

BEEING A LEADER. PERSONAL CHALLENGE OR MANDATORY REQUEST?

Cristian –Marian PANAIT

„Carol I” National Defence University, Bucharest

Abstract: *From the practice point of view, leadership is a phenomenon that resides in human interaction and becomes available to everyone. The two common forms of leadership, assigned and emergent, as a process, can be learned. However, someone in the assigned leadership position does not always become a leader. In the military this is a well known and vastly discussed subject, yet finishing the sentence "A leader is..." will find as many definitions as many people will be asked. This has led to the dramatic increase of many "leadership experts", an entire market of selling what leaders should do. Although this subject was thoroughly researched the presented methods in the paper are as direct observation, counseling, mentoring, building team skills and processes, developing others on daily basics from the assigned leadership position of commanding the first year students within Air Force Academy. Leaders development requires assignment of personnel that will understand it as a mandatory request, a personal challenge to have leader skills.*

Keywords: *leader, leadership, manager, teamwork, military education,*

1. INTRODUCTION

Most military activities are grounded in teamwork. The military student becomes a member of a squad, platoon, company, battalion from the very first day of his training as a future officer.

Air Force is a team of teams. His feeling about the membership importance is decreasing in numbers, one of seven squad members vs. one of the hundreds battalion members.

The assigned leader is the first person who give him importance and a sense of purpose.

As he graduates he will become one of those commanders.

WHEN he will become more aware of that, he will understand the responsibility for being an active, important member is on his own shoulders.

The leader should give his team the higher purpose by making every member feel important.

In a long term, having a mindset focused on the team goals, the future commander will identify his purposes with his unit, instead of his own.

There are, two ways of being a part of a team:

- the individualist, following the rules as much as he understands to, doing the *things right*;
- active member, taking the personal challenge of gaining the skills of a leader by doing the *right thing*.

When in the position of commanding a team, it's maybe a little too late to acquire all those skills needed to perform a "management of meaning: leadership"[1]. in order to have high performance When put in a leadership position, the potential leader will define his style based on the skills he already gain or he will try to take a personal challenge out of his position and shape into what he desire or is requested.

Teamwork is based on six interrelated elements: communication, cooperation, coordination, leadership, assertiveness and planning. The efficiency of one directly influence the efficiency of another (e.g. communication-cooperation). To obtain the skills in maximum possible number of these elements it is definitely a challenge . Teams that practice the six elements of teamwork efficiently will be able to reach their goal with less difficulty.

2. A PERSONAL CHALLENGE WE NEED TO VIEW AS A MANDATORY REQUEST

The reason I started this article with some basic description of an effective teamwork is a common misconception some officers and NCOs fall into while holding the formal authority: There aren't two separate entities: the commander and the team!

While stepping out of the team circle, there will be place for another "entity" which under pressure may hold more authority than the formal one and from the lack of information he possess, that might become a dangerous situation. It is desirable to have a good relationship with the active members of the team especially because they put up a great deal of teams morale and level of efficiency. In this case, under pressure situations, members that the assigned leader wouldn't maybe thought of, might emerge. In my opinion, this type of leadership, commanding, while outside of the circle does not suit the military situations in general, it's like God, unseen but felt through the words of religious leaders and books.

A job description is mandatory. However there are levels of performance, from unsatisfactory to exceptional. When developing leaders, starting with basic level to professional, a big part of responsibility reaches a personal level This brings us to the question of a personal challenge. How will others appreciate the results of the challenge a potential leader took? There are many surveys made but I would like to quote the results that came from a worldwide respected research company, Opinion Research Corporation, on the most valuable trait of a leader [2]:

Table 1. Most valuable traits of a leader, according to research by Opinion Research Corporation for Ajilon Finance.

Rank	Trait	Percentage
1.	Leading by example	26%
2.	Strong ethics or morals	19%
3.	Knowledge of the business	17%
4.	Fairness	14%
5.	Intelligence and competence	13%
6.	Recognition of employees	10%

These results are based upon telephone interviews with a representative sample of 600 adults, 18 years of age or older, who are employed either full- or part-time. Participants included 267 women and 333 men. Interviews were conducted between September 18 and September 21, 2003. The margin of error is approximately plus or minus four percent.

This is no surprise for us military as setting the example is a demand even found in the fundamental general regulations. The discipline by example is found long back in history. We can often see officers and NCOs taking a sideline, watching the work being done with the idea in mind "that is not my job, I have other responsibilities". Remember Plutarh says on Caius Marius who gained his soldiers respect by "matching in labor and abstemiousness... as indeed any voluntary partaking with people in their labor is felt as an easing of that labor, as it seems to take away the constraint and necessity of it...For they (the soldiers) do not so much admire those that confer honors and riches upon them, as those that partake of the same labor and danger with themselves; but love them better that will vouchsafe to join in their work than those that encourage their idleness." [3] The question here is for the students, from whom is expected to practice a form of leadership and set an example as soon as they will graduate. What example will you give? What does it mean to "set an example", for sure not the narrowed idea of how much you can get away with!

3. LEADERSHIP DILEMMAS

Dilemmas may occur while one is trying to figure it out what can be done to become a good leader. Human nature, as we all know is hard to quantify as we are in so many ways very different, therefore this personal challenge needs to have its grounds on better personal understanding.

Studies made on leadership and behavioral psychology gives us good tools to start this quest. One of the tools we have is questioning ourselves on this matter, debate and better understand. Leaders are born, not made. This thought can place us on an idle position.

Many times I heard “I’m not made for this!” BEFORE even trying. It’s a great thing to better understand ourselves and come to the conclusion what is the line of duty with the best performance we can give and yes, we cannot do everything on a high level performance. Being in a leadership position, leading men might not be for you but never accept that without trying. What stands in your way to achieve that goal? Circumstances and persistence are some of the major elements in the development process of any leader. Do you consider yourself not very much of a “people” person: reading proper literature, taking classes on empathy, developing a critical thinking, learning about tough-mindedness and how to develop more psychological resistance might improve that feeling. Personal traits will determine who will and who will not be comfortable leading others, we are always learning and changing.

If someone thinks that there isn’t much to learn while assigned on a leadership position and with much experience then maybe it’s a good thing to question his leadership: “How many followers will I have without my title?”. Take in account that a true leader won’t go in a popularity quest, a true leader will create more leaders not followers on a basic understanding.

Developing a leaders traits is a process that has roots long ago in history. Just think of the inherited role as a ruler present even nowadays in monarchies and the education received. Great names of leaders will never be forgotten, natural leaders are indeed rarely born, it’s a invitation to greatness, an opportunity, but you do not need a title to become one and for sure there aren’t any leader developed in a axiological vacuum. It is important to stress as well how the genetics influence ones development as a leader!

Manager - leader. That is another dilemma and often misconception. Many First lieutenants graduate with a diploma of organizational management thus...managers.

As I stated at the very beginning of this paper there are many definitions of what leadership, a leader is. I found so many definitions that my conclusion was only to acknowledge the complexity of this field, however there is one that resonates the most with myself:

“Leadership: management of meaning”, after Linda Smircich and Gareth Morgan[1].

Leadership is just a different kind of management which starts with self-management and to a certain extent a way of living. “Can we change the world? Probably no, can we change our day? Yes. We have to admit we are never at our full potential”[4].

There are many charts that put a leader in front of whatever a manager means to who made the study, it’s very much like a leader is someone that a manger will never be. In my opinion, there isn’t one that achieved greatness over the other one. A leader compared to a manager, has something more to offer to his working with people job, than his time, his soul. By soul I mean passion, feelings towards subordinates. That is a two-way road.

Side by side charts are good to observe the general understanding of these two concept and some of them are actually good (Google has plenty from funny to more serious ones) to understand the long road a leader has to walk. Here is an example from Mark Sanborn book, “You don’t need a title to be a leader”[5] where the differences are more orientated on the teamwork aspect “leadership is power *with* people, not power *over* people”:

Table 2 Leaders vs. Managers

Managers	Leaders
-have employees (subalterns)	- win followers
-react to change	- create change
-have good ideas	- implement them
-communicate	- persuade
-direct groups	- create teams
-try to be heroes	- make heroes out of everyone around them
-take credit	- take responsibility
-exercise power <i>over</i> people	- exercise power <i>with</i> people

Gender and diversity dilemma. This issue is the subject to some bias, prejudice, personal opinion. It’s featuring a combination attributes as gender, ethnicity and nepotism (family member or friend). I will focus on the gender one as it is the most common within military schools.

I would like to tell you some facts that influenced my perspective on military females on leadership positions.

Female students were allowed to participate at military academies admission in 2002. I was a military student also back then.

On one of the scientific communication sessions I participated as a military student, one of the students from a different academy came with a subject on military females status within academies.

The issue was that military females were not assigned on leadership positions, platoon commander deputy.

The debate was closed quite suddenly after one of his platoon colleagues asked why they are not bothered also for not being assigned with the position of the machine gun carrier.

Yes, we are equals in rights and obligations. After I graduated and was assigned at a mechanized infantry battalion I did witness another situation linked in my mind with the one at the scientific communication session.

While during a long march one of the military females that was with us, seemed at her limits with keeping the pace with others so one of her colleagues offered himself to help her with her backpack. Her reaction? "Why? Do you think I cannot do this? I'm fine!". She was a leader.

She had taken a personal challenge to gain all those traits that leads to respect. More than ten years have passed and I find myself back in the academy seeing military females in leadership positions with very good performance.

What has changed? They proved their qualities. Some took the active membership position within their teams and gained respect.

So if you are a military female and you think you can't be a leader within your team because of gender, maybe you're just finding an excuse for not taking the hard but rewarding path of becoming one.

CONCLUSIONS

I will start the conclusions with what is not this paper. It didn't scientifically breakthrough the field of leadership, it isn't (even though I would like to) about the responsible genome that makes it easier for natural leaders and it isn't about that "magic" something that makes a military stand up when he is down and go on fighting just by hearing his commander yell "Stand up! You're better than that!".

My intention was to raise some questions among the future leaders with the hope that some will actually challenge themselves to become the leader that would make his soldiers stand up fighting. It can be done.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1]Source.[online].Available:http://homepages.stmartin.edu/fac_staff/dconant/mba601/notes/LeadershipTheManagementOfMeaning.pdf
- [2]Source.[online].Available: <http://businessmanagementleaders.com/business/leadership-characteristics/>
- [3] Plutarh Lives, IX, Demetrius and Antony. Pyrrhus and Gaius Marius(Loeb Classical Library)(Volume IX)(1920)
- [4] Mastroiani G.,Palmer B.,Penetar D.,Tepe V., "A warrior's guide to psychology and performance", Washington,D.C.(2011)
- [5] Sanborn M., "You don't need a title to be a leader",New York (2006)