

A Reflection: Leadership does not Change!

Dr. Byron L. Cherry, Sr.
President, Succeed to Lead, LLC

When this article is published, I will have transitioned/retired from the US Army. As I reflect over the 25 plus years of my service, I can't help but think how privileged and honored I am to have served with some of the best Soldiers in the world. These young men and women were, and still are, fully committed to doing the right thing. What makes these individuals so special that they will sacrifice time with their families and loved ones to travel to foreign lands to serve the citizens of this country? The only answer to this question is "Leadership."

Leadership is the same today as it was in the past. Soldiers will follow good leaders because there is something about the leaders that they want to emulate. Soldiers want to be on a winning team and Soldiers want to be role models for others to follow. Throughout our history, we have had some great leaders, including, but not limited to: Dwight D. Eisenhower, a leader who excelled as a builder of coalitions; General George Patton, a hard-driving, brilliant field commander; General Douglas MacArthur, a brilliant strategist; and Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, a gifted but mercurial leader whom Churchill described as "in defeat, indomitable; in victory, insufferable."

According to Aust (1996)ⁱ, just as we have had great leaders, we also have examples of leaders who have gone wrong. Adolf Hitler was a brilliant leader who misused his talents. He marshaled treachery and intimidation to dupe the German people, exterminate much of Europe's Jewish population, and devastate neighboring nations. Simultaneously feared and hated, Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin was responsible for the deaths of nearly 15 million Soviet peasants between 1929 and 1933. These examples, and many others from the dark pages of history, illustrate that great leadership is more than just satisfying one's personal desires. Morality and right values are also necessary.

Austⁱⁱ states that one of the best ways to define great leadership is through the roles played by effective leaders. This takes us to the heart of the matter, because, as the Bible says, "you will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16). Let's notice some characteristics of great leaders:

- **Vision and goals.** Perhaps the most important task of any leader is to provide a vision to the followers. From this vision flow the goals of the leader and the group.
- **Ethics and credibility.** A leader's actions are governed by the leader's ethics, but a leader's credibility depends on how he or she is viewed by others.

Niccolò Machiavelli, the 16th-century philosopher, advised that leaders should, when necessary, resort to lies and hypocrisy to accomplish their ends. History reveals that approach to be a poor substitute for good leadership. *Good* leaders must show themselves ethical in their words and actions if they are to develop trust and credibility in their followers.

As I retire from the US Army and start the next chapter in my life, I personally want to thank the families who lost loved ones in combat, and say to them that God is good. He is a just and faithful God. Lean on Him for your comfort and strength.

Colonel Byron L. Cherry, Sr., PhD.
US Army Retired
1982 to 2008

Gardner, J. (1993). *On Leadership*. New York: Free Press.

Safire, W. (1992). *Lend Me Your Ears*. New York: W. W. Norton.

ⁱ Jerrold Aust (1996). What is True Leadership?

ⁱⁱ Ibid