

# *Hostmanship - A Leadership Ethic of Personal Responsibility*

*A Review by Ed Brenegar*

**Welcome.**

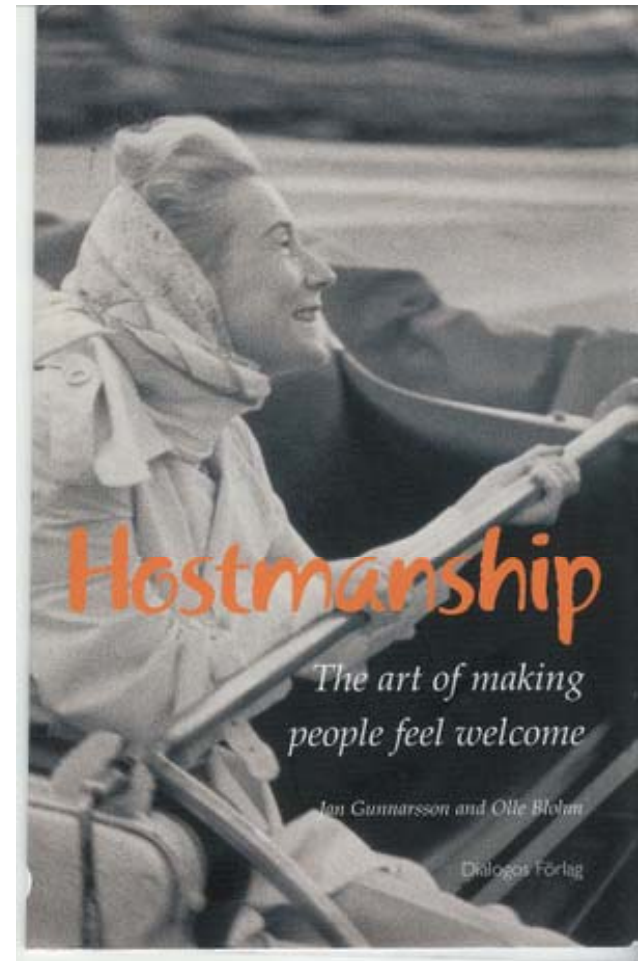
Finding Jan and Olle's wonderful book, *Hostmanship*, was one of those rare treats that we find in life. It is a book as real, personal, practical and profound as any you'll ever find. To take seriously the spirit of being a Welcoming Leader is to begin to recover the human dimension of leadership and organizational life.

This is such a unique and special book. It is not a book enamored with its own message. Rather it is a simple humble book of lessons learned through years of service to their "guests."

If you have questions or comments, you can send them to me at [ed@edbrenegar.com](mailto:ed@edbrenegar.com) or find me at [Leading Questions](#).

All the best,

Ed Brenegar



## #1 - An Ethic of Personal Responsibility

Hostmanship - The art of making people feel welcome is a remarkable little book by Jan Gunnarsson and Olle Blohm. I came upon this book reading a blog reference to it by [Tom Peters](#). Gunnarsson and Blohm are hospitality industry veterans in Sweden whose take on customer service and leadership is refreshing.

The book provides a fresh look at customer service. I'm going to review the book here at [Leading Questions](#) in a six posting serialized version during this week. The first will be a description of what Gunnarsson and Blohm mean by Hostmanship, and then in successive days, I'll take each of the five stages and discuss them.

What is distinctive about Hostmanship, as compared to most books on customer service, customer experience, word-of-mouth marketing or leadership, is that this is not primarily about strategies and tactics. It is about the attitude that we bring.

This attitude is captured in a quote from the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard.

If we wish to succeed  
in helping someone reach a particular goal  
we must first find out where he is now  
and start from there.

If we cannot do this,  
we merely delude ourselves

into believing that we can help others.

Before we can help someone,  
we must know more than he does,  
but most of all,  
we must understand what he understands.  
If we cannot do that, our knowing more will not  
help.

If we nonetheless wish to show how much we know,  
it is only because we are vain and arrogant,  
and our true goal is to be admired,  
not to help others.

All genuine helpfulness

starts with humility before we wish to help,  
so we must understand  
that helping  
is not a wish to dominate  
but a wish to serve.

If we cannot do this,  
neither can we help anyone.

Hostmanship is about the source of loyal customers. It is about the relationship that is established between a business and the people who benefit from that business. Hostmanship is about the kind of care that is exhibited. Hostmanship is about making people feel welcome. Gunnarsson and Blohm recommend stopping using the term customer and instead call them guests. Customers buy things, guests come and should be made to feel welcome. What does it mean to feel welcome? Here's how they portray it.

When I walk into a restaurant, there are several things that make me feel welcome:

Information - There should be a menu outside the door.

Design - that someone cares

Cleanliness - Everything from the hostess's blouse to crumbs swept off the floor

Safety - If it's below ground, I want to see an emergency exit

Greeting - Someone should notice I am there

Attention - I don't want to sit and wait forever

Friendliness - It doesn't hurt to smile  
Listen - I want to be heard  
Speed - Service, service, service  
Price - I don't want to be overcharged

All these things affect me before I've even eaten anything.

The difference that is created with Hostmanship is that the heart of a business is an attitude about yourself. It starts with who you are as the leader and who your employees are, and then that attitude gets translated to the "guests."

Hostmanship is about giving. It's about sharing a part of yourself and your knowledge. Never forgetting that people who have contacted you are an extension of yourself. It's about understanding that, at that moment, you are an important part of her life. Not only because you have the answer to her question. You are also the person she has chosen to turn to.

Hostmanship is an art. The host is an artist.

Gunnarsson and Blohm describe this attitude in terms of six fundamentals: Interaction, The Big Picture, Dialogue, Responsibility, Consideration, and Knowledge. Let's look at each.

**Interaction:** The authors convey a sense of magic in the encounters that we should have with guests. Each interaction is different. And we need to see it that way.

When a guest appears at the door of your business, she stands before you with her entire history in tow. What you see is not just a person but also a life's worth of experience. The question she will soon ask is a product of that experience. My point is that each meeting is different.

Because it is different, it means that we must look at each interaction as not the same as the one before, but as the one that is taking place right now. When we treat people as guests, they cease to be customers, market segments, or bottom-line fulfillment opportunities. They aren't the next appointment, the next interruption, the next distraction. They are people. They are not abstract objects that we just deal with. They are people who have real lives and real needs, and they've come to us to have at least one of those needs met.

**The Big Picture:** We live in such a segmented, fragmented, silo'ed world. But people don't really see us that way. When a guest walks into the shop or the office, everything is a part of the whole. There is a level of integration that exists that guests sense. If integrity is lacking, then the guests sense that too.

Being willing to associate yourself with what you sell means to a large extent being part of a guest's experience and making the product come alive. ... What's important is to see the connection between you, the product and the company. A trinity that in the guest's eyes is always a single entity the moment she visits your business.

**Dialogue:** There has been much written in the last 15 years about dialogue or in the importance of how we talk with one another. To a great extent, dialogue is dependent, not on our ability to articulate our thoughts, but rather to listen. To listen objectively, perceptively and non-prejudicially.

Dialogue requires the courage to see beyond prejudices and a willingness to treat guests in a friendly and personable manner. To show others who you are and offer a memorable encounter. ... Listening is much more than understanding what is said. ... In a dialogue with a guest, the "right" questions aren't always asked. But by listening, you can tell her what she hasn't yet put into words.

**Responsibility:** Responsibility is the initiative we take to meet our guest's needs. It is not simply doing what is required by the job description, but being responsible for the organization's care of the guest.

Assuming responsibility means seeing your business with guest's eyes. What's expected of you? What does your guest need? How can you help to ensure that the guest benefits from what you do? In short, are you taking responsibility for your guest's success?

Lying behind responsibility is a commitment or as the authors put it a promise. The promise can be anything, but it is what you say you will provide to your guests. Here's how they see it.

"I spoke with someone at your company who told me ..." "In the catalogue it said that it was included ..." "I phoned before and was promised that you would ..." "When I was here yesterday you said ..."

It's not unusual to hear such things from a guest you meet for the first time. She carried a promise with her across the threshold and now expects you to keep it. It might have been an ad that made the promise or maybe one of your colleagues who the day before was in a hurry to get home and went a little overboard. That doesn't

really matter. As an employee, you are responsible for the big picture and that includes promises.

What is a promise exactly? And when is it broken? Is a room by the sea where a big tanker is docked outside blocking the view still a room with a view? ...

When is a promise is broken and what consequences should it have? These are two questions a responsible organization has to answer. When I discuss this with people in the tourism industry, they usually refuse to offer any form of compensation when I mention things like ugly curtains.

Gunnarsson and Blohm see criticism as the test of this sense of ethical responsibility. Their approach to creating opportunities for guests to tell them the truth is rather creative and insightful about human behavior.

One of the toughest challenges is finding out what your guests really think about your business. I have a hard time believing they will tell you the whole truth even if you ask them. That may sound cynical, but I think about myself and how I react when someone asks how I feel, how the food tastes, if I slept well, if my car is working all right, if the shoes fit, how the jacket feels, etc. I have a host of polite responses the questioner is expecting to hear. You simply can't trust what a guest says as she is leaving or what she writes down on a slip of paper and drops in your suggestion box.

Getting to the truth takes more than that, something the guest doesn't expect. Situation where she is surprised by her feelings and eventually can't keep them to herself.

They proceed to tell a story of how the common factor in repeat business was that each guest was dissatisfied at some point in their experience with the company. In one instance a mistake is made and ... well, let them tell the outcome.

We of course apologized, immediately called in housekeeping and, to make it up to them, offered to buy a round of drinks for everyone before dinner that evening. They invariably accepted.

When evening came, we brought the entire company together for a drink in a separate area next to the dining room. It was there that we had our chance. I usually began with a toast and little speech about how what had happened was my fault, and then took advantage of the next half hour of casual chatting to get to know them. It was a half hour when I had their attention and could sell them on our hotel and town.

This formula proved so successful that we began purposefully forgetting things. ... It was a bit underhanded, I admit, but we learned that complaints could also provide an opportunity to nurture a long-term relationship.

An ethic of responsibility looks for ways to build relationships. What better way than to create opportunities for disappointment to be resolved and the host-guest relationships reconciled.

**Consideration:** The inclusion of the dimensions of Consideration and Responsibility is why I see Hostmanship as an ethical system for developing customer relationships, or guest relationships. Consideration is the key to the whole Hostmanship system because it is the key to how we see the guest before us.



Well, consideration means much more than understanding how someone else feels. To me, it means seeing another person's humanity without the blinders of prejudice, and doing so with affection.

Consideration requires the host, not to treat every person alike, but every person with dignity and value. This doesn't mean that guests are always right, or nice, good, pleasant people. It just means that we don't prejudge whom they are because of some identifiable characteristic that might make treat them one or another.

Hostmanship is giving. Considerately giving of yourself, your time, your energy and your personality. A willingness to share the best of yourself.

**Knowledge:** This is not simply mastering a collection of facts. Instead it is knowing how to interpret the situation that your guest is in and apply your knowledge to their situation. This means that a host is always learning, not just more about his field, but also how to integrate that knowledge into the life experience of the guest.

As a host, you also need foresight. It might be a simple thing, like noticing the man in a shirt and sport coat handing in his key before heading out into Malmo on a January night. You know how cold it gets in Malmo in January. Or when you help two British women with theater tickets. It might be worth mentioning that the theater they are attending is quite plain compared to the City Theater. You use your knowledge of the city to steer your guests in the right direction.

A considerate host does much of this naturally. A good host is always learning, interpreting and thinking. The goal should be to have enough knowledge to cover all the needs of your guests, and not only as guests but as people.

This sort of knowledge also means that you are aware of the differences in cultures so that your own behavior as host does not unintentionally offend or confuse your guest.

As is seen, there is much to learning Hostmanship. It is an ethic perspective that is similar in idea and practice to [Robert Greenleaf's servant leadership concept](#). Both intentionally focus on others in order for greater effectiveness to be gained.

Jan Gunnarsson and Olle Blohm divide Hostmanship into five stages of application.

**Personal Hostmanship**

**Functional Hostmanship**

**Organizational Hostmanship**

**Destinational Hostmanship**

**National Hostmanship**

I'll look at one of these each day this week.

Until then, you may enjoy reading [this simple introduction to Hostmanship](#) that can be downloaded from the Hostmanship site in Sweden. Make sure you link to the English side of the website.

## **#2 - Personal Hostmanship**

This second entry focuses on the first stage of Hostmanship - Personal Hostmanship.

Having read this little book, I am left with the impression that we Americans think of business as primarily a set of tactics, strategies and tasks that we do. We are focused on activities and not so much on the inner conditions of effectiveness. Personal Hostmanship is a way to address that lack of connection to personal excellence.

For Jan Gunnarsson and Olle Blohm, there is a distinction between hostmanship and customer service.

One of the big differences between hostmanship and a "service attitude" is the feeling that stays with you after the guest is gone.

In service, the focus is on the recipient, and we say that as long as the guest is happy you've done a good job. In hostmanship, the focus is on the provider. Good hostmanship is something you take home, that becomes part of you. It's something that helps you to develop your personality.

This is really counter-intuitive. We have been told that the customer comes first; the customer is always right; be self-sacrificing, etc. Hostmanship challenges these notions with the simple idea that healthy, balanced, happy people make the best hosts. This means that we each must have an eye to our own "self-care." Of course, this idea may be a cultural distinctive of Sweden. Here in the US, we tend to think everything IS about us. Of course, this is not what they are saying. It is about something more personally challenging than just taking care of yourself.

To have the courage to step forward requires confidence, and that can only be attained if you know yourself. It's also one of the biggest challenges as a host. You have to understand yourself, who you are, where you come from, your references, values, prejudices and limitations.

Read that last sentence again. That's a tall order, and quite different than simply living a stress-free, pleasure-rich life. To achieve this level of life is to become a person of wisdom; a person of integrity; a person who is whole, complete and "together." I'm sure that when the idea of hostmanship was introduced that it appeared to be simply a clever way to talk about customer service. Instead it is an insightful way for one human being to make a difference in the life of another.

Professional success demands personal success. No one can simply switch over from an uncertain, destructive personality at home to a thoughtful, caring one on the job. In other words, the private you must be in sync with the professional you. This requires a great deal of thought as to where you are in life and that you make the best of your opportunities. I realize this isn't easy, and it's something you would do first and foremost to better understand yourself rather than your guests. But personal hostmanship isn't something you can express halfway. You have to open up and greet your guests with your entire person. It requires that you know yourself and express any uncertainty you are feeling to the organization you work for, so that your colleagues can encourage you. They will thank you when they see the results.

Personal Hostmanship creates an environment where the guest's needs can be met. But it doesn't stand-alone. It requires the other stages to work.

### #3 - Functional Hostmanship

Unless impossibly small, every organization is divided up into functional units. You have a sales force. There's a fulfillment office, a HR department and a production staff. Each function has

its own purpose and method for operating and measuring their performance. The leadership challenge is to avoid the silo effect, which is the fragmentation into territorial units who are protective of their turf. Unless addressed proactively an organization will devolve into separate little fiefdoms.

Gunnarsson and Blohm address this reality in what they call Functional Hostmanship. They begin by identifying the principal attitude that lies behind this destructive tendency in organizations. When people view people with "thinly veiled contempt"(their phrase) they are making a statement that their function area is all that matters in the operation of the company. We've all either been treated to or have exhibited ourselves the condescension that one person or group has toward "them" who are not like us. When this attitude exists within an organization it is difficult for any sense of being a team to develop.

I've told the story before of the hosiery mill where I did a project several years ago. The mill was organized around 17 separate stages in the manufacturing of socks. Each stage was so isolated from the other stages - meaning their whole focus was on their function and their function alone - that no one in one stage knew what the stage before or after it did. This fragmentation was major factor in the eventual closing of the business. It extended beyond the manufacturing floor to the executive suite. In essence, everyone was there to do their own thing and receive their just compensation.

The cure for thinly veiled contempt is respect. Respect for other people, their backgrounds and the belief that everyone will make their best choice based on the situation at hand. If you look at it that way, it is easy to like other people, cherish the moment, to treat interaction with your guests as uplifting and always focus on

the guest's needs. You will clearly feel that you, your function and your organization are part of something bigger than yourselves.

The key to Functional Hostmanship is this attitude of respect. How is this done? It begins with the recognition that we each must be responsible for our own part of the organization. If we sit in judgment of others, we are in essence taking on ourselves the responsibility of knowing what is best for them to do in their function area. When we respect someone, we accept his or her responsibility for knowing what to do and doing it. Consequently, we accept our own responsibility for doing our part. This is partly why I see Hostmanship as an ethic of responsibility.

In truth, I can't fix anyone. That is a delusion. To think so is a denial of reality. If we are honest and objective, we have a difficult enough time changing ourselves, much less other people and whole departments with our business. But that is the attitude of thinly veiled contempt. We think we know better than them, and often we don't. Contempt is really a clever way to avoid responsibility. When I am contemptible toward some person or department, I am really trying to avoid that functional group's scrutiny of me and my department. As a result, we put up walls to avoid criticism. Our isolation not only keeps us from learning how to do a better job, but also hurts the company.

Gunnarsson and Blohm describe it this way.

A guest is a guest is a guest

The surest way not to misjudge a guest is never to judge anyone. What your guest chooses to wear, how she cuts her hair or who she is with is up to her. What you should be interested in is her needs. When I mentioned in the last section the ability

to read a guest, I meant doing it without making value judgments. Your focus should be on the situation at hand and the function within the company the guests decided to turn to.

Hostmanship is fixed before the guest ever arrives. It is part of the overall performance, expressed at a predetermined level in harmony with other functions and the company as a whole. In other words, the hostmanship you offer is constant as the products you sell, which in turn differ merely in terms of size, model, color, etc. The guest expects you to play your role and not break the spell.

Hostmanship is a way to bring unity and cooperation to your company. Just as personal hostmanship is integral to functional hostmanship, functional hostmanship is essential to organizational hostmanship. We'll look at that stage of Hostmanship tomorrow.

#### #4 - Organizational Hostmanship

Frankly, Organizational Hostmanship is where most people think of customer service belongs. Too often though it simply means a program of techniques employed to improve customer recruitment and retention. The idea of loyal customers or guests, as Gunnarsson and Blohm describe, to many organizations is little more than just trying to build repeat business.

Hostmanship is about creating loyal customers or guests. It is an ethical system of business relationships built upon the personal responsibility of employees to act as hosts to the guests of the business.

Gunnarsson and Blohm trace good hostmanship to a clear, well-stated mission. From their perspective a good mission incorporates clarity about “Why we are here” answering what need or problem is met through your business. It addresses how the culture of the business achieves that mission and what you do as a business.

Because hostmanship is fundamentally an ethical perspective, it finds its expression in the culture of the organization.

As luck would have it, there are really only two kinds of corporate cultures, and only one of them promotes hostmanship. You either create a culture where everything is steered in detail, where management lists every possible problem and standard operating procedure is never to promise anything without consulting a supervisor. Or you can try to create a culture where values are the overriding concern, where the key is shared responsibility. A culture where the satisfaction of every employee is a priority and where a level of hostmanship has been established. That’s when a philosophy of hostmanship develops, and the hostmanship you offer is firmly accepted by every member of that culture.

Hostmanship isn't a quick turn around approach to organizational improvement. Rather it is a culture forming methodology that creates the foundation for a sustainable relationship with guests. It is an attitude that the company projects that is open and welcoming to its guests.

## #5 - Destinalional Hostmanship



There is an old saying that goes, "A rising tide lifts all boats." This could be applied to the notion of Destinal Hostmanship. If Hostmanship is about making people feel welcome, then when applied to a "destination" or place, it means that everyone works to create a physical environment of welcome.

A destination's problems are rarely due to individual companies. Usually, they are issues "in the corridors," which no one feels directly responsible for but still affect you as an organization. It might be the number of parking spaces outside a shopping center or a train or bus schedule. While it might seem that such common interests only benefit some of destination's businesses, they actually reinforce the guest's overall impression. The cost of providing many of the things that make a place attractive has to be shared, which is not always easy to accept if you don't personally see the results outside "your" door or if "your" guests don't directly benefit.

Let's cut to the chase about Destinal Hostmanship. To be a good host means that you will be concerned and involved in all aspects of your community's life. You make the investment of time and effort to build relationships that provide a basis for shared action to benefit the whole community.

It is Destinal Hostmanship where we see the real character of the ethic of personal responsibility. For here is that place where there are no obligations, only free choice to contribute in ways that make a difference. If you lack pride in your local area, then your hostmanship will suffer, if it exists at all.

I'm not talking about just be involved. I'm talking about taking initiative to make a difference. For example, in our community, a study has determined that the economic future of the community is dependent upon attracting middle class jobs. We are increasing an attractive

place for people to retire and consequently increasingly the jobs are low-paying service sectors jobs. The project report stated that \$500,000 needed to be raised to facilitate the implementation of the plan's recommendations. A proposed one-half cent sales tax is part of the recommendation. The question before elected officials is whether they can see a larger enough picture to understand what their Destinal Host role is.

This is just one application of the idea. Another involves the recognition that a repeat visit by someone to a community creates a different experience than the first one. Here's a long quote from Gunnarsson and Blohm.

Everything changes and remains in flux. That was the gist of what Greek philosopher Heraclitus meant when he said, "You cannot step twice in the same river." When a guest returns to a destination, she brings her previous experience with her. She's been there before. She knows where the stores are, how to get to the beach and find the train. She recognizes and remembers.

Some destinations around the world interpret this to mean that the guest wants to experience the same thing again and base their hostmanship accordingly. They try to make everything the same, so that guests will always know where they are. They feel they are creating security, calm and harmony for both the guest and the destination. The thinking is that if the guest is received exactly as she expects, she can't help but be satisfied.

Or can she?

Of course she can! Unless, of course, the company's mission is never to change, but that takes a little extra doing. Most businesses get stuck in a rut believing that

things pretty much can be kept the same. The gust is the same, the destination is the same and the same experience can be created over and over. ... A guest who knows her way around, has gotten to know some of the locals and has her favorite places is a different guest than she was when she visited the first time. With this in mind, the destination's hostmanship also has to be adapted to repeat guests.

If not, there is a risk it will face the same consequences many other destinations around the world have suffered. They didn't see the changes in their guests or themselves and became complacent. All they saw was their guests come back and their numbers point skyward. ...

This collective self-confidence reaches unforeseen heights year after year. Then, just as suddenly, guests grow tired of the self-righteousness. They tire of finding everything more expensive. And they tire of seeing the same things year in and year out, the only difference being that the product shrinks in quality but rises in price.

To be a destinational host is to see the big picture that includes your community. It means understanding what outsiders think. It means taking initiative to lead in those areas that bridge the gap between my business and my community.

As the authors say in another place,

If not me, who,  
If not now, when?

Care for your city. The residual impact will be magnificent.

## #6 - National Hostmanship

Jan Gunnarsson and Olle Blohm wrote this book focused on Hostmanship as it applies to people and companies in Sweden. One of the outcomes that they hoped to achieve is raising the pride that Swedes have in the country and expressing that pride to visitors from other countries.

There are many ways to welcome someone to your country. Your hostmanship is a reflection of your personality. If you are Swedish, you might take a foreign guest to a hockey or bandy match in the winter or a boat ride to the archipelago in the summer. You might buy tickets to a concert in Dalhalla or stay a night at the Ice Hotel. You'd want to show them something exotic about your country.

Your hostmanship is a reflection of you, what you're fascinated by, what makes you proud and what makes you Swedish. National hostmanship is a way to show your guests that it's not just any country they have traveled to; it's your country.

...

Being a host in your country is very much a question of pride. You have to want to show off what's yours and not be afraid to occasionally defend yourself. You live here and you've taken a stand - you're Swedish.

As I read these words, and the entire chapter, I thought about how this applies to being an American. I felt that as a country we had lost something that the authors are trying to encourage in their country. In America, I think this is a more complex issue. There really isn't a single America. We are a nation of immigrants and geographic regions.

Think of the difference between an Italian from the North End of Boston and or a Navaho living in northern Arizona. Very different cultures, traditions and geographic locales. Yet both American. People take pride in being an American when they are away from our shores. When home they take pride in the indigenous culture of their region.

For example, when visitors come to our home, we want to show them the mountains and help them listen to some mountain music that has its roots in the ancient Scots-Irish Celtic string music tradition. As a North Carolinian, I want them to share with them basketball and barbeque. More than anything, we want to share our friends with them.

Several years ago, a young woman and her family from North Ireland that my son had met a church youth conference came to America for a month long journey. A week was spent, not so much with us, but in our neck of the woods here in Western North Carolina. We gathered with friends for dinner. I took the father and the brother who is wheel-chair bound with MS down to the camp where our Boy Scout troop was at summer camp. Daniel, the boy, is a scout back in Belfast. It was so much fun to share parent's day at camp with him and his dad. We took the family to a mountain farm to pick blueberries. We helped them to understand who we are, and especially Scots-Irish heritage of our region.

This type of hostmanship is highly personal. It requires a personal relationship for hostmanship to be done.

I believe what Gunnarsson and Blohm are suggesting is something different. And it is this that is both its genius and its most problematic aspect.

They are not saying, "be a host when convenient." They are saying that live every day as a host. That every person whom you meet act as a host to them. They are saying make an effort to share your country with the guest, the visitor, and the stranger.

The problematic nature of this it would seem is that so many people come to America looking for a better life. This phenomenon in particular is being played out on our southern border with Mexico where thousands cross our border every day seeking a variety of things - some noble and some illegal. I'm not making a comment about government action. I am suggesting that what Hostmanship implies is that people who come to our country are guests, and that certain privileges, rights and responsibilities come with being a guest.

As a guest in my home or my nation, you have the right to be treated with dignity, as a person and with due respect. You don't have a right to knowingly and with malice violate our laws and culture. You have the responsibility as a guest of treating our country with respect. If we can establish mutual respect, then a relationship of trust can be built, and then I can show you my country, and you can tell me your desires for your life and family, and why you have come here. I know Mexicans who come to America to work to support their families that live back in their home country. They spend nine months working, sending checks home and then they return home for three months, and then return to work again. These guests in our country work in the Christmas tree industry in our region. They are people who are respectful of the communities where they live and as a result build a long-term relationship with the families that hire them. This is an example to me for how in our country people can act as hosts to people from foreign lands who come here for more than a holiday visit.

There are many more aspects of Hostmanship on a national level that require us to reflect upon how we present the best of our country to the world.

I am proud to be an American. I love all the regions of our vast land. I love the rich blend of cultures that make the regions unique. I am pleased, therefore, that Hostmanship ends with this call to National Hostmanship. It is a very good attitude to encourage.

## #7 - In Comparison to Servant Leadership

Hostmanship is a leadership approach that mirrors what is called servant leadership, a business leadership concept developed by the late [Robert Greenleaf](#). His work is carried on by an organization under his name. The [Greenleaf center](#) describes servant leadership this way.

Servant-Leadership is a practical philosophy that supports people who choose to serve first, and then lead as a way of expanding service to individuals and institutions. Servant-leaders may or may not hold formal leadership positions. Servant-leadership encourages collaboration, trust, foresight, listening, and the ethical use of power and empowerment.

Here's Robert Greenleaf's own definition.

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. He or she is sharply different from the person who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. For such it will be a later choice to serve - after leadership is established. The leader-first

and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. 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, will they not be further deprived?"

Taken from the *Servant As Leader* published by Robert Greenleaf in 1970.

Servant leadership is what people should do. The problem is that we primarily think of it as a system of leadership to be applied like a manufacturing process. It is not a technique driven solution to organizational problems. It is something different, and that difference I believe is what Jan Gunnarsson has understood in this idea called [Hostmanship](#).

The difference between the two concepts is that Servant Leadership begins with the desire for the leader to serve. Hostmanship begins with the leader as a person.

As the authors say, Hostmanship is an attitude. It is an attitude that is exhibited in action, in relationship. This is a throwback to the philosophy of ancient Greece that saw in the action of a person the character of the person. The better the character the better the action. And in this case the better the Hostmanship character the greater acts of service as a servant leader.



I have struggled for over twenty years with the way leadership is conceived in American organizations. I do find it primarily technique driven. Master these skills. Adopt this style. And you'll be an effective leader. I don't think it really happens that way.

Rather, leadership character develops under stress and testing. The real character of the person emerges when the walls of responsibility are closing in and there is no easy escape. When pressure builds and there is the inclination to flee or hide, and you stand your ground and find a way out. This is the pressure cooker that builds or reveals leadership character. And if you come through it as a servant leader, you will most likely have the makings of being an excellent host to your company's guests.

Literally everyday, I talk with people in the crucible of leadership stress and demand. They are not all clients in fact most are not. They are simply people of all types who desire to make a difference in their lives, and seeking for some way to make it work. I don't think servant leadership as a management concept addresses this situation for most leaders. I do think that Hostmanship begins to.

Hostmanship is an attitude about people and your relationship with people in a business context. It is an attitude of openness and caring expressed in service. But it begins by recognizing who you really are. Do you really know your own limitations? Do you really see your limitations as a gift of direction for your life and the course of your business? Where you are limited means either, don't go there or I need someone to fill the gap. Hostmanship leaves behind our natural arrogance that puts ourselves above our guest, and instead puts us in a more humble relationship to people so that mutual service and benefit may result.

I've known about Hostmanship for a long time, though I didn't know the name or of the Swedish authors that brought the world this fine little book. I've known it as much as a guest who wants

my hosts to be at their best. I want to be the kind of guest that wants my host to serve me with joy and anticipation for the appreciation that I can return to them. Yes, you are hearing correctly that I think guests have as much to do with the quality of service as hosts do.

Hostmanship is born in caring and kindness towards others. It is not a weak or passive approach to leadership. Rather it is the most difficult type of leadership there is. It is the attitude and the character that precedes servant leadership. It is the leadership of personal responsibility. It is my taking responsibility for my actions in relation to my guest and the environment that my guest finds them in when they come to me for service. It is the leadership of the whole person realized through their function, in their organization, for their destination and nation.

I hope you will acquire a copy of Hostmanship and share copies with your friends and colleagues. It will make not only a business difference, but also a personal one that will bring great satisfaction and happiness.