

THE
Ken Blanchard
SERIES

SIMPLE TRUTHS UPLIFTING THE VALUE
OF PEOPLE IN ORGANIZATIONS

The Serving Leader

5 Powerful Actions That Will
Transform Your Team,
Your Business, and Your Community

Ken Jennings and John Stahl-Wert

*You Were
Born to Make
a Difference.
Start
Today!*

FOREWORD BY KEN BLANCHARD

An Excerpt From

***The Serving Leader:
5 Powerful Actions That Will Transform Your Team, Your Business,
and Your Community***

by Ken Jennings and John Stahl-Wert
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FOREWORD

KEN BLANCHARD

Coauthor of *The One Minute Manager*[®], *Empowerment Takes More Than a Minute*, *Raving Fans*[®], *Gung Ho!*[®], *Whale Done!* and *Full Steam Ahead!*

I am thrilled to have Ken Jennings and John Stahl-Wert's excellent book, *The Serving Leader*, as a part of the Ken Blanchard Series. This book will challenge you to lead differently. I believe it will also cause you to want to live your life differently. It presents so beautifully the simple truths that uplift the value of people.

That Ken Jennings and John Stahl-Wert would write this book together is a testament to the surprising nature of the book. On the surface, Ken and John could hardly be more different. Ken is a hypervelocity management consultant in constant motion between multiple corporations. John is an inner-city leader who generally stays put to work with his diverse partners creating extraordinary results for the people of one city.

But together they have crafted a singular message for leaders in businesses, communities, churches, and nonprofit organizations. From two very different life paths has come a unified vision of leadership and an understanding of

human change that will make a lifelong difference for you and the people you lead and serve.

What sets this book apart most of all is the beauty and quality of the storytelling. Ken and John have brought us a moving story that you will not want to put down. An estranged son, his dying father, and a wonderfully diverse group of innovative leaders in business, volunteer organizations, and civic groups work together to grasp and illustrate the basic daily actions that make a *Serving Leader*.

While *The Serving Leader* is presented as a work of fiction, the leaders and organizations Ken and John depict are based on real situations, and the results that are described match the incredible results being achieved in real businesses and communities. At the end of the book, the authors introduce us to some of these real-life leadership miracle stories.

On one level, *The Serving Leader* is the most practical guide available to implementing servant leadership in your life and work. On a deeper level, it is a book about the journey of growth that every great leader must be willing to take.

It gives me a special satisfaction to introduce you to the beautiful and life-challenging work of two of my good friends. Enjoy this book and be encouraged. You were born to make a difference!

INTRODUCTION

This is a story about leadership: leadership in teams, businesses, and communities. It is also a story about personal growth and how good leaders become great leaders through their willingness to face and be changed by the greatest challenges of their lives.

The story comes out of our friendship with Mike Wilson. Mike is a man we both know well. He shows up everywhere in the businesses and neighborhoods we serve. The circumstances of place and vocation vary, but Mike is always there. As a leader, he's professionally talented and highly motivated to successfully reach his business and financial goals.

But Mike wants his life to be about more than success. He's searching for the deeper significance of his leadership and for the satisfaction of living a life of real purpose. In this deeper search, however, Mike often feels very unsuccessful; sometimes, he feels completely lost.

As we've shared this story with our friends, these questions usually arise: "Is Mike's story real? And if it is, where can I find him?" Here's the best answer we have: Mike's story is real. And the chances are reasonable that you'll find someone like him occupying the office next to yours. She rides on the train with you each morning. You pass him in the hallway every day. Glance up from your reading and look around; she might be sitting right there in the room with you now.

Perhaps it would be helpful to say a brief word here about the friendship out of which this story was born. We two at first glance appear to have little in common. Ken is a business consultant who resides in the flight matrix that connects the great urban centers of America, Europe, and Asia. John is a community leader who resides and works in one great city. By strategic design, he leaves that city and his citywide colleagues as infrequently as possible. Ken works with bottom-line business leaders, John with frontline community leaders. Ken's work focuses on the corporate sector, John's on the faith-based sector. In terms of space and time, Ken's work is space expansive and more time limited; John's is the other way around.

These differences aside, our lives are much the same. We both work with men and women like Mike Wilson every day. In whatever airport Ken lands and on whatever street John walks, Mike is there, trying to close the painful gap between his hard-working day and his persistent sense of unfulfilled purpose.

Since we're making introductions here, we may as well go one step further. We, too, are Mike Wilson. While the details may be fictional, at its deepest level Mike's story is real—and very true.

Perhaps you will recognize yourself in parts of this story, too. If so, then you are already on your way. We hope these pages will offer you some guidance as well as encouragement as you continue on the journey of both professional and personal growth that great leadership requires.

THE FAST TRACK DIVERTED

Why am I sitting on this train? If I had taken a flight, I'd already be there. Instead, I've got four more hours to sit here and fume about what I've gotten myself into.

I feel like I'm eight years old again. Dad says, "Why don't you ride down on the train, Son! It'll give you a chance to think." And so I just *do* it. Like I've got time to sit for hours, thinking. Like I actually enjoy trains.

The thing about trains is this: trains only show you what you're passing, not where you're headed. Whatever you can see out the window is already old news. Been there. Regularly, the track bends enough that you can catch a glimpse of the journey ahead, but as soon as the train straightens its aim for the goal, you're left sitting in the back just watching stuff go past. An hour into this trip, I'm way past bored.

Scratch that last sentence. I'm not bored. And, truthfully, being stuck on this train is not what I'm really troubled about. What upsets me is the fact that I don't know

what's waiting for me at the end of this track. And I'm afraid to find out. I'm deeply worried about Dad. I don't know how I'm going to pass so much time sitting here just with myself.

And more truth: I used to *like* trains. A lot. It's one of the memories I *do* have with Dad. One of the too-few memories. And that's what this is *really* about. Sitting here reminds me of so much that I've lost. So much!

There you have it, boss: a journal entry. I'd say I'm well on my way!

All right, Mike, enough time on the therapist's couch. Here's a thought: scratch it all out. I doubt Charlie wants to read the sorry ramblings of a lost son.

Please let my dad be okay!

Okay, new start. Official sounding.

Journal entry: "Background and Orientation."

Two months ago, Charlie gave me the assignment of building a new leadership development practice for our firm, working from our Boston headquarters. An MBA, ten years of management consulting assignments, experience with nearly fifty clients around the world—I had done it all with this in mind, the chance to take the lead. Thirty-eight years old. Heading the development of our firm's newest and most promising practice area. My life was right on track!

Our firm routinely gets involved with helping clients attack tough strategic problems, strengthen their operations, and improve profitability. Up until now, however, we have never directly focused our client services on building critical leadership capacity in organizations. As a firm, we have the access and reputation required to build a practice in the area, but I knew we did not have a good handle on the current best practices in leadership effectiveness. It became my mission to pull together a point of view on "leadership that really works," as Charlie put the challenge to us.

So I buried myself and my crew—the colleagues who joined me—in the research available about leadership, including traits, models, value propositions. PowerPoint presentations were zigzagging back and forth between our offices like crazed bats. We interviewed some of the best CEOs in the country, scanned mountains of journal articles, met with professors and writers who studied leadership, and amassed our data. We felt like we were launching a major Himalayan expedition. It felt good!

In all our research, some threads emerged. And a few especially puzzling findings spurred us to go deeper.

A Boulder, Colorado–based “freelance professor” and rock climber, Jim Collins, along with his team, had found some unusually curious data. He observed that dramatic improvements in company performance were coming from leaders whose traits and practices broke the traditional leadership mold. This research described leaders who were personally humble (in some cases, almost shy) and totally devoted to the service of others but who were also fiercely and unwaveringly resolved to do whatever it took to improve organizational performance. Something was jarring about great results coming from a self-effacing style, but the data was compelling.

It occurs to me just now that it was this Collins research that got me thinking again about my own dad as a leader. All right, score a point for this long train trip. Back in business school, I took a fair measure of ribbing about my famous father. He was featured in one of the school’s management case studies about leadership, ethics, and decision making in business. Honestly, I didn’t put much effort into that assignment. Dad was well known, admired by many, so loved. And he gave me, his son, so little of himself. It was a sore point. Still is.

I didn't fare very well on that particular assignment, and my classmates rode me big time. Not that I really cared; I figured back then that some of them were better suited to social work than business, anyway.

But reading Collins had caused me to reconsider all of this. What I've always heard about my dad's way of working sounds suspiciously like the profile of the effective leader Collins described. The thought had even crossed my mind that if I was going to launch a new leadership practice, then my old man might be helpful. Just a week ago I was thinking about Dad and wishing I could get past my hurt enough to reach out to him and run some of these ideas past him.

I should be more careful what I wish for. Mom called me on the same day I was having those thoughts.

"Hi, Son," Mom said. "I'm glad I caught you. Do you have a minute to talk?"

Her words were casual, but her voice had none of its normal breezy character. A feeling of alarm began to creep up the back of my neck. Of course I had a minute to talk!

"It's about your father," she continued more slowly. She cleared her throat. "I've been putting this conversation off for a while, Mike. He's not been feeling that great lately." Mom's voice cracked, and silence filled the line.

"Oh, just hand me the phone, Margaret!" My father's voice broke the silence with that tone of impatience I knew so well. He sounded all right to me.

"Look, Mike, things aren't too good right now. I met with my doctor this morning and there's a problem. The bottom line is that I'm going to have to cut back on some things. He wants me to get a little treatment. Rest up."

I was stunned. My mouth opened, but nothing came out. I had no words.

"I need your help, Mike," he continued, his voice suddenly sounding like a badly scratched record. "I'm involved in some leadership projects here, and they're all at critical points." Now it was Dad's turn to clear his throat. "I thought you could step in for me for a while, maybe a couple weeks," he finished weakly.

I wasn't processing any of this. My father, the master of understatement where his own personal issues are concerned, was saying that he had a problem! He needed a little treatment!

"I've talked about this with your boss. He told me you're launching the firm's leadership practice, so this should benefit both of us." Dad plowed on with his pitch like a runner determined to hit the finish line. "While you're helping us out, the team here will teach you what we've learned about a unique approach to leadership. Charlie suggested you keep a journal on your investigations while you're here, and I've got some friends who can help you develop it into something useful later." I heard my father take a quick breath.

"Would you come and help me, Son? Please?"

And just like that, my leadership sabbatical began. I can't adequately express how strange it is that I made such an abrupt move. I was in the middle of everything I had always wanted, on the threshold of a future I had always dreamed of. And I didn't like my father's unsolicited intervention with my boss in the least. Back to my earlier comment about feeling eight years old.

And yet I didn't hesitate. The sound of Mom's voice. What my dad said. What I felt in my heart. It all just went "click."

The next day, I handed off assignments to my crew. I decided to leave my techno-gadgets at home, packing three blank notebooks and an anxious mind. At the last minute,

on an impulse, I dug back through my graduate school files and grabbed the case study on my pop. I was going to see him, yet I still didn't really know who he was.

My executive assistant booked me a seat on Amtrak to Philly for the very next day. She looked at me suspiciously, like I'd lost my mind. Amtrak! I explained myself by repeating my dad's explanation: "It'll give me time to think." Her frown worsened—it was alien possession, not mere mental distress.

And here I am. I spent the first forty-five minutes of my trip reviewing Dad's case study and have been writing ever since. I'm beginning to suspect that this investigation may well be as much about him as his projects. I'm actually glad. It's time.

Some notes from my reading:

The son of a coal miner, my dad grew up in tough circumstances. Like many of his generation, he went to war when called. On Robert Wilson's twentieth birthday, a cease-fire was signed in Korea's Panmunjom, and he was shipped home. The GI Bill took him to Princeton where, according to the case study, he ran track. That reminded me of my favorite photo of him. A boyish Robert Wilson is straining forward, chest first, breaking the tape 100 yards ahead of the field in a 100-yard race! So fiercely determined was he to win that he false-started, failed to hear the recall gun, and ran the entire race alone. He explained to me, "I always expect to win and never look back to see the other guys."

That's the dad I know.

But the case study drew another picture that didn't fit this first-at-all-costs photo. Starting his career as a pharmaceutical salesman and rising quickly to management, he distinguished himself as a team builder. He always credited the team with his success, the file declared, and appeared to

be genuinely surprised whenever he received recognition or promotions.

This just doesn't square with what I thought I knew about him. Honestly, I never felt that he gave me credit for much of anything.

Robert Taylor Wilson was described in the article as unique. When he became CEO of the company twenty-two years later, he hardly ever stayed in his office (or at home, I might just add). He spent a lot of time in activity that looked more like teaching than managing. He practically turned his company's entire senior team into teachers.

As a leader, he was known for setting high goals and standards. He was death on what the article called "mistakes of the heart," poor ethical decisions like when managers shaded the truth, took credit when it belonged to others, or passed on unflattering remarks about their colleagues. Conversely, he was softer on other kinds of mistakes. He used honest missteps as teaching occasions. He encouraged risk taking, though he wasn't afraid to remove people for persistent underperformance. His top leadership team actually got smaller in his first few years, even as the company doubled in size and profitability.

He avoided taking credit when things were going well; indeed, he went to great pain to attribute success to others. At the corporate annual meeting, he always showcased others' accomplishments, not his own.

He called himself a "truth teller." He was famous for plain talk, for going to great lengths to describe company performance accurately. This part, at least, I recognize. He also encouraged managers to honestly describe the reality of their unit's performance.

Reviewing all of this from my dad's corporate past, I am becoming very curious to see the leadership system he has

helped build in Philly. Maybe more to the point, I think I'm ready to take a fresh look at my father, give us both another chance.

Robert Taylor Wilson. I know that he looks great on paper. I know he has hundreds of loyal friends. I know that people love working for him. I also know there are dimensions of this man that I've never encountered. And I think I'd like to.

While I'm chronicling things I know, here's one more. I know why I'm sitting on this train. My father said "please." It wasn't "Get down here, Son!" Just "please." I don't remember ever hearing that before.

Okay, time to put the pen down and watch America go past my window. The ride might not be too bad, really. I'm noticing the track bending out ahead. I can see the engine now, but even so, I can't see where it's heading. I suppose that if I were seated with the conductor at the head of this train, I would still be unable to see what's around that bend.

I wonder where this journey will take me.

A NEW ASSIGNMENT

Day's end, and what a day it has been. Mom and Dad are in bed, and I'm back in my boyhood bedroom feeling time warped and badly torn between feelings of exhilaration and grief. I've got to somehow capture this incredible and tumultuous day.

Amtrak's *Acela Express* pulled into Philly's Thirtieth Street station at 12:05, five long hours after my Boston departure. Wanting to stretch my legs, I hiked the short thirteen blocks east along Market, crossing the majestic Schuylkill River—the Manayunk, as I insisted it be called in my boyhood Indian phase—to my first appointment of the day.

Dad had arranged for me to plunge right in with a lunch meeting at the famous Pyramid Club, high atop my hometown's new, art deco skyline. When I walked in, I was stunned by the gaunt and pale face that greeted me, my dad's wan smile masking nothing of the seriousness of his condition. He must have lost thirty pounds, and that from a frame that had been quite trim to begin with.

Dad saw that I noticed. Not giving me a chance to comment, he hooked my elbow and steered me to a circle of six men and women standing to the side. I saw the unspoken apologies on their faces—they already knew what Dad would put off telling me for another five hours.

Relocated to our table, my lunch mates introduced themselves. The first three were chief executive officers. One was the CEO of a premier biotech firm, the second had spent her career in financial services, and the third came out of the manufacturing industry. Next was the city's former mayor, Dr. Will Turner, now devoted to the work of his inner-city church. Will said a few words about his passion for the city and for serving the most vulnerable members of the community.

Another member was an academic, Martin Goldschmidt. Martin was a sociologist whose research was aimed at understanding why some social sector initiatives succeeded and why others failed so miserably.

The final member was a transplanted Irishman named Alistair Reynolds. "Ali" was known to me already, but by reputation only. He'd had a meteoric stint with my firm prior to my own tenure there. Ali described himself as a "social entrepreneur." I had heard the term before but never actually met one. Social entrepreneurs, by definition, approach social sector needs with entrepreneurial and capital-generating strategies. He could have used his talents to continue making many millions for the firm and plenty for himself, but he had set that goal aside. Strange.

Dad also indicated that there were other members of the team not at the lunch. I wondered how such an interesting and diverse group wound up working together.

After the introductions, Ali stood up. "Mike, we'd like to tell you why we are here. Actually, we chose this spot

because we want to show you. Dr. Turner," he continued, "would you do the honors?"

So right there in the Pyramid Club, we all got up and followed Turner to the windows looking south over Philadelphia. He turned to me and said, "Up here, you can practically see the whole city. When our team first started to meet, we'd come here for lunch, look out at the city, and talk about its challenges. Looking here to the south," he continued, "you'll see growing businesses, the airport, the seaport, and a network of diverse neighborhoods." He went on to outline the team's projects on the south side of town. "Follow me," he said, speaking with a gracious authority. I followed.

As we walked, he expanded on his points. "As a team, we concluded that one of the most significant barriers to progress in all sectors of the city was the lack of effective leadership. We have been working for several years to accelerate the emergence of effective leaders around the city. We are now working in all sectors of the city: business, government, nonprofit, and community organizations.

"If you look out into the distance," Turner continued, "you can almost make out some of the homes, churches, and businesses in what we call the Main Line. There are exciting stories waiting there for you, Mike."

On around the building we continued, with everyone getting a chance to talk. We spent the better part of an hour walking around the club, eventually coming back to our table.

During lunch, Dad didn't eat. Frankly, I was torn between the exhilarating ideas I was hearing about and the grief that was welling up within me. There was nothing I could do about any of this. Ali had resumed the position of lead and just kept plowing forward with his narration.

"Let me shift focus from our projects to our team, Mike," Ali said. "So, who are we? We call ourselves the No-Name Team." Laughing at my puzzled expression, he continued. "It's a little contrived, but we're not the story, and we want to make that clear. The leaders who are out on the frontline are the story. They're the ones who make the difference, and we're here to support them.

"We really think we have something quite remarkable going on here. You'll see that there have been some amazing breakthroughs. Individuals, teams, and organizations have accomplished much more than any of us thought possible. We've seen for-profit companies accelerate past their peers, nonprofit organizations work much more effectively, and churches have gotten their members off the pews and into high-impact work in the community. Even our friends in the government are improving.

"A new kind of leader is getting this done. That's the bottom line."

I noticed that one of our waitresses was standing off to the side, her ear cocked to hear Ali's remarks, her head nodding in agreement. She'd been listening!

He continued. "We believe the key to success is what we call 'the Serving Leader.'"

"So you're basing your approach on the writings about servant leadership," I said. "On Robert Greenleaf and others." This growing body of work had been part of my team's research.

"Well, yes and no," Ali responded. "Yes, we've all read Greenleaf and with him Blanchard, Tichy, Collins, Block, Bennis, Gallup, Wheatley, Senge, Kotter, Drucker, and much of everything else that's been written in the field."

"I've read it all, too!" I interjected, wanting everyone to know I was pretty much up to speed. "Great stuff!"

"It's all great, Mike!" He sounded irritated. "Greenleaf and the great thought leaders who have followed him pioneered such important thinking about leadership. They have helped transform our basic assumptions about what makes great leadership great.

"But I also have to tell you, no! We're not basing our approach just on writings and books. Mike," he continued, his voice softer now and more imploring, "we've learned so much on the ground here, from Serving Leaders who are in the trenches with their teams, businesses, and neighborhoods *doing* what everyone's writing about. Our emphasis here is on what a leader actually does to support individuals, teams, and organizations. This is why we use the active word *servicing*. The *theory* of servant leadership is vital, but it's the *active Servicing Leader* who makes the critical difference."

I glanced over at my dad and saw the greatest look of satisfaction I think I've ever seen on his face. Dad was pleased with Ali—and with what Ali was saying—and his face left no room for doubt. I could sure stand to see that expression pointing in my direction sometime.

Dad caught me looking at him and nodded his head once. "Ali's gotten right to the point," he said. "And here's your first hint: the Serving Leader has a way of helping everyone else to succeed. Almost before we've spotted a Serving Leader, we notice this symptom—people all around are flourishing."

"So here's your task in a nutshell, Mike," Ali said. "Look at what we show you and then write the story. Put to work all that fine consulting expertise your dad is always bragging about."

I glanced over at Dad again. He was cleaning his glasses. He didn't glance back.

Ali was still talking. "We want you to make simple and practical sense of what the Serving Leader is doing that causes teams and companies and communities to flourish. Make it teachable, Mike. Make it learnable."

I just blinked. How was I going to do that?

Seeing my dubious expression, Ali laughed. "We're going to do this together," he said encouragingly. "Why don't we start by making a picture."

He took his napkin, placed it on the table between us, and drew a pyramid. Then he spun the napkin, flipping the pyramid upside down.

"I think you'll see that this Serving Leader approach takes almost all of our thinking on leadership and turns it right up on its head. At least since the pharaohs, we've thought of leadership as climbing to the top of the pyramid, right? I mean, here we sit at the top of the Pyramid Club, just like leaders are supposed to."

I nodded, though I can't say I was totally thrilled by what I was hearing. Being able to dine at the Pyramid Club is cool. Climbing is what my life's been largely about, truth be told.

The Serving Leader is down here unleashing the strengths, talents, and passions of those he or she serves. It works this way for a team of two, a business with a thousand employees, or a community of several million.

"Our findings point us in another direction," Ali continued. "The Serving Leader is down here at the bottom of the picture. The team, the business, and even the entire community are up above. The Serving Leader is down here unleashing the strengths, talents, and passions of those he or she serves. It works this way for a team of two, a business with a thousand employees,

or a community of several million. Quite a switch, huh?"

Quite!

Ali shoved the napkin over to me, and I just stared at it. A plain, upside-down pyramid hand-drawn on a simple paper napkin. This was my starting point. Candidly, I was expecting more, but conscious of all the eyes upon me, I reached out and retrieved my gift. Okay. It was a starting point. I gave it a good look, folded it up, and tucked it into my coat pocket.

Glancing up again, I saw Ali nod his satisfaction to my father. What he was satisfied with, I don't know. That I had picked up his little picture and put it into my pocket? Very impressive!

I must confess that as I recount this day, I'm feeling overwhelmed. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me finish my first day's account.

The rest of the lunch went by quickly. Each team member agreed to a schedule of time with me. My time with each of them was to be spent focusing on their key projects. I was to learn both by observation and by rolling up my sleeves to work on some of the projects.

Clearly, they were excited about having me involved. I was more than a little nervous about all of this. I kept glancing over at my dad to see what was registering on his face. Ali had spoken of my father's pride in me. I wanted to see his pride firsthand. Dad didn't return my glances.

After lunch, Dad suggested I come with him. Much to my surprise, the elevator doors opened to the lobby and there stood my boss, Charlie, like he was expecting us! "Hey, Mike! How's it going?" Charlie said.

"Hey, Charlie," I answered. I glanced over at my dad. There was no surprise on his face. I shook my head. Dad was up to more than met the eye, and I wasn't enjoying it.

"I was in town and wanted to see how your old man is doing," Charlie explained.

Plausible, but not satisfactory. Dad was maneuvering me. He wasn't relating to me. He still hadn't told me *anything*.

They moved ahead of me and talked quietly. It was strange to see my boss supporting my dad with his arm as we walked to the street.

In the cab, I steered the conversation to my task. "This Serving Leader thing would seem to be a stretch for real business applications," I began. "It might work in social sector projects, but it's hard to imagine us selling something like this to our clients."

"Far from it, actually," my boss said. "I really think we need something fresh. More to the point, I think you're going to see approaches that deliver more than the old paradigms do. I want you to examine these Serving Leader approaches. Your father is quite excited about what's going on, and he's as tough a grader as there is."

No argument from me on this score.

"My instinct tells me this thing could indeed be commercial. That's one of the reasons you're here, Mike."

I was getting anxious. This was clearly not going to be the quick and simple proposition Charlie seemed to think. I was going to have to work my way through a jumbled smorgasbord of diverse projects—even diverse worlds. The worlds of the corporation, the nonprofit, the neighborhood, and the government.

And through it all, I was going to have to find simple, teachable principles that Charlie assumed would then sell new business like hotcakes. I wasn't sure which challenge was the more daunting, connecting all of the scattered dots I was shown at lunch or reconnecting with my father. This was not going to be a quick little detour from my nicely arranged life.

Dad directed the cab to deliver Charlie to the airport and then to take us home. After Charlie left us, I asked Dad to tell me how he was doing. "Later" was all he'd say.

What else should I write? Mom and Dad and I had dinner at home, an old boyhood favorite from my mother's Pennsylvania Dutch past—shepherd's pie. And, again, Dad barely nibbled at the edge of his serving.

I could weep, there's so much hitting me, so many things coming at me all at once. I've lost so much, left so many things behind. Too many things.

And now I know the very worst of it. I had just pushed back my plate when Dad said it. A few spare, chosen words, and my world will never be the same.

"It's pancreatic, Son," he said simply, evenly. "Too far gone to treat."

Just that. My dad will die this summer. I have to write it again, it's so hard to grasp. My dad will die this summer.

So here I am, back in my boyhood room, trying to capture my day on paper. A noisy owl calls out in the dusk. No other sounds. Okay, Mike, start with what you have—a napkin, a picture, some words, a very heavy heart.

Assignment notes:

- Learn what Serving Leaders do and how their approach works.
- Use the upside-down pyramid to structure what I learn.
- Be with my dad while he dies.

I don't know if I can do this!



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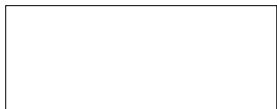
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