

The 3rd Squad, 2nd Platoon, 523rd Horizontal Engineer Company, 84th Engineer Battalion, 130th Engineer Brigade, 8th Theater Sustainment Command, stands during a ceremony after winning the 84th Engineer Brigade Best Squad Competition at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, on Oct. 16, 2015.



What Makes a Good Leader?

■ By Lt. Gen. Robert S. Ferrell



“We want leaders that are tough, resilient, that can think and out-fight and out-smart the enemy. We want them to be adaptive, agile and flexible. And we want them not only competent, but we want leaders of character.”

Gen. Mark A. Milley, 39th Chief of Staff of the Army

Army leaders should make a daily commitment to do the right things, develop the right foundational leadership traits, and understand today's complex, expeditionary environment.

There are few topics that are simultaneously as ancient and as modern as the topic of leadership. In our Army, the elements of effective leadership are infused in much of our training, doctrine, tactics, techniques, procedures, and even daily conversations. Despite the extraordinary attention the Army—and many other institutions in our society—pays to the subject of leadership, the answer to the question, “What makes a good leader?” is neither simple nor universal.

Nonetheless, certain foundational leadership traits have proven themselves over time, particularly for those who have accepted the unique responsibility to lead Soldiers and Army civilians. We should take every opportunity to remind ourselves of these traits because they emerge from our commitment to a common set of Army values.

The 39th chief of staff of the Army, Gen. Mark A. Milley, aptly stated that the traits we seek in today's Army leaders include agility, adaptability, flexibility, mental and physical resilience, competence, and most importantly character.

Character is often demonstrated in how closely our actions, decisions, and relationships adhere to Army ethics and values. Competence is developed over time through rigorous practice, professional learning, and a commitment to excelling in every aspect of our duties. It is vital that Army leaders have both character and competence.

In fact, the development of competence, character, and other leadership traits is one of the most important missions we have as an Army. Leadership is taught from the day Soldiers arrive at basic training and continues at the basic officer leader courses, at training rotations at the combat training centers, and at the Army War College and other advanced schools.

Timeless Tips and Leadership

As important as formal training is to developing good leaders, effective leadership is something that has to be practiced in our day-to-day actions. As a result, good leadership is not only about learning overarching leadership

principles; it is about doing the right things, large and small, dozens of times each day for your Soldiers, Army civilians, and command. In this way, good leadership becomes a habit that is hard to break.

So, what are the right things that good leaders turn into daily habits? They include the following timeless practices:

- Always treating people with dignity and respect.
- Earning and building the trust of your Soldiers, civilians, peers, families, leaders, and the public.
- Setting the highest standards and holding yourself and everyone in your organization accountable for maintaining them.
- Communicating horizontally and vertically, openly, transparently, and continually.
- Mentoring, evaluating, and recognizing your team members honestly and fairly.
- Reading and reflecting on the Army profession, your branch, your organization, and your mission.
- Maintaining balance by devoting time to your family and community.
- Having fun by embracing your responsibilities with enthusiasm and optimism.

Good leadership is often built by practicing each of these actions until they turn into habits your Soldiers and civilians will come to expect.

The Operational Environment

In addition to developing foundational leadership traits and practicing the right daily habits, today's Army leaders confront an incredibly complex and rapidly changing environment. The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Win in a Complex World and the new Army Vision describe this globally interconnected environment. Its dangers range from the threats posed by an array of nonstate actors to “hybrid threats” that incorporate elements of state and nonstate capabilities to rising national powers that challenge U.S. interests and the international order.

The Army Vision and Army Operating Concept also remind us of the strengths that Army leaders and our forces provide in support of our nation's defense. For example, we have the most combat-experienced force in our history. Many of our emerging senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and officers have spent most of their Army careers in support of operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and related theaters.

As these theaters matured, many Soldiers became accustomed to extensive resources, funding, and deployed contractor support. Now leaders confront an environment where resources are scarcer and must be managed with maximum efficiency. Matching mission requirements with the efficient use of resources will be a critical mindset that today's leaders must develop.

In addition, as our Army becomes increasingly expeditionary, today's leaders must develop unique skills and capabilities to train their units for rapid deployment to austere locations across the globe. This approach places a premium on those foundational leadership traits previously mentioned: agility, adaptability, flexibility, resilience, competence, and character.

With more of the Army based at continental United States locations, expeditionary maneuver will be the norm. Units at all levels must be more mobile and agile, leave a smaller footprint, and have greater endurance and adaptability. Lower echelons will require freedom of action to develop the situation, and bottom-up input will be as important as top-down guidance.

This operational complexity and diversity are the new standard for Army engagements. Whether the primary mission is combat, humanitarian assistance, or something else, great leaders must be prepared for and able to accomplish their objectives in these demanding conditions.

Mission Command and Leadership

In addition to our complex, expeditionary environment, the Army is developing leaders to exercise mission command through synchronized training, education, and assignment

opportunities. Mission command is the foundation for current and future Army operations. It is both a philosophy and a warfighting function based on specific principles.

These principles include having leaders that can provide clear intent, create shared understanding, build cohesive teams, exercise disciplined initiative, encourage Soldiers to take prudent risk, trust subordinates to make sound decisions, and use mission orders that focus on what to do and why rather than how the order is to be carried out.

Making the mission command philosophy and warfighting function a reality will require a network that connects our Soldiers, platforms, and formations from the home station to the tactical edge of the battlefield. As the Army's chief information officer/G-6, I am particularly interested in the impact of information systems and technology on our leaders.

Accordingly, to better support our expeditionary approach and mission command philosophy, the Army is establishing home station mission command centers (HSMCCs) at key commands and installations. These HSMCCs have a suite of standardized capabilities that take advantage of advances in network capability, telepresence, and remote collaboration.

HSMCCs eliminate many of the limitations imposed by distance and make the physical proximity of command posts to one another less important. HSMCCs provide Army leaders the flexibility to deploy command posts in a scalable, tailorable manner according to operational requirements.

Technology and Leadership

As we build capabilities like HSMCCs and modernize the Army network, our objective is to employ information technology in ways that provide Army leaders situational understanding, access to Army and joint enterprise resources, and the right information at the right time in any environment and across all types of operations.

Our emerging cadre of NCOs and officers are well-suited to maximize the

advantages that uninterrupted mission command and expanding network capabilities will bring to our force. That said, tomorrow's leaders must also be skilled at managing the substantial flow of information that advancing technology makes possible.

In today's Army, information can flow from a deployed squad to the Pentagon in seconds. This creates both opportunities and challenges. It places more information than ever in the hands of our Soldiers, enabling them to bring all of the Army's resources to bear on their mission.

It also creates the challenge of providing too much information or not the right information and overloading a leader's ability to understand, direct, and command the unit. As a result, managing information effectively and identifying critical information requirements from a large volume of data will be increasingly important skills for good Army leaders.

Answering the question, "What makes a good leader?" involves all the above and much more. It is likely a question that will never be fully answered. For leaders in our Army, what is more important than finding the right answer is the daily commitment to doing the right things, developing the right foundational leadership traits, and understanding the complex, expeditionary environment in which we operate.

Given all that this generation of NCOs and officers has accomplished in the last 15 years of conflict, I am confident that we are building a cadre of exceptional leaders to take our force to 2025 and beyond.

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