

“Takeaways” from The Military Leader ©

Great leaders regularly talk about leadership. Leadership, for them, is at the very least a dedicated hobby but more often, it is a passion.

Without intentionality, life will direct our personal growth along paths of least resistance to arrive at a place that falls short of our potential.

Find a way to display passion for your work while appropriately divorcing emotional stability and self-worth. We can't take the work's esteem with us when we go. We can only focus on making a positive impact in the unit that outlasts our tenure.

Individuals have the personal responsibility to reserve judgement until the facts develop and leaders have the responsibility to develop the organizational narrative deliberately, if not slowly, in the face of crisis and uncertainty.

As a leader, you may have the option to reach down into any level of your organization to affect change. The question is, *should you?* It may be more appropriate for your subordinates to handle the problem at their level, which would reveal their talents and reinforce the organizational structure and procedures already in place. They would also learn from their own actions and consequences, which is more permanent than being told what to do.

Biases are acceptable in life and leadership until the point at which they're harmful to one's cause or other people.

The most challenging event in a leader's life could be just around the corner. Leaders must live in the mindset that their talents will be put to the test in some unimaginable, untested way...caused by an event that is alarmingly unpredictable.

The nation's citizens expect that along with the freedom we assist in providing for the country, that we also display a corresponding degree of responsibility borne out in thoughtful, considerate, and moral behavior. Leaders are the ones who should apply the mental energy to come up with new ideas, try out different techniques, and create innovative solutions. They are the first to volunteer in tackling a challenging or dangerous situation. Leaders make things happen by DOING, not by watching.

Inspiration does not have a duty-day. In case you haven't realized it, the energy your followers apply to their jobs is directly tied to your enthusiasm for the mission, your passion for organization's purpose, and your ability to communicate both.

If you are a leader and you find yourself moving slowly throughout the day, you are probably not doing enough to help out the team.

Helping solve your subordinates' issues empowers you as a leader in two ways: one, you show your subordinates that you have the competence to get things done, and two, you build confidence that you will be there for them when they REALLY need you, like in combat.

You don't get to decide which lessons people take from your example or when they decide to learn from your behavior. You're always "on" and you will likely never discover the true impact of your leadership. This is both the burden and the blessing of leadership...make it count.

The "starting line" for leadership in combat is that one must accept, ignore, and discard the physical hardship that accompanies it. Exhaustion is the innate price of participation. Thus, leaders should maintain a physical fitness level that allows them to fulfill their command duties despite fatigue.

If you're an officer, there is no more important team member than your senior enlisted leader. He/She has a wealth of experience and has probably already walked every road you'll encounter during your tenure. He/She will be the action arm of your leadership, so it's crucial that you get aligned early and challenge each other's opinions to ensure you're always on the same page.

The military mission rests completely on teamwork. Whether deployed or in garrison, a subordinate who cannot interact with others is a threat to unit's cohesion. Every service member must be able to engage, converse, and share responsibility with those around him. Failing to do so erodes the most important characteristic of capable teams...trust.

A subordinate with no willingness to develop is without question, useless. They need to grow as technical experts of their skill, and they need to grow as leaders. Leaders should publicize personal development as a "No-Fail" task and take active steps to evaluate subordinates on their relative growth.

Some people believe they won't get any of the credit if they show their hand to everyone else. This belief is shortsighted. People who devote time to improving those around them cannot help but be noticed in a positive way. And good talent shared prolifically cannot remain a secret. The real benefit will come when your boss sees his entire team strengthened by your efforts, not just *your* team.

As leaders progress in rank and responsibility, they take more and more skills for granted. Reach back to old lessons and pass those on to the younger generation - they need to hear it.

Identify the moments that require clear communication and emplace protocols to ensure the right people get the information they need. Leaders must protect their ability to remain above the fray and provide perspective during chaos.

If everyone in the room is nodding their heads in agreement, then no one is brainstorming the multitude of ways the plan can falter.

Failing to acknowledge the education, experience, and proven success of your team members causes them to question whether their ideas are good enough to offer. It's easy for people to say, "*Well, the boss doesn't think any of us bring anything to the table, so why should we contribute?*"

A thanks doesn't cost anything, except your followers' drive to contribute to the team. If you think "Selfless Service" also means "Thankless Service," then brush off every accomplishment as "just part of my people's duty to the mission."

Having a team full of Yes Men is perfectly ok...as long as your skill as a leader is perfect enough to account for all the breakthrough ideas, seized opportunities, avoided catastrophes, and psychological cohesion that comes from building an aligned and committed team.

Military leaders have a hard time saying no to a good idea, even at the expense of stated priorities. Because we care so much about development, we evaluate the idea in light of its contributor instead of in light of the idea's usefulness to the unit. It's as if simply *having* a good idea is the benchmark of high performance. It's clearly not...but we can't say no, ideas get implemented, and people get run into the ground because of it.

Leaders bear the responsibility of distilling the best ideas from the organization and crafting them into effective activity.

The good ideas that proliferate from motivated individuals on the team are not enough to ensure success. The road from "Aha!" to AAR requires hard work, individually and systematically.

In training for organizational effectiveness, leaders must determine what activity (warfighting as well as staff practices) they can make reflexive and what must remain...for lack of a better term...fluid. Executing battle drills in an operations center should be reflexive; generating ideas during planning, fluid. Reporting logistics status to higher headquarters, reflexive; tailoring the resupply packages to maximize efficiency, fluid.

Leadership is clearly about influence. Passionate leaders spend night and day discovering ways to improve their organizations and have an impact that endures. The best leaders inspire growth that survives their tenure, even their lifetime, and continues to echo positive influence through time.

Effective staffs provide answers, not more questions. Take the perspective of the people you're leading and shape your products to make it easy to follow your orders...*even if it means more work for you!* Serve and enable the people you lead and you will accomplish the overall mission more efficiently and effectively.

While processes allow us to efficiently execute tasks within a predictable system, they can also stifle. There exists an intangible line where the procedures we rely on begin to dilute both individual cognitive agility and collective organizational adaptability. Teams and their members take fewer risks and stop fighting for new insight when they have processes to protect them. It's not intentional, it's a function of our innate propensity to seek homeostasis...a comfortable, predictable environment.

History's most well-respected visionaries showed a committed resistance to the status quo, an unwillingness to blindly accept the hierarchies of life, an inspirational vision for shaping their environment, and a penchant for observing the masses and doing the opposite.

Never miss an opportunity to talk to your assembled troops. When they're in formation and the First Sergeant asks if you have anything to say, *a/ways* take the chance to teach an object lesson, encourage them, reinforce your command philosophy, or simply thank them for their hard work.

Don't step around the unsaid. Few worthwhile lessons ever come from comfortable conversations.

Talking about subordinate accomplishments instead of your own is one of those classy habits that separates good leaders from great leaders.

Talking frequently about the high duty and sacrifice of the profession inserts an attitude of responsibility into the formation, which leaves little room for apathy and immaturity.

Terrain changes, so be flexible. Leaders must be open-minded about the operating environment and ready to react when conditions shift. There is no "unfair" when dealing with an uncontrollable variable like terrain. Each side has the same opportunity to use the environment to its own advantage. Expect to fight in a way you never expected and train adaptability into the organization.

Acknowledge that being a military leader gives you a lot of power, but you're still dealing with human beings who don't necessarily enjoy living in a world that revolves around you.

It's vital for the team members to see that their small win contributes to the team's big win. And even though Soldiers will dutifully execute any task assigned them...leaders will shift from positional power to transformational power if they can connect at the Soldier level and show how their contribution matters.

Being in charge doesn't mean you'll always be right. In fact, being a leader almost guarantees that your decisions will be wrong in at least some people's eyes.

Eliminating the negative, as any skilled leader can tell you, is not just the flipside of accentuating the positive. It's a whole different set of activities. For someone with people to manage, accentuating the positive means recognizing productive and constructive effort, for example, and helping people discover and build on their strengths. Eliminating the negative, for the same boss, might mean tearing down maddening obstacles and shielding people from abuse.

Average leaders think their work is finished after making a decision; great leaders know that the hard part is execution and, as Benjamin Franklin quipped, "*Well done is better than well said.*"

Average leaders let others figure out how to do the tedious tasks; great leaders use their experience to provide solutions for their team, even though the problems are beneath them.

Average leaders think their authority will be the force that pushes the task along; great leaders use engagement, motivation, encouragement, vision, and example to lead their team in execution.

Great leaders know that the *What* tells what occurred but the *How* tells the story that people will remember.

Great leaders understand that the *How* is the personality of one's leadership. It's what will convince people to follow because they want to, not because they have to.

The severity of combat operations demands that military leaders must be able to leverage near-absolute power in moments of crisis.

We have to be good at combat...and we have to be good at taking care of Soldiers and families. All else is bonus.
