

Leadership and the Christian Officer; The Basis of Successful Leadership

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Within the limits of the material means given him, the effectiveness of a unit depends to maximum degree on the leadership ability and practice of the commander. The military system of discipline is an essential foundation, but the extent to which it succeeds in obtaining the best results depends upon the commander's own personality.

The commander must win confidence and loyalty by his own acts. No one can do this for him. While he does certain things with the deliberate intent of gaining optimum control over his unit, and the maximum effort from it, his acts must nevertheless not be a front. They must represent the real man under the rank insignia.

Confidence

To inspire confidence the commander must be confident. Leaders must firmly believe that they can handle the job, seeing obstacles as challenges rather than a cause for apprehension. The commander must be able to understand and analyze problems, make firm decisions, give clear orders and then forcefully carry out their will despite difficulties.

There must be that character which is willing to accept responsibility, to reason out problems, make decisions and then push them through to success. Possessing this basic trait of character, they must then prepare themselves intellectually to face the tasks which confront them.

Loyalty

To achieve the best results from subordinates, the commander must have their confidence and personal loyalty. One thing must be remembered—loyalty starts at the top, not the bottom. If commanders desire loyalty of subordinates, they must first be loyal to them. They must be treated fairly, and, to the extent practicable and legitimate, assisted in those difficulties which are an inevitable part of life while in the service.

Commanders must never forget that even the newest recruit is a person worthy of respect and ordinary human courtesy. Training should be arduous and high standards must be demanded in everything. Encourage and praise progress. Try to make subordinates successful at their jobs, and

then give them the credit. If they do well, the commander will do well, and get credit also.

Leadership Requirements at Different Levels

There is a real difference in applied leadership at various levels. Tactical and strategic principles are the same; soldiers, sailors and airmen are basically the same. It is the circumstances that are different and therefore require different applications of the basic principles.

At lower unit levels problems are tangible and immediate. The commander and subordinates are face-to-face with them. The commander has close personal contact with subordinates. Physical courage has a great impact. The problems are relatively simple, covering small areas, few people and few types of situations.

At higher levels it is quite different. While there are fewer opportunities to display personal physical courage, moral courage is a constant requirement. It is impossible to spend the desired time with subordinates, hence the commander must seek other ways to influence them. The problems are greater and more complex.

The commander must look further into the future and into the unknown. Much greater and broader professional knowledge is essential. Command at higher levels demands an ongoing commitment to personal study and reflection.

Command In The Broadest Sense

I have previously used the terms command and commander in a rather specific way, but in truth, their meaning is generic. Although an officer may not ever be close to a battlefield or combat unit, nevertheless he will command. Because, to command is to lead and a commander is, certainly, a leader.

There are countless valuable officers who never command a unit, per se, but no matter what the circumstance, they will command, that is lead, others. That is, after all, the primary task of an officer. Some are suited to line units and others best suited to different kinds of service on staffs, etc. Rarely, though, will officers find themselves in a position where they have no subordinates. And

the principles outlined previously in this article are applicable in any leadership position.

Implications for the Christian Officer

Christian officers will recognize immediately that the principles and methods described here are not only compatible with their Christian faith, but that the Christian's faith will make them easier to follow and implement. Confidence, loyalty, character, respect, preparation and encouragement are all cornerstones of Christian conduct.

Insistence on high standards for ourselves and others is fully Christian; our faith demands nothing less. The Golden Rule is certainly applicable when dealing with superiors and subordinates alike.

Christian officers actually have an advantage in achieving the best results. They know that God has a specific purpose and plan for their lives (Eph. 2:10) and that promotions come from God, regardless of any human actions connected therewith (Ps. 75:6-7). The Christian can rest assured that God oversees life and career (Matt. 10:28-31; Rom. 8:28; Phil. 4:19; 1 Thess. 5:18).

The Christian therefore need not worry about a particular assignment or promotion, nor, practically, should one fret or worry in general. The Christian's first duty is to glorify God.

If we accept this duty, we will be single-minded and able to concentrate on the work to be done without being pushed and pulled by worry, fear, envy, and other concerns that prevent the full use of our abilities. God puts us where He wants us to serve Him.

He will provide the talent to do whatever tasks He gives us. He will keep in perfect peace of mind one who fully trusts Him, regardless of circumstances (Is. 26:3; John 14:27; Phil. 4:4-8).

Finally, in this life the Christian is a witness to the world that Christ saves one from sin and transforms one's life. Others will scorn our Christian testimony unless our lives exhibit true Christian character. Therefore, the Christian officer should strive to be the very best professional officer possible, and should do this with Christian faith and conduct.

Lieutenant General William K. Harrison Jr.

Lieutenant General William K. Harrison Jr., retired in 1956, after forty-four years in the Army. In 1944-45, he served as Assistant Division Commander of the 30th Infantry Division, which noted historian S.L.A. Marshall rated as the best division in the European Theater during World War II.

Later, he was Chief U.N. Negotiator at Panmunjom, Korea, and subsequently served as Commander-in-Chief of the Caribbean Command. General Harrison served as president of Officers' Christian Fellowship from 1954 to 1972, and as president emeritus until his death in 1987.