

Dr. Joe Cardwell
“A Servant Leader”

By
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Dr. Joe Cardwell

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A pillar in the community and beloved professor by many, Dr. Joe Cardwell's memories of being a true servant leader is carried forward today in the lives of those he touched. It now trickles down as a legacy in the lives of his children. Servant leadership is defined by Max DePree as an art, a heart condition. Robert Greenleaf started the modern concept of servant leadership in an essay, “The Servant as a Leader”. The focus was to seek to serve each other in order to be true leaders. This approach differs from other approaches by avoiding the hierarchical style, which emphasizes the top-down approach. The servant leadership approach emphasizes collaboration, trust, and empathy. The leader seeks to lead in order to serve better, not to gain power. The objective is to create teamwork and personal involvement in an organization. As this report unfolds, it will become more vivid how Dr. Cardwell fits the mold of a true servant leader.

Dr. Cardwell was born near Vernon, Texas. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees in Dairy Manufacturing from Texas Tech University and doctorate of philosophy in Dairy Foods and Dairy Chemistry from North Carolina State University. In 1952, he began teaching in the Dairy Science Department at Mississippi State University. He taught generations of students how to make the famous Edam cheese, cheddar cheese, and cottage cheese. Dr. Cardwell provided tours of the cheese plant for all ages. On April 28, 2006, the dairy products section of the MAFES Cheese Sales Store was named the Cardwell Cheese Shoppe in his honor.

His work in academia contributed over 100 publications in professional and academia journals. He served as a major professor or committee member to 150 master's or doctoral students. He was an active member in Gamma Sigma Delta, Sigma Xi, and Phi Tau Sigma honor societies. He was listed in Who's Who in the South and Southwest, and Leaders in American

Science. His teaching awards span a broad array of honors. The National Kraft Dairy Science Teaching Award and the Honors Award from the Southern Division of the American Dairy Science Association were presented to him. Other noteworthy awards consisted of the Mississippi State University Alumni Association Teaching Award, Gamma Sigma Delta Teaching Award, and Alpha Zeta Outstanding Teaching Award. He also served as president in numerous state and regional organizations. He was not prideful of the awards, but was rightfully due them because of the time and energy he put forth to help every student be all they could be.

His community service is extensive and his involvement extended to many organizations. He served as a committee member for the United Way Budget and Allocations Committee, Oktibbeha County Hospital Auxiliary patient representative, Golden Triangle Planning and Development District advisory committee, Oktibbeha County Heritage Museum advisory board, Chamber of Commerce, benefactor of the Starkville Community Theater, Scout Master of Troup 45, and president and state vice-president of the Civitan Club, just to name a few. He was all about community involvement and trying to better the community for all citizens.

Service to the Starkville First United Methodist Church included Chairman of the television ministry, which he helped establish. He served as one of the camera operators for 27 years. He also served as a Sunday School teacher, administrative board member, Lay Leader, and Chairman of Board of Directors of the Wesley Foundation of Mississippi State University.

Even though he was busy with his career, community and church service, Dr. Cardwell found time for his hobbies. He truly enjoyed collecting antique clocks and watches. He became interested in this when he served as an Air Corp aircraft instrument specialist during World War II. Another entertaining hobby he enjoyed and one that provided some physical exercise was “buck dancing”, which is a pre-tap method of heel- to-toe dance. He was one of the best buck

dancers around and performed at a Mississippi State University Faculty Awards Banquet so all could see his skilled talent.

He and his wife, Leota, served as Grand Marshals of the Starkville Christmas Parade in 1999 and were recipients of the Chamber of Commerce T.E. Veitch Award. This award is the highest award that is bestowed upon anyone by the Starkville Chamber of Commerce. The winners must have exemplified continuing involvement in community affairs, be dedicated to serve above self, and service should be clearly identifiable as worthwhile for community betterment. They also won the 2003 Crystal Pineapple Tourism Award presented by the Starkville Convention and Visitors Bureau for their efforts to promote tourism in Starkville.

The combined career service, community service and, religious service equates to the formula for “servant leadership”. Max DePree defines this leadership style as an art, a belief, a condition of the heart, more than a set of things to do. Dr. Cardwell patiently worked with his students at MSU to encourage and teach them, gave an untold amount of hours to professional and community organizations, took up time to visit with the elderly as he delivered “meals on wheels” and still had time to devote to his family. He did all of this and much more without demanding or requiring recognition. Dr. Joe is a servant leader role model because he led by doing.

To conclude this report, I asked the Cardwell children, Rebecca, Durenda, and David to write their thoughts describing their Dad as a servant leader. The conclusion of this paper records their own words as they viewed “Dr. Joe”, as many knew him. Their thoughts further verify the servant leader qualities Dr. Joe possessed. Each word is inspired with emotions of love, joy and pride that can be spoken only from a child describing a parent!

Dr. Joe Thomas Cardwell
by: Rebecca Cardwell Sibley

1. Word to describe Daddy as servant leader: Faithful, humble pristine character or legacy continues

2. As a professor, Daddy would approach his teaching in such a way that any student could understand. He would support his theory that students learn and retain information better by constant testing. He would give a test to each class in order to help the students retain the information. He always included a humorous bonus question that students could get...like who was buried in Grant's tomb and when was the War of 1812? His office door was always open to students. He cared about his students outside of the classroom. I always said I was proud to share my Daddy with other students who needed a Daddy away from home while in college. He gave his time, energy, money, and gifts to students from all backgrounds and nationalities. He always had time to listen and counsel students and other faculty and staff when asked. His interest in making sure his students succeeded went beyond the norm. He was known to help students graduate when it looked like they would not. Examples of how he cared for his students was shown in his calling to check on them when they were sick and visiting them in the hospital when ill. He helped many find places to live so they could continue their studies at MSU. Daddy wanted to be sure that when a person seeking a job was interviewed that they knew more than the technical aspects of a job. He wanted to be sure they knew the practical side of life as well and knew the basics in life. He led by example.

3. Legacy continues---Daddy grew up without much. He knew what it was to struggle in life. Even though his family was poor, his parents set an example of leadership before him in the way they opened their home to those even less fortunate. Daddy saw what it meant to give to others and the rewards that come from serving others and he in turn was a leader by giving to others in his family life, his church life, his community life and his career life. One of the many examples of his being a servant leader was when he had his first foreign student at MSU. This student was from India and had come over without his wife to begin his PhD. Immediately, my Daddy became his mentor and father figure. This student became part of our family. After his wife came to America and they were about to have their first child, they called my parents to come to the hospital when his wife was in labor. I can still see my parents so excited when they got that call and left to be with them at the hospital. It was humbling when their daughter was named after me!! They were their American parents and continued to be that even after this student left MSU and became a leader in the field in LA. Having grown up seeing this servant leadership in my Daddy, when I became a college instructor, I too took an interest in my students outside the classroom. My husband and I have taken in several young men going into the ministry to live with us as well as being called Mom and Dad by many young people from all nationalities. The legacy continues as our son and daughter-in-law have taken in students who are having trouble at home and by giving the hungry homeless on the street a meal and seek to help them find a job. My Daddy's servant leadership made a profound impact on our lives and we have continued to keep his footprints visible.

4. “Give and it will be given to you, a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” Luke 6:38. Daddy’s faith in the Lord stood out as an example to me, his daughter. He exuded the fruits of the spirit in his life....love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. He had them all! And, because of this, he was able to make an impact all who met him. Daddy saw the good and positive in people and not the negative. And, he used the positive in a person to help them find their potential to be a servant leader.

Servant Leader---Dr. Joe Cardwell

by: Durenda Cardwell Loftin

I was asked to define servant-leader as it pertained to my father, Joe Cardwell. In this context, I believe the word servant means to give and my father gave a lot of himself to others. In his teaching, he was not only a professor but a mentor and friend to his students. He gave them his time, his interest, and his heart. This was always evident to me by the way his students and many others in the community lovingly called him "Dr. Joe." He continued to serve or give in the community after he retired from teaching. He received several honors for all of his service but my Dad never set out to do things in order to be recognized. He did because he loved others and in return he was loved by many.

This brings me to the word leader. I feel by his serving and giving he was leading by example. His fun-loving, easy-going personality, with a heart to give back to the community made him a leader. He was the type servant-leader we all should try to become.

Servant Leader---Dr. Joe Cardwell

by David Cardwell

The term “Servant-Leader” seems at first to be a statement of contradiction. Traditional thought would have us believe that people either lead or they follow – serving the wishes of their leaders. However, I can think of no term that better describes the personality and character of Joe Cardwell than “Servant-Leader.”

My definition of “servant-leader” at least as it relates to my dad would be: an individual who leads by their own heart-felt commitment to care for and to serve others.

Joe Cardwell’s commitment to serve others grew out of his sincere love and care for literally everyone he knew. His devotion to serve went far beyond simply helping out in times of need. He genuinely wanted everyone – from friends, family, co-workers, and students to people he may have just met – to realize their fullest potential. There are endless examples. Here are a few that come to mind.

In his leadership position as a teacher, he never lost sight of his personal commitment to serve his students. One of his former students tells the story of Dr. Cardwell tracking him down the

night before a research paper (for another class) was due. The paper was a requirement for graduation. The young man concluded that the task was too overwhelming and had resigned himself to failure when Dr. Joe found him and convinced him that failure was not an option. Partly because of their conversation and partly because Dr. Joe cared enough about him to go to such lengths, the student stayed up all night, finished the paper, graduated and went on to a productive career and life. To this day he will tell you that he would never have graduated had it not been for Dr. Cardwell.

Joe Cardwell's record as a community leader is well known because his leadership was so intrinsically tied to his genuine love of people. He was, for example, the slowest delivery person in the history of "meals on wheels." Because for him the task was far more than simply bringing food to people in need, it was an opportunity to get to know the people he was serving, to visit with them and to offer whatever help he might be able to provide so he was rarely in a hurry to leave. And he simply loved to talk to people.

I believe his leadership roles and influence in professional organizations, as well as church, civic and community endeavors were a direct result of his commitment to service.

Tirelessly and often without thought for his own personal best interest my dad served the needs of his friends, neighbors, co-workers, and students - in many cases making them virtual extensions of his family. Those of us who are privileged to be part of his family learned early on that we share that relationship with the entire community.

I like this quote from Max DePree – it seems particularly appropriate for a discussion of Joe Cardwell's approach to leadership and to life. "Leadership is much more an art, a belief, a condition of the heart, than a set of things to do".

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