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# Leadership

## GENERAL OF THE ARMY OMAR N. BRADLEY

*This article was first published in the Winter 1972 issue of Parameters.*

*(Editor's Note: General of the Army Omar N. Bradley visited Carlisle Barracks on 7-8 October 1971 to meet with members of the 12th Army Group Association. While he was at Carlisle, he addressed the Army War College faculty and students on the subject of Leadership. His address contained observations that were gleaned during a long and significant career. A careful reading of his remarks gives us some insight into the qualities that made General Bradley the great soldier and human being that he is. General Bradley's thesis is that leadership is an intangible that involves a constant interplay between the leader and the led. When this interplay is successful, we have the ingredients for great accomplishment.)*

All of you here this evening are leaders. I am pleased to meet you. What you do may well dignify the past, explain today, and secure for all of us—tomorrow.

Perhaps I can touch upon a few factors that will underscore the value of good leadership. Leadership is an intangible. No weapon, no impersonal piece of machinery ever designed can take its place.

This is the age of the computer, and if you know how to program the machine you can get quick and accurate answers. But, how can you include leadership—and morale which is affected by leadership—into your programming? Let us never forget the great importance of this element—leadership, and while we use computers for certain answers, let us not try to fight a whole war or even a single battle without giving proper consideration to the element of leadership.

Another element to be considered is the Man to be led, and with whose morale we are concerned. I am constantly reminded of this point by a cartoon which hangs over my desk at home which depicts an infantryman with his rifle across his knees as he sits behind a parapet. Above him is the list of the newest weapons science has devised and the soldier behind the parapet is saying: "But still they haven't found the substitute for ME."

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*General of the Army Omar N. Bradley was born in Clark, Missouri, 12 February 1893. Following graduation from the US Military Academy in 1915, he served with the Infantry in a variety of assignments, and at the Military Academy as an instructor and a tactical officer. Early in World War II he commanded the 82d and later the 28th Infantry Division. In 1943, he was Corps Commander, II Corps, during the Tunisian and Sicilian Campaigns; and in 1943 was Commanding General of the First US Army, during its famed Normandy invasion. In 1944 and 1945, he served as Commanding General, 12th Army Group during campaigns in France and Germany. In 1946, General Bradley was named Administrator, Veterans Affairs, until he was recalled to active duty in 1948 to serve as Chief of Staff, US Army. In 1950, he was appointed General of the Army while serving as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He is the only General of the Army alive today.*

Of course, with this particular group of service personnel, I am considering leadership as it applies to a military unit. However, having been associated with industry for some time now, I find it difficult to completely separate the principles of military and industrial leadership. They have much in common.

In selecting a company in which to invest our savings, we often give primary consideration to the company with good leadership. In similar manner, a military unit is often judged by its leadership. Good leadership is essential to organized action where any group is involved. The one who commands—be he a military officer or captain of industry—must project power, an energizing power which coordinates and marshals the best efforts of his followers by supplying that certain something for which they look to him, be it guidance, support, encouragement, example, or even new ideas and imagination.

The test of a leader lies in the reaction and response of his followers. He should not have to impose authority. Bossiness in itself never made a leader. He must make his influence felt by example and the instilling of confidence in his followers. The greatness of a leader is measured by the achievements of the led. This is the ultimate test of his effectiveness.

Too frequently, we use the words leader and commander synonymously. We should not forget that there are far more staff officer assignments than there are command billets, and a good staff officer can and should display the same leadership as a commander. While it takes a good staff officer to initiate an effective plan, it requires a leader to ensure that the plan is properly executed. That is why you and I have been taught that the work of collecting information, studying it, drawing a plan, and making a decision, is 10 percent of the job; seeing that plan through is the other 90 percent. A well-trained officer is one who can serve effectively either as a staff officer or as a commander.

I can recall a former vice-president of one of the companies with which I am associated. He would formulate some good plans but never followed up to see that his plans got the expected results. I knew he had served in World War II so, out of curiosity, I looked into the nature of his service and found that his entire period of service was a staff officer. He had never had the advantage of a command job, so his training was incomplete. Maybe if he had remained in the service longer, we could have developed his leadership qualities as well—and this man would still be with the company.

You may have heard this story about General Pershing in World War I. While inspecting a certain area, he found a project that was not going too well, even though the second lieutenant in charge seemed to have a pretty good plan. General Pershing asked the lieutenant how much pay he received, and when the lieutenant replied \$141.67 per month, Sir.” General Pershing said: “Just remember that you get \$1.67 for making your plan and issuing the order, and \$140.00 for seeing that it is carried out.”

I am not sure that I would go to that extreme. Certainly in these days, problems are complex and good staff work plays a large part in resolving them. I have known commanders who were not too smart, but they were very knowledgeable about personnel and knew enough to select the very best for their staffs. Remember, a good leader is one who causes or inspires others, staff or subordinate commanders, to do the job. Furthermore, no leader knows it all

(although you sometimes find one who seems to think he does!). A leader should encourage the members of his staff to speak up if they think the commander is wrong. He should invite constructive criticism. It is a grave error for the leader to surround himself with a “Yes” staff.

General George C. Marshall was an excellent exponent of the principle of having his subordinates speak up. When he first became Chief of Staff of the Army, the secretariat of that office consisted of three officers who presented orally to General Marshall the staff papers, or “studies” coming from the divisions of the General Staff. I was a member of that secretariat. We presented in abbreviated form the contents of the staff studies, citing the highlights of the problem involved, the various possible courses of action considered, and the action recommended.

At the end of his first week as Chief of Staff, Marshall called us into his office and opened the discussion by saying: “I am disappointed in all of you.” When we inquired if we might ask why, he said “YOU haven’t disagreed with a single thing I have done all week.” We told him it so happened that we were in full agreement with every paper that had been presented, that we knew what he wanted, and that we would add our comments to anything that we considered should be questioned.

The very next day, we presented a paper as written and then expressed some thoughts which, in our opinion, made the recommended action questionable. General Marshall said: “Now that is what I want. Unless I hear all the arguments against an action, I am not sure whether I am right or not.”

If you happen to be detailed to a staff, try to be a good staff officer and, if possible, avoid being a “Yes” man. I would suggest to all commanders that they inform the members of their staffs that anyone who does not disagree once in a while with what is about to be done, is of limited value and perhaps should be shifted to some other place where he might occasionally have an idea.

Of course, I am thinking about the decision-making process. After a decision is made, everyone must be behind it 100 percent. I thought the British were admirable in this respect during World War II. No matter how much discussion there had been on a subject, as soon as a decision was made you never heard any doubts expressed. You had to believe that everyone involved in making the decision had never entertained any ideas except those expressed in the decision.

I don’t want to overemphasize leadership of senior officers. My interest extends to leaders of all ranks. I would caution you always to remember that an essential qualification of a good leader is the ability to recognize, select, and train junior leaders. I would like to quote from a book entitled *Born at Reveille* and written by Colonel Red Reeder. Colonel Reeder was on a trip for General Marshall and one of his assignments was to inquire into junior leadership. This is an account of his conversation with Colonel Bryant Moore on Guadalcanal. And I quote:

“Colonel Moore,” I said, “tell me something about leadership.” I had hit a sensitive spot. He forged ahead.

“Leadership! The greatest problem here is the leaders, and you have to find some way to weed out the weak ones. It’s tough to do this

when you're in combat. The platoon leaders who cannot command, who cannot foresee things, and who cannot act on the spur of the moment in an emergency are a distinct detriment."

"It is hot here, as you can see. Men struggle; they get heat exhaustion. They come out vomiting, and throwing away equipment. The leaders must be leaders and they must be alert to establish straggler lines and stop this thing."

"The men have been taught to take salt tablets, but the leaders don't see to this. Result, heat exhaustion."

The good leaders seem to get killed; the poor leaders get the men killed. The big problem is leadership and getting the shoulder straps on the right people."

Sixty-millimeter Japanese mortar shells fell about thirty yards away and attacked a number of coconut trees. I lost interest in taking dictation and the colonel stopped talking. When the salvo was over and things were quiet again, Bryant Moore said, "Where was I? You saw that patrol. I tell you this, not one man in fifty can lead a patrol in this jungle. If you can find out who the good patrol leaders are before you hit the combat zone, you have found out something."

"I have had to get rid of about twenty-five officers because they just weren't leaders. I had to *make* the battalion commander weed out the poor junior leaders! This process is continuous. Our junior leaders are finding out that they must know more about their men. The good leaders know their men."—Unquote.

What then are the distinguishing qualities of a leader? There are many essential characteristics that he must possess, but I will mention a few that come to mind as perhaps the most important. First, he must know his job, without necessarily being a specialist in every phase of it. A few years ago it was suggested that all engineering subjects be eliminated from the required studies at West Point. I objected. For example, bridge building is a speciality for engineers; yet, I think every senior officer should have some idea of what is involved. When we reached the Rhine in World War II, it was not necessary that I know how to build a bridge, but it was very helpful that I knew what was involved so that I could see that the bridge engineers received proper support in tonnage allowed and an idea of the time involved.

Specialities dominate almost every problem faced today by the military leader or the business manager. This individual must get deeply enough into his problem that he can understand it and intelligently manage it, without going so far as to become a specialist himself in every phase of the problem. You don't have to be a tank expert in order to effectively use a tank unit of your command.

Thomas J. Watson of IBM once said that genius in an executive is the ability to deal successfully with matters he does not understand. This leads to another principle of leadership which I have often found neglected, both in the military and in business. While you need not be a specialist in all phases of your job, you should have a proportionate degree of interest in every aspect of it—and those concerned, your subordinates, should be aware of your interest.

You must get around and show interest in what your subordinates are doing, even if you don't know much about the technique of their work. And, when you are making these visits, try to pass out praise when due, as well as corrections or criticism.

We tend to speak up only when things go wrong. This is such a well-recognized fact that a "Complaint Department" is an essential part of many business firms. To my knowledge, no comparable facility exists anywhere to expedite the handling of praise for the job well done—it need not be extravagant.

We all get enough criticism and we learn to take it. Even Sir Winston Churchill, despite his matchless accomplishment, found occasion to say: "I have benefited enormously from criticism and at no point did I suffer from any perceptible lack thereof." But let us remember that praise also has a role to play. Napoleon was probably the finest exponent of this principle of recognition through his use of a quarter inch of ribbon to improve morale and get results.

Both mental and physical energy are essential to successful leadership. How many really good leaders have you known who were lazy, or weak, or who couldn't stand the strain? Sherman was a good example of a leader with outstanding mental and physical energy. I cite him with some trepidation because some of you may be from Georgia! However, during the advance from Chattanooga to Atlanta, he often went for days with only two or three hours of sleep per night and was constantly in the saddle reconnoitering, and he often knew the dispositions and terrain so well that he could maneuver the enemy out of position without a serious fight and with minimum losses.

Conversely, a sick commander is of limited value. It is not fair to the troops under him to have a leader who is not functioning 100 percent. I had to relieve several senior commanders during World War II because of illness. It is often pointed out that Napoleon didn't lose a major battle until Waterloo where he was a sick man.

A leader should possess human understanding and consideration for others. Men are not robots and should not be treated as though they were machines. I do not by any means suggest coddling. But men are highly intelligent, complicated beings who will respond favorably to human understanding and consideration. By this means their leader will get maximum effort from each of them. He will also get loyalty—and in this connection, it is well to remember that loyalty goes down as well as up. The sincere leader will go to bat for his subordinates when such action is needed.

A good leader must sometimes be stubborn. Here, I am reminded of the West Point cadet prayer. A leader must be able to choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong. Armed with the courage of his convictions, he must often fight to defend them. Then he has come to a decision after thorough analysis—and when he is sure he is right—he must stick to it even to the point of stubbornness. Grant furnishes a good illustration of this trait. He never knew when he was supposed to be licked. A less stubborn man might have lost at Shiloh.

Maybe you have heard the story of Grant in the Richmond Campaign when, after being up all night making his reconnaissance and formulating and issuing orders, he lay down under a tree and fell asleep. Sometime later, a courier rode up and informed the General that disaster had hit his right flank and that his

troops at that end of the line were in full retreat. General Grant sat up, shook his head to clear the cobwebs and said: “it can’t be so,” and went back to sleep—and it wasn’t so. He had confidence in himself and in his subordinate leaders.

I do not mean to infer that there is always just one solution to a problem. Usually there is one best solution, but any good plan, boldly executed, is better than indecision. There is usually more than one way to obtain results.

Another quality of leadership that comes to mind is self-confidence. You must have confidence in yourself, your unit, and your subordinate commanders—and in your plan. This recalls a couple of incidents. Just before the invasion of Normandy in 1944, a story went around in some of the units that were making the assault on the beaches that they would suffer 100 percent casualties—that none of them would come back. I found it necessary to visit these units and talk to all ranks. I told them that, of course, we would suffer casualties, but certainly our losses would not be 100 percent and that with our air and naval support we would succeed. After our landing, a correspondent told me that on his way across the Channel in one of the leading LSTs he had noticed a sergeant reading a novel. Struck by the seeming lack of concern of the sergeant, he asked: “Aren’t you worried, how can you be reading at a time like this?” The sergeant replied: “No, I am not worried. General Bradley said everything would go all right, so why should I worry.”

I can’t recall just what I had said, but it had accomplished its purpose, at least where one man was concerned.

I might relate another incident where there was a lack of confidence. I had to relieve a senior commander because I learned that his men had lost confidence in him. This meant, of course, that we could not expect maximum performance by that division. After being relieved, the officer came back through my headquarters and showed me a file of statements given him—by request, I am sure—by the burgomaster of all towns his division had passed through. If he had confidence in himself, he would not have felt the need for those letters.

After seeing the letters, I told the officer that if I had ever had any doubts as to whether I had to relieve him, those doubts were now removed. His letters proved beyond question that he had lost confidence in himself, so it was no wonder the men had lost confidence in him.

A leader must possess imagination. Whether it be an administrative decision, or one made in combat, the possible results of that decision must be plain to the one making it. What will be the next step—and the one after that?

While there are many other qualities which contribute to effective leadership, I will mention just one more—but it is a very important one—Character. This word has many meanings. I am applying it in a broad sense to describe a person who has high ideals, who stands by them, and who can be trusted absolutely. Such a person will be respected by all those with whom he is associated. And, such a person will readily be recognized by his associates for what he is.

Circumstances mold our character. These circumstances affect different people in different ways. From exactly the same set of circumstances

one man may theoretically build a palace, while another may have difficulty building a lean-to.

It has been said that a man's character is the reality of himself. I don't think a man's strength of character ever changes. I remember a long time ago when someone told me that a mountain might be reported to have moved. I could believe or disbelieve it, as I wished, but if anyone told me that a man had changed his character, I should not believe it.

All leaders must possess these qualities which I have been discussing, and the great leaders are those who possess one or more of them to an outstanding degree. Some leaders just miss being great because they are weak in one or more of these areas. There is still another ingredient in this formula for a great leader that I have left out, and that is LUCK. He must have opportunity. Then, of course, when opportunity knocks, he must be able to rise and open the door.

Some may ask: "Why do you talk about the qualities of leadership?" They maintain that you either have leadership or you don't—that leaders are born, not made. I suppose some are born with a certain amount of leadership. Frequently, we see children who seem inclined to take charge and direct their playmates. The other youngsters follow these directions without protest. But I am convinced, nevertheless, that leadership can be developed and improved by study and training.

There is no better way to develop leadership than to give the youngster or other individual a job involving responsibility and let him work it out. Try to avoid telling him how to do it. That, for example, is the basis of our whole system of combat orders. We tell the subordinate unit commander what we want him to do and leave the details to him.

I think this system is largely responsible for the many fine leaders in our services today. We are constantly training and developing younger officers and teaching them to accept responsibility.

However, don't discount experience. Someone may remind you that Napoleon led armies before he was 30; and that Alexander the Great died at the age of 33. Napoleon, as he grew older, commanded even larger armies. Alexander might have been even greater had he lived longer and had more experience. In this respect, I especially like General Bolivar Buckner's theory that "Judgment comes from experience and experience comes from bad judgment."

I have been asked to speak on leadership in the past. I have fairly well covered these same thoughts with other groups.

Somehow, however, at the moment, these thoughts take on added significance for me. You see, my first great-grandson was born a year ago. We call him "Fat Henry." What happens to his life, and to the lives of his contemporaries, may well be in your hands. Thank you.