

The Old Professor, Kay Kyser: Band Leader/Servant Leader

Abstract:

Although many people today barely remember, if they remember at all, the former band leader, Kay Kyser (a.k.a. The Old Professor) and his College of Musical Knowledge, Kyser, however, did more than bring his zany style of music to affect the lives of others.

During the 1930s and 40s, he did lead one of the most popular big bands in American history. The Kay Kyser band often out drew the fabled Glen Miller band at the box office and Kyser did have one of the most popular radio shows for many years, had 10 number one hits and many more top ten hits, he starred as his own persona in eleven movies, and he had his own TV show before he retired. What many people do not know about Kyser is that he started entertaining troops in WWII before Bob Hope and had many more troop shows. He helped develop the Hollywood Canteen to support the troupes and he helped raise money for several hospital facilities. Kyser was instrumental in the beginning stages of public health and public television in his native North Carolina.

Finally, Kyser played a key role in--and eventually president of--the Church of Christian Science. It is both with his band and without it that Kyser exhibited the principles of servant leadership as laid out by Robert Greenleaf. The purpose of this paper will be to draw parallels between the ideas of Greenleaf and other servant leadership theorists and the life of Kay Kyser, who, ironically, were contemporaries on this planet at virtually the same time period.