

Leadership

You either have it or you don't

by CWO2 William Hanna

What brings the thought of death, isolation, and the fear of the unknown full circle to accomplish a common goal? Many would argue that leadership is an inherited attribute that is expressed as “you either have it or you don't.” I would argue with this claim. Leadership is defined as an individual's character, a person who is devoted to leading Marines 24/7. Per *Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 6-11, Leading Marines* (Washington, DC: HQMC, August 2014), “The indispensable condition of Marine Corps leadership is action and attitude, not words.” So we ask ourselves, what is a leader? Is it that man or woman who can yell at the top of his or her lungs to get his or her point across, or that aggressive individual who can manipulate others to do what he or she wants? Neither of the characteristics is deemed favorable as a leader. A leader is someone who stands not only for his cause but takes responsibility and strives to motivate others to complete a task. Leadership is not a quality but a behavior that is learned from experiences. When an individual showcases a positive attitude and demonstrates high self-esteem, it becomes contagious for others to feed off. As Hercules stated in the *Passion of Command* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Association, 2007) by Col B.P. McCoy:

Of every one hundred men in battle, ten should not even be there. Eighty are nothing but targets. Nine are the real fighters. We are lucky to have them since they make the battle. Ah, but the one—one is the warrior—and he brings the others home.

Leadership is a burden for many, but few embrace it. For those who do, they practice it daily; they obsess over mastering it only to find out that there is

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no mathematical equation for life. Each obstacle and impossible situation only facilitates growth as a leader. Leadership is an improvisational art that may trigger an overreaching vision, clear, orienting values, and even strategic plans, but what leaders tend to do is adapt from moment to moment because each situation allows leaders to tailor their leadership based off of the environment. As the experiences and tribulations define us as individuals, our individual values are the defining factors for who we are as Marines. Setting a base for a professional organization like the Marine Corps can only be set if clearly defined guidelines are implemented. To take care of your brother or sister to the left

or right of you, to embrace honor, courage, and commitment, and to live by the 14 leadership traits and try to better yourself daily as an individual and as a Marine. These leadership guidelines are defined as the keys to the castle for leaders to be successful throughout their careers by fostering an environment that gets away from the boss/employee-type atmosphere and allows their Marines to make mistakes and learn from them. Gen John A. Lejeune said: “The leader's most sacred duty is to purify his own soul and to cast out from it all unworthy motives.” Leadership is not based off of monetary gain or material possessions but rather the satisfaction of developing unity, *esprit de corps*, and a brotherhood that allows for the potential of every individual to express himself freely.

Understanding that over time leadership becomes more habit than practice, the ability to sustain your leadership requires the capacity to see what is happening to you and your initiative.



Leadership becomes more habit than practice over time. (Photo by Cpl James Marchetti.)

This requires discipline and flexibility to sustain a constant learning environment that doesn't slack on maintaining the high standards of being a leader. When leaders tend to lack the initiative to continue leading from the front, it is not viewed as laziness or that they

your Marines are able to follow and respect.

As we circle back around and understand that leadership is a proactive tool that eases your Marines' doubts and fears of isolation and the unknown, it allows them to trust your judgment by

are as Marines. Based on our 14 leadership principles and commitment to one another, we succeed in accomplishing impossible tasks.

In conclusion, leadership is a continuous skill set that needs to be sharpened from all angles of life. Not only will your Marines benefit from a leader who takes pride in his conduct, they will follow you when you must make those tough decisions that are questionable in certain situations. As leaders, you need to be humble in your daily activities, understand that a big part of being a leader is being open to suggestions, and take an active approach in the development and welfare of your Marines. Leadership is not a "you have it or you don't have it" trait. It is a quality that is developed over time with experience and passion.



Leadership becomes the base for leaders when they show sincerity, compassion, and commitment; it helps steer their moral compass and also shapes who we are as Marines.

lost the drive to care for their Marines; their performance and actions clearly outline the success of their duties based on their Marines' success. Being in a position that requires 100 percent commitment is a daunting task that will slowly wear down any leader. The way this is avoided is building those relationships with like-minded leaders or mentors who are able to pick up the rate of fire when a jam occurs. This becomes imperative in organizations that breed leaders at early stages in their careers. Many have said that it becomes lonely at the top; not because of the lack of human interaction but because of the added stress of not having a "guide" to confide with over issues that mentally drain leaders in making decisions that affect the way they lead. Why is this important to address? Because at least once during our careers we have wished for that guide or mentor to be there to talk to and ask for advice, knowing that the decisions that were being made could have potentially determined a different outcome. In my opinion, leadership is only 15 percent of who we are; the other 85 percent is based on character, commitment, and discipline along with the willingness to succeed at life. It's like being a professional athlete; you must be honest with yourself and your abilities, you must show commitment to your Marines, and you must continue to try to improve yourself each and every day. These characteristics directly correlate to being a good leader and they will help shape a leadership style that

reassuring them that the decisions you make as a leader are in their best interest and that their opinions are valued. Leadership becomes the base for leaders when they show sincerity, compassion, and commitment; it helps steer their moral compass and also shapes who we



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