

MILITARY LEADERSHIP : A CLASS APART

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Maj Gen C P Singh



***“An army of deer led by a lion
is more to be feared than an army of lions
led by a deer.”***

—Chanakya BC 350-300

Introduction

1. I always wondered if the leaders are born or they can be manufactured in the worthy management colleges(wrongly called institutions) that churn out half baked managers and loosely call them leaders of generation next. Leadership is certainly a higher pedestal and that too the military leadership is a class above the best.
2. It's my belief, backed by half a century of worldly wisdom and three decades of experience in military leadership that leaders are born with the right DNA and they can't be factory produced. These leadership qualities can only be honed with right training. Hence the wisdom lies in selecting the candidates with the right potential and then train them to perfection. Chanakya did the same in 400 BC when he picked up village boy named Chandragupta with great leadership qualities, then went on to train him to become the king of central India (Magadh). Followers of history or even TV viewers who followed TV Serials 'Chanakya' and 'Chandra Gupta Maurya' would totally agree with me.
3. Even today boys with requisite qualities are taken through SSB and trained rigorously to build first rate military leaders of future.

Military Vs Corporate Leadership

4. The **Basic Differences** in the two forms of leadership are:-
 - (a) An **unlimited liability contract** vs a limited liability contract.
 - (b) An **environment of diversity** – the soldier is charged to identify with 'unity in diversity' a unique core value.
 - (c) There is **no prize** for being **runners up**.
 - (d) Profession in the Defence Services is a '**calling**'. Corporate engagement is a '**business**'.

5. **Discipline, loyalty, frugality, selflessness and courage** (Military) can be complemented by **creativity, entrepreneurship, innovation and risk-friendliness**(Corporate).

6. It is thus axiomatic that the corporate world learns the leadership content from the way Military develops and grooms their leaders, whereas the management content within Armed Forces can be refined after studying the corporate model.

Challenges of Military Leadership

7. The fwg unique challenges of Military Leadership sets it apart in a class of its own :-

(a) **No Runners Up in War.** There are no second best spots for any competition in War. Thus, it s either win or you do not exist.

(b) **No Second Chance to Improve Performance.** The 'baptism by fire' in military leadership is always hands on, and does not permit any second chance to improve one's performance.

(c) **Achieving Victory at Minimal Cost.** War inevitably, comes with an enormously high cost, both in terms of life and property. It causes irreversible damage and sets warring nations back economically by decades. It is thus axiomatic to infer that achieving victory at minimal cost is even a greater challenge, than achieving victory itself. Victory at all costs will not be acceptable in future wars, considering the precious value of men and material.

(d) **Maintaining Levels of Motivation.** Highest levels of motivation are absolutely vital to ensure supreme sacrifice by the team, if required. Achievement of victory through such leadership is only possible through the highest levels of motivation.

(e) **Team Work.** Team work is an extremely vital complement of military leadership, which provides the bonding factor as well as the stimulant for complete and motivated team work. For military leadership to succeed, cohesive team work is a must for any subunit or unit to succeed in battle. Opportunities will be seldom and fleeting, and can only be exploited through effective team work. The esprit-de-corps is the fibre that binds the team together and forever.

(f) **Management of Change.** The challenges of the modern world also need to be addressed for effective leadership, as complexities of modern wars also include cyber issues and social, political and demographical issues. All such challenges need to be encompassed, for military leadership to be ever evolving and successful.

(g) **Service to the Nation.** The absolute essence of military leadership lies in the fact that it is a service to the nation. The dominant ingredients of such leadership necessitate that a competent military leader puts all priorities of the Nation and Services before personal requirements. Selfless service and willingness for any sacrifice hence will be the main pillars on which military leadership will rest upon.

The Art of Military Leadership

“The safety, honour and welfare of your country come first, always and every time.

The honour, welfare and comfort of the men you command comes next.

Your own ease, comfort and safety come last, always and every time.”

—Philip Chetwode

8. Developing the art of military leadership involves a process wherein the leader has to perform a variety of roles, and extract full obedience willingly and with motivation. To do this, he has to be able to :-

- (a) Chart out the path to be tread upon.
- (b) Be the guide and mentor – set a personal example.
- (c) Be the coach – teach and inspire subordinates to be able to learn and imbibe training.
- (d) Helper to assist and support men enables them to fall back upon the leader when in need for assistance.
- (e) **Provide Enhancement.** A Proficient leader has to be a master in wielding the right balance of authority and compassion. Encouragement in terms of motivation as also by displaying personal example has to be incorporated in the right proportions, based on the situation at hand.
- (f) **Kick when Required to get the Best Out.** At times, there would be situations wherein same amount of authority is needed to force the best results out of a team. In such occasions use of such authority to ensure the desired end state is essential. This sets us apart from leaders in civil world.

Military Leadership Styles

9. **Authoritarian Vs Democratic Leadership.** Authoritarian leadership is extremely strict and rigid. This leadership style is used during basic training, when drill sergeants teach obedience and respect to new recruits. Commanders may also choose to be authoritarian in time critical missions or during emergencies, where taking the time to debate orders would cause property damage, mission failure or injury. Democratic leadership offers followers the highest level of freedom in decision-making. In this leadership approach, leaders consult with one or more followers to make decisions. Most military teams after basic training use this approach to promote fellowship and teamwork within the unit.

10. Thus, the following styles are ideally suited as given below:-
- (a) Participative during the planning stages.
 - (b) Authoritarian during the Execution stage.
 - (c) Democratic in Regimental affairs.

Ethics and values

“To educate a man in mind and not morale is to educate a menace to society”

—Theodore Roosevelt.

11. Military leadership demands the highest level of ethics and values to be able to lead in war. The right balance of concern for man and motivation for the supreme sacrifice has to be imbibed and ingrained in all leaders and men alike, to deliver against all odds in the most adverse of conditions. Ethics and values are to be imbibed as part of character building for all leaders. Only then will the confidence to handle adversity come, as a part of strong character qualities.

12. The bottom line, of course, is to first recognise the need for ethical and value based military leadership and to reaffirm its importance in projecting the armed forces as an instrument of credible national power.

13. **Core Ethics and Values.** Some core ethics and values for military leaders are :-

- (a) Loyalty.
- (b) Duty.
- (c) Respect.
- (d) Selfless Service.
- (e) Honour.
- (f) Integrity.
- (g) Personal Courage.
- (h) Character.

14. **Factors Causing Erosion in Ethics and Values.** The major factors that have accelerated the erosion of ethics and values in the Indian armed forces are :-

- (a) Rapid economic growth and growing disparity in incomes between the military and other professions.

- (b) Increased involvement of the armed forces in internal security duties without adequate institutionalised sensitisation.
- (c) Increased involvement in anti-terrorist operations and the associated dilemmas of force protection vs non-combatant immunity, collateral damage and civilian casualties.
- (d) Enhanced civil-military-para military liaison and increase in the exposure of men in uniform to various forms of corruption.
- (f) Poor resettlement opportunities for officers and men who superannuate early in life.
- (g) Changed priorities of the younger generation and absence of enough 'role models', coupled with reluctance on the part of senior officers to assume serious mentoring roles.
- (h) Lack of any serious institutionalised training in ethics and value-based leadership for officers and men.
- (j) Intense media scrutiny of matters relating to the military.
- (k) Closed assessment system and absence of a fair in-house redressal system that forces military personnel to go to court and tarnish the self-image of the armed forces.
- (l) Changing morality of personal relationships in society.

Officer – Men Relationship

"The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help them or concluded that you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership."



15. A commander cares deeply about his men, takes personal interest in their welfare and tries to keep them out of harmful ways. All subordinates are treated with respect and made to feel as valued as all others, and as important. Credit will always be given to them and responsibility for mistakes accepted by the leader.

16. A competent leader generally creates a father figure atmosphere. He is the source of discipline and stability. He is also the strict 'father' who is to be feared for his terms and conditions.

Principles of Effective Leadership

“To create great armies is one thing; to lead them . . . is another.”

—Sir Winston Churchill

17. There are eleven principles of good leadership:
- (a) Be tactically and technically proficient.
 - (b) Know yourself and seek self-improvement.
 - (c) Know your soldiers and look out for their welfare.
 - (d) Keep your soldiers informed.
 - (e) Set the example.
 - (f) Ensure the task is understood, supervised and accomplished.
 - (g) Train your soldiers as a team.
 - (h) Make sound and timely decisions.
 - (j) Develop a sense of responsibility in your subordinates.
 - (k) Employ your unit in accordance with its capabilities.
 - (l) Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions.

Work Life Balance

18. Achieving the elusive “work-life balance” can often feel like an impossible goal, especially for people who strive to give everything 100%. In today’s “do more with less” competitive reality, how can we manage careers and families, and feel satisfied with both?

19. First, prioritize. If you want balance—and not everybody does—you have to force yourself to edit yourself personally and professionally. Tailor your ambitions as per your competence. Focus on the things that are important to you. It’s a discipline that doesn’t come too naturally to most of us. Set up your rules and adhere to them. This doesn’t make you inflexible or unresponsive, it just allows you to be more in control of how you work.

20. Some ways to achieve a correct work – life balance are :-
- (a) Don’t overbook.
 - (b) Prioritize ruthlessly.
 - (c) Learn how to say no.
 - (d) Organize.
 - (e) Use technology...but don’t overdo it.
 - (g) Know it won’t always be perfect.

21. “Dont be so busy making a living that you forget to live”. The journey is more important than the destination of life.

Conclusion

“Each of us is led, some of us are leaders. The competence we demand in our leaders must be our model when we lead.”

—Gen Glenn K. Otis

22. There’s no one fixed view of what makes for a successful leader. Some common factors stand out in a successful model are: the **approach** (task versus people) that is selected; the **followers’ ability, maturity, and willingness**; the **situational requirements**; and the leaders’ own **skills, abilities, and values**. Still, no one has discovered a secret formula for creating great leaders. To be an effective military leader, there will be a need to work hard at all aspects of leadership—not just one. He will be committed to modeling high values, building trust, focusing on results, and motivating and influencing others as he learns and grows. The ultimate mission is to transform soldiers and help them adapt to an ever-changing world.

23. In the end, I would like to conclude by saying that

***“OURS HAS BEEN...IS, AND MUST
CONTINUE TO REMAIN
THE FINEST ARMY TO SERVE IN....
WHERE JUST BEING A PART
OF...HAS TO BE...
A MATTER OF HONOUR”***

Maj Gen CP Singh