

Leadership for Expeditionary Logistics

What makes a good leader? The Army G-4 offers his views on leadership and provides advice for new and potential commanders.

■ By Lt. Gen. Gustave “Gus” Perna



Restoring our ability to execute expeditionary logistics will only be accomplished by leaders who know what right looks like, or who can learn what it looks like, and then coach, teach, and mentor that understanding across their formations.

A few months ago I sent a note to fellow senior leaders asking them to contribute articles to *Army Sustainment* magazine in 2016. My intent was to leverage their significant experience and vision as we collectively transition from predictable, cyclic deployments to no-notice, expeditionary operations.

You will see the results of the invitation in this issue. Three great leaders, two from the present and one from the past, have contributed thoughtful articles that will make us better. Lt. Gen. Robert S. Ferrell, the Army's chief information officer/G-6, Maj. Gen. Darrell K. Williams, commander of the Combined Arms Support Command, and retired Lt. Gen. Arthur J. Gregg, a former Army G-4, provide their perspectives on leadership and mission command. For future issues, many more senior leaders will be picking up their pens, and I look forward to reading their insights.

This issue also marks a new approach that *Army Sustainment* will now use to assemble its high-quality publication. Every issue will focus on a central theme with many articles in that issue oriented on that theme.

This approach, developed in collaboration with the Army G-4 office, provides a nice change of pace. You will see that it is an effective way to generate discussion and new ideas.

Why Leadership?

I selected leadership as the focus of this issue because we are in a period in which leadership and leader development are absolutely critical. The changes that are re-

quired across our Army in logistics planning and execution will not be accomplished by a new piece of equipment or a new process.

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Simultaneously, today's leaders must develop adaptive future leaders who can operate successfully in increasingly complex environments. I have observed over the last 10 years that many Soldiers have received exceptional evaluations because they did tremendous work as we fought two wars. But great reports and even combat service do not guarantee that these same people are ready to lead at higher levels.

You can be a great staff officer, but that does not make you a great commander. You can be a great company commander, but that does not mean you will do well as a battalion commander. Performing well as an Army leader, especially at higher levels, takes continued self-development, honest self-awareness, and a few other characteristics I will address below.

The Leadership Triad

I find it helpful to visualize key leadership characteristics as a triangle with three distinct sides: commitment, competence, and character. All three are important for a leader to possess.

When I ask majors which one is the most important, they usually say competence. But the fact is you can be highly competent—successfully



accomplishing missions with discipline and rigor—and highly committed to honorable service to the Army. But if you lack character, if you do not adhere to Army values and the ethics of our profession, you are missing a key element.

I have watched too many great leaders do magnificent work but go astray in their professional ethics. So, for me, character is the most important.

My belief is that anyone who wants to be selected for the highest levels of leadership—battalion or brigade command and potentially service as a general officer—must strive for even higher standards.

Beyond the Triad

When I am deciding whether or not officers and noncommissioned officers are eligible to advance to higher levels of responsibility, I first validate that they are all of high character, commitment, and competence. Then I assess them against four questions:

- Are they team builders?
- Are they team players?
- Can they think bigger than themselves and their unit?
- Are they thinking about what is best for the Army, the nation, or society as a whole?

Let me illustrate. A few years ago, a forward arming and refueling point (FARP) in Afghanistan was destroyed by a rocket attack. The company asked surrounding units if they had any extra equipment that could be used to re-establish the FARP.

Many commanders immediately said no, thinking that giving away extra equipment might risk their own units' readiness. But some Soldiers, thinking bigger than themselves, checked their unit inventories and found ways to offer equipment without degrading their own units.

So before you draw your "red line" of what you will or will not do, always ask yourself what is best for our Army and our nation.



This triangle represents the three elements effective leaders need: competence, commitment, and character.

Tips for New Commanders

Before leaders go out to the field to take command, I offer them this advice.

Understand the difference between training and developing. You can train Soldiers to repair a specific item, but if you instead develop their ability to understand and operate a complex repair operation, they can provide much greater value to their units and the Army.

Do not believe your own press clippings. If you get a good evaluation, show it to your mom or spouse, and then put it away. Good leaders are not consumed by their evaluations; positive reports just follow them naturally.

Good leaders are not interested in getting credit. Good leaders focus on how to highlight and praise members of the team. If someone says, "Great job, Col. Smith," they reply, "Thank you, but Maj. Jones did all the work; I will pass your comments on to her."

Understand that the bedrock of our profession is trust. Good leaders are the ones who do what is right when no one is looking because it is the right thing to do. If you choose to

compromise your integrity, there is no turning back.

Know that mission command is one of the most important investments a leader can make. Clear guidance and intent can go a long way in a disciplined organization.

We owe it to our Soldiers to have leaders who are ready. From my perspective, this means leaders who have the highest levels of character, competence, and commitment. It means having leaders who are team builders and team players and who consistently think bigger than themselves and their units. And it means having leaders who are open to new ideas, who keep learning, and who, most of all, are adaptive and can operate successfully in increasingly complex environments.

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