



Influential Leadership

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General John J. Pershing, a World War I commander, once stated, “A competent leader can get efficient service from poor troops, while on the contrary an incapable leader can demoralize the best of troops” (Pershing, 1931, p. 411). To measure a leader’s effectiveness, one must look to their ability to influence others. Great Army leaders use their influence to positively impact their Soldiers’ behaviors, attitudes, opinions, and choices. However, this influence should not be intertwined with the likes of power and control. One must not use manipulation for results. Leadership is about identifying what motivates a Soldier’s commitment and using that information to leverage positive performance. A leader’s influence has the capability to turn the tide on even the worst of Soldiers. To be an influential leader, a Soldier must be authentic, communicate effectively, and inspire others to accomplish the mission and better themselves.

Being Authentic

An influential leader must be authentic in their actions. They manage this perception of authenticity by practicing what they preach. When Soldiers see their leadership doing the right thing, they are more inclined to follow suit. In a 2016 study published by *Military Behavioral Health*, authentic leadership was more likely to increase mental resiliency and decrease adversity-related psychopathology (Gaddy et al, 2016, p. 3). Moreover, subordinates were less likely to show resistance when given guidance or orders by their leaders (Gaddy et al, 2016, p. 3). In the Army, when Soldiers know their leadership genuinely cares, their whole mentality can change, even to the point of putting their psychological trauma at bay. A simple, “Hey, how are you?” can go a long way. On the other hand, as humans’ we can spot when someone is being genuine and when they are not. When they are inauthentic, we feel deceived and manipulated. A Soldier is more likely to collaborate and follow their leader when perceived as genuine.

If you put the authenticity factor in the context of a counseling session, it is easier to understand how your influence can affect your performance as a leader. When counseling a Soldier for a decrease in work performance, a leader can identify deficiencies and problems effectively when that Soldier opens up. In turn, the two can collaborate and find common ground to correct these issues. This disclosure of personal and professional information is derived from a subordinate's perception of authenticity. An inauthentic leader would get the adverse effect in which a Soldier would show resistance and withhold their issues. This leader is seen as deceiving and shady. It's likely that this Soldier might ask, "Why do my problems matter now?" An influential leader will also utilize their genuine attitude to communicate effectively with their subordinates.

Communication

Communication is the voice of a leader's influence. However, in a time where one could send information at the blink of an eye, Army leaders have lost sight of how to communicate with those they lead and serve. The Army has an abundance of communication tools—Outlook, phones, PowerPoint, social media, and so much more. Ironically, Army leaders suffer communication breakdowns on a daily basis. Instead of conducting in-person training, Soldiers swiftly click through online slideshows and scurry to Google for answers on the exam. Moreover, leaders pass along information to their Soldiers through text message, yet they scold them when they're on their phones too much at work. In several instances, noncommissioned officers (NCO) and officers alike are expected to get face time with their subordinates but have a myriad of emails to respond to every morning. The Army as of 2019 is in a communication paradox. So, how must Army leaders effectively communicate?

Technology

Army leaders must not overuse these communication tools. When a leader relies too heavily on technology, their influence can get confusing and misunderstood. It also makes us forget the valuable leadership lessons we learn at Army schools, which in turn makes for bad practice. The *New York Times* has quoted former U.S. Secretary of Defense and retired Marine Corps General James Mattis, saying that “PowerPoint makes us stupid” (Bumiller, para 4). On the contrary, when used properly technology can streamline information to one another. Text messaging, email, and social media can make information easily accessible, but the principles of basic human interactions must not be neglected. Soldiers want to be led, and it is definitely not behind a computer screen. Great communicators are also great listeners.

Listening

Communication within Army ranks flows in both directions, not just one. Leaders are almost always great listeners. Listening to subordinates’ interests and understanding their perspectives will open the door to this communication. Effectively listening to subordinates will build rapport, solve problems, share understanding, and improve accuracy. When you take a look at the officer-NCO relationship within the Army, it is almost like a marriage. When an NCO feels like their opinion is heard and valued by their officer counterpart, they will go above and beyond to get the mission accomplished. In the same vein, if an NCO feels like their experience and advice is undermined, this relationship will falter.

Bottom Line Up Front

Leaders must communicate a clear and concise message. There are many types of leadership styles, but regardless of the method, a leader will fail if their message is not

understood on the receiving end. This sometimes requires leaders to simplify their directions. In other words, to put their bottom line upfront. Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-22: Army Leadership (2019) directs leaders to clearly communicate what needs to be accomplished and their reasoning behind it. All too often Army leaders try to influence by adding “fluff” in their directions. Anyone who has been in the Army past their initial training can attest to malapropism and overuse of the word “caveat” during weekend safety briefings. Speaking just to be heard or noticed is not effective communication. Audiences can easily become frustrated or bored, so it is important for a leader to quickly get to the point. Nevertheless, when communication is in good standing, a leader has the ability to inspire their subordinates to do great things.

Inspiration

Virtually anyone in the Army can get results from other Soldiers, regardless of rank or position. Following orders is engrained into every Soldier from the moment they become recruits and, if they don't, the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) has plenty of punitive articles in which one can be prosecuted. However, great leaders do not have to threaten their Soldiers with punishment to achieve results. A leader must inspire others by giving their people meaning. As an Army leader, one must consistently ask: Why are we doing this? And the answer needs to be articulated and answered clearly. When Soldiers don't understand, they lose sight of the big picture. An article from the *Harvard Business Review*, claims that 9 out of 10 people in the civilian workforce are “willing to forego 23% of their entire future lifetime earnings in order to have a job that was always meaningful” (Anchor et al, 2019, para 6). Finding meaning and purpose in one's work gives people motivation. That motivation is contingent upon a leader's ability to inspire those around them. Additionally, leaders can inspire their Soldiers to better

themselves as well. An influential leader will inspire his Soldier to grow both professionally and personally, whether that be going to college after duty hours or studying for a promotion board.

Conclusion

Being an influential leader is contingent upon three things: authenticity, effective communication, and inspiring others. When a leader's message and direction is perceived to be genuine, and is communicated in an effective manner, positive results can be attained. As a result of these two factors, subordinates will be inspired to follow their leader's footsteps. Leaders are scattered throughout the Army, but an influential leader can achieve great results with even poorest performers.

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What Does It Mean to Be an Influential Leader? Why Are They So Critical in Our Formations?

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As a military service member or civilian, you will find someone in a leadership position who directly or indirectly will make an impact in your life. Many, at some point in their careers, are placed in a leadership position, but being there does not necessarily make them leaders. The definition of a leader can change from person to person; there is not a set definition that satisfies everyone's expectations. However, there are specific characteristics that leaders have in common that set an influential leader apart. Influential leaders have the ability to inspire and encourage the personal and professional growth of their subordinates and peers. In addition, they change individuals' mindsets and set an example through their actions for others to follow. Influential leaders are the outliers of our formations because they accomplish one of the hardest missions, which is to change an individual's attitudes and beliefs to develop more influential leaders that empower the organization and future generation of Soldiers.

Influential Leaders Have a Special Responsibility

Influential leaders have many important responsibilities to fulfill. As true leaders, they put the needs of others above their own. Leaders have the responsibility to work on their own development, but most importantly, they focus on their subordinates because the entire organization will benefit from it. It is like a two-way street; influential leaders have the ability to advance and achieve their own milestones and, at the same time, they help others advance along the way. Inspiring others to advance is critical to any organization. According to Chamorro-Premuzic, leaders are a resource for the organization, and "effective leaders enable a group to outperform other groups." (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2016). In order to be an influential and effective leader, a leader must advance and remain relevant and proficient in order to convey their expertise to the rest of the organization. Therefore, it is crucial that influential leaders are experts in their fields.

On the other hand, the Army pays a high price when formations are led by toxic leaders. In *It's Time to Address Toxic Leadership in the Military*, Jarrod Sadulski analyzes the impact of toxic leadership. According to Sadulski, toxic leaders negatively impact our formations across the board, starting from junior Soldiers. These leaders also impact the unit's potential as a whole, creating a domino effect that ultimately affects our readiness because toxicity contributes to a high attrition rate. Toxic traits have an adverse impact in our formations, and, as a result, the military loses valuable members, for which the price of replacement is very high. The main reasons why influential leaders are so important in our formations is because they have the ability to develop more leaders who work hard toward the accomplishment of the mission, generating structural commitment toward the organization. They have a remarkable responsibility to do everything in their power to nurture others (Sadulski, 2018).

In *From One Leader to Another*, MSG Garrick Griffin analyzes the importance of developing leaders, quoting the Drill Sergeant Creed, which states, "I will lead by example, never requiring a Soldier to attempt any task I would not do myself" (Griffin, 2013, pg. 92). The Drill Sergeant Creed speaks volumes about the importance of leading by example. Soldiers pay attention to what their leaders do because they respect them, admire them, and put so much trust in them. Leaders lead from the front; as a leader, you cannot demand or expect things from your team that you are not capable or willing to do yourself. For instance, you cannot demand your team be technically and tactically proficient if you are not a proficient leader. Similarly, you cannot instill the importance of education in your Soldiers if, as a leader, you are not willing to get the education that you need to lead from the front.

Influential Leaders Lead by Example

General Colin Powell pointed out the importance of personal example when he noted, “The most important thing I learned is that Soldiers watch what their leaders do. You can give them classes and lecture them forever, but it is your personal example they will follow” (Powell, 2014). Similarly, Chad Storlie conveys the impact and the importance of leading Soldiers by example. According to Storlie, small actions set an example and have a greater impact than lectures. In a small narrative, Storlie mentions an anecdote of an exceptional Brigade Sergeant Major who, through small actions, such as checking the welfare of a group of staff officers, made an impact in their life. The Brigade Sergeant Major not only checked the welfare of the staff officers, he also inquired if they had enough water, enough communication with higher headquarters, and he checked how could he assist with planning to make sure the Commander received the best mission plans (Storlie, n.d). This, as small as it sounds, made a great impact. Leading by example was the Brigade Sergeant Major’s way to show how the staff officers should care for others in their unit, regardless if that duty was inherent in their roles or not.

Many leaders constantly excel in what it is expected from them, and most of the time that is the reason why they lead our formations. But, is not only their big accomplishments that always merit admiration and emulation. For many who look up to them, it is the small actions that count and impact our careers. Leading by example is the most critical factor to develop future leaders. As a Soldier, there are few leaders who have made a great impact in my personal and professional life. As General Powell argues, it is their personal example that motivates me to follow in their footsteps. I will argue that through their actions such as valuing their team, taking the time to know their team, and promoting resilience, as well as their self-effacement and humility, is what critically impacted my professional and personal life. As a young leader, their

actions have led to my personal and professional growth; but most importantly, they have changed my mindset. They have encouraged me to do things I did not believe I could do. Many times, I have done things I did not believe I could have done, but they did it first and inspired me to follow their path. Thanks to those leaders, I walk confidently with feelings of determination, character, and motivation that I have so much to offer to my peers and this organization. At the same time, their actions have instilled in me the desire to understand the needs of my organization and seek more opportunities to contribute to the development of others and the organization.

Outliers of Our Formations

Influential leaders have the ability to change someone's attitude, thoughts, beliefs, and actions. The critical question is how they accomplish this. There are multiple ways to have someone comply with a task. A service member has to adhere to policies and regulations such as the Uniform Code of Military Justice. But it does not necessarily mean that service members comply with rules and laws because it is in their nature to have integrity or to contribute to the goals of their organization. Hence, it is not difficult for authoritative figures to make Soldiers comply with orders. However, influential leaders have the ability to be authoritative figures who can make their team accomplish a mission while they also change their mindset, attitude, values, and beliefs. Influential leaders are the outliers of our formations because they develop new leaders, which is one of the greatest contributions to our organization. For instance, Sadulski states, "if a unit commander acts as a role model, identifies value in subordinates, fosters motivation and unit commitment, and considers each subordinate equally, then lower rank leaders will likely follow a similar leadership style" (Sadulski, 2018). Influential leaders contribute to the growth and quality of our organization because they develop leaders who have

integrity and values, which benefits our formations because Soldiers receive quality leadership that empowers them. In addition, developing leaders for the future contributes to the readiness of our organization by increasing retention rates.

Conclusion

Influential leaders are knowledgeable individuals who, through their example, change individual's attitudes and beliefs. In other words, influential leaders are the outliers of our formations, and their mission to develop future leaders is critical to military readiness. Unlike toxic leaders, influential leaders contribute to higher retention rates by fostering the organization's morale. They demonstrate the ability to motivate and inspire others, developing leaders who can contribute to the organization with integrity. At the same time, these leaders create an environment in which Soldiers feel valued and confident that they can become the next generation of influential leaders. Hence, leadership at all levels has an impact in our mission because it can effectively contribute to the organization, but it can also demoralize its members, causing high attrition rates. Influential leaders have a great impact in our organization because they inspire us to follow their example to become leaders with integrity to effectively lead a new generation of Soldiers, who then become our future influential leaders.

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