SDI Service Desk Institute

Be curious, not judgemental. Be a goldfish. Believe.

Be a Goldfish

8 Leadership Lessons for Service Desk Teams

Lessons of Ted Lasso

What a fictional fotball coach can teach your service desk about leading people.

JOHN NOCTOR
SDI's Chief Customer Success Officer

Connect with John

I LOVE A BIT OF TED

The most optimistic show on television

Funny, warm, relentlessly kind — and underneath all of that, a masterclass in leadership.

Ted arrives in England to manage a Premier League club having barely watched a football match. He isn't the technical expert. He doesn't talk tactics. And somehow he turns a banter club into a belief machine. So what can we in service management and beyond learn from a coach whose main qualification is that he cares?

More than you might think.

THE SERIOUS BIT

It isn't just nice. It's evidence.

Three pieces of research that turn a feel-good TV show into a management argument.

1970 Greenleaf
Servant leadership gets a name
His test wasn't results. It was whether those served grow — healthier, wiser, freer.

1999 Edmondson
Psychological safety gets measured
Teams learn faster when people can admit an error without being punished for it.

180 Google teams
Project Aristotle picks a winner
Not seniority. Not IQ. Not team size. Psychological safety came out on top.

CLEAR THESE OUT OF THE WAY FIRST

Six things people get wrong about Ted

Strip out misconceptions and what's left is a method, **not a personality**.

That he's naive
He can see exactly how bad it is. Optimism is the response he chooses, not the news he's been given.

That he's soft
He benches his best player in front of everyone, and doesn't flinch.

That he's a natural
He works at it. Deliberately, daily, before anyone else is up.

That it's about football
He barely mentions it. He manages people who happen to play football.

That it's a personality
It's a method. And a method can be copied — see the playbook below.

That kindness is the point
Kindness is the delivery mechanism. The point is that people get better.

THIS IS THE BIT THAT MATTERS

Ted's move, your Monday

Everything above is set-up. Here's what it actually looks like on a service desk.

ON THE PITCH		ON YOUR SERVICE DESK
He learns every player's name in his first week.	→	**You know each analyst's career goal, not just their ticket stats.**
Biscuits with the boss. Every morning. Without fail.	→	**One small ritual of attention that never gets cancelled. It beats an annual engagement survey.**
He puts a suggestion box in the dressing room.	→	**In the post-incident review, the newest analyst speaks first .**
He hangs a hand-lettered sign where nobody can miss it.	→	**Your team's purpose on the wall — not on slide 34 of the strategy deck.**
He asks the kit man for a tactic.	→	**Ask the person closest to the customer before the person closest to you.**
He says "I don't know" in a press conference.	→	**Say it in a major incident, and watch what it gives everyone else permission to do.**

THE PLAYBOOK

Eight things to do on Monday

Verbs, not virtues. If you can't do it before lunch, it isn't on this list.

01
Ask before you assume
One question in your next one- to-one you've never asked before.

02
Go first
Say "I got that wrong" out loud. You set the ceiling for honesty.

03
Say what good looks like
Then say it again. Nobody hits a standard they've heard once.

04
Hand over the whistle
Give someone the decision, not the task. Ownership is what grows people.

05
Be a goldfish
Learn it, logit, move on. You can't win today living in yesterday.

06
Do the small thing daily
Biscuits beat bonuses. The consistency is the message

07
Have the hard conversation
Kindness that avoids conflict isn't kindness. It's cowardice in a nice jumper.

08
Take the blame, give the credit
Every time. No exceptions. That's most of the job.

A QUICK THOUGHT FROM JOHN

I'll go first: number seven is the one I have to work at.

Which of the eight would your team notice first?

THE HONEST BIT

Servant leadership isn't soft

The Ted and Nate story — including the part where Ted gets it wrong.

- Ted believed in Nate when nobody else did. He pulled the kit man into the coaching room and asked him what he thought. Nate grew.
- Then Ted got busy. His own life was coming apart and there was a season to save. Nate kept looking for the same attention — and Ted, distracted, stopped giving it.
- Nate didn't turn because he was a villain. He turned because he was starving, and nobody noticed.
- Ted's mistake wasn't being too kind. It was mistaking believing in someone for paying attention to them.

Care personally. Challenge directly. Do both, or you're doing neither.

AFFTER KIM SCOTT, RADICAL CANDOR

AND SO

Be a goldfish

Happy as can be. In the moment. Just keep swimming.

- ✓ **When it goes wrong — and it will — don't dwell. Learn. Adjust. Swim on.**
- ✓ **Be present. Be positive. Be of service.**
- ✓ **Believe in people out loud — and keep believing on the days it's inconvenient.**
- ✓ **Then hold them to it.**

John Noctor

How STRONG is your team culture in practice?

Strong leadership is one part of a high-performing service desk. SDI's **Service Desk Certification (SDC)** helps you look at the bigger picture!

Take your team further →

"I believe in **belief.**"

Sources — Greenleaf, *The Servant as Leader* (1970) · Edmondson, *Administrative Science Quarterly* (1999) · Google, Project Aristotle (2012–14) · Scott, *Radical Candor*