don't have to be perfect to anybody. I'd let it go, it's an insecurity, right? You

don't want people to see you fail. You feel like you just told on yourself, or the secret's out, now everyone will know I'm not perfect. Nobody's perfect. Just let go of that and just be willing to say, "I can see how I made a mistake there." Honesty is huge. And you don't have to be honest with just your words, because we don't speak as much in sports. And so, we notice when someone makes a mistake, but they hustle the next play. They make up for it. There's an honesty there, right? If that person's giving an honest effort, they made a mistake, and they know they made a mistake, and they're going to make up for it with their effort, or try to do everything they can to show their teammates "I'm sorry, I'm 100% in, and my motives are here, and I want to do well." It's a non-verbal communication. There's an apology, an acceptance, and admission, all going on there, in a player. Like missing a lay-up and sprinting back and trying his best to make up for it. There's a big statement there. You could do it in the locker room where he stands up and addresses the room. There are a lot of ways for that to happen, and there are a lot of different settings, and it's much more difficult for some people than others, but it can be difficult for all of us at times. Sport is emotional, it's stressful, it's instantaneous. And so, being able to make decisions on the fly, and being able to constantly not only make decisions of performance, but decisions of emotion—to be self-critical, judge, admit, apologize—all in literally a nanosecond. You could blame someone else. You see it all the time. I've probably done it tons of times, but you blame someone else, then afterwards you realize it was your mistake, but you lashed out because you're frustrated with yourself. It didn't go the way you wanted it to go. And so, trying to limit those experiences, and being able to be the one to take a mistake, even take a mistake for your teammate. I feel it's important to be the person who would say, even if it's probably your

teammate's fault, you had something to do with it. Say "you know what, I'm sorry."

"Hey, don't worry about it." I think now that person has the ability to more easily accept when they make a mistake. It's okay to make a mistake as long as you're not doing it because you're cutting corners, or you're being selfish or doing something for the wrong reasons.

Ritch: The one that kills me, and there are players who do it all the time, is that when they miss a shot, it's the refs, right away every time.

Steve: Right.

Ritch: It drives me crazy. There are guys, prominent guys in the NBA who, every time they miss a shot when they drive the lane, their palms are up and it's the ref's fault.

Steve: Yeah, and I mean, unfortunately, guys get rewarded for that sometimes.

Ritch: Yeah, I know.

Steve: But I don't think it's good for the team. Two years ago we went to the Western Conference Finals, and we made a decision, and Steve Kerr had a big part in it early in the playoffs. He's like, "we've gotta stop talking to the refs." Cause a lot of people have told me, you need to get on the refs more. You know, because they don't give you calls. So there's been times when I've let that seep into my way of thinking, and really gotten after the refs. I think it's a waste of time. Of course there's going to be, like this season, is probably the least I've ever really got on the refs at all. The game isn't about that.

They're...really, they're a bystander.

Ritch: For sure.

Steve: The decision might as well come up on a computer screen. It's not a personal, like don't ever let it get into a personal thing, or think that you're going to be able to change

them. So all the energy you expound on referees, even if there is some benefit to it, I think it's wasted energy. How much production you could have if you turned that energy into the next play?

Ritch: Mm, hmm.

Steve: So, I think Steve Ker said like, "hey, let's just get off the refs, coach included, everyone."

Ritch: Yeah.

Steve: And we got off the refs, and maybe that extra energy is why we were two games from the finals.

Ritch: I like that outlook.

Steve: Unlucky not to get there.

Ritch: This next question was suggested to me by a gentleman named Shann Ferch, who used to play NCAA basketball, and is big in the leadership world now. How does an athlete use mind, body and spirit to the full extent to lead his teammates? Do you have a spiritual piece, or something that you draw motivation from, or draw inspiration from?

Steve: I don't really have a spiritual piece, in a really direct, or illustrated viewpoint. But, I imagine if somebody told me their spiritual piece, there would be major commonality, or the same thing in my belief, my feelings about how to react and handle situations. I think if you started putting up words, or ideas, and said "does this relate to spirituality?" Like unselfishness, or selfless, or service, or commitment, belief. I would probably have a similar list to the person who would say, "yes, I'm spiritual, this is my spirituality." Whether it comes from a religious sense, or just a belief in what they're doing. I would imagine it's up there with the most spiritual, but I don't necessarily title it that way.

Ritch: Well you've talked a lot about honesty and trust, and respect, and that certainly resonates with some kind of spirituality whether you have it set or not.

Steve: And to be honest, this year's a good example. It'd difficult not to get selfish, and I don't mean like I'm going to shoot, because I don't get off on that. It's the perception of it being my fault. Is it my fault? It's something you have to deal with every day when things aren't going well, people want to know why, or from the front office to the media, to the fans, "well it's not my fault." That's something you really have to guard against. And the reason I guard against it, besides the fact that it's not positive to the group, is that it makes you feel like shit. But we have that instinct as human beings, to protect ourselves. Or deflect harm to our ego or our securities. At the same time, you feel worse when you don't accept responsibility; when you deflect it all. If I ever catch myself, in that moment, saying "he's not doing this", or "he's not doing that", it's okay to say those things, to be honest about a group, but only if it's with the motive of the group getting better, not to deflect fault or blame from yourself. And I think, for me, it always drives me to be self-critical. If I have those conversations, I know the truth, I know that I could do this just a little bit better.

Ritch: Yeah. Do you set time aside for reflection, or is it an ongoing process?

Steve: Not really, it could be anywhere. It could be walking to the elevator, and taking a ride downstairs, "I really should have handled this better", or "I'm not doing a good job of this." I think it's a constant thing in sport. I know for me, like the battle of insecurity, fear of failure, of overcompensating, self-loathing, self-praise, there's this big pendulum of emotions, that you constantly have to control, and put into perspective, and sell. And I think that's one reason that motivates me to practice and train hard, is because it takes a

lot of that out. You've put that insecurity, or that fear of failure, or whatever pain you are suffering that you are trying to hide, into work. Which is in effect a service. You're serving the betterment of your team by serving yourself. And so, by doing the work it eliminates a lot of that talk. All that stuff going on, it's like "hey, it's right there, I put in my hour of shooting, and I got my sleep, and I prepared". So now like there's more of a peace when you go out there, and there's less voices, and fewer things going on, and you're able to perform better, consistently.

Ritch: If you're not well, and don't make time for yourself, and exercise, and sleep, nutrition, you're no good to anybody.

Steve: Absolutely. And if you're not calm—and for me, a big part of this stage in my career (and I hope this doesn't sound arrogant), everywhere you go people want to talk to you, and every day an endless amount of people on the street, or fans, or e-mails or texts, or social media, sponsors, the team, the Foundation, it's so overwhelming, that for me a lot of times I just want to get in a cocoon and just turn a movie on and not think. And I need that so that when I get back out in the world, or I'm on the floor, I'm freer and I'm more peaceful. And I can go and do and not be on the edge because I didn't decompress. It's really important for me because if I don't do that I won't be any good to anyone else; I'll be on edge, and I won't react well to certain situations. It will be a deterrent to performance, and I won't enjoy it. I won't enjoy what I'm doing if I'm on edge. Then why am I doing it? If you think about that, not answering the phone and watching a movie is just as important as training, sleeping and performance. It is a part of a holistic view of how you go about performing.

Ritch: Servant-leadership places value on the skills or traits of listening, empathy and healing. I know you talked a bit about healing there. These might not be qualities that come to mind when most people talk about strong athlete leaders. How do you think they fit into athletic leadership, and your particular leadership style?

Steve: I think it comes down to going back to having interpersonal relationships, having compassion for what people are going through. If someone's doing really well be happy for them. If someone's not doing really well, hurt for them, and be able to try to show compassion, show them that you know, you feel their pain and you want them to do better. And you support them, and you're going to be there to help them, and it's okay that they're not doing well right now. It's fine, you're going to do better. And, you just got to ride the wave. It's work, but lose yourself in the work, and the performance will take care of itself. So I think it's just having that compassion and sensitivity to others, having the motive--"I really want to see my teammates do well" Everyone goes through stretches where they struggle. Just go the little extra step; just let people know. Whether you want to go way over the top is up to you, but just to have that awareness to recognize, and see what the situation is.

Ritch: Intuition.

Steve: Intuition, and then take steps to help that person in need. It's kind of a thing that we should do whether we're mom, dad, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, teammate, co-worker.

Right: Do you find that a lot of athletic leaders have these traits, or not enough, or?

Steve: I think a mixed bag. I think, like you said, some people look at this as soft leadership. I think you'll probably find hard leadership from that viewpoint. You're going to find guys who are really compassionate, and also are very tough. And you're going to

find guys who are not compassionate, and just tough. That's not good either. That's not healthy. And you're going to find guys who are, maybe too soft, that are too compassionate, and they go the way of enabling somebody who's... let's call it lack of production, but whatever somebody's struggles are. So it comes back again to awareness, intuition, and realizing this person might need a kick in the butt now; I'll support you, but I can't hold your hand the whole time. There's a balance there, which I think I'm much more willing to try to find, than to just always confront. There's a point where you can say "Ok, I've told you it ten times now, you're fine, don't worry about it, everything's going to be great--I'm not telling you today." And I do the same to myself. You can't make excuses, or you can't pout, or you can't feel sorry for yourself, you know there comes a time we all do it. Succeed or fail, my attitude has to be absolutely brave today. And if I'm not, if it's a shooting slump, not one time am I going to complain about the ball going in or out, I'm just going to play the game like every shot goes in. That's a microcosm for whatever the struggle that empathy is needed for.

Ritch: This philosophy talks a lot about courage, and a lot of that resonates with courage, I think you have to have courage to approach things in that way.

Steve: Yeah, yeah, I mean it's not war. But there's still courage, right? The biggest thing, I think, is being honest with ourselves.

Ritch: Absolutely.

Steve: You know once you can do that, that's the courage. After that, it's like, there's freedom, I think.

Ritch: Yup, for sure. So I'm going to show you, this is probably the most famous quotation from this Robert Greenleaf book, and I just want you to read it, and just share your impressions on it. So it's just these two paragraphs I've indicated there.

\*Steve reads the quotation for a few minutes

Steve: Yeah, I think the two things that come to mind are...so there's the leader and there's the servant. Is one better than the other? I would say the servant is, because there's at least a moral high ground that's reached. Um, that supersedes, like success or whatever, like winning, or production, let's say. So, but is the truth somewhere in the middle? Or does the servant-leader need to borrow from the leader at times, and vice-versa? You know, cause both can be extremely efficient, effective... obviously I like the servant-leader because it supersedes...whatever the group is doing. Whether it's sport. Let's use sport cause we're here for sport. You know, it supersedes sport. There's an idea that's higher than sport, and bigger than sport.

Ritch: Right.

Steve: Whereas with the leader, it seems like it's all about sport. It's all about production. It's all about a means to an end. Which is great, whereas I think the servant-leader, by nature, wants that same success, but realizes there's a higher calling to this, and that you can get the same success through this route. But, the question is, is the truth somewhere in the middle? And my second major point is... when being a servant...having that intuition to when are you serving someone's betterment, or when are you enabling someone to, um, to be useless. When are they given a fish instead of taught to fish? So, I mean it's very, it is thought provoking, it's also...I think, there's no necessarily right or wrong, but I think that it's an intuition for sure that, if it makes sense to you do the best to

make what makes sense to you successful, and then, that's all that you can do, that's the right way.

Ritch: Right. Okay, good. So we're on our last question here. So, I'm interested in teaching character through sport, and life lessons, and all those things. So what words of advice would you give to young athletes about their own personal athletic experience, and how it will contribute to character development and their lives beyond sports? What would you say to them, again exactly what we're talking about, trying to get more out of sport than just the game itself?

Steve: That's a tough question. I feel like... through experience, you know, we both understand what it means, but to be able to articulate it in the right way, to have to most impact for the kids, is difficult. I should probably sit down one day and formulate this so that I can actually make sure that I'm being as poignant or as direct as possible.

Ritch: You could e-mail it if you want.

Steve: Yeah. But, no, but I think my point is...to teach kids that...sport is just one small part of life, so when you're doing it and when it seems most important, really, it isn't.

You, in the moment you want...like when I think of my experience, when I'm playing out there it probably looks like this is life or death, you know, when we're in the playoffs, it's like life or death, and there's nothing else that matters, nothing else that exists. But, that's really the furthest from my reality. This is just...if they blew the whistle and brought a marching band in and said the game's over, you know, I wouldn't kill myself. It's just a game. And, it really is just a game, but you get lost in it. And you should. You should enjoy it, but you should also know that it's just a game. And that there's so much more to it, so you have to use sport. For me I use sport for happiness. So there's things it helps me

with. One, my happiness. I enjoy training, goal setting, challenging yourself to get better, being a part of a team and competing. You know, that's a great way to live your life, for me. Other people might not like the training, "I don't like the structure, I don't like the team stuff, I wanna be at my computer doing stuff on my own." For me, I love that. That is great, and there's a lot of things about the job that are tough. I don't like talking to the media every day, I travel all the time. I don't like getting to the game an hour and a half, two hours early all the time, I don't like having to you know, a hundred times a year in the normal season, um, waste a day just sitting in a hotel room...but the lifestyle's better than anything else I can think of, and the highs and lows are better than anything else I can think of. The lows are great too, because they inspire you to do better, they spur you on, they teach you a lot of lessons. So I think, I don't know if it's the best way to articulate it to kids, depending on their age, but what I'm trying to get across to the younger age is that there's nothing like being a part of a team, and being able to work well with people, so, understand what it means to commit to a group, to work hard, to, to be able to make mistakes and hold your hand up and say sorry, and work hard...for the betterment of the team...these are all things that you learn, these themes that keep coming up as we talk about sport, that are gonna inevitably help you when you're dealing with a mother in law.

Ritch: Mm hmm.

Steve: A boss, you know.

Ritch: Yeah.

Steve: A child. Um, a neighbour, a police officer...whoever it is you're, you know, if you learn these lessons through sport, which is in a situation where it's emotional, it's high pressure. Where else do you get that? As a kid, where do you get a situation where there's

a lot of pressure on you, it's emotional, you're working with people. A test? You're on your own, totally isolated. But when you're out there trying to perform. Everyone's emotional. Both sides. Parents on the sidelines, referees, spotlight, everyone's, you know, there's no place like that, really, and I mean, for most kids, of course if you're like, growing up in a really impoverished, developing country, there's different pressure. So my point is that, this is a pretty awesome way to put yourself in a simulated situation, to learn to succeed, and whether it's through sport or music or academics, or a craft or trade or family, you know, to be able to succeed in all those situations...this is a great practice for that. Because it puts pressure on you to make, to perform under pressure, not just to score goals, but to say like, "I made a mistake here", and make up for it, or "my teammate's really struggling. Look, he's over there, he's almost in tears", instead of turning your back on him, helping him, you know. There's nothing better than...seeing someone struggle, feeling bad for them, helping them, support them, turning it around...it's better than you getting a hat trick. It's like...you feel so good that that person feels good, and you had a small part in it. It's okay to have that, I think, to feel a little bit of pride in that...it's not a selfish thing, an ego thing, but you're like, "I helped them, it's great, it feels really good." You don't have to go tell everyone, but, it's okay for you in your own heart of hearts, isolated, to be like "that felt great, I helped them.

Ritch: Somewhat altruistic.

Steve: Ahh...you know, you can go on, we could have a philosophical debate, like, is ego bad, and...if you take credit for helping someone else, is that really selfless? You're helping yourself feel good by helping someone else, we could get into all that stuff. I

think that ego is fine, and that it's just having it served under the right conditions. I hope what I'm saying will be applicable to kids', you know, stage of development.

Ritch: I think it will be.

Steve: Those are the things, like I said, I don't have a format or a speech, that's kind of like.

Ritch: No, that's great.

Steve: It's the best, like it's the best way to teach people I think...I mean, music would be great...when someone's got the discipline, and they've gotta learn a trade a craft, a skill, execute, they've got ups and downs, accountability, but there's something about being in a group. You know, like musicians in an orchestra...I think there's something in sports even, that's hard to match. All the different things that are going on. Especially when it's really competitive. It's fine when it's not. There are still lessons to be had: participation is number one. But, when it's a team of six year-olds that's really trying their best, if they learn to do it for the right reasons, and as a group...the lessons will last, those are those building blocks. Those guys will always be able to fit into a team. They change schools every year, they change clubs every year. You know, they play 35-and-over hockey. They fit into a team. They fit in right. Because they learned the lessons, you know. I think someone called it "the secret," it was Bill Simmons called it "the secret." It's kind of like that. That whole...unselfishness, and some, I think it's great. I think there's so much of that. I hope my daughters get more into sports.

Ritch: Well I've gotta say, you've given me some great stuff to work with, and as I suspected, a lot of this stuff, actually most of this stuff you talked about, really does resonate with servant-leadership. Do you have any questions about it, or final comments?

Steve: No, not really, I think it's great. I think it's great that you recognize the opportunity to do this, and not with me, but just to follow up on this in sport, because I, I mean I know we talk about it a lot, but I think it could be developed further. I think we worry so much about the individual, but like, the idea of group, and how to elevate a group. You know, right now, because it's easier to be accountable to an individual, we worry about performance, and the individual basis, nine times out of ten.

Ritch: Mm hmm.

Steve: But to work on that team dynamic, it's exponentially great because the individual grows, the group grows, and the individual is able to use those skills on other groups.

Ritch: That's right

Steve: So, kudos for recognizing that.

Ritch: Thanks very much.

Steve: And seeing where you can take it. It's an area that some literature could really be great. You could have a huge impact.

Ritch: I hope so.

Steve: It might not be thirty years till we're flooded with literature on the subject, but we need to start getting there.

Ritch: Well my last comment would be, I think we need more leaders like you in athletics, and I think, with your high profile we can look at a leader like you, and inspire kids to go that route, and be the ethical, compassionate leaders we need.

Steve: Thanks a lot. I hope this turns out worthwhile.

Ritch: I think it will.