

GIFTS: Great Ideas for Teaching Servant-Leadership

*A project of the Center for Spirituality & Leadership
at Marian University, Wisconsin*

Activity Title: *Norma Rae*: Coaching, Mentoring and Emerging Leadership

Group Size: Varies

Time Needed: Set up time 10-15 minutes
Runtime 110 minutes
Debrief / discussion 45 minutes

Servant-Leadership Attribute addressed:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Active listening | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coaching and mentoring |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community building | <input type="checkbox"/> Facilitating collaboration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foresight and vision | <input type="checkbox"/> Fostering growth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self awareness | <input type="checkbox"/> Stimulating creativity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____ | |

Objectives / Goals / Purpose of the activity:

- To apply the principles of servant leadership to the character of Reuben Warshafski
- To find examples of the gifts of leadership (Bolman and Deal, *Leading with Soul*) to characters in the film
- To find examples of the capabilities of effective leadership defined by Kouzes and Posner (*The Leadership Challenge* and *Leadership Practices Inventory*)

NOTE: this exercise utilized concepts and readings regularly completed in a basic course in leadership for undergraduates. These concepts could easily be presented prior to viewing the film or “teased out” during discussion after viewing the film.

Materials Needed:

Copy of film, copies of discussion guide for all participants

Directions for the Activity:

- Spend some time reviewing what you want students to look for in the film
- View the film
- Debrief using the questions listed on the discussion / essay guide

Questions or Process for Debriefing the Activity:

- See discussion guide / essay format that follows

Describe when the activity is best utilized:

- I use this exercise as an example of emergent leadership and the importance of coaching and mentoring. The unlikely leadership of the main character gives students encouragement in that Norma Rae as a person represents someone who is at times much more “relate-able” than outstanding examples of servant leadership found in history (i.e. Gandhi, Mother Theresa, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.).
- There are moments of intense listening in the film when those seeking to bring a union into the plant gather at Norma and Sonny’s home to tell their stories.
- The film can stand alone as a legitimate discussion of various aspects of leadership. However, I use the film mid-way in the semester after students have completed reading several texts including Bolman and Deal’s *Leading with Soul*, and undertaking the *Student Leadership Practices Inventory* (Kouzes and Posner).

Variations and/or Helpful Hints:

- If time is unavailable to view the entire film, certain clips can be used
- Students could be asked to view the film on their own and either be prepared to discuss the film in class and/or write the essay without discussion. I find that group discussion is quite important however with this assignment.
- Consider using the film as part of an online assignment if teaching in an all online or hybrid format. Discussion boards or live chat could substitute for in-class, face-to-face discussion

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Norma Rae

A film review of spirited, servant leadership

MAIN CHARACTERS:

Norma Rae Wilson (Webster) – textile mill worker (Sally Fields)

Reuben Warshafski – Union Organizer, Textile Workers Union of America (Ron Liebman)

Sonny Webster – Norma Rae’s husband (Beau Bridges)

Jimmy Jerome Davis – Plant manager

TASK:

1. Watch the film *Norma Rae*
2. Write an essay which responds to the following questions
3. You may want to refer to <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0079638/> for additional information about the film, and other characters.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Based on the book *Leading with soul*, how does Norma Rae Webster fit the description of a spirited leader, or a leader who leads with soul? Does she give the gifts of authorship, significance, power and love?
2. How does Reuben Warshafski fit the description of a person who leads with soul? Does he give the gifts of leadership? How does Reuben demonstrate the servant leadership characteristics of coaching and mentoring (Keith)
3. How does Norma Rae utilize (or not) the elements of effective leadership as defined by Kouzes and Pozner: challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart?
4. What mistakes are made by Norma Rae in the process of her emerging as a leader?
5. What are the risks and costs of leadership for the characters in the film?
6. Based on the film, comment: *everyone can lead*.

DUE DATE: