

THE SERVANT LEADER

“There is a moment when you realize you are the adult in the room, and everyone is looking to you for the answer.”

What leadership challenges and strengths do people experience in mid-life?

THE CHALLENGE

The Sandwich Generation

Many people become caregivers in mid-life — of children, elders, and communities — often at the same time. As responsibilities in every aspect of their lives increase, leaders in this stage feel the pressure of supporting and serving those who rely on them.

The Happiness Curve

Research suggests that happiness tends to follow a “U-curve” for people over time, declining into mid-life, then rising again with late adulthood and elder years.^[1] Mid-life can be a challenging time as people face regrets over missed opportunities; come to terms with aging and mortality; and experience loss of loved ones. Leaders may have a difficult time projecting strength and calm as they navigate turbulence in their inner lives.

STRENGTHS



“Oh, this rodeo? Not my first.”

Never underestimate the power of experience. While less experienced colleagues may panic at the first sign of trouble, you know better. Because you’ve seen it before.



Role Integration

While working hard to serve others’ needs, you’re also developing — perhaps without realizing it — a formidable skill set. Inspiring a shared vision, developing others, planning ten steps ahead, setting a good example, and rewarding success are leadership skills you’ll find yourself developing simultaneously across your roles as caregiver, manager, and community leader.^[2]



Creativity Peaks

Decades of work and learning come to fruition for leaders in middle-age. In fact, research suggests that intellectual creativity has two peaks: one in our 20’s, the other in our 50’s, after years of trial-and-error lead to remarkable breakthroughs.^[3]

LIFELONG LEADERSHIP

Great leaders are made at every stage of life. Whether just getting started or planning our legacies, we can integrate the challenges and benefits of each life chapter into powerful leadership approaches.



JOHN R. BRANDT

¹ Blanchflower, D.G. and Oswald, A.J. “Is well-being U-shaped over the life cycle?” *Social Science & Medicine*. 2008, 66, 8, 1733-1749.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2008.01.030>

² Dumas, T.L. and T.L. Stanko. “Married with Children: How Family Role Identification Shapes Leadership Behaviors at Work.” *Personnel Psychology*. 2017, 70, 597–633.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12182>

³ Weinberg, B.A., Galenson, D.W. “Creative Careers: The Life Cycles of Nobel Laureates in Economics.” *De Economist*. 2019, 167, 221–239. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10645-019-09339-9>