Leadership Philosophy

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I have been in the military for almost 20 years. In that time I have had some great leaders, a few leaders that were just marking time, and very few bad leaders. I’ve learned lessons from all of them and have tried to emulate some of the positive examples and avoid those things that made the bad leaders, bad leaders. Each one of those leaders left me with tool for my tool kit, some of which have been more valuable than others. It is paramount that a leader understands that their leadership style may often have to adapt to their environment. What works in a Marine Reconnaissance Unit may not work as well in an Army Medical Center. Things often need to be tailored to accomplish what a leader is trying to accomplish within his organization. I think leaders often change some parts of their leadership philosophy. What I might have thought was good as a PFC in the infantry may not be nearly the same as what I think almost 20 years later in the Army Medical Department. Regardless, I still think there are key values that must be followed to be successful. I have four values that I think all good leaders must have; courage, balance, trust, and loyalty.

What does it mean to have courage? I think a good leader must possess physical courage and moral courage. In our line of work it is imperative to have physical courage. You must be willing to face physical pain, hardship, or death. I have been to combat four times in my career and there were many circumstances where I felt death may be around the corner. As a leader I had to show my subordinates that I was willing to put my life on the line for them and for our mission. A leader who is not willing to have this attribute in combat will most likely not garner much respect. In 2005 I was Marine Infantry officer and the lone Marine attached to Task Force Pioneer, as Special Operations Task Force. One night I was tasked to be part of the over watch security forces for the Special Forces Operators who were doing a night raid in a high threat area of Iraq. Intel told us that the resistance was going to be heavy and that would most likely take some casualties. I knew that I had to have the physical courage to put my life on the line to protect my fellow raid members. Moral courage is part of being courageous as well. It takes moral courage to come forward and expose a toxic leader. I had to do just that in 2010 when I was an OIC at William Beaumont Army Medical Center. The hospital had a Troop Commander who had created an environment of fear and discontent. Having worked with her as one of her commanders for a period of two months I knew I needed to go to the hospital commander and inform him of the things this toxic leader was doing. I knew that it was likely that she would find out that I had gone over her head to have certain command climate issues addressed. In the beginning of this toxic leader’s period I took some heat from her and she tried to retaliate by discrediting the accomplishments I had made as a company commander. I knew I had to stand my ground and not let her treat the Solders within that hospital unfairly. I had spent two years building a good company and I was seeing her tear it down in front of my eyes. In the end the allegations I brought forward were listened to and they were partial responsible for her being relived from her Troop Command. A leader must be willing to face this adversity to do what’s right for his people.

What happens when you take one of the legs off of a four legged stool? Well that’s a simple question; the stool loses its balance and falls over. I recall when I was a young 2ndLT in the Marine Corps, I asked an Infantry Captain named Capt Ruger what was the hardest thing he ever did in the Marine Corps. I was expecting to hear him say something along the lines of a fifty mile road march with a fifty pound pack or some other grueling physical challenge. What he told me has stayed with me to this day. He told me the hardest thing he ever had to do was say goodbye to his family. This is so true, which brings me to the value of balance. Many of us in the military have had to deploy and say goodbye to our families or loved ones. Having a balance of work and friends and/or family is one of the keys to being a good leader. There will be days as a leader that you will have deadlines looming over your head and missions on the horizon. It is paramount that you recognize that your subordinates have a loved one or family at home and they want to share time with them. Ensuring that your people have that time will make them happier employees. I’ve seen bad leaders who did not recognize this and they would keep their people till odd hours of the night making them miss dinner family or time with their children. I recall when I was at 1st Medical Brigade and we were getting ready to deploy to Afghanistan. Soldiers would tell me that they felt guilty for leaving work very early in the work day before we were going to deploy. I would tell them that when we got down range they would have no time with their families and they needed to get that balance of family time before we went off to the war zone. All work and no play makes for a dull and boring life. Make sure you and your people are taking time to smell the roses and have fun. These things will keep most people happy. Looking at your balance and looking out so others have that balance is a sign of a good leader.

Do your people trust you? Of all the good and great leaders I have had in my career I have trusted them all. Trust is not always easy to earn but can be lost in a split second. Sometimes people may not like you but they may still trust you. I recall when I was in Iraqi in 2006 on a 15 month deployment. I had come from Mosul to Tal Afar to take over the 26th Logistical Task Force. When I got there the unit was in disarray. The previous OIC had been more of a friend with the Soldiers than a leader. They were not on point when were went out on mission and their gear and weapons were not combat ready. I made it my point to square those issues away within a week. At first some of the Soldiers didn’t like my stricter tolerances but they soon learned that I was looking out for their best interest and wanted all of them to come back home in one piece. I gained their trust by showing them I was looking out for their well being. I also made it clear that I would go out of my way to protect them if they did the right thing. Case in point, one of my gunners had to put a round into the engine of a vehicle that refused to stop. He knew that I was going to back him if he did the right thing and when the day came to do that he had no hesitation that his leader was there to back him up. They found out very quickly that I could be trusted and in the end many of them said they trusted me much more than they would have ever trusted the previous OIC. If you do lose someone’s trust do your best to build it back up. People who trust you will want to follow you.

The last cornerstone of a good leader is loyalty. If your people know you are going to be loyal to them they will work hard for you and believe in the mission. Loyalty goes both ways, leaders need employees who are going to be loyal to the organization and it’s beliefs. I have been in organizations where employees talk negatively about the mission or the leadership. In some cases it is warranted but sometimes even those cases that are warranted need to be kept under wraps. I’m not saying someone should cover up things to keep an appearance of loyalty. When a leader or organization has buy in from its employees they will more often than not be loyal. Looking out for your people shows them that you are loyal to them and they will mostly give you their loyalty in return. Loyalty to your employees also means you are taking care of them on the professional development level. Bosses who are loyal to their employees want to see them grow in the workplace and in life. I had previously mentioned that I had worked for a toxic LTC who was a troop commander at a medical center. One of the things she tried to do to me to retaliate against me for brining to light some of her harsh treatment was to falsify and downgrade my award from my company commander time. When I went to some of the senior officers in the command with this issue they told me to let it go. Is that loyalty? No it is not. They knew she was lying about my accomplishments and I was not about to stand by and let he run my name trough the mud. Those officers who told me to turn the other check lost some of my loyalty that day and I have not forgotten their lack of backing. It took a Brigadier General, outside of my chain of command, who was one of my mentors to push me to take my cause to a higher level. Major General Stephen Twitty will always have my loyalty. It’s sad that AMEED officers in my command couldn’t be loyal to me. It took and Infantry Officer outside of my command to give me his loyalty. Never forget to be loyal to your people. In return they will most likely be loyal to you.

I think for a good leader to lead effectively they must have the physical courage to face physical pain, hardship, or death. They must also have the moral courage to face adverse consequences for bring unsavory things to light. A good leader must also maintain a balance of work and family. This means they must also recognize that their subordinates and seniors need to be taken care of as well. When all your work is done one day all you will have left is your life will be your family and friends. A leader must not let that relationship suffer due to the daily requirements work brings to the organization. A good leader must also maintain a climate of trust. A trusted leader makes working so much easier and pleasant. Those same employees will most likely return that trust to you. This ties in to the last attribute I think all good leaders should have, and that is loyalty. If you employees feel you are loyal to them they will want to do their best for you and make sure the mission succeeds. I think with these four cornerstones of leadership a person can be a great leader.