

Leadership: A Personal Viewpoint

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 one of your wounded crewmembers cannot bail out. Leadership is keeping your young Soldiers, Marines, Airmen, Sailors, and Coast Guardsmen alive and never leaving your wounded behind. Leadership is writing a dead trooper's family a personal letter immediately after the 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 officers' field mess.

No compromise of the integrity of one's word, deed, or signature is leadership. Setting high standards and seeing that they are met is leadership. Intelligence, dedication, creativity, and selflessness are leadership. Stamina, vigor, and commitment are leadership. Spontaneous, contagious enthusiasm is leadership. Initiative, self-improvement, and professionalism are leadership.

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. Leadership is 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 is leadership.

Leadership is treating men and women equally without regard to race, color, creed, religion, age, or custom. Leadership is visiting your wounded and sick frequently. Leadership is knowing and living by the Constitution, the Code of Conduct, the Geneva Convention, and the basic human rights of all mankind. A leader is assertive, but not aggressive. Leadership is neither ruthless nor mindless discipline, but the ability to do the right thing at the right time, by putting the whole before the parts. Leadership is not a good efficiency report, nor is it paper readiness. Leadership is not a court martial for every mistake or leniency for serious violations. A leader is fair, predictable, and consistent.

Giving sound professional advice to a superior, even when you know he or she does not want to hear it, is leadership. After you have given your best advice, following all legal, moral, and ethical orders—even when you do not agree with them—is leadership. Leading when you can, following when you should, and getting out of the way when you have nothing to offer is leadership. Learning the language, culture, and customs of a host country is leadership. Staying in top physical condition is leadership.

Leadership is a general who knows the friendly and enemy situation, knows the immediate action sequence for the M16 rifle, knows his driver's first name and family, and can recite the Lord's Prayer. Leadership is a private who knows that he or she is in the chain of command and may 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.

Not forgetting that the past is our heritage, the present is our challenge, and the future is our responsibility is leadership. Not being overweight, not smoking, saying no to 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. Cross training is leadership.

Leadership is not being right all the time, and it is certainly not being wrong most of the time. Leadership fixes problems—not blame. 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. Leadership knows 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, recon, and logistical forces; and why combined arms and concentration of combat power are important. A leader knows about net-centric warfare and defense in depth, civil affairs, urban operations, 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.



“Leaders know about the need to wage ‘total war’ to win and the special advantage the defender has in cities, mountains, and jungles.” (Combat engineers with Special Troops Battalion, 2d Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division, prepare to enter and clear an “enemy” compound during an exercise.)

Leadership can be good or bad, centralized or decentralized, warm or cold, offensive or defensive, macro or micro, expensive or free. Leadership can be Catholic or Protestant, Jewish or Moslem, Hindu or Mormon, Atheist or Agnostic. Leadership prevents overmobility of junior leaders and troops, by keeping them in their jobs long enough to really learn their jobs and common and collective tasks and to work 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 advantage the defender has in cities, mountains, and jungles. Leaders know how to “own the night” and take maximum advantage of all of the combat arms team and are skilled in the use of snipers, attack helicopters, counter artillery, naval gun/missile fire, and close air support. Leaders know not to keep troop weapons locked up and away from them, but rather train troops to live with a clean weapon that they are an expert with.

Leadership is embodied in Martin Luther King Jr., Abraham Lincoln, Pope John Paul II, Robert E. Lee, Mohammed, Irwin Rommel, Jesus, Joan of Arc, John Paul Jones, Winston Churchill, Sister Teresa, Margaret Thatcher, and many other well-known figures. Leaders are also Robert Lightle, J.C. Dandridge, Sam DeLoach, Bubba Segrest, Lee Thompson, Val Berger, Earl Erickson, Luther Bergen, Judi Dandridge, Rick Maull, and thousands of other unknowns.

Commitment to the team and a participatory form of leadership that draws on every troop’s knowledge and skills—

at every level—is leadership. Encouraging and rewarding suggestions and complaints is leadership. Having an “open door” and “open mind” policy is leadership. Empowering troops, civil service employees, and support contractors with the tools, responsibility, authority, and “accountability” to get the tough jobs done is leadership. Making troops multiprocess, multiweapon, and multifunctional experts is good 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 both 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 those front-runners in their specialty.

Leadership is guiding. Leadership is legendary. Leadership is foresight. Leadership is absorbent, abstinent and, unfortunately, at times it is abominable. Leadership is baccalaureate, balance, basic, and too frequently backward and barbaric. Leadership has saved lives, killed, 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, concise standard operating procedures, plans, and operations 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 of the answers is leadership. Repeatedly doing simple things that demonstrate sincerity 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 includes being a good boss, comrade and friend, father or mother, son or daughter, sister or brother, and husband or wife. Knowing that the profession of arms is much more than just a job is leadership.

Being 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 workload, understanding that distance (to supplies, replacements, ammunition, fuel, etc.) is usually evil, and ensuring that things are at least "in time," not "just in time."

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, and naturalized and unnaturalized. Leaders are from the city and from the farm. Leadership works hard to close the gap between the potential and the performance of a Soldier.

Knowing how to use teams, flow charts, simple—yet powerful—statistical methods, simplification, continuous improvement, 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 Soldier common tasks—everyone should be an infantryman first!

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 mission. Knowing 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. Practicing servant leadership and 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 the one most important word is "we" and the least most important word is "I." Leadership knows 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 make sure the enemy gives his life for his cause. Leaders ensure that their troops always have the tactical advantage, the best training and equipment, and the highest morale, as well as plenty of water and hot food. Leaders work hard at ensuring 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 nor bought. Leadership can be seen, tasted, smelled, felt, and heard, and it can 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 to ensure that others' lives—and our great nation—will go on!



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Note: Beginning with this issue, *Engineer* will include an article from a previous issue of the bulletin, which has published continuously since the premiere issue in Spring 1971. When Lieutenant Colonel Dandridge recently submitted this article—an update of one that was selected as the first of a new feature called *A Personal Viewpoint* in the Winter 1983-84 issue—it seemed like an appropriate first article for our new feature called *From the Archives*.