



# JEANNE M. HOLM CENTER

## *The Air Force Leader*

### **Cognitive Lesson Objective:**

- Know the basic concepts of Air Force leadership.

### **Cognitive Samples of Behavior:**

- Define leadership in your own words.
- List the traits of an effective leader.
- List the leadership principles.
- Describe the four primary factors in a leadership situation.

### **Affective Lesson Objective:**

- Respond to the importance of leadership and the profession of arms.

### **Affective Sample of Behavior:**

- Actively participate in a discussion of leadership by providing personal examples of effective and ineffective leaders.

# THE AIR FORCE LEADERSHIP CONCEPT

Leadership is the art and science of motivating, influencing and directing Airmen to understand and accomplish the Air Force mission. The concept of effective leadership includes two fundamental elements: the mission and the Airmen. They are embedded in the definition of leadership.

**The Mission.** *The military organization's primary task is to perform its mission.* This is paramount, and everything must be subordinate to this objective. Thus, the leader's primary responsibility is to lead people to carry out the unit's mission successfully. Former Air Force Chief of Staff, General Curtis E. LeMay stated, "No matter how well you apply the art of leadership, no matter how strong your unit, or how high the morale of your men, if your leadership is not directed completely toward the mission, your leadership has failed." Yet, a leader must never forget the importance of the unit's personnel.

**The Airmen.** Airmen perform the mission. They are the heart of the organization and without their support a unit will fail. One of a leader's responsibilities is the care and support of the unit's personnel. Successful leaders continually ensure the needs of their subordinates are met promptly and properly.

## Leadership Traits

Effective leaders have certain distinguishing characteristics, which are the foundation for their approach to the leadership situation. The list of a leader's desirable qualities is virtually endless. While many characteristics (such as truthfulness) are expected of all members of the military profession, there are six traits that are vital to Air Force leaders.

**Integrity.** The total commitment to the highest personal and professional standards. A leader must be honest and fair. Integrity means establishing a set of values and adhering to those values. Former Air Force Chief of Staff General Charles Gabriel said, "Integrity is the fundamental premise of military service in a free society. Without integrity, the moral pillars of our military strength--public trust and self-respect--are lost."

**Loyalty.** A three dimensional trait which includes faithfulness to superiors, peers, and subordinates. Leaders must first display an unquestionable sense of loyalty before they can expect members of their unit to be loyal. General George S. Patton Jr. highlighted the importance of loyalty saying, "There is a great deal of talk about loyalty from the bottom to the top. Loyalty from the top down is even more necessary and much less prevalent."

**Commitment.** The complete devotion to duty. A leader must demonstrate total dedication to the United States, the Air Force, and the unit. Plato said, "Man was not born for himself alone, but for his country." Dedicated service is the hallmark of the military leader.

**Energy.** An enthusiasm and drive to take the initiative. Throughout history successful leaders have demonstrated the importance of mental and physical energy. They approached assigned tasks aggressively. Their preparation included physical and mental conditioning which enabled them to look and act the part. Once a course of action was determined, they had the perseverance and stamina to stay on course until the job was completed.

**Decisiveness.** A willingness to act. A leader must have the self-confidence to make timely decisions. The leader must then effectively communicate the decision to the unit. British Admiral Sir Roger Keyes emphasized that, "In all operations a moment arrives when brave decisions have to be made if an enterprise is to be carried through." Of course, decisiveness includes the willingness to accept responsibility. Leaders are always accountable--when things go right and when things go wrong.

**Selflessness.** Sacrificing personal requirements for a greater cause. Leaders must think of performing the mission and caring for the welfare of the men and women in the organization. Air Force leaders cannot place their own comfort or convenience before the mission or the people. Willingness to sacrifice is intrinsic to military service. Selflessness also includes the courage to face and overcome difficulties. While courage is often thought of as an unselfish willingness to confront physical dangers, equally important--and more likely to be tested on a daily basis--is the moral courage a leader needs to make difficult decisions. General Douglas MacArthur said, "No action can safely trust its martial honor to leaders who do not maintain the universal code which distinguishes those things that are right and those things that are wrong." It requires courage and strength of character to confront a tough situation head-on rather than avoiding it by passing the buck to someone else.

These traits are essential to effective leadership. Developing them in yourself will improve your ability to employ the leadership principles.

## **Leadership Principles**

An Air Force officer is flexible enough to meet changing circumstances, competent enough to perform under adverse conditions, courageous enough to lead at the risk of life or career, and courageous enough to stand on principle to do what is right. The leadership principles are guides that have been tested and proven over time by successful leaders. Many of these principles are related to the Air Force Core Values. As you comprehend and apply these principles, you and your subordinates will begin to experience success in all your efforts.

**Take Care of Your People.** People are our most valuable resource and should be cared for to the best of a leader's ability. The time and effort a leader spends taking care of subordinates and co-workers will be amply rewarded in increased unit morale, effectiveness, and cohesion. Leaders should exhort each unit member to reach their highest potential and thus maximize their value to the Air Force. An effective and thorough effort to resolve threats to the individual's and family's well being will free Airmen to

achieve their potential. Find out what their requirements are and be sensitive to their needs. Are the people housed adequately; are they well fed; are they paid promptly; are there personal problems with which they need help? When people are worried about these conditions, they cannot focus their full attention on their job, and the mission will suffer. If people believe they are cared for as well as circumstances will permit, the leader is in a position to earn their confidence, respect, and loyalty.

**Motivate People.** Your greatest challenge is motivating subordinates to achieve the high standards set for them. Motivation is the key to successful leadership. Motivation is the moving force behind successful leadership. In fact, the ability to generate enthusiasm about the mission may be the single most important factor in leadership. Recognition of the efforts people put forth is one positive way in which motivation toward mission accomplishment pays dividends. The leader who publicly applauds the efforts of unit personnel builds a cohesive organization, which will accomplish the mission.

Motivating people depends on understanding their needs and working to align these needs with unit requirements. Most people will work for an organization, which they know, cares about them, and one in whose mission they believe. Remember, the most powerful form of lasting motivation is self-motivation. One of your goals as a leader should be to provide an environment that fosters and rewards self-motivation.

**Be a Follower.** The Air Force expects all its leaders first to be followers. Airmen observe their leaders and take from them successful traits while avoiding those that are counterproductive. Good followers also understand and take personal pride in their contribution to the total Air Force mission; they have the strength of character to be gratified by the collective pride in a fine team effort without seeking individual reward. Effective followers have the strength of character to flourish without seeking “hero” status and are willing and able to participate in a team effort to effectively employ air and space power.

**Know Your Job.** People will follow a competent person who has the knowledge needed to complete the mission successfully. The Air Force leader should have a broad view of the unit’s mission, and should ensure all members understand how their jobs relate to mission accomplishment.

Between World War I and World War II, the Army Air Corps was fortunate to have men like General Henry “Hap” Arnold and General Carl Spaatz. These men knew their jobs and how they could enhance the mission. Their preparation and vision paid substantial dividends when they were charged with building a force to fight the air battles of World War II. But, just as important as their own competence, these leaders ensured assigned people knew their responsibilities. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Maxwell Taylor stated, “One expects a military leader to demonstrate in his daily performance a thorough knowledge of his own job and further an ability to train his subordinates in their duties and thereafter to supervise and evaluate their work.”

**Know Yourself.** Knowing your own strengths and weaknesses is important to successful leadership. You, the leader, must recognize your personal capabilities and limitations. Former Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Robert D. Gaylor put it this way: “Sure, everyone wants to be an effective leader, whether it be in the Air Force or in the community. You can and will be if you identify your strengths, capitalize on them, and consciously strive to reduce and minimize the times you apply your style inappropriately.” Don’t, however, ignore your weaknesses. Recognize them and strive to overcome them. In the interim, select team members whose strengths compensate for your weaknesses so that your collective efforts will get the job done.

**Set the Example.** You must set the standard for the unit. People will emulate your standards of personal conduct and appearance. They will observe your negative characteristics as well as your positive ones. A leader’s actions must be beyond reproach, if he or she is to be trusted. Deviations from high standards will only be amplified and the message of a leader’s actions will permeate the entire organization. Regardless of how strongly we feel about ourselves, it is the public perception of our actions that count in the end. For example, the supervisor who violates basic standards of morality invariably ends up in a compromising situation. A leader who drinks excessively or who abuses controlled drugs sends a dangerous message: I cannot control myself; how can I control you? Lack of self-discipline in a leader destroys the unit’s cohesion and, ultimately impairs its ability to perform the mission.

People do not expect their leaders to be saints. But they do expect leadership from a person who recognizes the importance of example. As General George S. Patton, Jr. once remarked, “You are always on parade.”

**Communicate.** Information should flow continuously throughout the organization. Former Air Force Chief of Staff General Thomas D. White believed, “Information is the essential link between wise leadership and purposeful action.” Communication is a two-way process. An informed leader is able to evaluate realistically the unit’s progress toward mission accomplishment. Successful leaders listen to what their people have to say, and are always looking for the good ideas which can flow up the chain. It is the leader’s job to keep all channels open. The more senior a leader becomes, the more listening skills are required.

**Educate Yourself and Others.** People should be properly trained to do their jobs. Education, technical training schools, and on-the-job training are formal means by which Air Force personnel are trained. Informal training, practice, and personal experience at the unit level are crucial reinforcements to formal training. General of the Army Douglas MacArthur observed, “In no other profession are the penalties for employing untrained personnel so appalling or so irrevocable as in the military.” Greater efficiencies are possible with a highly trained and skilled force; therefore, education must be a top priority.

**Equip Your Troops.** It’s your responsibility to ensure the unit is equipped properly to accomplish the mission. If they do not have the proper tools, obtain them. Proper tools include equipment and facilities that lead to mission accomplishment. Occasionally, needed tools are not available in enough quantity or are not available to you at all, despite

your best efforts to obtain them. In these situations a good leader works to develop a creative alternative and solicits solutions from those doing the job. A poorly equipped force cannot capitalize on its extensive training and requires more personnel or time to accomplish its mission than a properly equipped force. Your leadership responsibilities include identifying needs, securing funds, and then obtaining the necessary weapons, tools, and equipment.

**Accept Responsibilities.** General Curtis E. LeMay was once asked to provide a one-word definition of leadership. After some thought, General LeMay replied, “If I had to come up with one word to define leadership, I would say responsibility.” As a leader you are responsible for performing the unit’s mission. If you fail, you are accountable for the consequences. Any unwillingness to accept responsibility for failure destroys your credibility as a leader and breaks the bond of respect and loyalty. Accountability also includes the requirement for discipline within a unit. A leader should reward a job well done and punish those who fail to meet their responsibilities or establish standards. The former is easy, even enjoyable; the latter is much more difficult, but equally necessary. George Washington observed, “Discipline is the soul of an Army. It makes small numbers formidable; procures success to the weak, and esteem to all.”

**Develop Teamwork.** Leaders cannot accomplish the mission alone. It is also impossible for followers to accomplish the entire mission while working completely alone. As a leader you must mold a collection of individual performers into a cohesive team that works together to accomplish the mission. The unit’s mission will suffer if each person in your organization is “doing his own thing” in isolation. As the leader, you should know how the various functions within the unit fit together and how they must work in harmony. You should create and maintain an atmosphere of teamwork and cooperation to meet mission demands. Teamwork comes when people are willing to put the unit’s mission before all else.

## THE LEADERSHIP SITUATION

Leadership has been defined as the art of influencing and directing people to accomplish the mission. Management is the manner in which resources are used to achieve objectives. Military leaders should also be aware of their responsibilities as Air Force managers. British Field Marshall Lord Slim made a clear distinction:

There is a difference between leadership and management. The leader and the men who follow him represent one of the oldest, most natural, and most effective of all human relationships. The manager and those he manages are a later product with neither so romantic, nor so inspiring a history. Leadership is of the spirit, compounded of personality and vision--its practice is an art. Management is of the mind, more a matter of accurate calculation, statistics, methods, timetables, and routine--its practice is a science. Managers are necessary; leaders are essential.

In essence, you lead people and you manage things. The Air Force needs people who can do both. The requirement is for the proper division of attention between the two, with the proportion dependent on the situation. Approach each leadership situation paying careful attention to the four primary factors: the mission, the people, the leader, and the environment.

**The Mission.** Most missions involve many tasks that must be completed if the unit is to fulfill its responsibilities. The leader must define the mission and set priorities for its various components. In many instances higher headquarters has defined the mission. Yet, the leader should translate the higher direction into goals with which people will relate. When possible, the leader should involve unit personnel in setting these goals to ensure their support. Individual involvement is very important when total effort is needed from everyone. The goals must be challenging but attainable. Goals that are unrealistic frustrate even the most dedicated people.

Set reasonable and acceptable standards of job performance to make sure that goals are met. These standards must be consistent with the mission, and defined clearly for every individual. Recognize those who meet or exceed standards, prescribe additional training for those who cannot, and take corrective action for those who will not. When standards are not met, determine the reason and move quickly to correct the situation through training or, if appropriate, administrative or disciplinary action. Get the facts, then act.

**The People.** Be sensitive to people. People perform the mission. Understanding people helps determine the appropriate leadership action to take in a given situation. You cannot be totally successful at getting the most out of people without first knowing the capabilities of those you are leading. Capabilities have two principal elements: training and experience.

- *Training.* Assess the level of training in the unit. If the people are not trained, do what it takes to get them the necessary training. Your subordinates cannot successfully accomplish the mission without the proper training. Medal of Honor recipient Sergeant John L. Levitow credited his heroic action under fire to the training he received.
- *Experience.* Levels of experience vary widely. A leader should identify each individual's experience and ability to perform in various situations. Do not base your evaluation of an individual's experience solely on rank. While rank may be a good overall experience indicator, the person may never have accomplished a particular job or been in a particular environment.

**The Leader.** Successful military leaders adapt their leadership style to meet the mission demands, and use an approach that capitalizes on their strengths. For example, if you are able to communicate effectively with people on an individual basis but are uncomfortable when speaking to large groups, then use personal conferences as much as possible. If you write well, take advantage of this skill by writing letters of appreciation or using other forms of correspondence. If you are a good athlete, organize and participate in unit sporting activities. In other words, capitalize on your strengths and minimize your weaknesses.

The Environment. Leaders should carefully consider the environment in which they work. Leadership methods, which worked in one situation with one group, may not work with the same group in a different environment. Consider the squadron that is permanently based in the United States, but deploys overseas for an extended period of temporary duty. Billeting or food service difficulties, equipment, or parts shortages, family separation problems, inclement weather, etc. may occur. Any of these problems create an entirely new environment with which the unit's leader must cope. As a leader, you must alter your leadership behavior, as necessary, to accommodate changes in the environment of the given mission. Be sensitive to your surroundings.

## **ROLES OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

To better explain the roles of management and leadership, we'll examine them in terms of three elements: behavior, personal characteristics, and organizational situation.

**Behavior.** Managerial behavior is based on building organizational relations that mesh together like parts of a timepiece. Leadership behavior, on the other hand, concentrates on making the hands of the timepiece move so as to display the time of day. The behavioral focus of each is clearly important, but while the manager may be preoccupied with the precision of the process, the leader concentrates on the inertial forces that drive the process. Warren Bennis, a professor and researcher who has devoted years to studying leadership, summarizes the two behaviors as: "Management is getting people to do what needs to be done. Leadership is getting people to want to do what needs to be done."

Effective leaders are often described as "dynamic," which is regarded as beneficial because it denotes movement and change. The function of leadership is not only to produce change, but also to set the direction of that change. Management, however, uses the function of planning to produce orderly results, not change.

<b>MANAGERS</b>	<b>LEADERS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administers</li> <li>• Maintains</li> <li>• Controls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivates</li> <li>• Develops</li> <li>• Inspires</li> </ul>

Managers use the management process to control people by pushing them in the right direction. Leaders motivate and inspire people by satisfying their human needs, keeping them moving in the right direction to achieve a vision. To do this, leaders tailor their behavior towards their followers' need for achievement, sense of belonging, recognition, self-esteem, and control over their lives. Bennis offers the following summary of this behavioral comparison:

**Personal Characteristics.** The following figure illustrates an interesting comparison of successful leaders and managers that was researched by Professor Robert White of Indiana University. Everyone who has been exposed to both types of characteristics knows from experience that neither is exclusively positive or negative.

<b>MANAGERS</b>	<b>LEADERS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem solvers</li> <li>• Statistics driven</li> <li>• Seek conflict avoidance</li> <li>• Thrive on predictability</li> <li>• Assure that the organization's objectives are achieved, even if they disagree with them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysts of purpose and causes</li> <li>• Values driven</li> <li>• Not only accept, but invite conflict</li> <li>• Ambiguous</li> <li>• Assure that their objectives and those of the organization become one and the same</li> </ul>

The best managers tend to become good leaders because they develop leadership abilities and skills through practicing good management techniques. Seldom is there an effective leader who has not been a good manager. Similarly, managers who become successful leaders have humanized their management skills with inspiration, empowerment, and vision through a catalyst called charisma. Social scientist Alan Bryman goes so far as to suggest that management styles may set the stage for charisma.

**Organizational Situation.** What are the organization implications of these two concepts of management and leadership? Leaders launch and steer the organization towards the pursuit of goals and strategies. Managers ensure the resources needed to get there are available and are used along the way. An organization needs both leadership and management, and if they are combined in one person or persons, so much the better.

To achieve a plan, managers organize and staff jobs with qualified individuals, communicating the plan to those people, delegating the responsibility for carrying out the plan, and devising systems to monitor its implementation. What you, as an officer, will need to do, however, is not to organize people, but to align them, and that is a leadership activity.

## Conclusion

What is the relative importance of effective leadership and management? Strong leadership with weak management is no better, and sometimes actually worse, than the opposite. The challenge is to achieve a balance of strong leadership and strong management. A peacetime military can survive with good administration and management up and down

the hierarchy, coupled with good leadership concentrated at the top. A wartime force, however, needs competent leadership at all levels. Good management brings a degree of order and consistency to key issues like readiness, availability, and sustainment. But no one has yet figured out how to manage people into battle. They must lead.

Embrace these proven leadership traits and principles. The Air Force requires every Airman, officer and enlisted, to reflect these traits and principles, at every level, when performing the Air Force mission--our success in war and peace depends on it.

## **BATTLE LEADERSHIP EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD**

### **Major General William A. Cohen, U.S. Air Force Reserve, Retired**

More than 40 years ago, management guru Peter F. Drucker reiterated that the first systematic book on leadership, written 2,000 years ago by Xenophon, a Greek general, is still the best on the subject.<sup>1</sup> Xenophon's book on combat leadership describes leadership actions during a five-month campaign when he and others, although surrounded by a hostile and numerically superior foe, led 10,000 men in a retreat from Babylon to the Black Sea. If the concepts of battle leadership written 2,000 years ago are so powerful they attract the recommendation of probably the greatest management thinker of our time, I thought they might well apply to nonbattle environments also.

The fact is, a professional Soldier, Sailor, Marine or Airman spends most of his or her career preparing for war or cleaning up after a war--not fighting. Moreover, modern warfare requires a supporting cast far larger than just those who actually wield weapons. So, whether assuming combat responsibilities or serving in a noncombat function as a "war supporter," combat leadership potentially seems to have something to offer outside the confines of the battlefield.

### **Is Conventional Thought Wrong?**

That combat leaders have anything to offer noncombat leaders flies in the face of conventional thinking. Even some military people feel that war is war and so unique as a human endeavor that nothing derived from it has any noncombat application. Yet, much technology and cures for diseases have sprung from wartime developments. No less a military thinker than B.H. Liddell Hart, writing of his concept of the indirect approach in his classic book *Strategy*, states: "With deepened reflection, however, I began to realize that the indirect approach had a much wider application--that it was a law of life in all spheres."<sup>2</sup>

Many military leaders who never served in battle probably apply combat leadership principles without considering what they are doing or where their ideas and leadership philosophies originated. General Dwight D. Eisenhower commanded the largest seaborne invasion in history. However, he had no actual combat leadership experience. General Henry H. “Hap” Arnold was the only Airman to wear five stars, and he commanded the largest air force in history, but he never served as a combat leader either.

Some civilians believe that leadership in battle consists only of running around shouting orders. If this were true, there would not be a lot we could learn from it to apply elsewhere. In my judgment, battle leadership represents probably the greatest leadership challenge for any leader. There are significant hazards. There are poor working conditions. There is probably greater uncertainty than in any other type of human activity. It may be the only leader activity where both followers and leaders would rather be somewhere else. Further, as Drucker points out, “In no other type of leadership must the leader make decisions based on less, or less reliable, information.”<sup>3</sup>

While there are true military geniuses in battle, the majority of people in the military, as in most organizations, are ordinary men and women—not military professionals. And, not all are suited to their jobs. Whether a professional or a trained amateur, all soldiers are stressed far more than those in any civilian situation or occupation. Also, leaders must not only carry out the mission, they must also be responsible for the lives of those they lead. So, battle represents a “worst-case” condition. No wonder traditional motivators such as higher pay, good benefits and job security are not much good. There is no “business as usual” on the battlefield.

Under these conditions, good leaders enable ordinary people to routinely accomplish the extraordinary. In battle, leaders help their followers reach difficult goals and complete arduous tasks. People in such an environment cannot be managed—they must be led. And under terrible conditions, successful combat leaders build and lead amazing organizations that get things done ethically, honestly and, for the most part, humanely.

## **Goldwater’s Suggestion**

Back in 1989, Senator Barry Goldwater endorsed an earlier book of mine on leadership that described the techniques of leadership as an art. Goldwater stated that while my techniques were sound, all were founded on certain principles such as basic honesty. According to him, all leadership techniques must be derived from these basic principles or they will not work.<sup>4</sup>

Assuming Goldwater was correct, while leadership techniques depend on the situation and the leader’s as well as the followers’ styles, there are basic principles from which all techniques are derived that are always true.<sup>5</sup> Once these principles are uncovered, techniques in any situation almost automatically follow. Moreover, if general leadership principles from the worst-case scenario could be documented, they would have an extremely important impact on many other activities. Leaders from all organizations could use these principles to dramatically increase productivity and the likelihood of success in

any project in which they were engaged. Such principles could be likened to the law of gravity. A stone dropped from an outstretched hand will fall whether the one who drops it is a combat leader, a business leader, a coach, a teacher or any other leader. And, the stone will always fall down--not up. Thus began my search for the source principles of leadership from the battlefield experience. I was hardly the first to do leadership studies in the military. I have heard of and examined leadership studies from combat and in noncombat situations from all of the services. However, I believed this would be the first attempt to derive noncombat leadership principles from the combat experience.

## **Former Combat Leaders Survey**

The foundation of the research was data from a survey sent to more than 200 former combat leaders. Other data were derived from conversations with hundreds of leaders from all four military services and from information gleaned from histories of wars ranging from World War II to current operations.

I especially sought people who had become successful in the corporate world or in nonmilitary organizations after leaving the Armed Forces. Of the responses received in the initial phase, 62 were from generals and admirals. The survey asked these extraordinary leaders the following questions:

- What had they learned from leadership in battle?
- What tactics did they use?
- How important was their style?
- What are the most important principles a leader must follow?
- How did they adapt these principles outside combat and in their civilian careers?

Not unexpectedly, the data show that successful leaders practice many different styles. Moreover, confirming Goldwater's opinion, certain universal concepts that these successful leaders followed appeared again and again. These principles resulted in dramatically increased productivity and extraordinary success in all types of organizations. However, with so many respondents listing three or more principles, I anticipated an encyclopedic list.

## **Eight Basic Principles**

Napoleon developed a number of ideas about warfare but published neither his memoirs nor his ideas. After his death, 115 of his maxims on the conduct of war were published. If a single combat leader documented so many ideas necessary to be successful in warfare, how many hundreds of leadership principles would be uncovered after analyzing and tabulating the input from such a large number of combat leaders? Surprisingly, 95 percent of the responses could be boiled down to only eight principles, one or more of which helped leaders achieve extraordinary results in their careers. So, I began to think of them

less as principles or guides to leadership success and more as leadership “laws”—to be violated only at great peril. A significant number of survey respondents wrote notes or letters expressing their support for my project and sending anecdotes illustrating one or more of the principles that had helped them achieve success. It was as if they had seen payment in blood for what they had learned. They knew their experiences’ value and did not want to see their hard-won knowledge wasted.<sup>6</sup> During the interviews, I talked with successful senior business leaders and reviewed dozens of corporate situations and the actions these corporations’ senior leaders took. Among those I talked with were Robert C. Wright, chief executive officer (CEO) of NBC, who served five years in the Army Reserve, and Michael Armstrong, CEO of AT&T, who never served in the military, but whose ideas of integrity were closely aligned with ideas expressed by combat leaders.<sup>7</sup> Some senior executives interviewed had combat backgrounds; some did not. Some allowed the use of their real names and companies; some preferred to remain anonymous. Some had developed their own lists of principles of leadership. While their lists differed, they invariably included the eight responses developed from the surveys. I also looked at 7,000 years of recorded history to confirm these concepts. There was an abundance of evidence to support the “laws.”

## Leadership Essentials

There are hundreds of excellent techniques and rules people may follow in leading others. But the eight universal laws are essential—the soul of all leadership. The eight laws are simple, but they are not always easy to implement, and sometimes conflict with one another. However, implementing even one of these laws can make the difference between success and failure. But, if you violate these universal laws, you will probably fail, even if you are at first successful. No one can guarantee success in any situation because there are other factors, such as available resources or policies, which might override anything a leader could do. But, there is no doubt that if a leader follows the universal laws, chances of success will increase. These laws are so powerful that the consequences of following them or not can determine success for most leaders in most situations.

## The Eight Leadership Laws

**Maintain absolute integrity.** Although the other laws are described in no particular order, this one is listed first for a reason. Most combat leaders say integrity is critical and the foundation of everything else because leadership is a trust. If the leader does not maintain absolute integrity, he will not be trusted regardless of his implementation of the other laws. Successful leaders indicate there is more to integrity than simply not lying. For example, “white lies” not for the benefit of the leader might be told, and this would usually not impact integrity. However, integrity means doing the right thing even when no one is looking.

In his book *Taking Charge*, U.S. Air Force Major General Perry Smith writes of Mildred “Babe” Zaharias, who was an Olympic Gold Medal winner and later became a professional golfer. She once penalized herself two strokes when she inadvertently played the wrong ball, something no one else had seen. “Why did you do it?” asked a friend. “No one would have noticed.” “I would have noticed,” she answered.<sup>8</sup> That is the kind of integrity leaders say must be maintained--the kind of leader we follow even if no one else notices. Smith is himself a leader of integrity. As a CNN consultant, he was first hired during the Gulf War. He did such a good job CNN retained him as a consultant. Last year, CNN ran a story that U.S. forces used gas warfare on our own troops in Vietnam. Smith knew the story was false and warned CNN before the story was released. He did everything he could to convince CNN’s CEO to retract the story. When nothing worked, he publicly resigned. This forced CNN to take notice. They turned the evidence over to an independent investigator, who confirmed Smith’s allegations and eventually forced CNN to retract the story and fire some of the individuals directly responsible.

**Know your stuff.** No leader can know everything, but the more you know about what you are responsible for, the better. During World War II, the U.S. Army conducted the largest leadership study ever completed before or since. The study was conducted by some of the most prestigious universities, including Harvard, Yale and Princeton.<sup>9</sup> The 12 million people under arms during the war provided an adequate sample size. Moreover, they surveyed some very important people--the soldiers who looked to their officers for leadership. They asked the soldiers what they wanted from leaders. Integrity was so basic it was assumed; it was not even included in the choices given. Among the choices listed in the survey, the top choice was that leaders should “know their stuff.”

As confirmation of the universality of this law, during my research, I found a speech by Captain Wolfgang Lueth, one of Germany’s leading World War II submarine aces, which clearly shows he came to the identical conclusion. He told German naval cadets: “Your crews won’t care if you are a perfect fat head, as long as you sink ships.”<sup>10</sup> Your subordinates do not care two straws how good you are at office politics either. They do not care whether you are good at managing your career or that you get all your tickets punched correctly. They want to know if you are competent--they want to know if you know your stuff.

**Declare your expectations.** This law encompasses objectives, goals and vision--and getting the word out over and over in every way possible. But first, you must think through the entire process. I like to say you cannot get “there” until you know where “there” is. Drucker spent a fair amount of time working and consulting with Japanese companies. Commenting on “Theory Z” back when it was thought this was the solution to managing American companies, Drucker maintained it was not so much “quality circles” or some other special technique used in Japan that changed the quality of Japanese goods. Rather, it was management experts such as W. Edwards Deming, Joseph M. Juran and others who made Japanese leaders aware of the problem.<sup>11</sup> Japanese business leaders then declared their expectations of a renewed focus on quality. This redirected the emphasis in their companies to a subject that had previously been ignored or thought unimportant.

Quality circles and other techniques that became total quality management techniques supported that effort. So this law really has two parts: establish your expectations, then declare them.

**Show uncommon commitment.** People will not follow you if they think your commitment is temporary or that you may quit the goal short of attainment. Why should they invest their time, money, life or fortune in something if the leader is not going to lead them there anyway? Others will only follow the leader when they are convinced he will not quit no matter how difficult the task or no matter what obstacles are encountered. The 216 BC Battle of Cannae was probably the most decisive battle in history. Most military students study Cannae for its lessons in strategy and a most successful employment of what has come to be known as the double envelopment. But Cannae also has an important lesson for leaders. Carthaginian commander Hannibal faced Roman forces that outnumbered his by almost four to one. Hannibal showed uncommon commitment: “We will either find a way, or make one.”<sup>12</sup> His commitment clearly gave his men heart. Almost 80 percent of that seemingly overwhelming Roman force was left dead on the field of battle. Fighting in the Carolinas during the American Revolution, Major General Nathanael Greene also demonstrated this kind of commitment: “We fight, get beat, rise and fight again.”<sup>13</sup> During the Civil War, in a note to General Henry W. Halleck, General Ulysses S. Grant wrote: “I propose to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer.”<sup>14</sup> Little wonder that Grant was the first Union general about whom Confederate General Robert E. Lee expressed concern. There will always be obstacles. Someone said, “There are no dreams without dragons.”<sup>15</sup> When you show uncommon commitment, followers know their investment of time and effort will not be wasted. They know you will not walk away--that you will see the task through to the end. Yes, there may be dragons; but your commitment gives everyone confidence that you and they can and will slay them.

**Expect positive results.** It is true a leader who expects positive results might not actually get them because of circumstances beyond his control. It is equally true a leader who does not expect positive results will probably not get them. Chester L. Karrass, who said, “You don’t get what you deserve--you get what you negotiate,” proved that years ago.<sup>16</sup> In thousands of negotiation experiments, Karrass found that time after time the better the negotiators expected to do, the better they did. So, while expecting positive results might not always lead to success, failing to expect positive results will almost always lead to something less--and, maybe, to failure. When things were at their blackest, with his troops surrounded by superior forces and over 1,000 miles from friendly support, Xenophon told his officers, “All of these soldiers have their eyes on you. If they see that you are downhearted they will become cowards. If you are yourselves clearly prepared to meet the enemy, and if you call on the rest to do their part, you can be sure that they will follow you and try to be like you.”<sup>17</sup> Xenophon expected positive results, and he got them.

**Take care of your people.** During recent downsizing, CEOs who made sacrifices for their people, including taking salary cuts themselves to help avoid layoffs, were rewarded. Their workers were more productive, which eventually paid off in higher profits. Those who sacrificed others while taking bonuses and pay increases for themselves did not get the same results. According to retired Colonel Harry G. Summers, a commander has a

responsibility “to shield his subordinate leaders from arbitrary and capricious attack.”<sup>18</sup> Summers is 100-percent right. To illustrate his point, Summers tells of a combat action in Vietnam. Brigadier General James F. Hollingsworth, an assistant division commander, flew over Summers’ battle position in a helicopter. He called Summers’ battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Dick Prillaman on the radio and told him that one of his company commanders was all screwed up. “I want you to relieve him right now,” he demanded. Prillaman responded instantly: “He’s doing exactly what I want him to do. If you relieve anyone, it should be me.”<sup>19</sup>

Hollingsworth could have done exactly that. Instead, he said, “Now dammit Dick, don’t get your back up. It just looked screwed up from up here. Go down and check it out.”<sup>20</sup> By the time he retired from the Army, Prillaman was a Lieutenant General. Good leaders who take care of their people tend to get promoted, but that is not guaranteed. The decision we must make is whether we are primarily interested in being a real leader or getting promoted no matter what. Most of the time good leadership and promotion go together, but not always.

**Duty before self.** Duty has two main components: the mission and the people. Sometimes the mission comes first; sometimes the people. However, with a real leader, one thing never comes first--personal interests and well-being.

All U.S. Armed Forces have great examples of those who put duty before self. Howard Gilmore was the commander of the USS Growler, an American submarine on its fourth war patrol in the Southwest Pacific. Forced to surface to recharge the submarine’s batteries on the dark night of 7 February 1943, Gilmore and his crew did not see the Japanese gunboat until it was too late. The gunboat closed range to ram the surfaced submarine. By skillful maneuvering, Gilmore moved the Growler aside to avoid the gun-boat’s attack. The gunboat’s crew fired all of its guns, hoping it could damage the Growler and delay its escape for only a few minutes so nearby enemy ships could finish the sub off. Gilmore had already ordered those on deck to clear the bridge. He was the only one still not inside the sub. Before he could get below himself and order a dive, he was wounded by enemy fire. He was alive but could barely move. He knew his crew and submarine were in danger from the gunboat and other approaching enemy ships. He could not get to the hatch. For his men to climb out of the submarine to drag him into the submarine would result in further delay, which could be fatal to his crew. The submarine had to crash dive immediately. Gilmore gave his final order even though he knew it meant his own death: “Take her down.”<sup>21</sup> The Growler was seriously damaged, but under control. Gilmore’s crew brought the sub back to a safe port. No doubt they were inspired by the courageous fighting spirit of their skipper, who had sacrificed his life while putting duty before self. Gilmore was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously for his bravery. Fortunately, noncombat situations do not require this kind of sacrifice. But make no mistake about it, if you put duty before self, there will be sacrifices you must make.

**Get out in front.** There are leaders who feel they must maintain total detachment. They believe they must coolly and carefully analyze the facts and make decisions without being influenced by outside complications. From their viewpoint, this must be done away from the action, where the noise, pressures of time and other problems distract from their ability to think calmly and clearly.

There is a place for contemplative thinking and measured analysis in leadership, but many leaders have their priorities wrong. The first priority is that the leader must get out where the action is—where those who are doing the actual work are making things happen. They cannot lead from behind a desk in an air-conditioned office. Military historian John Keegan has written many professional books on command and strategy. In his classic treatise on the essence of military leadership, *The Mask of Command*, he concludes: “The first and greatest imperative of command is to be present in person.”<sup>22</sup> That means getting out and seeing and being seen. That way, you can see what is going right and what is not. You can make sure your objectives, goals and vision are being conveyed the way you intend. You can make on-the-spot corrections. You can tell it like it is. You can set the example. At the same time, your people can tell you what is on their minds. You can communicate with them in a way no consultant’s survey can match. When you are out in front and “for real,” others know it and will positively respond to your leadership.

I call the eight universal laws “the stuff of heroes.”<sup>23</sup> Apply them. They will work for you today, as they worked for Xenophon 2,000 years ago.

---

End notes:

1. Peter F. Drucker, *The Practice of Management* (New York: Harper and Row, 1955), 1942.
2. B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Praeger, 1954), 18.
3. Drucker, interview with the author, 7 November 1997.
4. Barry Goldwater, letter to the author, 10 August 1989.
5. E.P. Hollander and L.R. Offermann, “Power and Leadership in Organizations,” *American Psychologist*, 45 (1990), 179-89.
6. Anonymous, letter to the author, 13 November 1997. Former Vietnam combat leader Brigadier General Michael L. Ferguson’s comment is typical of the responses: “I truly hope it reaches all the people out there who are students of leadership, because I am convinced that we need more and more great—no, really great—leaders who will use these laws of leadership to protect the future of our country. If not, we will be in real trouble. God bless.”
7. For a complete list of interviews and contributors, see William A. Cohen, *The Stuff of Heroes: The Eight Universal Laws of Leadership* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1998), 263-66.
8. Perry M. Smith, *Taking Charge* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 1986), 28-29.

9. National Research Council with the collaboration of the Science Service, *Psychology for the Fighting Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 1944), 307.
10. Captain Wolfgang Lueth, "Command of Men in a U-Boat," speech given in 1943 at a German Naval Officers' Course, in Harald Busch, *U-Boats at War* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1955).
11. Drucker.
12. Mark Healy, *Cannae 216 BC: Hannibal Smashes Rome's Army* (Grants Pass, OR: Osprey Publishing Co., 1998).
13. Spurgeon Compton and W. Carroll Headspeth, *The Retreat to Dan* (South Boston, VA: South Boston News, 1974), 8.
14. "In His Own Words," Ulysses S. Grant Network Home Page at <http://saints.css.edu/mkelsev/bygrant.html#determination>.
15. Anonymous.
16. Chester L. Karrass, *In Business as in Life, You Don't Get What You Deserve-You Get What You Negotiate* (Santa Monica, CA: Stanford Street Press, 1996).
17. Xenophon, *The Persian Expedition*, Rex Warner, trans. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1949). 104.
18. Harry G. Summers, "Take Care of the Troops," *Washington Times*, 7 August 1997, 14.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. Citation awarding the Congressional Medal of Honor to Howard Walter Gilmore, The American War Library, at <http://www.familyville.com/wirlibrary/moh/w2b.shtm#28>.
22. John Keegan, *The Mask of Command* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 329.
23. Cohen.

---

**Bibliography:**

1. Air Force Doctrine Annex 1-1. *Force Development*, 15 December 2014.
2. Air Force Doctrine Volume II. *Leadership*, 4 November 2011.
3. Benton, Col Jeffrey C. *Air Force Officer's Guide*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1996.
4. *Guidelines for Command: A Handbook on the Leadership of People for Air Force Commanders and Supervisors*. Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University, 1995.