

SECOND EDITION, UPDATED AND EXPANDED

Includes new chapters to update the Popeyes story
and provides specific examples to help you
apply these ideas in your daily leadership

DARE TO SERVE

**HOW TO DRIVE SUPERIOR RESULTS
BY SERVING OTHERS**

CHERYL BACHELDER

FORMER CEO OF POPEYES® LOUISIANA KITCHEN, INC.

Praise for *Dare to Serve*

“Dare to Serve stands out as one of the most practical, useful books on leadership that I have ever read—full of real-world examples and grounded in the dramatic turnaround of Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen restaurants. Cheryl shares with us how to serve others with intention, competence, character, courage, and humility. Her practical experience, proven results, and contagious passion to serve others well is an inspiration to all of us who want to make a real difference in the world.”

**—Bonnie Wurzbacher, former Chief Resource Development Officer,
World Vision International, and former Senior Vice President, Global
Customer Leadership, The Coca-Cola Company**

“Dare to Serve chronicles both the remarkable turnaround story of Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen, Inc., and Cheryl’s inspiring personal journey of discovery, which galvanized her commitment to an unconventional approach to corporate leadership that has yielded remarkable results.”

—Andy Stanley, founder, North Point Ministries, Inc.

“Dare to Serve offers a candid, behind-the-scenes look at how a struggling restaurant chain was transformed into a soaring brand success through a simple but revolutionary model of leadership based on serving others. This book is a must-read for leaders of all kinds!”

—Phil Cordell, Global Head, New Brand Development, Hilton Worldwide

“Compelling and inspiring! Bachelder makes the case for her people-focused approach to leadership through her real-life experience at Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen. Developed and honed in an industry where service to others is at the very core of what we do, these lessons are sure to translate not only across industries but to our personal lives as well.”

—Dawn Sweeney, President and CEO, National Restaurant Association

“Cheryl Bachelder’s brave and unconventional approach to the turnaround of Popeyes challenges all of us to step up our game. Cheryl stands in the gap for us, calling us to a purpose that will drive better results for our organizations, while putting the needs of our people and customers ahead of our own.”

**—Scott MacLellan, CEO, TouchPoint Support Services, a Compass Group
company**

“By focusing on the purpose-driven success of those she leads, paradoxically, Cheryl Bachelder gets the results we all want from our organizations. *Dare to Serve* is about the gutsy principles she applied to a business desperately in need of a turnaround and the spectacular results she achieved.”

—**Tim Irwin, PhD, bestselling author of *Impact*, *Derailed*, and *Extraordinary Influence***

“This book turned my thinking upside-down. Cheryl shares her road-tested wisdom and shows how and why Dare-to-Serve leadership works so brilliantly. This is a game-changing book and should be required reading for all leaders.”

—**Art Barter, President and CEO, Datron Holdings, Inc., and founder and CEO, Servant Leadership Institute**

“*Dare to Serve* is a game changer! The principles outlined create exponential results far beyond what the individual ego will allow. Boards today are looking for Dare-to-Serve type leaders to ignite possibilities in their organizations. This is a must-read for leaders everywhere!”

—**Jane Edison Stevenson, Vice Chairman, Board & CEO Services, Korn Ferry, and coauthor of *Breaking Away***

“Buy this book, read it, and put it to work. Cheryl is an impressively successful chief executive who has advanced the cause of servant leadership by sharing her practical, how-to approach. In doing so, she invites you to join us in building a community of serving leaders that create great workplaces and deliver superior results.”

—**Ken Jennings, CEO, Third River Partners, and bestselling coauthor of *The Serving Leader***

“Cheryl Bachelder has gone far beyond researching and writing about the principles of purpose-driven leadership; she has lived it in her turnaround of Popeyes. Her book *Dare to Serve* offers an authentic and compelling voice to the practice of servant leadership and serves as an inspiring example of leadership principles valuable to every company in every industry and at every stage of development.”

—**Idalene “Idie” Kesner, Dean, Kelley School of Business, and Frank P. Popoff Chair of Strategic Management, Indiana University**

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CHERYL BACHELDER



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Dare to Serve

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*To my grandparents,
Jack and Bertha, John and Gertrude;
to my parents, Max and Marge;
to my siblings, Beth, Laura, and David
and their spouses;
to my husband, Chris, and daughters,
Tracy, Kathleen, and Katerina;
to sons-in-law and grandchildren,
current and future—
because of you I know the joy of love,
family, and faith.*

*To the Popeyes leadership team, with whom
I have served—I am deeply grateful for your
competence, your character, and your service.*

*To the entire Popeyes family for making
this story possible—it was amazing
to be on this journey with you.*

*All glory be to God the Father,
for He sent His Son, who dared to serve us all.*

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THE **DARE-TO-SERVE** LEADER

AT THE BEGINNING OF A BROADWAY SHOW, the lights dim, the music plays, and the audience waits for the spotlight to hit the stage. When the main actor appears, the story begins.

So it is with leadership. When you become a leader, people wait for you to step into the spotlight on center stage. All eyes are fixed on you—waiting to see who you are, what you will say, and what you will do. After all, you are the leader.

What if the spotlight appeared on stage, and you were not in it? What would happen then?

The people would be confused. They would wonder where you were. They would think that you didn't understand your role.

Until they realized what you were doing.

You are a different kind of leader. Not seeking the spotlight.

In fact, you have walked off the stage to find the light crew.

You will shift the focus of the spotlight—to the people you have been asked to lead.

You will lead the people to daring destinations—far beyond their imaginations.

You will focus intensely on serving them well on the journey.

You will help them discover meaning in their work and principles in their actions.

You will dare to serve.

THE SPOTLIGHT PROBLEM

Conventional leadership thinking puts the leader in the spotlight.

Conventional leaders assume the power position and declare a new vision. Grabbing the spotlight, these leaders have all the answers. They are high achievers, though perhaps a bit self-absorbed. We tolerate that, because they are going places that we want to go. If they are successful, we will be successful. So we think.

At the other extreme, we think of humble, servant leaders. They shun the spotlight. They listen carefully to the people. They involve the people in decisions. They make decisions that serve the people well. They give others credit. We wonder about these leaders. We like them, but we fear they will not get us to success. Could they deliver superior performance results? We doubt it.

We conclude that it is the leader *in the spotlight* who delivers results. Because, of course, nice guys finish last.

Have you worked for a leader who loves the spotlight? Were *you* served well?

My message is simple, but unconventional. If you move yourself out of the spotlight and dare to serve others, you will deliver superior performance results.

Most haven't heard this before. Many will be skeptical, even confused.

What about you?

Perhaps you think selfless service is for charitable causes and saints. Perhaps you think serving is weak and cowardly, not bold and courageous. Perhaps you think, *I've never met this kind of leader and doubt that they exist.*

It's time to reconsider your assumptions.

This is a different kind of leader, with a rare combination of traits, *courageous* enough to take the people to a daring destination yet *humble* enough to selflessly serve others on the journey. The dynamic tension between daring and serving creates the conditions for superior performance.

This is a Dare-to-Serve leader.

THE DISCOVERY

There's nothing fundamentally wrong with our country except that the leaders of all our major organizations are operating on the wrong assumptions.

ROBERT TOWNSEND, *UP THE ORGANIZATION*

About fifteen years ago, I began to study leadership with a newfound intensity. At the time, I had been working for large public companies for twenty years. I had been promoted numerous times and had worked for a wide range of people—some great leaders and some terrible leaders.

I started looking at the traits of the leaders I had loved—the ones for whom I had worked the hardest, the ones who had brought out my best performance. I discovered

that the leaders I admired most not only were great to work for but also led their teams to remarkable results.

What kind of leader would I aspire to become? What model would I follow?

In my leadership journey, I have uncovered something that, in your heart of hearts, you already know.

Your favorite leaders have been decidedly different. Their motives go beyond self-interest. They challenge you to pursue daring, bold aspirations that create an exciting place to work. They shun the spotlight in favor of serving a higher purpose. They evidence principles in their daily decisions. You not only love these leaders but also perform your very best for them.

So now the question is, what kind of leader will you choose to be? Will you dare to serve?

THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU

This book is for practitioners—people leading right now—in any organization, large or small, at any level. If you have been given a position to lead people, this book is for you.

The inspiration for this book is not a group of famous leaders, chief executive officers, or celebrities but ordinary people who want to do extraordinary things wherever they are given the opportunity to lead—at work, at home, or in the community. I was privileged to meet these inspirational people daily during my work with the people who led Popeyes restaurants, from New Orleans, Louisiana, to Singapore. Restaurant leaders dare to serve far more often than do the CEOs I have met. They have inspired me to tell this story.

WHAT WILL YOU LEARN?

This book brings together the discoveries of my leadership journey in the hope that this perspective can help you become a Dare-to-Serve leader with superior performance results. What I propose is not an impossible dream, but it is unconventional thinking.

The first half of the book is the story of the turnaround of Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen, Inc., a publicly traded global restaurant chain I am honored to have led. The Popeyes story provides a real-world example of how one leadership team dared to serve the people well—and produced industry-leading results.

The second half of the book is about how you can become a Dare-to-Serve leader. It offers thoughts and reflections to guide you in becoming the most effective leader you can be.

What is the most difficult thing I will suggest to you?

You will have to take yourself out of the spotlight.

The curtain will open, the lights will dim, and the people will be waiting.

You will not do the expected. You will not step into the spotlight.

Instead, you will find a way to get that spotlight to shine on others. You will help them pursue dreams and find meaning in work. You will grow their capabilities. You will model principles in daily decisions that build an environment of trust and commitment. When the people figure out what you are doing, they will find that you are a leader they want to follow on a path to the best performance results of their life.

If you become a Dare-to-Serve leader, your legacy will be your impact on the lives of the people you lead and the outstanding results you create together.

WHERE DID I GET THIS IDEA?

Many years ago, I met Jim Collins, the author of *Good to Great*, at a meeting of Yum! Brands leaders. He presented the findings of his book, describing a new type of top-performing leader: a Level 5 leader. He said that Level 5 leaders are a “paradoxical mix of personal humility and professional will. They are ambitious, to be sure, but ambitious first and foremost for the company, not themselves.”

Collins’s work established a case for servant leadership called by another name, the Level 5 leader. It included financial data proving that Level 5 leaders delivered superior performance results.

The idea fascinated me.

I wondered, *Is it possible to be humble and ambitious? What would it mean to put the people and the enterprise first—above self-interest? How would this inspire superior performance?*

Collins’s book sold more than 2.5 million copies. But will these findings change your approach to leadership?

THE OPPORTUNITY ARRIVES

In 2007, I got my chance to test Dare-to-Serve leadership in a real-world setting with seven talented people, collectively called the Popeyes leadership team.

We made a daring decision to serve others well by pursuing a bold ambition for the enterprise. We then established a purpose and a set of principles to govern our leadership.

We wanted to prove that we could drive superior performance results by leading like the handful of humble, serving leaders we read about in books like *Leadership Is an Art*, *The Soul of the Firm*, and *Firms of Endearment*.

At the time, Popeyes was a struggling restaurant chain with a long history of declining sales and profits. It offered a classic “turnaround” opportunity. Leadership had been a revolving door of short-lived CEOs—four in seven years.

In those same seven years, guest traffic had declined. Same-store sales were negative. Restaurant average unit volume and profitability had fallen to dangerously low levels. New restaurant returns were anemic. The relationship between the company and its franchisees was on the rocks. As for investors, the stock price had slid from a peak of \$34 per share, in 2002, to \$13 on the day I joined the company.

What better time for a grand experiment in leadership? What if we were able to prove that a daring aspiration and selfless service to others could deliver superior performance results? What if a purpose and a set of principles could guide us to industry-leading performance? What if we did this under the scrutiny of a public-company environment, garnering the attention of those cynical, short-term Wall Street investors?

Fast-forward to end of the story. Popeyes restaurants experienced eight years of growth. Average restaurant sales climbed by 45 percent. Market share grew from 14 to 24 percent. The profitability of Popeyes restaurants doubled in terms of real dollars, with restaurant profit margins up from 18 to 23 percent.

The franchisees were so delighted with the business results that they rapidly remodeled existing restaurants and began feverishly building new Popeyes, with excellent returns on their investment.

The corporation saw diluted earnings per share grow from \$0.76 to \$1.98 per share from 2008 to 2016. The stock price grew from \$13 to \$61 at the end of 2016, up nearly 500 percent in nine years.

During this time, the company was the darling of the industry . . . a favorite of the franchisees . . . a favorite of lenders . . . a favorite of investors . . . and a case study in serving up superior performance results.

The secret to Popeyes' turnaround performance?

We dared to serve.

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS BOOK

As I grew up, I learned many of my leadership lessons from my father. Daddy Max, as I called him. He served as vice president of National Semiconductor Corporation for many years, primarily overseeing manufacturing operations in Asia.

My dad was an accomplished and perceptive storyteller, and most of his stories were about how to lead people. Over dinner he would talk about his day at work. Always included in his story was the "moral of the story," to make sure we understood the underlying leadership lesson.

One evening my dad was pacing the kitchen floor, visibly upset. When I asked him what was bothering him, he told me that tomorrow he would be laying off people at the manufacturing plant. He told me he was sick over it. People he cared about would be unemployed. Families

would suffer from the loss. Moral of the story: letting people go should make your stomach turn; never take it lightly.

My dad and mom raised four children, each of whom became a CEO or president of a company, in four different industries. The leadership lessons in those dinner table stories served us well.

Similarly, I will share leadership stories—what I have observed, reflected on, and learned. I encourage you to seek the “moral of the story,” to discover the leadership lesson. Throughout these chapters, you will find Dare-to-Serve Reflections to help you think about the leadership role you are in today and the best way to influence and steward the people entrusted to your care. In this process, you will consider whether you want to be a Dare-to-Serve leader.

The world is waiting for leaders to come forward who can steward an organization’s people and resources to superior performance. When you choose to humbly serve others and courageously lead them to daring destinations, the team will give you their very best performance. And the spotlight will be found shining on the remarkable results of the organization as a whole.

May you be inspired to be a Dare-to-Serve leader who drives superior results. And may you spend the rest of your days teaching others to do the same.

Cheryl A. Bachelder
Former Chief Executive Officer
Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen, Inc.

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PART ONE

HOW TO DRIVE
SUPERIOR RESULTS