

A portrait of William Welch, a middle-aged man with short, graying hair, smiling. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a light blue button-down shirt. The background is a blurred office interior with large windows.

# SPOTLIGHT ON WILLIAM WELCH

President and COO,  
**Duo Security**;  
former COO of **Zscaler**

*ON Partners Client Spotlight Series offers  
timely insights and strategies from leading  
global executives.*

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**William (Bill) Welch** has 25 years of experience leading global technology companies. He joined cybersecurity firm Duo Security as COO in June 2018. Weeks later, Duo entered an agreement to be acquired by Cisco for \$2.35 billion. Earlier in 2018, Mr. Welch served as COO of Zscaler, the cloud security company that became one of the year's top IPOs. Previously, he held sales leadership roles at HP, Symantec, and Oracle.

**Duo Security**, headquartered in Ann Arbor, MI, provides a category-defining zero-trust security platform that enables organizations to provide trusted access to all of their critical applications, for any user with any device.

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# Q+A

## **What exactly is 'servant leadership' and why have you adopted it as your leadership style?**

**William Welch:** I believe that the corporate organizational chart, that pyramid, should be inverted. We as leaders are not here to be served, we are here to serve others. And those 'others' include our team, employees, customers, and business partners. That means adopting a posture of being selfless versus selfish.

A servant leader enters into agreements with the team about business activities. Agreements require a two-way conversation versus a one-way directive. The servant leadership posture offers a safety net. Yes, we have goals to achieve together, but if employees fail, I will catch them and take the blame. When good things happen, they enjoy the limelight, and as their leader, I am there to encourage and inspire them. Additionally, servant leaders ensure their team members benefit from coaching and mentors; our employees need to understand how much you care about them before you can have an impact on their lives.

The reason all of this is so important to me is that servant leadership develops highly engaged employees. And when people are engaged, encouraged, and inspired, their interactions with customers and partners will be that much better. From a business perspective, it is black and white.

## **Can you tell us more about the broad impact of servant leadership?**

**William Welch:** Absolutely. One of my account executives had Home Depot as a client. I asked, 'Have you ever worked in a store to earn your orange apron? Why don't you go to work there and learn how many gallons of paint that store has to sell in order to give you a purchase order for \$10 million of cybersecurity?' When you start thinking about what you can do to build their business, you will be a better rep for them.

I empower my team. I was once asked by a superior why I was not on every call related to a big deal. I said, 'Hold on. What you don't see is that every Sunday night at 8 p.m. my team and I get together and agree on what we each will do in the coming week. I empower them.' I have already done a \$50 million deal during my career, but 90% of the people on that call have not. I want them to get the experience, so that 10 more people on the team can do \$50 million deals, versus just one.

Other leaders might be skeptical of servant leadership. But eventually, they will notice the positive impact on performance, whether it is in terms of the net promoter score, the attrition rate, the job satisfaction. Then they may wonder, what is different about that team?

## **How does servant leadership help you personally, as a leader?**

**William Welch:** It makes my job a whole lot easier. The team does not wait for my decisions, they are self-reliant. So, it gives me more time to think about broader issues. I should only be making two or three decisions a day. If I am making 20 or 30 decisions, then I have become a toll booth and the company is not running efficiently. I try to break that culture of co-dependence.

The ideals of servant leadership are common sense, but they are not common practice. It is incredibly rewarding when I see a company or partner that has previously worked with our team adopt this style and lead their own teams with these learned servant leadership practices.

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