



# THE 3 CS OF LEADERSHIP

*By Major Brian S. Smith*

**I**n the military today, especially the Army, there is no skill more desirable for success than good leadership. The price paid for bad leadership or lack of leadership, tragically, is the ultimate sacrifice of Soldiers' lives. Good leaders do not magically appear; they are developed, or "grown from within." According to doctrine, "An Army leader is anyone who by virtue of assumed role or assigned responsibility inspires and influences people to accomplish organizational goals. Army leaders motivate people both inside and outside the chain of command to pursue actions, focus thinking, and shape decisions for the greater good of the organization."<sup>1</sup>

## Leadership Attributes

**T**he characteristics I look for in good leaders are the 3 Cs: competence, confidence, and compassion. I learned these three attributes from former supervisors and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) in different forms and manners, but they all conveyed the same message. I viewed these attributes as necessary not only for good leaders but for followers as well, and adherence to them has contributed to many successes in my career on different levels.

### Competence

First and foremost, good leaders need to be competent in their field. One does not need to know everything about one's field but must have breadth in knowledge and experience to receive a mission, analyze it, ask for guidance, recommend courses of actions, delegate tasks, and supervise as needed. All this is done with some level of assistance from one's peers, subordinates, and/or supervisors. For example, competent Army engineers must know the following: combat engineering (demolitions, mines, force protection, field craft, and explosives); combat construction (road, structure, or facility construction); military pipeline operations (storage and transport systems); facilities development and management (utilities and structures); power generation (military and

civilian systems); dive operations (reconnaissance, salvage and recovery, destruction and demolitions, and construction operations); military bridging (tactical and nontactical); topographic and geospatial operations; and United States Army Corps of Engineers operations (military and civilian projects/activities).

Engineer officers will not be expert in all of these areas, but they should have a general knowledge of these systems, how they work and support others, and whom to resource or leverage to get desired information and complete an assigned mission or task. When engineers join a unit, leaders and peers assume that they are technically adept and ready to advise or recommend engineer courses of actions. Many engineer officers have technical backgrounds while others just have technical training, whether professional or personal. Good engineer officers continue to develop professionally (and train) and seek mentorship to ensure that they are true combat multipliers. Leadership is not only on the battlefield or in direct conflict but also off the battlefield, such as Lieutenant General Russel L. Honore's actions and command during Hurricane Katrina, or General David H. Petraeus' expressed importance of transition teams to assist in our nation's efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

### Confidence

Second, leaders must be confident in action and in word. This contagious confidence influences an ideology in which orders are delegated, not questioned, and followed specifically to include whatever guidance is given. One's subordinates or peers will be encouraged to "buy in" to that guidance and exhibit their own initiative when confidence is modeled by a leader. Confidence is a physical aspect illustrated by direct presentation: how one dresses, speaks, or interacts with others, professionally and personally. Good leaders know the difference between confidence and overconfidence (cockiness) and where to draw the line; each of these two levels of confidence has a place in leadership.

## Compassion

Finally, leaders must have compassion and respect for co-workers—and especially subordinates. At times, compassion requires leaders to have physical, mental, and spiritual courage. Such courage is what inspires others willingly to go the extra mile, to give 110 percent or, if necessary, to lay down their lives for a buddy. Good leaders should praise and reward members of the organization as well as counsel and punish; with punishment, good leaders look at all matters of mitigation and decide an outcome (and live with it). Leaders must recognize the dynamics of the organization and team-build to bring others on to their philosophy. The downside to compassion is that at times it can be abused; additionally, some people view compassion as a character weakness. If leaders are compassionate as well as competent and confident, compassion will be seen as strength.

## Summary

**O**ur Soldiers, their Families, and our leaders deserve our competence, confidence, and compassion. It is these ideals which inspire that private, that NCO, or that lieutenant to get up day after day in combat and say, “Let’s go!” When Family members see those qualities in good leaders, they will have faith that their loved ones are in good hands and confidence that they will return home safely. Leadership is the number one business of all Army officers, next to management of resources and personnel, and leaders should strive to be impact players or combat multipliers wherever the assignment is to do their country’s bidding. Leaders at all levels should continue to “fill their lamps with oil” to further develop leadership and critical thinking skills. No matter where our boots take us, we owe it to our subordinates to be competent, confident, and compassionate!



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## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Field Manual 6-22, *Army Leadership*, 12 October 2006, paragraph 1-2.