

## Lieutenant General Martin Brandtner on Leadership

A departure point into this discussion is a quote from Hans von Seeckt that aptly sums up the essence of the Marine Corps' philosophy, which drives its concepts of leadership:

The essential thing is action. Action has three stages: the decision born of thought, the order or preparation for execution, and the execution itself. All three stages are governed by the will. The will is rooted in character, and for the man of action character is of more critical importance than intellect. Intellect without will is worthless, will without intellect is dangerous.

The Marine Corps demands professional competence among its leaders. As military professionals charged with the defense of the nation, Marine leaders must be true experts in the conduct of war. They must be men of action and intellect both, skilled at "getting things done" while at the same time conversant with the military art. Resolute and self-reliant in their decisions, they must also be energetic and insistent in execution.

As a practice, the Marine Corps gathers into its ranks highly competent leadership experts in their profession, intelligent, decisive, and self-reliant. Such leaders will possess the ability to inspire subordinates to achieve lofty goals, to innovate to improve performance and productivity, while adhering to the principles and ethics that drive the Corps. The military profession is a thinking profession. Commissioned and non-commissioned officers are expected to be students of the art and science of war and leadership at all levels... with a solid foundation in military history and the timeless lessons gained from it.

The Marine Corps style of warfare requires intelligent leaders with a penchant for boldness and initiative down to the lowest levels. Boldness is an essential moral trait in a leader, for it generates combat power beyond the physical means at hand. Initiative, the willingness to act on one's own judgment is a prerequisite for boldness. These traits carried to excess can lead to rashness, but most Marines realize that errors by junior leaders stemming from over boldness are a necessary part of learning. Most Marine leaders deal with such errors leniently, as did my leaders in my early career; there is no "zero defects" mentality. Marines not only do not stifle boldness and initiative, they continue to encourage both traits in spite of mistakes. Regrettably, as we well know, there are exceptions to that positive leadership approach in a certain small percentage of Marine leaders serving today. We should root those bums out and put them out to pasture.

.... On the other hand, Marines should and do deal severely with errors of inaction or timidity, and will not accept lack of orders as justification for inaction; it is each Marine's duty to take initiative as the situation demands.

Consequently, trust is an essential trait among leaders—trust by seniors in the abilities of their subordinates and by juniors in the competence and support of their seniors. Trust must be earned, and actions that undermine trust must meet with strict censure. Trust is a product of confidence and familiarity. Confidence among comrades results from demonstrated professional skill. Familiarity results from shared experience and common professional philosophy.

In the Marine Corps, the highest level of confidence and familiarity is naturally shared by those Marines who have served together in mortal combat—who have actually experienced battle up close, who have made untold sacrifices on behalf of their fellow Marines, and who have demonstrated bravery, professional excellence, and who know how to win.

There are naturally many other critical leadership qualities that make up the good leader; attributes like devotion to duty, moral courage, integrity, honesty, resoluteness, compassion, self-awareness. How about love? I loved my Marines. Do you? I could list a hundred more, but you know them all they are--in the book.

Let me talk about three in particular. The first is self-awareness. A truly outstanding leader has a good grip on himself. He knows his strengths and weaknesses. He knows how to apply different leadership styles for different situations, and how to do it effectively. Moreover, he understands that good leadership is about who you are—not so much about what you do or can do. Anyone can seek out persons with specific skills to address a deficiency or provide a capability, but they can't infuse that so-called "expert" with character and heart. It has to already be there. Do you have it? Do you know who you are?

Knowing who you are suggests a sense of spiritual awareness and knowledge of one's place in the universe and purpose in life. Knowing who you are also bespeaks the fact that you understand reality—that you know you have to deal with what is happening now and with who you really are at this moment, not what you want to be at this moment, not what you were ten years ago, or who you would like to have been or would like to be ten years from now. You cannot change the past nor predict the future. You can think about what you would like the future to be, but it is this very moment that counts, and for which you are being held accountable.

The second attribute I will briefly discuss is love, or perhaps more aptly termed sacrificial devotion to duty. As the Bible says, "No greater love hath man than to lay down his life for his fellow man." Only the truly great leaders possess this attribute. If a leader loves his Marines, this attribute will emerge like water from a wellspring.

Lastly, in speaking about critical leadership qualities, I cannot overlook loyalty. As we all know, loyalty goes both up and down the chain of command. It cannot be purchased. It must be earned. Once earned, it is a treasure to be protected.

.... There is doubtless as much literature on best leadership practices as there is on leadership itself. ...but, in the interest of time I'll cite the most important. That is leadership, and I quote: "Here is the very heart and soul of the matter. If you look to lead, invest at least 40% of your time managing yourself—your ethics, character, principles, purpose, motivation, and conduct (remember what I said about being who you are, not what you can do). Next, invest 30% of the time managing those with authority over you and 15% managing your peers. Use the remainder to induce those you "work for" to understand and practice this theory. I use the term "work for"

advisedly, for if you don't understand that you should be working for your mislabeled "subordinates" you haven't understood anything. Lead yourself, lead your supervisors, lead your peers, and free your people to do the same.

In closing out my discussion of good leadership practices, I would add the following vignettes, what I term the five practices of exemplary leadership:

**Model the way:** It's your behavior that wins respect. This means talking about your values. You must lead from what you believe. People follow the person first, and then the plan.

**Inspire a shared vision:** the dream or vision is the force that invents the future.

**Challenge the process:** Leaders venture out. They do not sit idly by waiting for fate to smile on them.

**Enable others to act:** The test to see if someone is on the way to becoming a leader is to count the use of the word, "we."

**Encourage the heart:** Recognition, appreciation, and celebration. Encouragement is strictly serious business. It's how leaders visibly and behaviorally link rewards with performance. As Colonel Toolan will remember in 1<sup>st</sup> RTBN we praised recruits for success, and did not berate them for failure. My drill instructors were damned tough, but fair.

Moving on, I want to briefly discuss leadership style and how personality and temperament affect a person's ability to lead.

There are fundamentally four recognized leadership styles, directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating. These styles are called situational leadership and are based on the principle that there is no best leadership style. Effective leadership style is matched to an individual or unit development level on a specific goal or task. For example, when an individual or unit is lacking competence but is highly motivated to learn, the directing style of leadership is employed wherein the leader provides specific instructions and closely supervises task accomplishment.

The coaching mode is employed when the individual or unit has achieved some competence but is vaguely committed and involves the leader continuing to direct and closely supervise task accomplishment but also explaining decisions, soliciting suggestions, and supporting progress.

The supporting style of leadership is employed when the unit or individual has moderate to high competence and varied commitment wherein the leader facilitates and supports efforts toward task accomplishment and shares responsibility for decision-making.

When a unit or individual is fully developed and possesses high competence and high commitment, the leader employs the delegating style, wherein he delegates authority for decision making and problem solving to his subordinates.

It should be noted that at no time in the application of any of these styles of leadership does the leader ever delegate responsibility.

Each of these styles are familiar to Marine leaders, but the point I want to get across is that leaders should be sensitive to each situation and apply the appropriate style to achieve the best outcome. For example, no Marine leader would apply the delegating style in a recruit training environment, nor would they employ the directing style to the members of a highly select joint staff directorate.

Surprisingly, however, we do have so-called leaders in our ranks who do not have a clue, and who go clunking about in an insensitive ham-fisted manner, breaking all the china, as well as spilling the food. Fortunately, the system usually catches up with them, but not always. As I said earlier, we need to root them out.

Temperament plays a big role in how we lead. Each of us has a personality profile and it greatly affects how we apply the principles of leadership. Moreover, our personalities determine whether we are truly effective and inspiring as leaders or are merely able to get people to accomplish the mission.

There are numerous instruments on the street to help individuals determine their personality traits and temperament, some of them are new age crap and others quite serious. I am not here to endorse any of these, but merely tell you that there is merit in the concept that there are a finite variety of personalities and temperaments and that an understanding of those varieties and how to deal with them vis-à-vis our own personality traits can be of help in making us more effective leaders. However, I would caution that if you are a complete ass, no amount of sophisticated understanding of the psychology of leadership will help. You might want to consider becoming a target on the pistol range.

I want to briefly talk about the differences between leadership and management. While this may seem irrelevant to warriors, rest assured that as Marine leaders you will undoubtedly find yourselves at some point dealing with this issue, particularly if you find yourself in logistic commands, in programs or acquisition departments at HQMC, or in organizations or commands such as Marine Corps bases and stations that have a civilian complement. Good commanders at every echelon will find the need to be a manager at times. We are sometimes assigned to commands that have armories, budgets, admin offices, barracks, clubs, mess halls, gyms ranges, and so on. One way to look at the matter is to look at the similarities and the differences between managers and leaders. While the two are related and often treated the same, their central functions are different. There are unique functions performed by leaders that are not performed by managers. In that regard, my observation is that we develop a lot of good

managers, but very few good leaders.

With that in mind, let me make a few points about leaders and managers in the form of axioms:

- A manager takes care of where you are; a leader takes you to a new place.
- A manager deals with complexity; a leader deals with uncertainty.
- A manager is concerned with finding the facts; a leader makes decisions.
- A manager is concerned with doing things right; a leader is concerned with doing the right things.
- A manager's critical concern is efficiency; a leader is focused on effectiveness.
- A manager creates policies; a leader establishes principles.
- A manager sees and hears what is going on; a leader hears when there is no sound and sees when there is no light.
- A manager finds answers and solutions; a leader formulates the questions and identifies the problems.
- A manager looks for similarities between present and previous problems; a leader looks for the differences.
- A manager thinks that a successful solution to a management problem can be used again; a leader wonders that if the problem was set in a new environment, may not it require a different solution?

These are sage observations well worth pondering. It would be well to remember that leadership cannot be held to be provided only by people in high positions. Such a view causes us to ask too much of too few. We need more leaders as well as better leaders.

I promised you I would provide insights from General Colin Powell's leadership primer. I am going to do that citing the principal message of each of his "lessons."

Lesson 1. Being responsible sometimes means pissing some people off.

Lesson 2. The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have lost confidence that you can help them and concluded that you do not care. Either case is failure of leadership.

Lesson 3. Don't be buffaloed by experts and elites. Experts often possess more data than judgment. Elites can become so inbred that they produce hemophiliacs who bleed to the death as soon as they are nicked by the real world.

Lesson 4. Don't be afraid to challenge even the pros, even in their own backyard.

Lesson 5. Never neglect details. When everyone's mind is dulled or distracted, the leader must be doubly vigilant.

Lesson 6. You don't know what you can get away with until you try.

Lesson 7. Keep looking below surface appearances. Don't shrink from doing so just because you might not like what you find.

Lesson 8. Organization don't really accomplish anything. Plans don't accomplish anything either. Theories of management don't much matter. Endeavors succeed or fail because of the people involved. Only by attracting the best people will you accomplish great deeds.

Lesson 9. Organization charts and fancy titles count for next to nothing.

Lesson 10. Never let your ego get so close to your position that when your position goes, your ego goes with it.

Lesson 11. Fit no stereotypes. Don't chase the latest management fads. The situation dictates which approach best accomplishes the team's mission.

Lesson 12. Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier.

Lesson 13. Powell's rules for picking people: look for intelligence and judgment, and most critically, a capacity to anticipate, to see around corners. Also look for loyalty, integrity, a high energy drive, a balanced ego, and the drive to get things done.

Lesson 14. Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers, who can cut through argument, debate, and doubt, to offer a solution everybody can understand.

Lesson 15. Part I:  $P=40$  to  $70$ , in which  $P$  stands for probability of success and the numbers indicate the percentage of information required.

Part II: Once the information is in the  $40$  to  $70$  range, go with your gut.

Lesson 16. The commander in the field is always right and the rear echelon is wrong unless proven otherwise.

Lesson 17. Have fun in your command. Don't always run at a breakneck pace. Take leave when you've earned it. Spend most of your time with your family. Corollary: surround yourself with people who take their work seriously, but not themselves, those who work hard and play hard.

Lesson 18. Command is lonely.

Final Lesson. Leadership is the art of accomplishing more than the science of management says is possible.

Follow those wonderful guidelines and you will not go wrong. Trust me.

I will now—finally—close with a couple of challenges you will face as present and future leaders of our beloved Corps. Challenges that will not only affect the way you lead, but whether or not our nation will prevail in the Global War on Terrorism and against the other forces of evil that confront us on a daily basis.

Technology still cannot win wars by itself.

Land warfare still demands ground troops. Air power is over-hyped, as it always has been. We need more ground troops in sufficient numbers. Speed is the dominant battlefield requirement. Not only against the shooting enemy, but against the media enemy. We must get inside the media's "OODA LOOP."

We must destroy our terrorist adversaries. They must suffer catastrophic defeat and be rendered hopeless. We must fix military intelligence.

There are many other challenges facing us in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Take on the hard ones first. Some of the easier ones will fall into line.

The bottom line is that good leadership is the key to all of it. With it, we can accomplish great things, without it, we will fade into the sunset.

*This document is a reproduction of LtGen Brandtner's leadership lecture to the students of USMC Command and Staff College. LtGen Brandtner received (2) Navy Crosses in Vietnam as a Captain. He went on to to serve as General Colin Powell's J-3 on the Joint Chief of Staff during OPERATION DESERT STORM.*