

# **It's not all Sunshine and Lollipops: Servant leadership and “Tough Love”**

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Servant leadership, based on the principle of empathizing with followers and prioritizing their needs, has been criticized as ill-equipped for tackling the challenges of competitive work environments. We address this criticism by stressing that servant leadership is more than hand-holding and positive strokes, because a key part of helping followers to grow and succeed is the provision of negative feedback. Indeed, a key to individual and organizational success is to continuously improve. Although it is a term common among practitioners, we introduce “tough love” to the academic literature as negative feedback presented in a constructive and compassionate way. We contend that leader-follower mutual trust, so critical for follower engagement in productive work behaviors, is enhanced when followers sense that leaders are committed to helping followers to succeed in bringing their full potential to fruition. In addition to introducing a theoretical framework for studying the tough love construct, we also present initial psychometric research on the development of a tough love measure.

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