Leadership is "the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization." -Field Manual 6-22, Leader Development. (Photo by Lt. Col. John Hall)

Twelve Principles of Modern Military Leadership

Part I

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"A leader is a dealer in hope."

–Napoleon

Leadership is paramount to the success of any army. Leaders not only make life and death decisions but directly control the climate and quality of life of their subordinates.

But what is the real definition of leadership? Field Manual 6-22, *Leader Development*, defines leadership as "the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization."[1]

In three articles, we will discuss twelve fundamental leadership principles, as well as several educational and inspirational historical examples. Experienced leaders should

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already practice these principles; however, I have learned through personal experience never to assume anything. Therefore, we will start the series by examining the first four leadership principles -- lead from the front, self-confidence vs. egotism, moral courage, and physical courage.

Lead from the Front

Taught to lead by example, leaders inspire their Soldiers to perform deeds of heroism and sacrifice, which often requires suppression of natural feelings such as fear. Leaders do not encourage their Soldiers by saying, "onward," but rather, "follow me," the very apropos motto of the U.S. Army Infantry School.

To inspire troops, leaders must instill a pervasive attitude to motivate their troops to advance under withering fire or hold a seemingly untenable position. To accomplish this, leaders must be present at the forward edge of the battle area so their Soldiers will follow their example and respect their judgment, leadership ability, and tactical knowledge.

Have Self-Confidence, Not Egotism

"As I gain in experience, I do not think more of myself but less of others."

–Gen. George S. Patton Jr.

While a platoon of Soldiers is wary of going into action with an inexperienced leader, a smart platoon leader can mitigate this problem by seeking instruction and mentorship from the platoon sergeant, a role that noncommissioned officers have embraced since the rise of professional armies.

Any leader worth his stuff has confidence, but excessive egotism is usually indicative of a lack of assurance. A show of bravado in advance of a mission or the face of the enemy is acceptable; however, an abundance of cockiness is liable to portend a horrible day for all concerned. Below are examples of egotism that not only affected the leaders but their troops as well.

Gen. George S. Patton

Gen. George S. Patton knew a thing or two about projecting confidence. He could change at will and put on his "war face," followed by a speech, filled with "blood and guts," to motivate his men.

Patton believed he was the most distinguished Soldier who ever lived. He convinced himself that he would never falter through doubt. This faith in himself encouraged his men of the Second American Corps in Africa, and the Third Army in France, to believe they could achieve ultimate victory under his leadership.[2]

Moral Courage

"It is curious that physical courage should be so common in the world and moral courage so rare."

–Mark Twain

Doing the right thing, regardless of the consequences, is moral courage. An outstanding example is Gen. George Washington, whose legacy as the commander of the Continental Army and the first President of the United States remains among the greatest in American history.

Washington was one of the most experienced military leaders in the Thirteen Colonies, having served with the English during the French and Indian War in 1755.[3]

Selected as a delegate to the Continental Congress, he was selected as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army in 1775. Although Washington lost most of the battles during the Revolutionary War,[4] he kept the army together and built a strong coalition with the French when they intervened in the war.

According to historian Gordon Wood, Washington's most significant act was his resignation as commander of the armies—an act that stunned aristocratic Europe.[5] Many believed Washington could have been a dictator if he had chosen so.

Physical Courage

"There were all kinds of things I was afraid of at first, ranging from grizzly bears to 'mean' horses and gun-fighters; but by acting as if I was not afraid, I gradually ceased to be afraid."

–President Theodore Roosevelt

Because the life of a Soldier is fraught with danger, courage is a requirement for every military leader. Soldiers, who do their duty regardless of fear and risk to life or limb, perform bravely on the battlefield. As a result, there are numerous examples of the American Soldiers' courage.

For instance, during World War II, 2nd Lt. Audie L. Murphy became (at the time) the most decorated Soldier in American history. Ironically, he had been turned down for enlistment by the Marines, Navy, and Army paratroopers because of his physique.

On January 26, 1945, at Holtzwihr, Germany, Murphy ordered his men to withdraw from an attack of enemy tanks and infantry. During the withdrawal, he mounted a burning tank destroyer and fired its .50 caliber machine gun for more than an hour, killing 50 Germans, stalling the attack, and forcing the enemy to withdraw. Although wounded, he led his men in a counterattack and was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions.

Conclusion

As role models, leaders must lead from the front and display courage to motivate their Soldiers. However, it is important to maintain an acceptable level of confidence without it turning into excessive egotism. There is no "I" in team and success comes as a result of Soldiers' trust in their leader and their ability to work together, which we will focus on in part two.

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Part II

In part two of the series, we examine leadership principles five through eight -- teamwork, fitness and energy, aggressiveness and boldness, and caring for your Soldiers. By adhering to these principles, leaders can lead their troops from the front and create and foster unit cohesion.

Foster Teamwork

"It's amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit."

–President Harry S. Truman

When accomplishing the mission, teamwork is more important than personal recognition, thus the famous quote, "There is no 'I' in team." Today's military often functions in joint operations, which consist of other branches as well as coalition partners. Therefore, an experienced leader cannot favor individuals but must foster cooperation with all team members.

An excellent example of such leadership is General Dwight D. Eisenhower, supreme Allied commander, who despite the challenges of making multiple countries' militaries work together during World War II, built a coalition of U.S., British, French, and Canadian forces.

"I could never face a body of officers without emphasizing one word – teamwork," he said.[6]

Have Fitness and Energy

"Utterly fearless, full of drive and energy, he was always up front where the battle was fiercest. If his opponent made a mistake, Rommel was on it like a flash."

–Lt. Gen. Sir Brian Horrocks

If leaders follow the principle of leading from the front, then they must be physically fit and energetic to meet the demands of leadership on the battlefield. Leaders who possess such endurance can lead a platoon of hard chargers to fix bayonets and take the high ground.

Former Olympic athlete Gen. George S. Patton advocated for fitness long before it became a standard requirement for the modern day Soldier. Assuming command of the I Armored Corps on January 15, 1942, Patton laid out his expectations.

"As officers, we must give leadership in becoming tough, physically and mentally," he said. "Every man in this command must be able to run a mile in fifteen minutes with a full military pack."

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Sgt. 1st Class Coty Burns, a platoon sergeant assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, Fort Riley, Kansas, gives instructions to a member of his squad after a conflict with enemy opposition forces Jan. 25, 2018 at Hohenfels Training Area, Germany. These Soldiers are part of about 4,100 from 10 nations participating in Allied Spirit VIII, a multinational exercise that tests involved units' readiness and interoperability. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew Keeler / 22nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

When an overweight senior officer guffawed, Patton angrily resumed, "I mean every man. Every officer and enlisted man, staff and command, every man will run a mile! We will start in exactly thirty minutes! I will lead!"[7]

Be Aggressive and Bold

"An army of deer led by a lion is more to be feared than an army of lions led by a deer."

–Phillip of Macedonia

A leader must be bold and aggressive, many of history's most triumphant generals, such as Frederick the Great and Adm. Horatio Nelson, to name a few, embodied these qualities.

Frederick the Great

Frederick the Great built his army into the one of the most formidable in history. He was a bold general and used his infantry's swift maneuvering to confound and crush his enemies. This was the case at three of his most significant victories: the Battle of Hohenfriedberg in 1745 and the battles of Rossbach and Leuthen in 1757.

The Battle of Prague (1757), in which Frederick invaded Bohemia during the Third Silesian War (Seven Years' War) is a prime example of his audacity.[8] With England as his only ally, he faced Austrian, French, Russian, Saxon, and Swedish forces, and though he came close to defeat many times, he finally won the war.[9]

Adm. Horatio Nelson

Considered one of the most historically audacious naval leaders, Nelson faced the "Armed Neutrality," made up of the Russian, Prussian, Danish, and Swedish fleets, at the Battle of Copenhagen in 1801.[10]

The battle started badly for the British and the fleet commander, Adm. Sir Hyde Parker, ordered Nelson to withdraw. Nelson was informed of the signal by one of his officers and angrily responded, "I told you to look out on the Danish Commodore and let me know when he surrendered. Keep your eyes fixed on him." He then turned to his flag captain, and said, "You know, Foley, I have only one eye. I have a right to be blind sometimes." He raised the telescope to his blind eye and said, "I really do not see the signal."[11]

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In the end, the British fleet won, thus making the Battle of Copenhagen one of Nelson's greatest victories.[12]

Take Care of Your Soldiers

"The badge of rank that an officer wears on his coat is really a symbol of servitude to his men."

–Maj. Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor

A competent leader preserves combat power by putting his Soldiers first and doing the most to improve their situation. You will gain Soldiers' trust by making sure they are well equipped, fed, and rested. Beyond meeting their basic needs, it is also essential to be an advocate and ensure they receive proper recognition for their achievements. The U.S. Army prioritizes this as "the mission, the men, and me."

One of Alexander the Great's leadership qualities was the ability to place his men first:

> *After covering more than 400 miles in 11 days, Alexander and his soldiers were nearly dead from thirst. Some Macedonians had brought back a few bags of water from a distant river, and they offered Alexander a helmet-full. Although his mouth was so dry that he was nearly choking, he gave back the helmet with his thanks and explained that there was not enough for everyone, and if he drank, then the others would faint. When his men saw this, they spurred their horses forward and shouted for him to lead them. With such a king, they said, they would defy any hardships.*[13]

Conclusion

Training and caring for your Soldiers ultimately leads to unit success. It is crucial to remember there is no "I" in team and even the most well-known leaders, such as Eisenhower, needed to foster teamwork and unit cohesion to accomplish goals that would have been impossible to achieve otherwise. However, as we will discuss in the concluding article, to create unity, leaders must have the determination and decisiveness to overcome challenges they and their units experience.

Part III

Conflicts and setbacks allow leaders to develop abilities and characteristics that play a vital part in their future leadership. Past generals such as George Patton, who had dyslexia, and Douglas MacArthur, whose application to West Point was rejected twice,[14] remind today's military leaders that experiencing challenges is part of leadership and does not hinder the ability to lead. As Gen. Dennis J. Reimer, Army Chief of Staff from 1995 to 1999, said, "The role of leadership is to turn challenges into opportunities."[15]

Thus, in the concluding article, we discuss the final four leadership principles -- student of the past, decisiveness, determination, and strong character.

Be a Student of the Past

"The only right way of learning the science of war is to read and reread the campaigns of the great captains."

–Napoleon

History offers a wealth of information to those who have the foresight to examine it. In addition to obtaining vital technical and tactical knowledge, Soldiers can learn by studying how past leaders performed in "the fog of war."

Gen. George Patton was a consummate warrior, known for studying history and acquired an impressive library of professional military books during his lifetime. At an early age, he chose to become a Soldier. His father nurtured him in the classics, as well as the lore of the Patton family, which was composed of military leaders including two uncles who were Confederate officers killed in battle.[16]

Unfortunately, Patton had dyslexia, a learning disability not well known or diagnosed at the time. He realized, however, that with determination and constant effort, he could pursue military studies and achieve his goal of becoming a great leader.

He understood the military profession required immense technical competence, knowledge of weapons and equipment, tactics and operations, and maneuvers and logistics. Therefore, he expended vast amounts of time and energy in reading and making copious notes in the pages of his books,[17] making him not only familiar with field and technical manuals of his time, but also knowledgeable about history.[18]

Be Decisive

"In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing."

–President Theodore Roosevelt

In war, lack of decisiveness can have fatal consequences. Once you make up your mind, stick to your decision. Never show yourself to be indecisive.

When Julius Caesar refused to lay down his military command and return to Rome at the end of Gallic Wars, he said, "The die is cast," thus making it clear that his choice was irrevocable.[19]

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In 1805, during the Napoleonic Wars, Napoleon's empire was threatened by England, Russia, and Austria. During this period, Napoleon was able to compel the Austrian Army to surrender without firing a shot through rapid marching and maneuvers.[20]

As a final example, in 1862, at the Battle of Mobile Bay during the American Civil War, Confederate mines blocked Union Adm. David Farragut's path during an attempt to attack a Confederate Navy squadron to seize three forts guarding the bay entrance.[21] In a decisive statement, he said, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead."[22]

Show Determination

"You are never beaten until you admit it."

–Gen. George S. Patton Jr.

A leader must show determination even when others do not. This "never say die" attitude is necessary for your Soldiers to be tirelessly persistent during desperate, bleak, or challenging situations.

Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe, acting commander of the 101st Airborne Division during the Battle of the Bulge in World War II, is an excellent example. In December 1944, at Bastogne, Belgium, the Germans sent a demand for his surrender. He responded by saying, "Nuts."[23]

To articulate the resolve and determination of his countrymen, Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister, gave a number of inspiring speeches during World War II:[24]

Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat

"I would say to the House, as I said to those who have joined this government: I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering.

You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: Victory. Victory at all costs — Victory in spite of all terror — Victory, however long and hard the road may be, for without victory, there is no survival."[25]

We Shall Fight on the Beaches

"We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air. We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender."[26]

Their Finest Hour

"Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves, that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, 'This was their finest hour.'"[27]

Be Strong of Character

"Duty, Honor, Country. Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be."

–Gen. Douglas MacArthur

Gen. of the Army Douglas MacArthur was a historical leader who embodied the definition of strong character. He was a renowned general who won many battles against numerically superior and better-equipped foes and was awarded the Medal of Honor for defending the Philippines during World War II.

MacArthur did not accept anything but the best, even during times of peace, which was evident when he trained the 1927 American Olympic team. With his commanding presence, he pulled together a strong team, retorting, "Americans never quit," in response to the U.S. boxing team manager who wanted to withdraw from the competition due to an unfair decision.[28]

In his acceptance speech for the Sylvanus Thayer Award, one of the most eloquent expressions of leadership principles ever delivered, MacArthur's words speak to today's Soldiers, especially NCOs who are "warrior-leaders of strong character":[29]

> *"Duty, Honor, Country. Those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be ... They build your basic character. They mold you for your future roles as the custodians of the Nation's defense. They make you strong enough to know when you are weak, and brave enough to face yourself when you are afraid."*[30]

Related: Click here to read General MacArthur's Thayer Award speech in its entirety.

Conclusion

It is a tremendous honor, as an NCO, to lead Soldiers and along with this honor comes the responsibility to do it well. An ideal Army NCO has a sharp intellect, physical presence, professional competence, high moral character, and serves as a role model. He or she is willing to act decisively, within the intent and purpose of those appointed over them and in the best interest of the organization. They recognize organizations built on mutual trust and confidence accomplish peacetime and wartime missions.[31]

An NCO, who is proficient in some of these twelve principles, but deficient in others, will have a detrimental effect on mission success, morale, and the efficacy of leadership. It is therefore imperative that all leaders build competency in all principles and become well rounded.

The men and women of the U.S. military have made countless sacrifices in the service of our great nation. They deserve the best leadership we can offer, and it is our sacred duty to give it to them. ■

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