

## Be \* Know \* Do: Leadership the Army Way

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Kindle Notes by Dave Kraft

Leadership is first and foremost a character-based and value-driven art, not just management and communication skills. Candid After-Action Reviews (AARs)—a staple of Army leader development—promote and nurture teamwork, strengthen clear communications, emphasize personal accountability, encourage performance to standard, and acknowledge shared risk.

The military is a tremendous place for the development of leadership characteristics. It taught me a lot about motivating people and maintaining discipline, but not in an oppressive way. Crupi adds, “In the corporate sector, they are much more likely to go out and hire the leaders they need than to development them inside.” People need to do more than they are told; they need to participate actively and willingly. They need to be committed to achieving a common objective. Orders and commands don’t plant the seeds of commitment; leadership does.

Army Leadership, the Army’s official leadership manual, defines leadership this way: *“Leadership is influencing people—by providing purpose, direction, and motivation—while operating to accomplish the mission and improving the organization.”*

“Leadership transforms human potential into effective performance,” according to Army doctrine. This was the payoff for leaders who valued soldiers, communicated the importance of the mission, and trusted their subordinate leaders to accomplish it.

Excessive dependence on central definition and rule-making produces standardized solutions to be applied uniformly throughout the system. But the world ‘out there,’ the world to be coped with, isn’t standardized. It is diverse, localized, and surprising.” There are three aspects to leadership regardless of organizational level or military rank: who you are inside, what you know, and how you act. The Army encapsulates leadership at all levels by focusing on three simple yet powerful words: Be, Know, Do. Can three little words really sum up all the tangible and intangible qualities of leadership?

What do they expect from a leader they would follow not because they have to, but because they want to? Over two decades of asking this question in the United States and around the world, Kouzes and Posner say the results are remarkably consistent. People want leaders who are:

- Honest
- Competent
- Forward-looking

- Inspiring
- Interpersonal skills include coaching, teaching, counseling, motivating, and empowering individuals, as well as building teams.
- Conceptual skills include the ability to think creatively and to reason analytically, critically, and ethically, which are the bases of sound judgment.
- Technical skills are job-related abilities. They include the expertise necessary to accomplish all tasks and functions within a leader's responsibility.
- Tactical skills in the military apply to solving problems concerning employment of units in combat to achieve an objective. In civilian life, tactical skills involving negotiation, human relations, budgeting, and the like are often necessary to achieve objectives.

Successful leaders act in three key ways: they pull people together in teams and organizations with a unified purpose, they execute to achieve results, and they lead change to leave the organization stronger than they found it. In the Army's language, these three areas of action are called *influencing, operating, and improving*. Competent, confident leaders tolerate honest mistakes that are not the result of negligence. A leader who sets a standard of "zero defects, no mistakes" is also saying, "Don't take any chances. Don't try anything you can't already do perfectly, and for heaven's sake, don't try anything new."

Leaders who talk a good game but don't back their words with actions will fail in the end. Leaders must also have the right attitude; disagreement doesn't mean it's OK to be disrespectful. People in the culture will be driven by the values expressed by what people do, not by what they say.

The Army characterizes leadership attributes as mental, physical, and emotional. The Army expects its leaders to work to improve themselves across all three dimensions. Effective leaders do not just have initiative themselves, they also develop it in their subordinates by giving them freedom to maneuver, supporting their ideas, and tolerating honest mistakes. Napoleon observed how careful attention and hard work mattered more than sheer brilliance: "It is not genius which reveals to me suddenly and secretly what I should do in circumstances unexpected by others; it is thought and meditation." The leader's job in the Army—or in any organization—isn't to make everyone the same, but to take advantage of the fact that everyone is different and build a cohesive team with an appreciation of differences.

Mature leaders spend their energy on self-improvement; immature leaders spend their energy denying there's anything wrong. People who are serious about leading realize first and foremost that it is their responsibility to develop themselves before they seek to lead others. Positional leaders who lack character and values are hardly leaders at all in the real sense, even though they may hold the title of president or CEO.

The measure of leadership is not the quality of the head, but the tone of the body. The signs of outstanding leadership appear primarily among the followers. Are the followers reaching their potential? Are they learning? Serving? Do they achieve the required results? Do they change with grace?

Leadership in action is emphatically about using skillful interpersonal relations to pull people together in pursuit of common goals. It's about building teams and creating an environment that maximizes performance in achieving results. But treating people as replaceable cogs in a wheel does not build loyalty and commitment. The core interpersonal skills the Army teaches are communicating, supervising, and mentoring and counseling. Jean-François Manzoni and Jean-Louis Barsoux, who have extensively studied how leaders deal with performance problems, have discovered that many "performance problems" are actually the result of the leader's failure to communicate clearly and establish clear expectations.

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It is also important to let team members know about one's management style, priorities, and assumptions. An organizational leader visualizes the sequence of activities that will move the organization from its current state to the desired end state and expresses it as simply and clearly as possible. The Army recognizes that over-centralized authority and over-supervising undermine trust and empowerment. Training subordinates to act independently is important; that's why direct leaders give instructions on their intent and then allow subordinates to work without constantly looking over their shoulders.

A leader empowers subordinates by training them to do the job, giving them the necessary resources and authority, getting out of their way, letting them work, and being available to offer guidance. Coaching involves a leader's assessing performance based on observations, helping the subordinate develop an effective plan of action to sustain strengths and overcome weaknesses, and supporting the subordinate and the plan. Lauren Cantlon and Bob Gandossy at Hewitt Associates, a management consulting firm, conducted a study of the top companies for developing leaders and found that their top executives often spend 50 to 60 percent of their time mentoring and developing leaders. "

In shaping the environment of the team or unit. Do people speak up with good ideas or keep them to themselves? Is diversity honored at all times and in all ways? Do people cooperate with each other, offer help to each other—or do they just keep their heads down and focus on their own individual tasks? How is conflict handled when disagreements occur? The sum total of all these and many other aspects of behavior create the environment of the group, its climate or culture.

Does the leader set clear priorities and goals? Is there a system of recognition, rewards, and punishments? Does it work? Do the leaders know what they're doing? Do they admit when they're wrong? Do leaders seek input from subordinates? Do they act on the feedback they're provided? In the absence of orders, do junior leaders have authority to make decisions that are consistent with the leader's intent? Are there high levels of internal stress and negative competition in the organization? If so, what's the leader doing to change that situation? Do the leaders behave the way they talk? Is that behavior consistent with Army values? Are they good role models? Do the leaders lead from the front, sharing hardship when things get tough? Do leaders talk to their organizations on a regular basis? Do they keep their people informed?

Their people willingly share ideas and take risks to get the job done well because their leaders strive for more than compliance; they seek to develop subordinates with good judgment. Whereas climate is how people feel about their organization right now, culture consists of the shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize the larger institution. It's deeply rooted in long-held beliefs and customs.

Focus on People, Not Organizational Charts, Incentive Systems, or Policies

Take Care of Your People

Relentlessly Communicate the Big Picture

The Army distinguishes three levels of leadership:

1. *Direct frontline leadership,*
2. *Organizational leadership*
3. *Strategic leadership*

Because they exert influence primarily through subordinates, strategic leaders must develop strong skills in choosing and developing good ones.

Before deciding that teamwork is the answer, ask these questions of yourself and your fellow team members:

- Are we capable of admitting to mistakes, weaknesses, insufficient knowledge? • Can we speak up openly when we disagree?
- Will we confront behavioral problems directly?
- Can we put the success of the team or organization over our own?

Taken from Patrick M. Lencioni, "The Trouble with Teamwork," *Leader to Leader*, Summer 2002, 29

Leadership can and does emerge from a team when differences are honored, assumptions are suspended, and the quality of interaction is good. If leaders encourage open dialogue, actively listen to all perspectives, and ensure that subordinate leaders and staff can have a forthright, open, and honest voice in the organization without fear of negative consequences, they foster communication at all levels. Discipline is achieved when people trust their leaders, understand and believe in the mission's purpose, value the team and their place in it, and have the will to see the mission through. Leaders earn that trust by listening, following up on what they hear, establishing clear lines of authority, and setting standards. Effective leaders provide clear direction to their teams.

With clearly communicated purpose and direction, subordinates can then determine what they must do and why. Within that broad framework, leaders give power to subordinates, delegating authority to act within the intent: A leader's consistent, sincere effort to see what's really going on and fix things that are not working right can result in mutual respect throughout his or her organization. Follow-up validates the priorities and demonstrates that the leader is serious about seeing the mission completed. Leaders who fail to follow up send a message that the priorities are not really that important and their orders are not really binding.

The Army has developed a concept to describe the twenty-first-century world of increasing and changing complexity: VUCA. VUCA is actually an acronym for the words volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Strategic leaders create a vision of what's necessary, communicate it in a way that makes their intent clear, and vigorously execute it to achieve success. To use the transformational style, a leader must have the courage to communicate his or her intent and then step back and give other team members room to work.

Transformational leadership is best understood in contrast to transactional leadership. Transactional leadership focuses on the principle of exchange—rewards (or punishments) in exchange for the desired behavior (or the failure to behave as desired). Leaders who use the transactional approach usually are very directive, outlining all the conditions of task completion, the applicable rules and regulations, the benefits of success, and the consequences—to include possible disciplinary actions—of failure. They often apply “management by exception,” focusing on their subordinates' failures, showing up only when something goes wrong.

The transformational leadership style allows leaders to take advantage of the skills and knowledge of experienced subordinates who may have better ideas on how to accomplish a mission. Leaders who use this style communicate reasons for their decisions or actions, and in the process, help subordinates develop a broader understanding and ability to exercise initiative and operate effectively. This approach produces the most enthusiastic and genuine response. Subordinates will be more committed, creative, and innovative.

They will also be more likely to take calculated risks to accomplish the mission. However, not all situations lend themselves to the. Consistency and long-range focus

are neglected in the press to demonstrate immediate results. As Frederick the Great said, “What good is experience if you do not reflect?” leaders are taught to make their intent clear and ensure their people understand the sorts of mistakes that are acceptable and those that are not. The After Action Review (AAR) is a powerful learning tool developed by the Army that has drawn wide attention from the corporate world. As defined by the Army, an AAR is a professional discussion of an event, focused on performance standards, that allows participants to discover for themselves what happened, why it happened, and how to sustain strengths and improve on weaknesses.

There can be no sacred cows: “Unless all elements of performance are examined, including decisions made by the leader, the AAR will not be effective.” The real benefits of AARs come from taking the results and applying them to future operations and training. Most corporations spend precious little time on reflection—serious reflection, together, among the people who have to take action again. But this is precisely what the Army does and has done—it has created an infrastructure for learning.