



Army Leadership: A Personal View

By Lieutenant Colonel Wayne Larry Dandridge (Retired)

Leadership is taking the point position when your unit or flight is expecting contact with the enemy. Leadership is flying a crippled bomber to the ground when a wounded crew member cannot bail out. Leadership is keeping your young Soldiers, Marines, Airmen, Sailors, and Coast Guardsmen alive and never leaving wounded behind. Leadership is writing a dead comrade's family a personal letter immediately following a battle.

Leadership is not glorifying war. Leadership is not doing "anything" just to get promoted. Leadership is not winning the battle at all costs, nor is it losing a war to avoid casualties. Leadership is not found in the security of a well-fortified command bunker, nor is it found in a plush officer field mess.

Leadership allows for no compromise in the integrity of one's word, deed, or signature. Setting high standards and seeing that they are met; applying intelligence, dedication, creativity, and selflessness; and employing stamina, vigor, commitment, and drive for self-improvement—these are key factors in leadership. Spontaneous enthusiasm is contagious.

Leadership is rewarding a Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Marine, Coast Guardsman, or Civilian with the appropriate recognition immediately after exceptional service. Leadership is commanding and managing with professionalism and establishing and meeting, by priority, specific objectives. Leadership is managing by exception, using job enlargement, and seeking job enrichment.

Believing in God, family, and country—in that order—is leadership. Being humanistic is leadership. Trusting the ideas and decisions of well-trained troops is leadership. Knowing where the mission is, when the troops and material are to be there, and how many troops and systems are needed to win is leadership. Blocking out periods of "private time" to accomplish creative work and recharge—that is leadership.

Leadership is treating men and women equally without regard to race, color, creed, religion, age, or custom. Leadership is learning the language, culture, and customs of a host country. Leadership is knowing and living by the Constitution, the Code of Military Conduct, the Geneva Convention, and the basic human rights of all mankind. Practicing assertiveness, not aggressiveness when dealing with peers and subordinates is leadership. Leadership is

neither ruthless nor mindless discipline, but the ability to do the right thing at the right time—putting the whole before the parts. Leadership is not a good efficiency report or paper readiness. Leadership is not a court-martial for every mistake or leniency for serious

violations. A leader must be fair, predictable, and consistent.

Giving sound professional advice to a superior, even when you know he or she does not want to hear it—that's leadership. If you have given your best advice and followed all legal, moral, and ethical orders (even when you do not agree with them), you have accomplished effective leadership. Leading when you can, following when you should, and getting out of the way when you have nothing to offer is leadership.

Leadership is the general who knows the friendly and enemy situations, the immediate action sequence for the M16 rifle, his driver's first name and family information, and the words to the Lord's Prayer. Leadership is the private who knows that he or she is in the chain of command and will have to take over when senior in rank. Leadership is knowing that a water truck in the desert is worth more combat power than an extra armored cavalry regiment.

Remembering that the past is our heritage, the present is our challenge, and the future is our responsibility—that is leadership. Staying in top physical condition—maintaining your weight, not smoking, saying no to

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drugs, and not drinking alcohol in excess—is leadership. Delegating authority, commanding confidence and respect, and accepting full responsibility for your actions is leadership. Ingenuity, sociability, tact, and tenacity are leadership.

Leadership is not being right all the time, and it is certainly not being wrong most of the time. Leadership does not place blame; it fixes problems. Leadership is adaptability, appearance, cooperation, and decisiveness. Leadership displays knowledge, manages resources efficiently, and plans beyond the immediate requirements of assigned duties. Leadership creates an organization of mutual respect. Leadership is building an organization and environment where it is not necessary to tell troops what to do. Leaders know that combat without conscience is evil.

A leader knows why there are air, land, and sea forces; why there are cavalry, infantry, armor, artillery, aviation, amphibious, special-operations, pre-positioned, reconnaissance, and logistical forces; and knows why combined arms and the concentration of combat power are important. A leader knows about net-centric warfare, defense in depth, civil affairs, urban operations, and the advantages our forces have at night (and how to use them). A wise leader knows that young Soldiers spend most of their time worrying about and planning tactics, while older, more experienced Soldiers spend the majority of their time worrying about planning logistics.

Leadership can be good or bad, centralized or decentralized, warm or cold, offensive or defensive, macro or micro, or expensive or free. Leadership can be Catholic or Protestant, Jewish or Moslem, Hindu or Mormon, or atheist or agnostic. Leadership prevents the overmobility of junior leaders and troops by keeping them in positions long enough to learn job duties, master common and collective tasks, and perform as team members. Establishing and promoting worker and troop certification and team certification programs are leadership.

Leaders hope and pray for the best and plan for the worst. Leaders know about the need to wage “total war” to win and the special advantages the defender has in cities, mountains, and jungles. Leaders know how to “own the night” and take maximum advantage of combat arms teams, snipers, attack helicopter operators, counterartillery personnel, naval gun/missile fire operators, and close air support personnel. Leaders know not to keep troop

weapons locked up and away but, rather, to train troops to live with a clean weapon that they are an expert with.

Leadership was embodied in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Abraham Lincoln, Pope John Paul II, Robert E. Lee, Winston Churchill, Sister Teresa, and many other well-known figures. But leadership is also embodied in thousands of unknowns.

Commitment to a team and a participatory form of leadership that draws on the knowledge and skills of all personnel—at every level—is leadership. Encouraging and rewarding suggestions and complaints is leadership. Having an open door and remaining open-minded is leadership. Empowering troops, civilian personnel, and support contractors with the tools, responsibility, and authority to

get the tough jobs done is leadership. Making troops multiprocess, multiweapon, and multifunctional experts is leadership. Good leaders practice servant leadership.

Leaders know that “the bitterness of low quality remains long after the sweetness of low price.” Leaders allow talented Soldiers “long tethers” for experimenting. Leaders find ways to satisfy the essential dualism of troops and civil servants to be part of a team and be recognized as individuals. Leaders know how to use internal and external benchmarking, observations, and inspections to rate their organization’s readiness, products, services, and processes against the front-runners in their specialty.

Leadership is guiding. Leadership is legendary. Leadership is foresight. Leadership is absorbent, abstinent and, unfortunately, at times—abominable. Leadership is baccalaureate, balance, basic, and, too frequently, backward and barbaric. Leadership has saved lives, caused casualties and fatalities, stopped wars, and started wars. Leadership has walked softly and carried a big stick, but it has also been loud and nonviolent.

Saying what you do (in clear and concise standing operating procedures, plans, and operation orders) and doing what you say is leadership. Breaking down communication barriers between staffs, line units, support organizations, and sister units is leadership. Asking deep, probing questions and finding root causes is leadership. Changing problems into opportunities is leadership. Knowing that you can seldom wait until you have all the answers is leadership. Repeatedly doing simple things that demonstrate sincerity is leadership.

Remembering that the past is our heritage, the present is our challenge, and the future is our responsibility—that is leadership.



Leadership is honesty, enthusiasm, loyalty, courage, and wisdom. Taking care of your Soldier's, Civilians, Sailors, Airmen, Coast Guardsmen, and Marines (and their dependents) is leadership. Leadership is visiting your wounded and sick frequently. Leadership includes being a good boss, comrade, and friend; father or mother; son or daughter; sister or brother; or husband or wife. Knowing that the profession of arms is much more than just a job is leadership.

Being a champion of safety and quality and an unquestionable friend to the environment is leadership. Basing decisions on facts is leadership. Promoting and rewarding continuous improvement is leadership. Being a champion of safety and quality is leadership. Staying focused on internal customers, external customers, and the enemy is leadership. Performing preventive maintenance, knowing what cellular techniques involve, being skilled in setup reduction, understanding mixed-model methods, understanding rocks-in-the river inventory management, knowing how to level and balance a workload, understanding that distance (to supplies, replacements, ammunition, fuel) is usually detrimental, and ensuring that things are “in time,” not “just in time”—is leadership.

Leadership is enthusiasm, optimism, helping, training, encouraging, understanding, motivating, disciplining, crying, laughing, standing firm, giving way, counseling, correcting, giving a second chance, and trying again and again. Leaders are tall, short, thin, heavy, male, female, black, brown, white, yellow, old, young, naturalized, and unnaturalized. Leaders are from the city and from the country. Leadership works hard to close the gap between the potential and the performance of a Soldier.

Knowing how to use teams, flow charts, simple (but powerful) statistical methods, simplification, continuous improvement tactics, complaint and suggestion programs, and standardization to get the tough jobs done is leadership. Leadership makes quality easy to see, feel, smell, taste, and hear by finding root causes and permanently fixing the problem. Leadership is clarifying processes, flow-charting complex processes, and making every troop an expert at common tasks (everyone should be an infantryman first in their career!).

Leadership is caring, compassion, understanding, and leading by example. Leaders look you in the eye, kick you

in the butt, cover your flank, and take your place on the most dangerous missions. Knowing that “there is a place for everything and everything in its place” is leadership. Leadership is admitting mistakes and learning from them. Eating last is leadership. Sharing the pains of heat, dirt, sand, cold, wet, insects, and other harsh environmental conditions is leadership. “Packing your own roll and digging your own hole” is leadership.

Leadership comes from experience, but experience comes from making mistakes. A leader changes the odds and knows the risks. Leaders develop teamwork. The tides, the channels, the seasons, the winds, the hazards, the weather, and the best forecasts are all known by leaders. Leadership knows that there is no end to change except failure. Leadership knows that if you treat every customer like your last or first, you will never have to worry about repeat business.

Leaders often make good grades in school and have many years of formal education and numerous important degrees. But they also have been known to fail math, English, and other equally important subjects. Leaders ensure that the enemy gives his life for his cause. Leaders ensure that their troops always have the tactical advantage, the best training and equipment, the highest morale, and plenty of food and water. Leaders work hard to ensure that the workload is distributed equally among all troops.

Leadership comes from family, friends, teachers, coaches, and pastors. Simple, easy-to-understand orders come from leaders. Complex tasks are changed into short and accurate plans through leadership. Leadership can be learned and taught, but it cannot be forgotten or bought. Leadership can be seen, tasted, smelled, felt, and heard; and it can also come from a blind person with no hands who cannot hear, speak, or walk.

Finally, a leader is so in love with life that he or she is willing to die for the lives and freedom of others and our great Nation! 🗣️

Leadership works hard to close the gap between the potential and the performance of a Soldier.

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