



VIEWPOINT

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Leadership: A Human Quality

by

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Leadership is influencing others to accomplish the mission by providing purpose, direction, and motivation. However, this basic definition of leadership can be expanded. During my four years in the military, I have come to recognize more precise and distinct traits that make a true leader and I look to those who are my leaders to display these attributes.

A leader is a caring, competent, and professional individual who applies the human touch to all facets of the job. A leader is a positive role model who sets and uniformly enforces the standards.

When I look back and reflect upon those officers and senior NCOs in leadership positions that have truly influenced my Army career, there is one constant in all they have shown and taught me. This constant is that leadership is as much a human quality as it is a military principle.

There have been numerous times in my enlisted career where I have needed guidance, focus, and encouragement from my leaders. During these times one recurring theme became apparent to me: Being a leader is something more powerful than just being assigned to a leadership position. Leadership does not allow you to bend or twist the rules to suit your own agenda. A true leader possesses integrity and morals that are apparent in everything he or she says and does. A leader leads by example, in peacetime training and during war, and never puts himself or herself above the mission, the unit, or the welfare of their soldiers. Leaders must know themselves, their soldiers, and the job that is to be done.

Leadership means having the capability to get inside soldiers, find out what motivates them, and then properly use the soldier's own motivation as the driving force behind professional development and mission accomplishment. Sometimes leadership means creating motivation and dedication among the ranks. Leadership means understanding human nature.

A leader follows up with positive reinforcement and guidance where needed, and praise when the mission is a success. A leader must also deal with negative behavior accordingly. When a soldier is not performing to standard, a leader must find out why, follow up with counseling, and take further actions where needed.

Counseling is a large part of leadership. When done regularly and properly, counseling provides a written record of events and eliminates uncertainty. Counseling should occur not only when a soldier falls short of an assigned task but also when a soldier has performed well. Some soldiers simply need verbal guidance, both professionally and personally.

Leadership also means being strong enough to boldly face criticism and defeat and to realize when your best wasn't good enough. There is a learning experience in every situation; with that outlook a leader will always prevail. Leadership means standing tall when a judgment call is questioned. But when a mission is a success, a true leader does not stand alone in the spotlight. Instead, leaders recognize their platoon, squad, or element for their contributions and award them accordingly.

Leadership means stepping aside from time to time to give soldiers an opportunity to develop or increase their responsibilities and their decision-making skills. A leader must develop subordinates to take initiative within the commander's intent and lead in the absence of orders.

People have argued for years about leadership. Some of our greatest philosophers believe that leaders are born; others believe leadership can be a learned trait. To me it's not whether you are born a leader or whether you develop into a leader — it's all about how you do the job.

Leadership is a powerful tool. As NCOs it is our responsibility to ensure every troop receives the best leadership that the Army can provide.

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